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ANNA LOMBARD

VICTORIA CROSS

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Anna Lombard

BY
VICTORIA CROSS

Author of

"Life's Shop Window,"
"Paula," "A Girl of the Klondike," etc.



KENSINGTON PRESS

18 EAST SEVENTEENTH ST., NEW YORK

DEDICATED

TO

C—— MY C——

“Verona’s summer hath not such a flower.”

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PREFACE.

'I HAVE been challenged by certain papers to state my intentions in writing "Anna Lombard." This is my reply: I endeavored to draw in Gerald Ethridge a character whose actions should be in accordance with the principles laid down by Christ, one that would display, not in words but in his actual life, that gentleness, humility, patience, charity, and self-sacrifice that our Redeemer himself enjoined. It is a sad commentary on our religion of to-day that a presumably Christian journal—*The Daily Chronicle*—should hold this Christ-like conduct up to ridicule and contempt, stigmatize it as "horrid absurdity," and declare that for such qualities a man ought to be turned out of the service. I challenge *The Daily Chronicle* and all who follow its opinion to find one act which does not reflect Christ's own teaching, committed by Gerald Ethridge. He forgives the sinner, raises the fallen, comforts the weak. He works and suffers to reclaim the pagan and almost lost soul of Anna Lombard. Fearlessly, and with the Gospel of Christ in my hand, I offer this example of his teaching to the great Christian public for its verdict, confident that I shall be justified by it.

VICTORIA CROSS.

ANNA LOMBARD.



ANNA LOMBARD.

CHAPTER I.

A FLOOD of glaring yellow light fell from the chandeliers overhead, a sheen of light seemed to be flung back from the polished, slippery, glittering floor which mirrored a thousand lights above and a hundred lesser lights fixed to the walls, dazzling in white and gold. There was so much light, so much glitter, that it seemed to hurt the eyes coming directly from the soft, dark night outside. It seemed to wound mine as I stepped through the long window open to the marble piazza where I had been sitting, silent, by a pillar, alone with the gorgeous Eastern night.

The music, too, was stirring and martial rather than soothing. It was the splendid band of the Irish Grenadiers, and just then they were playing for all they were worth. It seemed as if some one had bet them they could not make a noise, and they had bet that they could. From end to end the room was one blaze of color, the scarlet and gold of countless uniforms standing out prominently in the general scheme. There were comparatively few present in plain civilian dress and no undress uniforms were to be found, for it was an occasion such as might not be known again for two or three years, or more, in that part of the country. It was the ball given by the commissioner of Kalatu in honor of the viceroy, on the latter passing through that station.

I stood leaning against the pillar of the window by which I entered the room, watching idly the brilliant, swaying crowd before me, and wondering how much real joy, pleasure, and gayety there was in the room in proportion to the affected amount of all these.

For myself, I felt singularly mentally weary and disheartened, yet I was generally considered a much-to-be-

envied person, one of Fortune's particular favorites. I was young—not yet thirty, though sometimes, possibly the result of much severe study, my brain and inner being seemed singularly old—I had, some five years before, come out head of the list in the Indian Civil Service examination, and had been granted the coveted position of assistant commissioner; my pay was good, my position excellent, my work light, and, indeed, far beneath the capacity my severe education had endowed me with; girls smiled upon me, mammas were not unkind, and “lucky fellow that Ethridge” was a comment frequently on the lips of my companions. And yet, in spite of all this, how empty life seemed to that lucky Ethridge himself! As a boy, always given rather to dreams, speculations, and ideas, how fair that same life looked to me; in my cold, hard, chaste youth of study and work, how much there had seemed to be done in it, to be gained, to be enjoyed! When my work is done! I had so often thought, and now, behold! my work was done, and I was free to do, to have, to gain, and to enjoy, and suddenly there seemed nothing particular in it all. No such wonderful joy to be enjoyed, and no such marvelous thing to be gained. This arena, that had looked so fair and dazzling while I was still shut behind its gates, seemed rather circumscribed and empty now that I was actually inside, and I, as it were, seemed merely walking aimlessly about in it and kicking up the sand which was to have been the witness of such great achievements, according to my former vague ideas.

After a minute or two I was conscious of some one standing close beside me, and I turned slightly, to see a young lieutenant in the uniform of the Grenadiers.

“Beastly thin that girl is! Just look at her shoulder-bones!” was his first remark addressed to me without any preface.

My eyes idly followed his, and I noticed the girl passing us, rather a pretty, graceful *débutante*, thin with the thinness of extreme youth and immaturity. Her shoulders rose white and smooth from her white gown of conventional, one might say viceregal lowness—for at balls given to the viceroy, gowns are cut lower than usual in honor of the occasion—but certainly beneath their delicate surface two little bones stood out rather too prominently. I looked at them absently, thinking it was the quality of the heart

that beat beneath them that would exercise and influence me most in my judgment of their owner.

"She is very young," I returned. "In a year or two she will probably be fat enough to please you."

"Thanks; then she will be *passée*, don't you know. Confound it, these English girls are all thin when they're young and when they're fat they're old. There's no getting one just made to suit a fellow."

"And what about the girls; are the men made to suit them?" I inquired, turning to look at him more fully.

He had a square, white face, with pale blue, expressionless eyes, a weak, receding chin and forehead, a weaker mouth, and a slight lisp in his voice. In his hand he swung an eye-glass, which he lifted only occasionally when an unusually striking girl went by. He laughed good-humoredly—a fatuous, conceited laugh.

"Aw, ah—I don't really know, upon my word; but they seem devilish glad to get us, don't you know, when they have a chance."

I did not answer. The conversation did not interest me; but where was I to find any better? I glanced along the line of vacuous faces by the wall to right and left of me. What was the use of moving? I should only hear something like this from the next man beside whom I should find myself.

There was a few moments' silence. Then my companion glanced suddenly at his card and affected to start with sudden recollection and contrition.

"By Jove! I had forgotten that poor Miss Scemler. She is waiting for me all this time. Promised her this dance, you know—d——d scrawny girl, too, but then she'd be so awfully disappointed, you know. See you again," and he mingled with the line of idlers passing round the room, in his search for the doubtless tremulously eager and expectant Miss Scemlar.

Hardly a moment or two later another acquaintance came up to me. This time it was a handsome young fellow with a dark, eager face and high color.

"Well, Gerald, old man, what makes you look so awfully blue? Come and have a pick-me-up, a bitter or something is just what you want. Come along to the bar. You ought to be there, too. We're talking the race, you know. There's a fellow there has got all the tips. Now's

the time to lay your money. He says Lemon won't be in it; they say now Parchment is; but you'd better hear it from him. Come along."

I stood still by the pillar and looked at his animated face with a slight smile.

"Thanks. I don't think I'll come. I do feel rather blue to-night."

"Why," he returned, rather blankly, "I think it an awfully jolly ball. I have been having a first-rate time."

"What have you been doing?" I asked, with a faint stirring of interest. Perhaps he could show me how to have a good time too.

"I have been in the bar all the time. The champagne is going just like water. All free, you know, and good stuff too. He's a jolly old com. He doesn't do things by halves."

The interest died out again.

"Don't let me keep you. You may lose some of the valuable tips," I said. "I'll stay here. I don't care for the races or the champagne either."

"You are such a queer fellow," he replied, eyeing me askance. "What do you care for, I wonder? But you'd better come."

With that he passed on, and I was again left alone. A short, stout, elderly gentleman scudded up to me next. He was a great talker, and it was a treat for him to find some unoccupied person apparently able to listen to him.

"Good-evening, my boy. I see you're enjoying yourself with the rest of the young folks."

"Good-evening, colonel," I replied.

"I've discovered all about that Brentwood affair to-night," he went on, coming nearer to me and speaking confidentially. "It's a scandal, a shame; it's clear that Brentwood accepted a contract for the Iumma road and never meant to build it, never *meant to*, I say; the service is rotten, rotten through and through, and if the Government don't take some steps about it—well I don't claim any particular brilliance of intellect; I don't suppose my brain is more acute or my vision clearer than the ordinary man's—"

Here he seemed to pause, as if he would like some interruption, and so I gratified him with a murmured:

"I don't know about that, colonel."

When he proceeded, happily:

—“And, therefore, what I can see others can see. If I know these things are going on, why, others know it. Now, I am proud of my country, I am proud of—”

I am afraid I lost what else furnished him with a cause of pride, for my attention wandered. Somehow I did not seem to care if the service were rotten or if Brentwood had contracted to build fifty roads and then backed out of it. My former interlocutor was right; I was queer, I suppose, since none of these vital matters interested me.

I really had an engagement for the coming dance, so when I had listened respectfully to the whole speech, and the colonel stopped to take breath for a moment, I said:

“You must excuse me, colonel; I have to look for my partner for this waltz.”

“Very good, my boy, very good,” he replied, genially, having at last, as he hoped, impressed some one with a sense of Brentwood’s enormities. “I don’t grudge you the dance or the girl. I like to see boys enjoy themselves.”

With which comforting assurance in my ears I started listlessly to find my partner.

That young lady I soon discovered sitting on a *fauteuil*.

“I thought you had forgotten our dance!” she exclaimed the moment I came up, and she looked at me with an arch expression that told me very clearly she thought such a thing would be an utter impossibility.

She was slight and round, very well-dressed, with a pretty face, frivolous expression, and a mouth that was always laughing. I assured her that the dance was what I had been waiting for all the evening, and we started together. She talked the whole time. She told me how the last man she danced with had held her so tightly the flowers at her breast had all been crushed and broken; wasn’t he a wretch? Not but what she liked to be held tightly, she exclaimed, as, involuntarily my arm round her loosened, but not, of course, so as to crush her flowers; but they were all dead now, and it didn’t matter. A hateful girl, too, had trodden on her train; they—trains—were a bore of course in dancing, but didn’t I think they made you look more graceful—yes, well, she thought so too, and was glad I thought so; and, fancy, that ugly little Miss Johnson was going to marry Captain Grant of the Eleventh,

and wasn't it wonderful what he could see in her, and didn't I think she was ugly? Not know her by sight? why, of course I must know her. She sat three pews behind me and in the left aisle at church, and when the congregation turned to the east to say the Creed I could certainly see her.

While this was being poured into my ear, I had to keep my eyes well on the alert to guard against possible collision, as the room was very crowded, and just as we passed a corner my gaze fell suddenly on a figure in white silk sitting alone on a *fauteuil*. I don't know why, but something in the figure caught and held my eye; perhaps it was only, in the first place, that it was alone and therefore possibly disassociated with all this crowd, with which I myself felt so out of tune.

"Do you know the name of that girl in white we have just passed?" I asked my companion, breaking in, I am afraid, rather abruptly upon more confidences.

"That?" she replied, looking back over my shoulder. "Why, you must know her, surely; she's the general's daughter—Anna Lombard."

"Anna Lombard," I repeated. "It's a curious name. It sounds somehow to me medieval, a Middle Age sort of name."

"Oh, Anna's not middle-aged," returned inconsequently my rather flighty companion. "She was twenty-one yesterday, and just out from England, where she was kept at study and things—regular lessons, you know. Don't you think it a shame to keep a girl studying so long? It's made her so serious. She says it made her serious, made her feel and think a lot, and see things in life, I mean more than most people—I don't know how to express it exactly—but you feel she's different from other people. Of course, sometimes she laughs and is just as gay as the rest of us, but she can be serious, oh, just too dreadful for anything, and she says there's a great deal in life, and you can get a great deal out of it if you choose, and oh! funny things like that. I don't see much in life—not much that's nice, I mean—excepting dancing and ices. Could you get me an ice now, do you think, Mr. Ethridge? I really should like one. Take me out on the terrace and then bring me one, will you?"

I took her out on the terrace, found her a chair and then

dutifully brought her the ice and sat beside her. The glory of the night had not changed since I sat there alone, only, as it were, deepened and grown richer; the purple sky above was throbbing, beating, palpitating with the light of stars and planets, and a low, large, mellow moon was sinking towards the horizon, reddening as it sunk. What a night for the registration or the consummation of vows! One of those true voluptuous nights when the soft, hot air itself seems to breathe of the passions.

It was a night on which, as the Frenchman said, all women wish to be loved. I glanced at the girl beside me and wondered if she were moved by it, but I thought not; she sat sipping her ice cheerfully and diligently—for ice, like virtue, does not last long in the tropics—and watching sharply the groups and couples that passed across the lawn and through the trees before us.

“I’m engaged for the next dance, so you’d better take me back to the room,” she said, as she set down the empty glass at last, with a sigh, on the stone. “And I’ll introduce you to Anna, if you like,” she added, good-naturedly, “and you’ll see what you think of her. Some men seem to like her awfully, and others can’t get on with her a bit.”

She rose and shook out the folds of her immaculate silk and muslin, and we went back to the ball-room.

The figure in white was still seated, calm and motionless, on the *fauteuil*, and remained so as we approached. I looked at her hard and critically as we came up. She had a tall, strong, beautiful figure and a face that was like an English summer day. Her hair was fair and clustered thickly round her head in its own curls and waves. It was parted in the middle, and was so thick that it rose on each side of the parting as hair is made to do in sculptured heads, and it had the same waving creases in it, a few short, tiny locks came down on the soft, white forehead, and at the back it fell in a doubled-up plait on her neck; her eyes were blue, like pieces cut from a summer’s sky, and her skin like the wild rose in the English hedgerow first opening after a summer shower.

Such was Anna Lombard as I first saw her at the age of twenty-one.

“Anna,” said the girl with me, as we stopped beside the *fauteuil*, “Mr. Ethridge wants me to introduce him to you. Mr. Ethridge—Miss Lombard.”

The girl addressed looked up and smiled, and I was surprised at the effect of the smile on the face; the red lips parted and showed, slightly, perfect white teeth between, and the eyes flashed and seemed to deepen in color and light up with curious fire.

“I am delighted to make your acquaintance,” she said in the conventional manner, and moved just very slightly to one side of the *fauteuil*, which was large, to indicate I might sit down by her, which I did.

“Now you can amuse yourselves,” said Anna’s friend, lightly, as her partner made his way up to her to claim her. “Good-by,” and she whirled away at the first bar of the new waltz.

It is difficult to say what we talked of or what it was lent such an irresistible charm to that conversation, but looking back, I think it was partly the great interest and animation with which the girl both talked and listened. Her face was brilliant, with her deep blue eyes darkening and flashing, and her milky, stainless teeth sparkling through her crimson lips as she laughed. Everything was new and fresh to her in this wonderful India of ours, and life itself was just dawning in all its beauty before her mental vision. Her childhood had been passed in the hardest study and closest intellectual training in a dull, fog-laden old town on the Cornish coast. There, she told me, she had walked on the sea-beaten sands repeating her lessons in the classics to the wild, wet winds that were busy blowing the color into her exquisite skin, while her restless, impatient mind had been wandering far off in the sunny lands and speculating on those strange passions and emotions she was learning of through the lettered pages. And now, suddenly transported to the vivid glowing East, taken from that quiet solitude of study and placed in a whirlpool of human life and gayety in these gorgeous surroundings of Nature—for nowhere on earth is there a more dazzling or brilliant arena for life to play itself out than in India—she was like an amazed, delighted, and clever child watching the curtain rise for the first time on the splendor of a pantomime.

We sat and talked through two entire dances, then as the strains of a particularly seductive waltz reached us I asked her if she would not give it to me, and she assented, with—I fancied—the slightest possible flush. She con-

fessed to me later that though she had been carefully taught and made to practice dancing at home, this was her first "real ball." My heart beat as I put my arm round her and guided her among the dancers. I can not say or divine exactly the attractiveness of her manner; but there was a sort of appealing timidity in it that, united with such an obviously clever and gifted mind and such a sweet face and form, had in it a keen flattery.

I held her close to me, and with a perfect unity of step and motion we glided round the room in the great circle of other dancers. The warmth of the slight white arm on my shoulder and the white breast against my own, the sight of the fair, animated face, and a swift glance now and then from those passionate, blue eyes, seemed working on me like a subtle charm. I felt happy, contented; India was no longer a gorgeous but barren desert, life was not full of disappointment after all, and this ball was the greatest, the best, the most interesting function I had ever attended.

How sweet she was, this girl; what a soft, gentle voice; what smiling, caressing eyes, and what a low, slim waist that my arm encircled, and that seemed to yield so readily as if seeking and desiring protection! When the music ceased we found ourselves in the outer ring of dancers and just beside the open windows. By a mutual impulse we both passed outside on to the low stone terrace into the soft heat which yet held the freshness of grass and flowers in it of the outer air. It was the same night, the same terrace as it had been when I was there an hour ago, only my companion was changed, and what a change that makes! Anna sunk even into the same chair the other girl had sat, and that was still there, but how different everything seemed now from when that hard, frivolous, worldly little doll occupied it. My heart beat more quickly than usual; and where, an hour ago, I had been silent and quite indifferent how I might appear to my companion, now my whole energy woke up in an effort and desire to please. Perhaps I succeeded, for smiles, blushes, and laughter swept by turns over the radiant, expressive face raised to mine in the subdued light of the veranda. She did not talk very much, seeming rather to wish to listen; but everything she did say was full of brightness and wit and a sympathetic intelligence that only comes from a really

clever brain. With all her knowledge—for I drew by my persistence from her reluctant lips the confession of one study after another with which she was familiar—she seemed full of diffidence of herself, and fixed her large eyes upon me, as she asked me questions, with the deference of an inquiring child. For the first time in my life I felt repaid for my hard youth given over to learning; yes, more repaid for those years of toil than when my name appeared heading the examination list. For the first time in my life the knowledge I had acquired seemed inexpressibly dear and valuable to me. She was listening, she was interested, she wanted to know and to hear things that I could tell her—things that Lieutenant Jones and Captain Scrubbins could not have told her. She liked me, I was sure of it; she was thinking that I knew something, and she cared for these things that I cared for, far more than the last details of the pigeon-shooting match, the latest score of the Gymkhana, the newest development of the growing scandal round the major's wife, in all of which Jones and Scrubbins could easily have surpassed me. These thoughts rushed through my brain as I leaned over her, smiling and exerting myself to the utmost to please her, and the time flew by and we neither of us heeded what was being played or what dances danced in the room behind us till suddenly "Home, Sweet Home," in the guise of a waltz, reached us, and we realized suddenly the evening—our evening!—was over. We both looked at each other with a quick glance, and both knew that we wanted this dance with each other. How little stiffness, how little formality there seems to be from the first when two people meet who are going to feel a great passion one for the other, even before the passion can be said to be lighted, and certainly is not recognized.

Nature's own hand seems to slip loose some bandage which is usually before our eyes, and we act with a certain tenderness, earnestness, and simplicity that is foreign to our usual life and other relations.

As we heard the first sounds of the waltz, Anna looked at me and then slipped that soft, slender, white arm through mine with a little, happy smile, and I, with a sudden sense of happiness and delight in life that I had never known, pressed it close, and we joined the moving circle within. As we danced, and when, at the corners of the

room, her weight was thrown on me slightly and I caught a breath from her lips that reminded me of the scent of the tea-rose, and the same faint tea-rose scent came from the laces on her breast, this feeling of happiness merged into an ecstasy. It seemed I had never known life before, and, in fact, I had never known love, not even any of its base counterfeits. The soft waist yielded the more I pressed it, and filled me with an infinitely tender impulse toward her, the gentle arm against my shoulder seemed of delicious weight. I met her soft, half-wondering, innocent eyes with their pleased smile, and I knew I was really alive at last.

The waltz ended somewhat abruptly. It was three in the morning and the musicians were tired.

“Would you go and try and find my father?” Anna asked me. “He does not dance, and I am afraid he may be getting tired waiting for me somewhere.”

Just as she spoke, General Lombard came toward us. We knew each other well, though his daughter, only having just come out, I had not seen before to-night.

He greeted me pleasantly, and when I asked if I might call on the following day he assented with a smile. Then in a half-dream-like state of feeling I escorted them to their carriage, and murmured “Good-night” and a glance from two beautiful, passionate eyes out of the darkness of the carriage closed the evening for me.

That night I had a curious and horrible dream—horrible because it was filled with that nameless, causeless, baseless horror and fear that only visits us in dreams. Whatever may happen in our waking life, we never feel that same peculiar dread which seems reserved for our brains to know only in sleep. I felt I was standing in a garden, in the center of which a large and beautiful white rosebud was unfolding itself before me, as I stood and watched it with an increasing sense of delight. It was the only flower in the garden and dominated the whole scene. At last the final and most lightly closed petals were opening and spreading, and in an ecstasy I leaned forward to see the heart disclosed, when suddenly, instead of a heart, a great rent was revealed—a jagged, cruel chasm in the beauty of the flower—and I fell back shuddering, a prey to that ghastly, groundless, reasonless fear of dreams. I awoke

abruptly, feeling cold in the sultry tropic night, and turned and tossed uneasily, and fell asleep to dream the same dream again. When I awoke the second time I had a confused feeling, such as troubles the half-wakened brain in the darkness of night, that my dream was connected with Anna. Then I d——d my own foolishness, and went to sleep for the third time, and then into blank silence and rest. The next morning, waking late, with the brilliant sunlight rushing like water through all the cracks of the closed *jilmils*, I felt in excellent spirits, dressed quickly, and descended to the dining-room of my bungalow in the best of humors. My plans for that day and many days to follow were distinctly laid. I would go to Anna, be with her, talk with her, ride with her, and then—and then—and the rest seemed one bright flame of light and happiness.

How strange it was, I thought; how life seemed to have quickened in me; how all the senses seemed tuning themselves to the enjoyment of existence; how the compound seemed to smile before me, the scent from the thousand opening flowers to delight me; the blood seemed spinning gayly along through my veins; I wanted to laugh, hum, or whistle out of mere light-heartedness, and what was it all? Surely some electricity had passed out of that soft, fair form I had held in my arms last night and kindled a fresh life in me. I sat down at the breakfast-table and glanced at the pile of letters waiting my attention, but deferred opening them and giving my thoughts over to business for a few moments longer. After I had sipped my coffee and mused another ten minutes, I laid my hand on a long, official-looking letter, and rather absent-mindedly broke it open and unfolded it.

I read the letter through to its last word—it was curt enough for that matter—then I crushed it down on the table under my hand.

“D—n! D—n everything!”

The two native servants, mute bronze statues, though they understood no other word of English, understood that one of four letters. They both started violently. The *kitmargar* removed my unfinished cup of coffee tenderly, and inquired, softly:

“The sahib has had bad news?”

“Yes,” I groaned, and then added, “Pack everything;

have everything ready. We leave for Burmah by the night train."

"Protector of the poor!" exclaimed the man, clasping his hands. "The sahib is transferred?"

"Yes. To Lihuli, Burmah. You wish to accompany me?"

The man hesitated, and great tears filled his large, brown eyes and then rolled down his cheeks. They are hysterical, these natives, and my news had startled him.

"That is in my heart. I wish to. But my wives are sick. Yet if I stay I have no money for them."

I knitted my brows. My own case dictated more sympathy for his wives than I should otherwise have felt.

"Allah forbid that I should take them from you, or that you should want. Stay till they are well, and I will see you get the same pay as now. When they are recovered you can follow me, with them, if you wish. Now go. I want to be alone."

For all answer the man flung himself at my feet and clasped them and kissed them and wept over them. All of which is extremely embarrassing to an Englishman, and makes him feel somehow that he is not so fine a thing as he generally takes himself to be. Then they withdrew, and I was alone in the room full of gold light, reflected from the desert through the *jilmils*, alone with that letter, my bad news, and my feelings. I stared at the open paper, feeling doubtless as many a prisoner may have felt when shown his death-warrant. How curious it was, a flimsy sheet of paper, with a few scrawly words—the handwriting was execrable, I remember—could deal such a blow of deadly pain.

Since a few moments ago, the whole situation was changed for me: my hopes of last night, that pleasant vista of days spent here, that yielding to the intoxication of passion for Anna, that teaching and arousing of her dormant soul, and that drinking at last of the one cup that this life holds worth draining—all this that had floated before me, not as certainties, indeed, but as delicious possibilities, was stamped out, and a hideous reality rose in its place. I was transferred to Lihuli, a lonely, desolate station in Burmah, at once, and for five years. Lihuli, or the place of swamps! I read the letter through again.

“This means separation from Anna, and separation means loss.”

This is what I thought as I laid it down, and the resentment against it was so great that a hundred means of rejecting it rose in my brain. “Go to her; carry her away by the storm of your passion, and take her with you.” Then came the thought, “Take her with you! Where?” To the place of swamps; to a place where there is always some epidemic raging—sometimes it is called the black cholera, sometimes the plague, sometimes small-pox; where there is a never-varying accompaniment of malarial fever and dysentery; where the air, night and day, is tainted and suffocating; where the evening, that brings coolness elsewhere, brings but a sickly white, miasma-tainted mist from the swamps and clouds of mosquitoes; where the face of a white woman is never seen; where there are no bands, no dinners, no dances; and where there is nothing but desert, disease, death, and duty. How could I take her there? And if I could, could I keep her there? And I shuddered. “Then make her wait for you,” was the next angry, turbulent thought that came rolling along in the tide of anger and resentment that came surging through my brain. “What! On one evening’s acquaintance, ask for a girl’s love and faithful waiting for five years, and such a girl as Anna!” Conceited fool though passion will make a man, still it had not blinded me so far as that. I sat on like a statue, thinking hard, and a thousand mad plans, all equally impossible, for evading my duty came before me and were dismissed.

As far as I myself was concerned, I felt no hesitation. I would have gone to her and spoken freely, gladly—oh, how gladly—if I had allowed myself to be swayed by my own impulses, though I had known her but a few hours. It is not in the nature of things that a great passion, or even that embryo which is to become a great passion, should admit of hesitation. These feelings sweep over the human being resistlessly. They do not permit him to argue or reason with them; they dictate. And, moreover, they carry with them a conviction to his mind which renders argument unnecessary. Lesser emotions, I admit, allow of reasoning this way and that, and weighing and considering; and doubtless more than half the men in the world have long periods of oscillation before they say those

irrevocable words I would have said so willingly now, without a tremor; but this vacillation only proves that the woman they are so considering is not the one of all this life for them, and she will never be the object of the intensest passion they are capable of. The case is much the same as that of a man waiting in the street to meet some friend of whose appearance long absence or other causes have made him not quite sure. How anxiously he scans each one of the passers-by, and fifty times imagines he sees a resemblance about which he debates in his mind—is that he or is it not? And only hesitates thus because each of these is *not* the man. When the friend appears, his glance lights on him, he recognizes him. That is the man; there is no question, no doubt, no hesitation. And he walks up to him with outstretched hand. Similarly my mind instinctively and unconsciously had been waiting, as the mind of every man not occupied with passion is practically waiting, for the woman to pass by me in the way of life that was the fulfillment of the indefinite standard in my thoughts. Others who were not such women might come and go, and, moved by resemblances, I might have hesitated and looked and hesitated again; but Anna had stepped up to me in the stream of human traffic that goes up and down the Way, and my mind had instantly recognized her, and my hand was outstretched, and there was no hesitation and no doubt.

Doubtless, if more time had been allowed me, I should have used it, out of a sense of the fitness of things, decorum, and, above all, deference to the girl herself; but even then it would have been the shortest time I could have set. Indeed, I knew that the impulse to caress her, to clasp her in my arms and know her to be my own would be a difficult one to hold down by the throat for long. So that the prospect of being forced to speak at once would not have been terrifying in the least to me, if only—and I groaned out loud. Circumstances seemed so willfully and needlessly to have arrayed themselves against me. Had I been ordered to a hill station, one with even a moderately good climate and where white life was not wholly excluded, I might have had courage enough to ask her to occupy a large, cool, rose-covered bungalow, situated somewhere where the breezes came, and to continue her gay, brilliant life of dances and dinners and idle amusements as the wife

of an assistant commissioner instead of the daughter of a general; but I could not take a girl, straight from England, to share with me a fever- and cholera-haunted swamp, even if she would come. Somehow I did not feel wholly certain that she would *not* come, and her smiling eyes, as they had looked at me last night, swam before me. I lifted my head and glanced involuntarily down the breakfast-table to where, at the end, a large and brilliant mirror in my sideboard gave me back a reflection of myself. It recurred to me suddenly, then, that I was usually considered good-looking, and my heart gave a beat of pleasure. I had never thought of nor valued the fact before; but just as last night, for the first time, I had felt thankful for my little store of learning, so now for the first time I recalled with genuine pleasure the general verdict of my friends. It is, perhaps, rather to the credit of the human being in general that he or she thinks invariably little of any personal gift until the question arises of pleasing some other by it. I looked again at the glass. Yes, the features of that face looking back at me were straight and perfectly regular, the skin pale and clear, the eyes large, and eyebrows and hair as black as an Asiatic's; and I remembered delightedly that fair people always incline naturally to and admire those who are dark, and *vice-versa*. Nature's craving to return to the type which is neither extreme in all cases has mixed that inviolable instinct with men's and women's desire. Then the next instant that little rush of vain egotism and self-contentment had passed. Though she consented a hundred times I could not take her to that horror of desolation and disease that I was ordered to. It was quite, quite impossible, and I put my head down in my hands, ashamed that for an instant it had seemed so possible.

At the end of an hour and a half I rose, put on my solar topee, and walked out of my compound toward the Lombards' bungalow to make the promised call—only now it was a farewell one. When I reached the house, the servants told me the Miss Sahib had had breakfast one hour ago and had gone out, but only into the compound, and if I would wish to wait in the drawing-room they would take my card to her. I gave the man a rupee and told him to go within himself, and that I would seek the Miss Sahib in the compound. With an intelligent smile of perfect com-

prehension and a salaam of profoundest gratitude the man withdraw into the cool darkness of the hall again, and I redescended into the wilderness of blooming beauty and glaring light of the compound.

I threaded my way quietly through the tangle of blossom-laden and flowering trees, glancing on every side as I parted them, not knowing at what minute I might come upon her. The morning was unusually hot, the sun seemed to have a peculiar intensity and its fiery beams to be distilling the utmost of their perfume from the flowers. As I advanced farther into the compound I became conscious of a damper, cooler air and of a mossy woodland scent; the gurgle of water reached me, and then at the next step forward I stood motionless and spellbound: the girl herself was before me and unconscious of my presence—asleep. In the thick, cool shade thrown by a luxuriantly tangled cluster of bamboo-trees stood a low, broad, stone couch covered with thick, square velvet-and-satin cushions—a Turkish divan, in fact—in the open; and one prepared, evidently, with skill and care, for all round the stone base was hollowed out a groove filled to the rim with water, thus forming an impassable trench to the innumerable tree ants of enormous size, that were crawling in black ribbons over the mossy ground. And on this couch, fully extended, with arm above her head, lay the girl tranquilly asleep. Noiselessly, hardly breathing, I stepped closer and looked down upon her. She was wearing a loose garment of white cambric that was unfastened at the neck and showed the whole of the beautiful, solid, white throat at its base, but which, of its own will apparently, closed itself completely over the softly rising and falling bosom; the head was thrown back, and her face, fresh as a flower, was upturned; the cheeks were like the petals of the wild rose, the mouth deep crimson like a pomegranate bud, and her light hair, ruffled and loosened, fell in glistening waves over the arm beneath, white and bare—for the kindly sleeve was loose and wide and had fallen back from it almost to the shoulder. So might have Aurora herself, wearied with tending the flowers, been found sleeping in the Elysian fields. I stood entranced, letting my eyes travel reverently over the sleeping form. The cambric was delicate and transparent almost as a cobweb, but its multitudinous folds veiled all but the beautiful outlines; the hem of the

garment seemed lost in the flounces of lace, or perhaps these came from some other under one, and from these issued two bare white insteps, the rest of the feet being cased in little indoor shoes. Beyond those delicate white feet was quite a long space of the divan, covered with a velvet cloth of cashmere work, and on this, mechanically, I took my seat. I had no thought of waking her. Awake, she would become Miss Lombard and I, Mr. Ethridge, conventional words would be spoken in conventional tones; it must be so, and what words could give any idea of the rushing tide of regret and sorrow and disappointment that was rolling through my brain at leaving her. No, this silence, this perfect harmony of beauty suited best our farewells. A deep, unbroken silence lay over all the compound, a heat that seemed of deadly weight fell from the brazen sky, and the transparent air seemed to quiver in it. But here in the deep shade of the feathery bamboo there was coolness and perfect peace. A large tank of water, reflecting the branches overhead till it looked like liquid emerald, stood bedded in the moss close by, and the tiny trickle and gurgle of water flowing from it round the couch seemed to intensify the sense of surrounding coolness. What a scene it was! One possible only, perhaps, in India, where the stream of Saxon civilization, with all its richness, comfort and wealth, flows abruptly into the wonders of native Indian beauty, into that store of gorgeous coloring, of blossoms without name, of scents without definition, of skies and gardens past belief. Beyond the compound lay a sea of radiant color, a wild confusion of pomegranate crimson and rose-pink and syringa white, that seemed swaying under the dazzling effulgence of golden light. Over it hovered lazily from flower to flower great butterflies large as one's two hands put together and blue as though they were fallen fragments of the sky itself; and now and then a crimson-headed paroquet or golden oriole would fly silently across from bamboo to palm. Nearer me, the cool green shadow, the flowing water, the white stone couch, the sleeping girl. Could Milton have seen anywhere a fairer vision for his Eden, Theocritus have dreamed lovelier things for his idyls, or the ancients have imagined more for their Elysian fields?

But such surroundings are every-day and commonplace in India and the birthright of every Briton. My eyes

wandered everywhere and then came back to rest upon the sleeping girl. How calmly and deeply she slept! How unconscious of the excited heart beating so near her! So this was to be the end of a passion but just lighted, the end to that new life which had rushed through my veins when I held her in the dance. A passing away in silence while she slept. And yet I did not think it would be the end. I had a dim prescience that this tranquil, sleeping form was bound up inextricably with my future; but I also felt that never again should I behold her as she now was, in the fresh, pure, unsullied morning of her youth and virginity. It is strange how these vague, dim thoughts pass through our brains, as if sometimes our future were vaguely reflected in some dark and misty mirror, and being only stray, idle fancies, as we think, we take no notice of them. It is only afterward, sometimes, a startling remembrance rebounds upon us from the past and we recollect what we have thought.

A great sadness seized upon me and pervaded me, and for a moment the temptation came over me to awaken her by kisses on those ivory feet so near me, awaken her and make her listen to me. Surely this enchanting scene, this languorous Nature that seemed everywhere bestowing her caresses, breathing into everything her rich fervor of life would favor me. How could I not tell that this sensitive, impressionable girl, wakened suddenly by a passionate kiss in the garden where all was glowing, sense-inflaming beauty, would not be inclined toward me? My heart beat violently; for an instant I swayed and had almost clasped that smooth instep. Then I stayed myself, and the grim realities rose before me. What had I to suggest? And again the reasoning of the morning passed through my brain. Five years of waiting for me here—waiting, for her; she ardent, impetuous, just roused to a sense of the joy of life, and eager, impatient to stretch out her hands to its glittering toys; or five years' banishment with me to a notoriously dangerous and desolate spot in the Burmah swamps! No! I could not be such a selfish fool as to offer either. The decision was the same as I had come to before, and must be the same if I thought of it a hundred times. I sat on there in silence, steeped in a dull sense of pain, and she, wearied and fatigued by the long hours of last night, slept on without a movement or a murmur.

My Aurora with the wonderfully smooth, round, delicately tinted cheeks, and the long, black lashes curling upward so that I thought each moment the lids were just opening! Well, I would leave her, but it should not be in absolute silence, and I took out my pocket-book and tore two or three leaves from it, and covered them closely with words. First I gave her the text of the command, *verbatim*, as I had received it. Then I described Lihuli as I knew it, and then I merely added my farewells. When I had finished it I drew off the amethyst signet ring I always wore, and adding a line to beg her to keep it as a trifling *souvenir* of me, I rolled the paper round and thrust it through the circle. Then I rose, and leaning over the couch, drew down a flexible spray of bamboo and bent it over in an arch, fastening the end to a niche in the stone side of her resting-place; from this arch I suspended the ring and the little scroll by a tendril. It hung just over her bosom, and she could not rise without first breaking or detaching the bamboo and seeing the ring. Then I looked down upon her with an immense tenderness and reverence—though that was nothing to the tenderness I was to feel later—fixing that fresh, pure face in my heart, and then moved away softly as I had come. It was time. As I retraced my steps through the blazing compound I heard the wheels of the general's carriage on the gravel. A few moments more and she would be awake or be awakened. Those minutes of silent calm and beauty, that glimpse into the Elysian fields was a thing of the past. My face was turned to the practical, every-day life and duties of a civil commissioner.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN my train drew into Lihuli it was evening, and a refreshing softness filled the heavy, magnolia-scented air. No other European was going to alight at this station, and I saw my solitary carriage waiting for me beyond the platform. It was a golden evening; everything seemed gold, and not a glaring, but a soft, melting gold. The sky, the air, the motionless palms, even the broad road down which my carriage rolled—for a short, tawny moss grew all over it, and caught and gave back the brilliant, amber light. We had driven for about fifteen minutes when the first

bungalow came into view. It was a low, white stone, flat-roofed building, from the side view almost buried in banana-trees; then, as we drove on, I saw it faced on to the road with a great, broad, inviting veranda full of long cane chairs.

"Club-house—*gymkhana*, sahib," volunteered the driver, slackening his pace, and I saw four or five men, clad in what looked like sleeping-suits, troop through the window on to the veranda. They waved their hands and set up a feeble cheer as they caught sight of me. They all had the same blanched, pinched-looking faces, wan eyes and dry white lips. I stopped the carriage, and they came half-way down the steps to meet me as I got out.

"Very glad to welcome you to Lihuli," one of them said. "Train must have come in early or we'd have met it."

They all looked so sickly and listless, like men one sees hanging round the balconies of public hospitals or convalescent homes, that the idea of their doing anything so far requiring an effort as meeting their new deputy commissioner seemed rather a joke than anything else. I merely laughed and suffered them to guide me up to the veranda, where there was an informal and hazy introduction.

"That's Jones, of the railway survey, and Knight of the telegraph here; and this is Doctor Kennings—you'll probably have a close acquaintance with him pretty soon—and Hunter, engineer, and these two kids Seymour and Robertson. Sit down and we'll have some pegs. What do you take?"

They pulled up a small table, and giving me the most prominent chair, they drew their own round me and proceeded to pump me for news.

"It's a perfect Godsend to see a new face," remarked Knight, after we had been talking pretty briskly for some minutes.

"We've had no com since poor old Burke went crazy and shot himself."

I saw one of the other fellows kick the speaker furtively under the little bamboo table.

"Burke was the last man—the com, I suppose?" I queried. "What sent him mad?"

"Oh, I suppose the—the heat, and being alone, you

know," stammered Knight, confused by the kick on his shins and looking guilty. "But the bungalow has been renovated, and, in fact, the room where—where it happened has been pulled down, and he left a note saying he was glad to go, and the change to the cooler climate of h— would do him good. He seemed quite content."

"You d——d fool!" muttered his *vis-à-vis*, glaring at him over the glasses of long straws. "What do you want to tell him all that for the first night?"

I laughed.

"I'm not afraid of ghosts," I said lightly; "and so far, it seems as cool here as one could reasonably expect below."

"Oh, yes, it will be all right until it rains," chimed in Hunter; "and a man's all right here if he can only adapt himself. You must settle down, take a wife, and live regularly. Burke never did. He was always fretting for some girl in England."

"Take a wife!" I echoed in surprise.

"Yes, a Burmese wife. Oh, don't look so contemptuous. You'll come to it. They most of them do, and it saves time and trouble to settle down at once. Now, tomorrow morning you will have an assortment brought to you. Your choice—as the American stories advertise—for one hundred rupees down, and the remainder in installments later. She will then be contracted to you for five years; that's your appointment here, isn't it? Yes, very good. Then you'll have some one at the head of your table and to look after your house for you; they're first-rate little housekeepers, though they don't look it. Then you'll enjoy legitimate matrimony for five years, and when your time's up you pay the bill and say good-by, and there's no trouble."

The other men listened in listless indifference, and one or two nodded in confirmation of their companion's statement when he had finished. I myself knew enough of the customs of Burmah to know that he was not chaffing or jesting. I had heard of these Anglo-Burmese marriages before, and how the Burmah girl, at the end of the white man's term, goes back to the house of her parents, sometimes with two or three children of mixed blood, and is in no way looked down upon by her own people for the same, and is probably eventually married to one of her own caste.

I suppressed a yawn.

"My own company, study, and books will be more to my taste," I answered.

Hunter looked at me pityingly.

"This is a country," he said, impressively, "in which a man can *live*, but he can not live *alone*. But you can try it, of course—as Burke and others have."

Then there was a pause, and it seemed as if a chill had come into the lambent, yellow air. Then, as a welcome distraction, the doctor suggested we should go inside and dine, and we all rose with alacrity.

The dining-room was a large, lofty, airy room, and they seemed to possess excellent wines, soda-water, and spirits—at least that kind that can be kept in bottles and well-hung *punkahs* swung briskly the whole time.

We sat long over our coffee and smoked and gossiped, and my new presence seemed to make them all quite cheerful. It was late, and the moon had risen before they put me into my carriage again, and with cordial good-nights watched me drive off to my own bungalow down the steamy road that looked misty in the moonlight, and where the wheels moved without sound over the spongy yellow moss.

The next morning, as soon as it was light, I was awakened by the sound of subdued but incessant and eager chattering, apparently just beneath my window. I got up from the *charpoy*, disentangled myself from my mosquito curtains, pushed open the *jilmils* of the nearest window, and looked out. What a scene it was to meet the eyes—especially eyes like mine, not yet satiated with, nor even accustomed to, the splendors of the East! The sun had not yet risen, only a golden glow intensifying every instant near the horizon in an otherwise pearly sky heralded its approach. The compound stretching beneath my window and all round the house was one mass of roses of every tint and shape and size; toward the gate of the compound and all round the walls were clumps of the broad-leaved banana-tree swaying in the slight breeze of the dawn, and two or three trees of *Bougainvillea* bursting through, from between them, stood pouring their torrents of magenta blossoms to the ground; there is no other way to express it, for the parasite grown to a tree yet can not forget its nature, but trails its branches to the ground, and for yards round the tree-roots the earth has a carpet of its pinkish

violet flowers. Beyond the walls and broad-leaved banana-trees stretched miles of golden sand, like a calm, golden sea, broken here and there by green islands of cocoanut-palm that moved languidly against the pale-growing azure of the sky. One glance took in all this beauty, and my curiosity as to the voices returned. I looked through the network of giant *convolvulus* that completely covered one side of the house, and peering between the great violet and white cups of the flowers, I saw beneath, seated in a circle in a small open space of turf, an old native woman and five other evidently younger women round her. I could only partially see them, but they appeared to be in festive attire, and suddenly the warning at the club last night came back to me. These were, no doubt, the threatened "wives." With mingled disgust and amusement I withdrew from the window and commenced my toilet, the chattering and jabbering continuing unabated the whole time, sometimes rising to a shrill clamor, and then sinking to almost whispers. I went down to my dining-room, where breakfast was waiting for me, and which I had perfectly undisturbed, then the servant withdrew and I lapsed into thought, swinging absently on my chair and staring up to the roof, which was high enough from the floor for the bats to come in and hang there in quiet comfort.

Suddenly the lattice door was pushed open, and the old woman I had seen in the compound entered, followed by the five little women, all holding one another's hands, and grinning the whole width of their little, painted mouths. They were all dressed in very tight, narrow petticoats—so narrow that they produced the effect of a bolster-case or one wide trouser-leg—these were of different gay-colored silks, and reached just to the little ankles of the wearers, which were loaded with blue china bangles. Above, they each wore a silk zouave, heavily embroidered, which, while it covered each breast, left the space between them exposed; their throats were quite bare and peculiarly round, smooth, and boneless; their arms were bare except for countless glass and china bangles, and they all wore flowers stuck in their straight, oily, black hair and behind their ears. The old woman flung herself flat on the floor before me, with her forehead pressed to the ground, and the five little creatures went down on their hands and knees, ducking their flower-decked heads, and subjecting the absurdly

tight, silk petticoat to a terrible strain over the broadest part of their small persons. After her obeisance, the old woman sat up and addressed me in a flow of excellent Hindustani. She had heard that the sahib, who was her father and mother and the protector of the poor, had come to shed the light of his most glorious countenance, which was like the sun rising in majesty upon Lihuli, and she had hastened her aged footsteps to minister to the wants of the sahib, and she brought him five flowers of the morning, and he was to stretch forth his kingly hand and indicate which would best suit him for a wife. When she paused, the five little girls also sat up and eyed me somewhat anxiously. Some chalk or white paste had been rubbed over their faces to simulate the Aryan complexion, and a round, pink spot painted in the middle of the cheek. Their faces were Mongolian in type, more like the Chinese face than any other, but the mouths were soft and pretty. Their diminutiveness was the most striking thing about them. They seemed like little children.

“How old are they?” I asked the woman.

“Eleven, twelve, and thirteen,” she answered, sharply, looking at me suspiciously. “Surely the sahib doesn’t think that too old?”

“Old! Good God! no; they’re not old enough,” I returned—speaking, of course, always in her vernacular.

The old woman looked relieved, and pulling forward the biggest one by the arm, she brought her close up to me.

“See here,” she proceeded, “she’s plump and good-sized.”

With this she pinched the girl’s bosom, and dug her fingers into her neck precisely as poulterers pinch the breasts of their fowls for customers.

After that, she went into various details pertaining to the girl with a degree of frankness that makes it impossible to repeat them. I sat back in my chair, surveying the scene with amazement at the strange commingling of ideas—these little, half-formed things, and wifehood, motherhood, and the modest Anglo-Indian Government that will not have the word prostitution printed in the newspapers, and yet countenances such things as these. For all this was perfectly legal, and the girls probably all came from Burmah families of some standing.

“Here, Nanee,” exclaimed the old woman to another

of them—perhaps the prettiest of them all—“go up and make yourself amiable to the gentleman.”

At this Nanee approached in little, bare, velvet feet, and nestled close to my side, one tiny hand, soft as satin, absurdly flexible at the wrist, and seemingly perfectly boneless, she placed on my knee, and looking up straight at me, she lisped, softly, “*Ashik karti*,” or “I love you,” to show me she too could speak Hindustani.

I looked down on her with a smile. The idea of love seemed to me ludicrous. What could I do with this little atom of doll-like, child-like life? But I smiled upon her as one does on a pretty child asking for a kiss.

“Now, which will the sahib, who is lord of all the virtues, decide upon—Nanee or Lalee?” asked the old woman, in a business-like tone.

I saw it was time to negative the matter at once, and I said, decidedly:

“I am not in want of a wife, and I have no intention of taking one.”

The old woman fell back, sitting on her heels, and stared at me blankly.

“But, sahib, protector of the poor, you are here for five years; no white woman at all in Lihuli, no woman allowed in bazaar! What will you do?”

Five years! So she knew the exact length of my appointment, probably the amount of my salary and private income to an anna. They know everything, these people. I looked up and saw, standing just inside my door, patiently waiting till the market should be concluded, a clerk with a long strip of paper and a bundle of reed pens in his hands. His duty was to make out the agreement between us, and give me a receipt for any money paid on account.

“I don’t know,” I said, abruptly. “When I want a wife I will send for one. I don’t want one now. I have spoken.”

“Let the sahib think once more. He may look from one end of Lihuli to the other and he will not find such buds from the garden of Paradise as these again.”

I glanced at the buds of Paradise and saw that their little faces had grown sad and wistful as they heard my decision.

“They are beautiful beyond comparison,” I said to reassure them, and perhaps save them from the old woman’s

wrath; "but I have no need of them. If I had, there are none I could wish better."

"Well," muttered the old woman, somewhat appeased, while the buds looked considerably happier, "I am but a poor woman, and the sahib is the lord of gold and silver."

I understood this, and it was an appeal to which I could respond. I put my hand into my pocket and drew out a handful of rupees. These I dropped into her outstretched hands, and she fell on her face again and declared I was more her father and mother than ever, and otherwise very nearly related to her.

Then I got up and filled each of the little, soft, brown hands of the buds with rupees, and their tiny fingers could hardly close over the large coins.

"Now go," I said, and clasping hands as before, they all wriggled in an uneven line to and through the door, followed by the clerk.

Then I threw myself into a chair and laughed, yet it was rather a sad laugh and ended soon, leaving me staring thoughtfully into the sheen of gold sunlight beyond the lattice door. I felt sorry for them, and after a time this impersonal sorrow merged into sorrow for myself. The old woman's words, "Five years! What will the sahib do?" rang in my ears. It is a curious fact how, if we are in an unpleasant position, another person's sympathy or pity seems to stamp it into our minds and bring out sharply its most disagreeable points. She saw the position more clearly than I did. She had seen my predecessor come and go. She knew, probably, more of the way in which heat and silence can work on the white man's brain than I did. My thoughts were decidedly unpleasant as I stared up into the great arch above me. There was no ceiling-cloth stretched across. The eye could go up far among the great timbers and cross-beams and watch the black, mummy-like bats clinging there in rows, head downward, with their claws sheathed till the night-time.

It was ten when I ordered the carriage and drove down to the city to see the native quarter and find my office. Lihuli is a place with a very large but straggling population, and without those grand buildings, tombs, temples, and mosques one stumbles over at every turn in the native cities of India. Nothing but piles of irregular, badly built, badly kept mud, plaster, and stone houses leaning against

one another, one on the top of the other, as if an earthquake had shaken them together, met my eyes on the left of the broad road I was traversing. And this was the town. On the other side of it lay a wide, flowing stream—doubtless but a dry, stony bed for many months in the year—and between the river and the town rose a high, stone wall which intervened to prevent the miserable little, mud houses slipping into the stream and being whirled away to the great swamps of the plain. Running through the town there was one respectable street, and in this I found the court-house and my office—a two-storied building in stone adjoining. The lower story one could enter from the street; but to arrive at the second, one had to pass through the ground-floor out into the square yard beyond, where great white oxen, reposing on their fore-knees, gazed at one steadily through the blinding glare of the sun, and by picking one's way carefully through piles of green fodder and pools of slime, one reached the airy, frail wooden staircase that ran up to the balcony of the second story. The house was a corner one, and the balcony at the side here overhung a narrow, native court. The buildings were not high, and the sun fell richly into it. Glancing across, I saw a little, grated window opposite, low down and white with the dust of the road. Two native women sat behind the bars, and I caught the glint of a red and blue glass bracelet as a tiny brown hand clasped one of the rails. It was fairly cool and shaded in the balcony, because an awning of English manufacture stretched over it made it so. Beneath, in the dust, sat the sellers of sweets and cakes, cross-legged, calling out their wares in a crooning, droning voice. I passed on and turned the corner of the balcony, coming round to the front of the office, where the long windows opened into it. Some white pigeons had their cote on the gray wall of the court-house adjoining, and they whirled round the balcony, their snow-white wings flashing in the gold sunlight against the blue sky. I watched them for an instant, and they seemed looking at me wonderingly. "Poor Burke!" I thought, "perhaps these birds were favorites of his, and are asking themselves if I am he come back to them." I shuddered and turned into the office. It was all so neat and in such perfect order. It seemed as if he had just stepped out of it except that the dust lay thick on everything. The *jilmils* of the

windows were closed, and all was black darkness to me stepping from the yellow glare outside. I started as a shuffling on the matting came to my ears and the light of a pair of eyes to mine, looking out of the shadow. The next minute I distinguished the figure of a native clerk bearing a bunch of keys.

“Why, where did you spring from?” I exclaimed, or a near equivalent to that in Hindustani.

“Behold, heaven born, there is an inner staircase,” replied the clerk, bowing, and then I noticed that a second little staircase just outside the office door led below.

I took over the keys and went to work—dry work for the most part—reading letters, filing and answering them, and writing judgments on cases I had not tried; and hot work, for there was no *punkah*, and ordering one put up for to-morrow did not make it any cooler to-day. The sweat gathered on my face and poured persistently off my nose, blotting and blurring everything I wrote in the most pathetic, approved, tear-stained way. It *was* pathetic, I thought; a few tears would not probably have cost me as much.

By five in the afternoon I was free, and shutting up the dusty, airless room I strolled out on the balcony and found compensation.

The Burmah air was round me, dazzling, yellow air, like liquid gold, and heavy with those strange smells of smoke and rose and incense and spices. Above, the Burmah sky of silver blue; below, the broad Burmah road, with its countless forms in white and blue and yellow passing up and down, and its bullock-carts with their heavy, large white bullocks moving slowly in from the teak forests that lie toward the west. I leaned on the rail of the balcony and looked down, realizing how truly the East was in my blood. It seemed my home, its air my native air. With all its miseries and its sins I loved it and I knew that I did. The wish of my childhood, boyhood, and youth had been accomplished. I had come to the East, and did not think I should ever want to return. It holds one with too many hands. I leaned on one elbow gazing down on the careless, light-hearted stream of Orientals passing below—people whose brains are like the brains of a genius, whose daily life is the life of a child, and whose passions are the passions of a beast. A feeling of contentment stole over me, borne on the heated, languid, spice-laden air. Had I

only had beside me that yielding form and those speaking eyes I should have been happy, far too happy; and this is doubtless what the gods thought when they arranged things differently.

I went down presently by the little, rickety outside staircase and through the court-yard, where the bullocks were still wallowing in the blue mud, and through the lower story of the building, which was the office of a native and full of dusky native clerks, perched on high stools in their straight white garments, with their long, black, braided hair falling down to the floor. The place was dark, with closed windows and *jilmils*; but the rolling eyes of the clerks as they turned on me, passing through their midst, almost lighted it with their gleaming whites and jetty pupils. And so at last out into the now cooling, brilliant air and to my carriage. A thought came to me. I was not hungry; my lonely dinner in my empty bungalow did not invite me. I would leave it till later and go now and see the notorious swamps, the blue, miasma-laden, death-dealing swamps of Lihuli. I would go now while I was fresh and strong, before the place had thinned and weakened my stock of clean blood. I found out from the native coachman that we should have to drive down to the river where, at certain places, there were landing-stages and boats—the common boats mostly used for merchandise, for the river higher up was fair and broad, a good highway for traffic. Here it became but a poor and sluggish stream that lower down, below the town, found difficulty in struggling through the wide morasses in its path.

Accordingly, through the balmy, red-gold air we drove down to the river-side, and found, by chance, an old Burman sitting on his heels beside a still older boat, damp and sticky yet from its recent load of half-rotten fruit. He was smoking peacefully, watching with dull, unseeing eyes the pinkish ripples of the stream tumbling along in their muddy bed.

The coachman threw his whip at him, by way of attracting his attention; and this, catching him full in the middle of his blue-brown, naked back, sufficed to arouse him from his reverie, and while I stood on the little quay the following colloquy, as far as it can be approached in English, took place:

“Hi, there, you son of an owl, this heaven-born person

of distinction wishes to descend the river. For how many annas shall his nobly proportioned body confer honor on your stinking old tub of a boat?"

"I am the servant of the heaven-born. For fifteen annas we will descend even to the swamps."

"And return, thou base-born?"

"I said not return."

"For fifteen annas thou shalt go and return and see that this king among men returns unharmed, or thou wilt sway in the wind as a leaf of the peepul-tree."

"It is well. I am but a poor man and the sahib's will is my will."

At the end of this I disposed of my "nobly proportioned body" in the old fruit-scented craft, and we pushed off from the bank by the aid of the long pole the old Burman used punting fashion. My *sais* got off the box, and, sitting on his heels beneath the noses of the horses, watched me go down stream, supremely satisfied with the coachman's bargaining. Easily the boat rocked its way down the river like a drunken man, pleased with himself and all the world, rolling homeward; pushed by the old Burman now from one bank, now from the other, it kept its middle course down stream, and the rank grass and long weeds at the sides stretched out their snares in vain. I sunk into a reverie that the warm stillness of the air and the ripple and the lap of the water aided, and it quite startled me when the punter ceased his work suddenly and waved his arms round his head and then toward the landscape in general, with a shrill cry to attract my attention. I sat up, raised my eyes, and looked about me.

The swamps were round me, stretching on every side of me as far as vision could reach, except in the west, where the great teak forests rose in dark masses against the glowing sky; and desolate, tainted, deadly as they were, they yet possessed a peculiar beauty of their own—that same wonderful beauty that rises before one's eyes everywhere in the East and is the consolation for all its trials. They lay around me, a wonderful plain of varied color, here the light amber and pale green of lichen and moss growing on fallen timber, there a patch of vivid scarlet from some nameless flowers springing out of the rotting vegetation, there a long, dark, green band of rushes tipped with gold in the flood of the evening sun; and over them all, faint

and indefinable, hung a pale blue mist, a shifting veil of blue vapor.

The river had widened out and shallowed, and great tussocks of coarse moss rose out of its straggling bed. Against one of these the boat jarred and finally rested. The old man laid down his pole and squatted on his heels. I gazed long and curiously about me, away over the masses of sodden moss, over the little, flat, gleaming pools turning blood red in the evening light, away over streaming patches of decaying vegetation and forming carbon, away into the pale, poisonous mist on every side. It was quite silent but for the sing-sing of the mosquitoes round us. Far off on the edge of a gleaming flat of water, motionless as an ibis carved on an Egyptian wall, stood a long-shanked bird. I could see his profile, all long beak and tufted crest, defined against the amber distance. He was the only sign of life; all around and between him and me stretched decay, poison, and death. I sat for a long time in contemplation, as the light sunk lower and lower over the dismal swamp, and the old Burmah began to get uneasy and move about in the boat. At last he raised his arms over his head to attract my attention, and I nodded to him that he might return if he wished. Slowly we pushed and punted back up stream, between the rank and muddy banks, and before we reached the landing-stage, darkness had swept over the face of the swamp; it had veiled itself in the night quickly and deftly as a woman draws her veil across her face with one turn of her hand. It was quite dark when I regained my bungalow, and I eat my solitary dinner by the light of one solitary lamp set in the center of the table, which threw—owing to its abominable shade, manufactured in Birmingham—a dazzling circle of light just round its foot on the white table-cloth, leaving the whole of the rest of the large and lofty room in complete obscurity. I heard the bats whiz in and out and repair to their haunts in the far-away ceiling undisturbed, and the lizards and spiders scurrying and clinking about in the shadowy, far-off corners; they doubtless gave the construction of that Birmingham lamp their unqualified approval. As the sole society of these companions is not very interesting, and I was too tired to seek the club, I went off to bed early.

Three weeks passed, and by the end of that time I felt myself settled into an old resident. I found I had court

work to do, and this rather amused me. Needing an interpreter by my side all through the court business irritated me. I like to hear a native's evidence straight from his lips, and by the coupling of particular looks and glances and motions of the face with certain words, I can tell pretty well which lie he is telling. Therefore, in most of my leisure hours I studied the Burmese language, and each day, after dinner, the bats, lizards, and spiders listened from their corners to a high-class conversation in the vernacular. I hired an old *Munshi* to teach me and to talk to me, and often he would bring two or three friends with him. Then, all crouching on their heels in a circle round my chair, they would all talk to me, in turn, by my special request, otherwise they would have all talked together.

In addition to this study, which was my form of amusement, I had found time in that three weeks to paint a portrait of Anna.

I hardly needed a portrait on canvas, since a very clear and, I hoped, indelible one was stamped in my brain; but one never knows about these things. The human brain is one of the crankiest creations, and a good stiff attack of fever will sometimes wipe away and make a blank of its dearest impressions. So I committed her face to canvas, in view of contingencies; and it was pleasant to see it smiling out upon me from the hot gloom of my dining-room, when I came back sick and weary from a crowded courtroom, with my retina weary of photographing infinities of black visages. I really found little time for going to the club, and the members did not see me there very often; but some of the men would sometimes bring their Burmese wives with them, and there was quite a family gathering on my veranda. It was unnecessary generally to bring out extra chairs for the women, as they were so small they could slip in beside their husbands into the same chair without his being cramped; but usually they preferred to sit cross-legged at his feet. Some of them were excellent musicians, and occasionally brought their pear-shaped guitars and sung native melodies in perfect time and tune; but for the most part they liked to sit idle, smoking their huge white Burmese cheroots, that are at least four times the size of our cigars, and which, sticking out from their little mouths, stretched quite round to hold them, do anything but improve their appearance,

One evening they followed me into my sitting-room, and spying Anna's portrait, which I had stood upon a table by itself, they crowded over it with eager curiosity. Lihuli is not an advanced Burmese community. There was no white woman there then, and perhaps had not been for years—perhaps not in the lives of these little creatures—and the fair, bright countenance looked to their dusky, peering eyes as a thing unseen and unknown. But it was the hair that struck them most. They could not understand that fair, clustering mass, full of waves and golden lights. They gazed at it in awestruck silence, and then I heard them murmur to one another:

"*Peri hai*," "It is a fairy."

"No," I said, rather sadly, "it's not a fairy. It's a living woman, who will love and be loved and have children some day, just like yourselves."

It is only by such images that one can convey the idea of womanhood to the native mind.

"But look at the hair," they said, pointing out their soft, dark fingers at it, and then turning to one another and examining one another's heads.

This was all they knew of hair, this mass of coarse, heavy, straight threads, each of uniform length, that, when dressed and oiled, lay in a black, solid lump against their heads, or when undone fell in uneven, unwavering lines to the floor.

"That is English hair, and she is an English woman," I said; but as I followed them out on to the veranda, I heard them muttering to themselves, "*Sachbat ne bolta hai, Peri hai*," "He is not speaking the truth; it is a fairy," and they looked dubiously on my veracity ever after.

During this time I had several letters from Anna, and they were characteristic ones, which delighted me. All the social news of the station, and what she had been doing in that way herself, crammed into the first few sentences and put as shortly as possible; and all the rest of the sheet filled up with some idea or theory of hers, or else a continuation of some argument or theory started in mine. Her first letter, too, had filled me with more hope than I had had since I had left her. It seemed full of a sorrow at my departure that she did not like exactly to express, but yet managed to indicate very clearly. She thanked

me for the ring, and said that she wore it on the middle finger of her right hand, and wound up her letter with:

“Why *didn't* you wake me?”

Altogether, so far, life in Burmah did not seem absolutely insupportable to me, and I grew deeply interested in my judicial work. I made headway in the language and watched everything, noted everything, and stored up all the native lore and knowledge of native life with which to surprise and please Anna in that far distance when we were to meet again. She was deeply interested in all that I told her of my Burmese friends, and every incident that was unusual or striking of my crowded court-room made the back-bone of a diverting story for her. One instance, however, I forbore to mention, though it was a great deal more to my credit than some others. On a certain Monday morning, when there had been an unusual number of cases, and I was wearied out in the heavy atmosphere before the lunch hour arrived, a case came before me of abduction, of which the facts elicited, at length, from a mist of lies, were as follows:

A low-caste Hindu woman had married a low-caste Burman, and their daughter, a low-caste hybrid, had been married and left a widow before she was eleven years old. Her husband's mother thereupon used her, according, indeed, to Hindu custom, as a household drudge, and endeavored to add to the cheerfulness of her existence by frequent blows and a scarcity of nourishment. The Burmese father, of the mild, gentle Burmese disposition, unable to bear the pitiful tale of his daughter's woes, summoned up courage, with several of his friends, to effect a forcible abduction of the girl, and had rescued her from the old woman's clutches. Hence the suit, and now the whole four stood before me. The court-room was not very large, with four high, narrow windows facing one another, two on each side. These had bars without and shades within to keep out even that much of the pitiless sunlight; the door had a square of open-work grating in it, to let sure current move, if possible, the stifling air; the back of the court-room was crowded with narrow wooden benches, black and polished from the continued contact of oily, naked arms, legs, and bodies. In the forepart was my chair, a little raised, with a *punkah* swinging over it, and on this particular morning there were ranged before me

the old, witch-like mother-in-law, the prosecutrix, the gentle old Burman, the accused, his wife, and their daughter Lulloo, a very beautiful, half-developed woman of eleven. She had very little to say; she stood with her great eyes under magnificent arching brows fixed upon me the whole time, and her dirty white, ragged cotton tunic turned down from her back and shoulders. They were horribly scarred and cut, while her left breast was swollen, and had a large circular red patch on it. Now, it is difficult to make a black skin red, and when a patch shows up dusky crimson on it, it means blood badly extravasated underneath. I knew what a cruel blow must have been given to cause that mark, and I was not much inclined to patience with the old woman when she explained to me at great length that the girl was her son's property and her property, and could not, under any circumstances, go back to live with her own people. All this was perfectly correct as far as Hindu India went; but the law was different in Burmah; moreover, a right to a person's custody is forfeited by excessive cruelty under any law.

"The girl is lazy, and will not work unless she's beaten," screamed the old woman.

"Is that true, Lulloo?" I asked, curious to have this beautiful, silent, helpless creature speak.

"No, it is not true," she answered, calmly. "I have worked from dawn till dark for a handful of rice and two dates. Let the sahib take me for a servant in his house and see how I will work. Let me be only *meteranni* in the house of the *huzoor*."

I smiled, and shook my head.

"I have no use for women in my house," I answered.

"Do you wish to return to your father?"

The girl looked down and fingered a dried and faded circle of clematis on her wrist, and then said, in a low voice:

"Yes, if I may not go to the house of the sahib."

I signaled for the old Burman to approach.

"Take your daughter and keep her. The court gives you the right to her."

The girl, instead of joyfully throwing herself into her father's arms, as I anticipated, flung herself at my feet, kissing and crying over them. The old woman, as soon as she fairly understood the sentence, began screaming and vociferating.

“Take her away,” I said, peremptorily; and two stout Burmans, ushers of my court, dragged and hustled her out between them.

We could still hear her shrill clamor outside, through the thick stone walls. Lulloo was still weeping at my feet, and a stray ray of light from the window fell across her bare shoulders and showed up the hideous weals and cuts upon them. I lifted her up.

“Don’t you understand, child?” I said. “You won’t be beaten or starved any more. Go away now with your father.”

The girl ceased sobbing, and turned away to her father, muttering to herself, “I am not a child. I am a woman and a widow.” Then she went away with her parents to the back of the court and other cases came crowding on, through all that long, hot afternoon, and I thought no more about her.

The next morning, strolling out into my compound to breathe a little cool air before the sun had fairly struggled over the edge of the plain, I saw something white in the centre of one of the big banana leaves of a prominent tree which grew close to the main path of the compound by the gate. I walked up to it and found a note, rolled up and stuck through a hole in the leaf. The writing was that of the professional bazaar letter-writer, and then, signed at the bottom in large, unsteady, straggling characters, was the word “Lulloo.” I laughed and read the note. When a native is in love, he or she may not be very constant or faithful, and what he feels may not be the highest class of emotion, but at least he is very earnest for the time being, and his language is always remarkably explicit. He loses, in fact, no time whatever in coming to the point. The present note was no exception to this rule.

Lulloo, having apparently lost her heart to me the previous day in the court-house, wished to draw my attention to that fact in the most emphatic manner. I read and re-read it several times—for it was in Hindustani, both substance and character, and therefore good practice, for one can not be too well versed in this sort of literature. Then I tore it in the tiniest fragments and gave them to the now stirring morning breeze and went inside to breakfast. A week passed, and I saw nothing of Lulloo; but the notes continued, and I found one each morning stuck in

the banana leaf. Some reproached me for not having answered the former ones, and some merely begged me to give her some sign of my favor. At the end of the week the notes ceased, and I thought my absolutely ignoring them had had the desired effect. That evening, however, just as I was leaving the court, Lulloo sprung up, apparently from nowhere, and stood in front of me. I was quite astonished at the change in the child since I had last seen her, with matted hair, thin cheeks and ragged, dirty clothes in the court-room. Now she was clean, plump, and radiant, with a brand-new bolster-case petticoat of green silk and a white muslin zouave.

“Sahib! sahib!” she said, joyfully. “Look at me!”

“Where did you get all these fine clothes?” I asked, smiling.

“I buy them. They are all mine. I make much money now by my profession.”

“What is it?” I pursued, watching the sun strike the purple lights in her hair.

“Snake-charming. All snakes know me. I can charm them all. They never hurt Lulloo. Would the sahib like to see my snakes?” she added, insinuatingly, coming a little nearer me and throwing back her head at an angle, where her curled lips and arching brows looked most beautiful. “Shall I come this evening with my snakes and show the sahib?” she repeated.

Native like, there was not a word about the notes nor any allusion now to those deeper feelings that had been breathed in them. What is it that sometimes sways us to grant, sometimes to refuse, a request that we ourselves have no personal interest in? I see now that I should have refused this one; but weakness, I suppose, took hold of me and I consented.

“Very good, Lulloo, come up at eight o’clock this evening and bring your snakes. I shall have some friends coming. You shall show all you do,” and then I got into my carriage and drove away.

Lulloo, the instant her request was granted, had disappeared. I had invited four of the fellows to come and dine with me that evening, and it struck me the snake-charming would be a good thing to amuse them with afterward, and I myself would not be sorry to see the thing done genuinely and watch it at close range.

So eight o'clock that evening found myself, the doctor, Knight, Hunter, and Jones seated in a semicircle facing the veranda, smoking, sipping iced brandies, and waiting for Lulloo. With customary unpunctuality our watches marked the quarter-past before Lulloo came on to the veranda and appeared before us, followed by an old, wizened Burman who was carrying a wooden box bound with brass that seemed to sway with a movement of its own as he carried it. I saw the men glance at one another with surprise, as the girl, with her easy steps and Bacchus-like face, came into the light. She might have served perfectly for the model of any of those beautiful antiques of the youthful Bacchus. She salaamed composedly to us all, and then sat down, crouching on her heels, opened a small, square door in the hutch-like box and gave a shrill whistle. Almost instantly the circular space around her was alive with snakes of all sizes and colors; they came tumbling through the small opening, one over the other, and went writhing, wriggling, and gliding in all directions over the matting.

"I say," whispered Knight, in my ear, moving uneasily in his chair. "This is too bad. It's like a fellow having D. T. without deserving it, you know."

"Perhaps you do deserve it," I retorted—for Knight was a consumer of many pegs. "Now, I don't mind watching them in the least."

Lulloo was catching up her snakes one by one and squeezing their throats till their mouths opened, so that we could all see that they were fully fanged. There were more snakes there than I knew the names of, but I recognized two fair-sized rattlers and a small python. She lifted the python with some little exertion of strength—for he was fat and heavy—and tied him round her waist as a girdle. Then she took the two rattlers by their necks, one in each hand, and knocked their heads together. They spit and hissed violently. Then she laid one down and slapped the other with her free hand, moving with incredible swiftness to avoid the darting tongue. Then, when the poor beast was worked up into a thorough loss of his temper, she brought out of her zouave a little square tablet of wood, and put it before his jaws. He struck at it viciously, and we plainly saw, when she drew it away, the yellow drops of venom his poison-fangs had left on it.

"I say, I don't half like this," muttered Jones. "It's

just playing with death. Suppose the brute catches her hand instead of the board, she'd be dead in half an hour."

"He who harbors love in his heart is in more danger than if he held a hundred snakes in his bosom," crooned Lulloo, as if she had understood or divined what he was saying, and she threw an eloquent glance in my direction that made all the men laugh and nudge one another.

"I say, you've been going it with this girl—must have. You'll get into trouble," remarked the doctor; and Knight added:

"Seems awfully stuck on him. I imagine we're expected to leave early."

I felt myself flush up with annoyance, but said nothing, and the clematis-crowned head in front of us bent low over the snakes as the girl twined the reptiles round her neck, letting a bunch of squirming heads hang down like a pendant or locket between her firm, round breasts.

She had knocked both the rattlers about and let them each strike at the wood tablet several times. "Now they are tired," she said. "See!" and indeed both snakes lay in a heap on the matting, apparently quite exhausted.

"You cruel little beast!" said Knight, in Hindustani, chaffingly shaking his finger at her.

The girl laughed, and picking up one of the dormant rattlers by the middle of the body, flung it full in his face. I have seldom seen a man so abjectly frightened. He turned livid and sprung to his feet, the snake slipped down between his legs and wriggled back toward its mistress.

I frowned angrily at Lulloo.

"How dare you, you rude, ill-bred little girl! I am sorry I had you to my house."

The effect of my words on Lulloo was remarkable. She stared at me with wide-open eyes for a moment, sitting back on her heels. Then she burst out crying and flung herself forward, clasping my feet and murmuring incoherent words of contrition.

Knight sat down again with a forced smile, but he had not altogether recovered his composure. It is not pleasant to have a full-sized rattler flung suddenly in your face, even though it is exhausted.

The other men looked on, amused. Lulloo's attitude to me interested them a good deal more, practically, than her snake-charming. I drew my feet away, and said:

“ You should apologize to my friend, not to me.”

Lulloo looked up and gazed resentfully at Knight out of her great, star-like, tear-filled eyes, then glanced back at me and finally crept toward Knight, clasped his feet, muttered some apology, and drawing from the bosom of her zouave a tiny, long vial of attar of roses, dropped some of it on them. The idea of well-blacked and polished London-manufactured boots being anointed with attar of roses amused the men; they leaned back in their long chairs and laughed at the scene till the cane creaked. Knight, looking uncomfortable, tucked his feet under his chair, and Jones leaned forward, spreading out his handkerchief.

“ Here, little girl, put some on this.”

Lulloo again looked questioningly at me. It was plain she would obey me to any limit; but she had no particular liking for my friends. They were laughing at her and making fun of her, and a native, like an animal, does not forgive this.

I nodded gravely, and she accordingly dropped some of the priceless stuff on the outspread handkerchief. Jones covered his face with it.

“ Phew! that’s nice. I say, how these snakes smell! Have you noticed it? They are worse than a tank full of muggers. Come on, you fellows. I think we had better be going.”

“ Have you anything else to show us?” I asked Lulloo.

“ See me as the snake girl,” she said; and picking up the smaller snakes, she twisted them together into a wreath and put them on her head; they hissed a little, but did not attempt to untwine; the next larger in size she knotted into a collaret and slipped round her throat; the large python formed her waist belt, smaller snakes her anklets, and smaller ones yet wriggled in twisting rings along her arms from shoulders to wrists. Then she stood upright before us, looking like some wonderful little Indian god, her whole body a mass of writhing, twisting snakes, and her perfect, Bacchus-like face looking out at us from under her garland of hissing, moving heads and darting, forked tongues. She stood still for a second, then gave a shrill whistle, and as by magic all the snakes dropped from her; rapidly untwining and uncoiling, they glided down over her face, breasts, and body, and in a moment they were all writhing about the floor at her feet again. She

sat down and began unceremoniously packing them back in their box.

“Come and have some pegs before you go,” I suggested, and took the men over to the sideboard.

They drank them with much appreciation, especially Knight, who declared he had an uncanny feeling yet in his face where the rattler had hit him; and then, with a good deal of laughter and chaff upon my having refused legitimate Burmese marriage ties and then succumbed to the wiles of a snake-charmer, they departed, and I walked back to the veranda where Lulloo was sitting.

She ordered the old Burman to pick up the box and retire, which he did, and then she and I were left alone. She seemed in no way disposed to hurry, but came closer to me and looked up in my face with parted lips and half-shut eyes.

“Well,” I said, putting my hand in my pocket, “how much is it to be?”

“Let there be no price. Am I not the slave of the sahib? But let me stay this one night in the house of the sahib.”

Then I saw my folly in accepting the snake entertainment at all.

“I have told you before, Lulloo, it can not be,” I returned, drawing from my pocket enough to amply repay her, and trying to force the money into her hand. “Go home, my child, and find happiness among your own people. I am here but for a time. If I loved you to-day, I must break your heart to-morrow. Go to your own people and forget me.”

Lulloo let the money fall and scatter on the floor as she slipped to her knees and clasped mine, putting both arms round them and commencing to sob pitifully.

“I ask but to remain this night. Am I, then, so distasteful to the sahib?”

Now, to argue with a native is worse than useless; it does nothing but confirm him in his own view. I bent over her and took hold of her shoulders to raise her up.

The skin underneath the thin muslin was soft like satin, and the warmth and electricity of it ran into my palms. But I think the only feeling stirred in me was a rush of wild longing for Anna, and as I raised my head, my eyes went straight over to the picture of her, fair and smiling,

looking out at me from the darkness. I raised her up and almost carried her to the high lattice door, put her outside in silence, and closed and locked the door between us. She stared at me for a minute through the yellow lattice wood-work, and then fled away into the darkness with one sobbing cry, "Sahib! sahib!" It came back to me over the magnolia jungle of the compound in a faint wail and then there was stillness. I went inside and upstairs and threw myself on my bed, but I could not sleep. I felt nervous, excited, supremely dissatisfied with myself, without exactly knowing why, and troubled about the girl and her genuine distress. I tossed about till morning, and got up with shaking muscles and aching head. I went round to the club after breakfast and found there my four companions of last night finishing their coffee and perusing some aged papers. They looked up as I entered and eyed me all over with a sort of sympathetic curiosity that I found very obnoxious.

"You look very tired this morning," observed the doctor; and at this remark a sly smile went round the circle.

"Yes; I got no sleep at all," I returned, yawning and dropping into a chair.

This statement was the signal for a fire of covert and idiotic chaff and innuendo. I listened to it all in silence, balancing a paper-cutter in my fingers and looking through the window. Then, when they had quite exhausted their stock of wit and were quiet, I said, crossly:

"If you think that girl stayed at my place all night, you're mistaken. She left five minutes after you did."

There was silence in the room.

Something in my look, voice, or manner convinced them, I suppose, that I was speaking the truth, for the doctor, after laying down his paper on his knee and looking at me over it in silence for quite two minutes, said, slowly:

"Ethridge, you'll come to a bad end. You're intemperate, and intemperance in India, no constitution can stand."

"What on earth are you driving at now?" I asked, more crossly still, for I did feel excessively irritable, and, so to speak, unnerved that morning. I wheeled my chair round on its hind legs and stared at him sulkily. "I'm not intemperate."

"Yes, you are," persisted the doctor, stolidly; "you

are intemperately virtuous, and it won't do. You won't even have the consolation of that girl of yours weeping over your grave. She won't come down to Burmah to do it. You drive things to extremes, and one can't stand extremes here. You are extremely moderate, and it won't pay. You should be moderately moderate. The moderate man is the only one who lives here. Moderately bad, moderately good, drinks moderately, eats moderately and is moderately virtuous. A man is made, apparently, for alternate vice and virtue; and this alternation suits his health better than a strict adherence to either. That theory has been threshed out in a novel called 'The Woman Who Didn't.' I would advise you to read it."

"I think you are talking a d——d lot of rot," I said, angrily, and got up and walked out of the club-house. But in my heart I knew the doctor was right—with limitations. I went as usual to the court-house and then back at noon to my bungalow. I had no heart for billiards or cards or any of the club diversions. I had hardly got inside my compound gates when a wild figure ran toward me, tearing its yellow tunic, and throwing handfuls of dust against its breast.

"My child, sahib! my child, my only child! Give me back my child!" and then, as it groveled in the dust at my feet, I recognized Jhuldoo, the old Burman, father of Lulloo.

"I haven't got your child," I said, wearily—for my head was aching, my eyes swollen, and life in general was a burden.

"No, sahib, she is dead, dead, hanged in the old stable by the bridge that spans the river; and Jhuldoo is childless, childless!" and he rocked himself backward and forward, sitting in the narrow path-way that ran up to the house.

I stood motionless, paralyzed by his words, and felt myself grow cold in the blighting heat of the full noontide sun. Lulloo dead! Hanged! Hanged herself, doubtless, after her flight from me into the darkness. And so I had added one more to the terrible list of Hindu suicides! I stood still, trying to realize it. The banana-tree drooped over us, and the figure in the dust went on swaying and rocking itself and moaning like a wounded animal.

"What did the sahib do that she should end her life in

the stable by the bridge that spans the river? What did the sahib do?" he moaned over and over again, yet without daring to demand or even waiting or seeming to expect an answer.

"I don't know," I said, mechanically, at last. "Come up to the veranda, Jhuldoo. I can not stand here. Come up and tell me about her."

I walked forward with a sick, sinking heart, and Jhuldoo got up and shambled after me. When we reached the shade of the veranda he sunk down and recommenced his crooning and weeping. I dropped into a chair and gazed blankly into the sunlight. Dead! choked! hanged! with a rope round that pretty, soft, round throat, and that beautiful child's face swollen and livid and distorted. Poor, pretty, little child! What an end! And I had brought her to it!

"The sahib could have gone to the city; he could have gone to the bazaar; he could have had a hundred wives; he need not have taken Jhuldoo's only child. Jhuldoo is a poor man! poor man! poor man!"

The "poor man! poor man! poor man!" rose to a piercing wail and went through the compound and distracted me.

"Jhuldoo," said I, passionately, "I have done nothing to your daughter—nothing. I am not responsible for her death. She came here and begged me to use her as my toy and my plaything for an hour or so, and I would not. I bid her go back to you. She was here in my house last evening when I and my friends were here, and showed her snake-charming. She left here at the hour of ten, unharmed. I know nothing more of her than that. I give you the white man's truth."

The old Burman lifted his head and scanned my face with his heavy, reddened eyes.

"How should I not believe the sahib?" he said, at length; "I know that his word is truth. Nevertheless, she has hanged herself in the stable by the bridge that spans the river, and Jhuldoo is childless and a poor man, a poor man!" He rocked and sobbed again, and I sat still, feeling very cold and sick-hearted. "It was an evil day when she first saw the sahib's face in the court-house. Yet do I not blame the sahib. He discouraged her, as I well know. Yet it is hard to remain a widow at eleven."

Then he wept afresh.

Much has been said about the avarice and greed of the native; but, whether my experience of them has been singularly happy or not, I do not know, I have always found them rather indifferent to money—certainly when any of their deeper emotions have been stirred. Now, when I offered the old Burman money—that being, it seemed to me, the only thing I could do, not in any way as consolation for his daughter's loss, but simply to aid in the expenses of her funeral—he put it aside and would not look at it. Although I think he was convinced that I had given him an absolutely truthful version of the matter, he still hated me for the loss I had unwittingly brought upon him, and he would not touch my money, and when he rose to leave, he shook the dust of my veranda from his clothes and shoes with something very like a curse. I watched him shamle away down the sandy path of the compound—a queer, bent, twisted figure with his bluish-black skin contrasting oddly with the crude yellow of his ragged garments—and then, with a hot mist in my eyes, I turned into my empty bungalow. It seemed very quiet, awfully quiet, and something crackled under my feet as I passed from the veranda. I turned to look what it was, and saw a little, dried, and withered garland of white clematis.

After this incident, life grew a good deal more intolerable to me. The thought of her death depressed and haunted me, and I felt a sort of distaste to black faces, which, considering they were all round me—they and nothing else—was bad. I felt an aversion for the court-house; some other of these narrow-petticoated maidens might hang herself on my account and her father come and sit on my doorstep and reproach me. The weather grew steadily hotter and hotter as we neared the rainy season, and Anna's letters grew less and less frequent. I was evidently, and quite naturally, slipping out of her existence, slipping out of her thoughts and memory. I had gone down to Burmah—that is, I was virtually dead and buried and was now fast being forgotten. And I had only been here not quite one year. At the end of five—I looked forward with dismay, and I began to feel more and more sympathy with Burke, who had blown his brains out in that tepid stillness of the bungalow, which was beginning to weigh more and more upon me each night. The time

seemed to pass slower and slower, so that sometimes I caught myself wondering if it meant to stop altogether and keep me anchored forever and ever in Lihuli. A day seemed to stretch and stretch out its long, hot, elastic hours; and a week, to look back upon when it had passed, seemed like a year. "Take a wife and settle down." Yes, that was doubtless one way to kill the oppressive silence and keep a rational head on one's shoulders. Knight had done so, and certainly seemed comfortable enough. He was growing portly, and but for a little trouble with his liver kept his health wonderfully.

When I went round to see him in the evening, I used to find him generally smoking peacefully in his dining-room with his wife and family crawling about on the floor around his chair. He had three little round, fat, toddling bundles of babies, the youngest of whom was as white as its father.

"But, Knight, what *will* you do with all these when your term is up and you have to leave?" I asked him one evening when I came upon the scene of happy domesticity.

"Oh, well, she"—with an airy wave of his hand—"will go back to her own people, you know, with the kids."

"But what about that little one—it's a girl, isn't it?—and as white as we are. You won't want her to go into the bazaar, surely, and lead a dog's life among these blacks—your own daughter, with your blood in her veins. It's horrible!"

"You're quite right, perfectly right, my dear fellow. It *is* a horrible thought, and that's why I never encourage it. I never think about disagreeable things. What's the use?"

I gazed at him—fat, rubicund, cheerful, and comfortable—as he leaned back in his chair; then at the pretty, child-like being who sat on her heels under the table, weaving a garland of clematis and crooning to herself; and then at the three little creatures tumbling round her, that he had seen fit, for his own amusement, to bring into the world and to such a miserable heritage.

"How different people are," I murmured, more to myself than to him. "To me, all love—any sort of tie of that kind—means responsibility."

"Does it?" returned Knight, sleepily. "To me it only means amusement." There was silence for a minute or

two, then he added, "I'm afraid you will go off your head, like Burke, with all your responsibilities and serious notions. I suppose that's why you didn't have anything to do with the little snake girl?"

"Principally," I answered. "Suppose I had consented, and at the end of my term—what then?"

Knight raised his eyebrows.

"Why, you would have been dead sick and tired of her—probably long before that."

"And what about her feelings?"

"You've no need to think about them."

"That depends on how you are made."

"Exactly. And you are made all wrong for your own comfort."

Which was true in the main.

I stayed and had their after-dinner coffee with them, a cup of which the little Burmese hostess brought to my side and then sung us a song in her soft, lisping voice to her oblong guitar, while the babies rolled about contentedly on the matting. Burmese babies never cry. They only laugh and croon and sprawl about and grow fat. It was a soft, heavy night; hot, so that we dripped where we sat in the thinnest of duck suits; but beautiful with the fireflies whirling in burning circles through the dark, the air laden with the scent of the white swamp lilies, and a great, mellow, red-gold moon climbing slowly up over the misty green of the rice-fields.

As I walked homeward I noticed a pale, tearful ring round it, and I thought: "The rains are at hand."

Next day the heat beat on the walls of the bungalow and came up from the cracked, thirsty earth like the glare of a furnace. Calling round early at the club for possible letters—which I did not find—I learned that three of the members were very ill with fever and the doctor himself down with dysentery. I went on to the court-house, and the only incident of the burning, weary hours was that one of the native witnesses for the prosecution in a case was seized with heat apoplexy and dropped dead on the floor in the course of his testimony. This simplified the case for the defense, and I drove home early. Entering the bungalow felt like walking into a lime-kiln, and eating was an impossibility. After a pretense of taking some dinner I went out, involuntarily seeking for cooler, fresher air out-

side. But there was little difference, except that outside one had to forego the slight relief the *punkah* gave. There was no breeze, not the faintest breath stirred the crystal, gilt air. The sky was calm; there was silence everywhere—silence and suffocating heat. The trees seemed holding themselves rigid; not a leaf even trembled on them; there was no hum of insects, no rustle of a lizard even in the parched and withered grass. The earth seemed waiting, tensely expectant, and there was a universal hush as it awaited the coming of the rains.

I strolled along very slowly, for each movement meant a fresh burst of drenching sweat pouring down one's skin, and the quiet of expectancy all round one got into my own blood and made me move silently and breathe lightly, so as not to disturb the omnipresent stillness. The sky above me was pale, pure, transparent, and gleaming like the inside of an oyster-shell. The air seemed like liquid gold to look at, and like a best Whitney blanket to breathe. The tawny moss beneath my feet was so dry it cracked with a little, hoarse whisper as I trod on it. I went on with my head down, thinking of Anna, and noticing in a vague way how the heat was increasing in intensity each moment, just as if I were walking steadily toward a furnace. At last, even movement, however slow, seemed overburdening fatigue. I stopped and looked up and round me. The sky had changed a little. I was to witness the thunder and lightning that would usher in the rains. Now, a thunder-storm with black clouds and night-like sky, with forks of lightning rending and splitting the dark curtain that seems drawn between earth and heaven, is an ordinary sight, one common to all men's experience, and that is impressive enough. But here was a roseate sky, luminous and transparent as a rose-leaf held before a flame, of itself exceedingly beautiful and clear, save for one enormous cloud that, rising almost from the earth, so low it seemed, towered into the sky and overspread all the center, white as the purest snow, delicate, soft, and filmy; while all round, to the west and east and north and south, the glorious bell of the sky hung unruffled and glowing with a few shining silver planets showing white in the translucent green and gold, and rose near the horizon.

I stood gazing up at the gigantic mass of white vapor, piled up like tossed and drifted snow, and apparently hang-

ing so close over me that it almost seemed by stretching my hands upward I could bury them in its soft, fleecy masses. Then, as I watched it, it suddenly changed to gold; light seemed poured forth from it and through it, until the whole was one dazzling, burnished, blinding mass of gold, towering to the centre of the perfect evening sky. Then suddenly from behind it there came a terrific crash, a splitting, rending roar of thunder like the bursting of a thousand cannon at my side; and the lightning—great, savage, silver forks of it—was thrown out from behind the glowing, golden mass, as if by an unseen hand, plowing up furiously the pearl and rose of the tranquil sky. If ever one could believe one was witnessing the wrath of the immortal gods, if ever it might seem to a poor ordinary mortal that he was warned to stand aside while the flashing car of Zeus swept upward through the sky, that moment of blinding glory was the time. I flung myself backward on the baked and glowing moss, and leaning upon my elbow, I gazed upward and let my brain interpret the scene in any fanciful way it would. Onward and upward swept that magnificent cloud of gold. Only for a few seconds had the charioteer of Zeus allowed the wheels of the chariot to graze, as it were, the surface of the earth, but for that moment earth's face had been transfigured. Everything had caught a golden flame, reflecting the celestial fire. Onward now through the clear blue expanse rolled the cloud, and to my eyes it almost assumed the form of a chariot. It seemed really as if Zeus himself was sitting within, his majesty veiled by that whirling nimbus of gold above it; as if the lightning, which kept falling from it in splitting, jagged rays on every side, were bolts scattered by his hand; and the long, low, threatening roll of thunder, that passed resounding through the listening air, was the thunder of his wheels. I lay and watched and waited. There was no other sound: a tense, breathless, expectant silence was all round me; there was nothing to be seen above but the measureless, glorious track of infinite blue and the tender green and lambent rose and gold of the west. In this direction the cloud was traveling rapidly, shedding its forked lightning all the way, farther and farther, higher and higher; and the long, low rumbling of the chariot-wheels grew fainter and fainter. At last, the light in the west grew of an almost intolerable brightness, and before

my straining eyes it seemed to open suddenly with light, and into an effulgence that was more than vision could bear passed the chariot of cloud. It was gone; nothing but a brazen shield of purest light hung in the west. Was it the outside of golden gates that had opened to the coming of Zeus and swung to behind the Immortal One? There was no lightning now. I listened. There was not the faintest echo of thunder. Not a sound. The sky was once more exquisitely serene, and Nature was waiting silent as before. As yet not one drop of rain had fallen. I rose and walked slowly homeward. I was convinced the rains would come in a few hours. What had I witnessed—just the inaugural thunder-storm or a sign from the gods to the parched and patient air? I laughed a little, but in a hushed way; the awful silence that seemed hanging everywhere like a suspended curtain in the pellucid air, it seemed profanity to break. Well, if it were but a thunder-storm it was certainly unique and most beautiful.

Wearied out with the intense heat and utterly exhausted, I went to bed early that night, leaving every slat in the closed *jilmils* turned open, and the *punkah* swinging over me with its musical squeak. Before I went to sleep I noticed the extraordinary amount of animal life that had taken up quarters with me. Hundreds of the white, transparent lizards that for want of knowledge of the biological name I call glass bodies, since every organ in their sinuous little bodies is visible through their transparent skin, scampered above over my walls and ceiling, devouring the green-and-gold flies that marched in, in perfect armies through every crevice and crack; dozens of solemn, heavy-bodied spiders, too, came waddling in from the garden and verandas and advanced, clicking their long legs on the matting; long ribbons of black tree ants journeyed steadily over the floor in the direction of my bath-room, while during the process of undressing I came across no less than six snakes of a harmless kind incased in my slippers, night-shirt, and other suitable places. I was too weary to attempt a useless war against my thousands of small invaders. Doubtless a message of the approaching death from the skies had been conveyed to them also, and they sought asylum with me. So beyond picking up, by means of a tumbler and a bit of paper, a portly and venomous-looking scorpion, that was making its way up to my bed, and

throwing him through the window, I made no attempt to defend myself, but flung myself on the *charpoy* and was mercifully soon asleep. It may have been midnight or later—at any rate, it was pitch dark when I was again awakened. The *punkah* had ceased. The heat was so intense that I sprang up, involuntarily fancying for the moment some one was trying to smother me with pillow or blanket. But no. It was only the intolerable pressure of the thick, suffocating air. All round me there was a roar in the air like the roar of a flood, and the noise of the rain beating on the roof was like shrapnel firing. I sat up for a moment trying to get my breath. There seemed no air to breathe. It had all become, apparently, pea soup. Then I was startled by the drip, drip of water falling with a tinkle into the matting, and I suddenly put out my hand and found my sheets and pillow were sodden wet. I struck a light and put it to the candle. The wick flared up and showed me my room. Room! Great heavens! It was more like an unfinished aquarium. The roof was leaking in a dozen or more places, one being directly over my bed, and the animal inmates were scurrying about in the greatest alarm on discovering the frail nature of their shelter. Snakes wriggled uneasily over the floor, the ants came trooping back from the bath-room, the spiders raced desperately up the curtains, and the lizards ran backward and forward over the dripping ceiling, sneezing. I got up, kicked aside the snakes, and put on my boots. Then I dragged my bed across the floor to a part of the room above which the ceiling appeared to be dry. The heat was inconceivable; the exertion of moving the bed made the sweat pour from me, and I sat down gasping with that awful sense of there being nothing to breathe—nothing such as we are accustomed to think of—only this horrible thick mixture that makes one feel one is sinking in quicksand. In that moment, as I sat dripping with perspiration, with limbs that seemed of cotton wool, and with mouth hanging open, gasping, I thought of the unhappy fish I had seen, when with anglers, lying straining and heaving on the dry rocks—and I was glad I had never fished. When I had recovered a little, I walked round the room rescuing my most precious possessions—books, papers, and clothes—from the persistent drip, drip that was coming now from every part of the ceiling. As soon as I had

done this I noticed the rain was leaking through the dry corner of the ceiling and my bed was again being dripped upon. I moved it again to shelter and lay down on it. I dozed after a little while, with the roar of the rain in my ears, and I woke again with water—warm, tepid water—splashing on my face. I rose again and dragged my bed after me, but only gained a few minutes' respite; the roof seemed giving way all over, and the few weary hours that remained of darkness I spent chasing my bed round the room and puddling after it in dripping, steaming pajamas. At the first light I put on a holland suit and went downstairs. The staircase had been transformed into a dashing waterfall. The rain had poured into the veranda rooms upstairs, and rushed out again on to the landings in the house, and from there found its way in a whirling, eddying torrent down the staircase. I picked my way down it, and entered my dining-room, to feel the carpet under my feet give like a sponge and go squelch, squelch at each step. On the table I saw no signs of my fine white damask cloth that usually adorned it. All over, for one-half inch deep, lay a mass of struggling, dying ants and fallen ants' wings. Every cup and saucer was full of them, and the bread and butter invisible beneath piles of filmy wings. These creatures, indued with wings for a short time at this season and driven in by the rain outside, enter the room in flying swarms. Their wings drop from them, they shed them everywhere—table, floor, sideboard alike are covered—while their struggling bodies fall, either to die at once, or crawl away reduced to their ordinary means of locomotion again. I sighed, gazing at this repulsive breakfast-table, and then looked through the verandas. Long, bright, diagonal lines from the sky to earth everywhere, so close and merged together that they made a wall between vision and landscape, and a white mist, thick as smoke, rising upward from the steaming, thirsty, drinking earth.

I called my servant and breakfasted as well as I could upon ants' bodies and wings flavored with coffee, and ants spread upon bread-and-butter, and then ordered my carriage and drove down to the office, with the rain lashing the top of the buggy and the running water in the road over the axles of the dragging wheels.

It rained for one whole month without intermission, and no one can tell what I suffered during that space of time.

Every road became first a running stream and then a sort of quicksand, in which foot or horse's hoof or carriage-wheel sunk hopelessly, so that exercise without became an impossibility, and one was confined to the lifeless, sultry air within the silent bungalow. Existence became a cruel blank; and it so happened that then, when I would have prized them so unspeakably, all my letters failed me, and day after day passed and post after post came in, and not a line came to me from that dear outer world, where people were living, any more than news comes to the inmates of the grassy graves. And on the last night of the month, I came home, as I remember, from a vain attempt at a walk in the torrents of lukewarm rain, that fell persistently in long straight lines from sky to earth, deadening every thing, shutting out sight of everything but itself, shutting out sound of everything but itself. The court-house had been closed a week, owing to the amount of prevailing sickness, so that that exercising ground, as it were, for the thoughts, speech, and feelings, had been shut up. I had not spoken one word beyond orders to my servants for the last fortnight. The club was closed, nearly all the members were sick or had managed, on one pretext or other, to get away for a little leave. I entered my bungalow that evening, knowing there was nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to see, no one to speak to. I was completely alone in this blank, tepid silence, shut in upon myself on every side by walls of falling rain. I went through the rooms, desperately looking at all the books; I had read them all, and the newspapers—all exhausted long ago. Oh, how I longed for a letter; how priceless one would have been to me then; it would have seemed like a hand stretched out to me from the real, living world that was somewhere far off, away in the distance. Where was I? I seemed out of the world. Dead, buried, and forgotten. I stood still in the center of my dining-room, staring blankly before me, and listening to the eternal low wish, wish of the water falling on the long-since sodden earth.

“Poor Burke! poor Burke!” I thought. “These were just such moments as he had.”

Then I thought I saw Burke himself advance from one of the dark corners, and he seemed to beckon to me and say:

“Come on, come on; one little shot in the temple does

it, and, after all, you are buried, and you may as well be dead.”

Then I sat down and hid my face on the table with a smothered groan. I am going mad, I thought—I certainly am. Oh, God! save me from that! Deliver me from this place! Then I sat still and listened to the rain again. It was very quiet, with no sound at all but this and the dull response of the long, rank grass to it. Just exactly as it must sound to the corpses in the grave-yard, I thought to myself. Then I wondered why solitude should have such a terrible, disorganizing and demoralizing effect on the human brain, and I found myself murmuring over and over again:

“They had to destroy Millbank and the solitary confinement system; they pulled it down for the same reason. All the prisoners went mad, yes, they went mad! and they were only confined a fortnight at a time.”

And the rain fell outside unceasingly and the hours crept by silently.

That night I took a large dose of chloral, pouring it out with an unsparing hand. I would run the risk of sleeping forever rather than remain awake that night.

The next morning there were really letters for me—several letters—and though they were all in long envelopes and looked horribly business-like, I seized upon them as a drowning man upon a life-belt. They were life-belts to me, drowning in this dead sea of solitude and silence, life-belts flung, as it were, from that huge, comfortable liner, the world, full of lights and life and companionship, standing far off from me. How I tore open the tough blue envelopes! I was still really then alive, a human being to be reckoned with. Positively, last night it seemed as if six feet of good church-yard soil was pressing above my breast. I commenced to read the letters through, and half an hour later I was walking round the room with two or three sheets of blue paper clutched in my hand and telling myself “it was impossible,” “incredible,” the chloral of the night before had affected my brain, and I was going cranky like Burke. For one letter informed me curtly—but those words seemed to me the sweetest that had ever been written—that “various changes necessitated my immediate recall to Kalatu,” and the other with equal brevity that, by the will of my late cousin, deceased, I was the

master of an estate worth nearly two hundred thousand pounds. The liner had indeed thrown out not only life-belts but a life-line and was rapidly hauling me on board! And I felt exactly that sensation. When I grew a little calmer and had read the letters again and assured myself that the words were really written there in good black ink, I took up my own pen and wrote off at once to Anna. Not one second would I delay now that I was free to speak. Her phrase in her very first letter, "Why *didn't* you wake me?" came before my eyes and encouraged me, and I wrote all that she should have heard then. I told her my own news, and wound up by saying I should start for Kalatu at once, and that she was not to answer me till my arrival there, when I would, the very first evening, come to see her. Then I began to walk up and down my room, trying not to feel too glad about it all. Had I been a Greek, I should have certainly seen in this unexpected and unusual good fortune the forewarning of some dire calamity—for no mortal is allowed to be equally happy with the gods for long—but I was only a happy-go-lucky, unsuperstitious Briton, and I did not feel the least uneasiness.

The next few days—my departure from Lihuli, rain-soaked and steaming, wrapped in a white mist; the long, hot journey north; the arrival and the first sight of Kalatu's palms and sparkling, sapphire line of sea beyond the desert—is all lost in a bright haze of pleasure; the clearest point being when, tired and dusty and travel-stained, I was back in my old room in the old bungalow on the Kutcherry road, with Anna's housetops just visible across the palms of the intervening compounds.

I changed my clothes hastily, a perfect fever of joy, hope, expectation, and nervous pleasure throbbing in my veins. Then I came down the steps of the bungalow in the glow of the evening and flung myself into the carriage and drove to the Lombards. As I entered the compound the sky flamed up with orange and saffron light, the broad *meidan* on every side rolled away like a sea of fire. As the wheels ground on the sandy path Anna herself stepped out on the low stone terrace. My eyes rushed over her in a second. She was the same, untouched and unaltered. There was the same exquisite freshness of the morning in her face. She came forward with a soft, sparkling smile, and the light in her hair. I sprung from the carriage,

which drove rapidly to the back of the bungalow and up the few steps. We stood on the terrace alone, in the orange sunset, with only great, warm, vital, whispering, indulgent Nature round us. I took her outstretched hands, very slim and white and half-lost in the filmy laces of the sleeve, and so drew her closer to me. I was burning, overflowing with the force of my joy, relief, and suppressed passion. Perhaps the electric force of all these passed through my clasp into her, and, for the moment, dominated her; her figure inclined docilely toward me, and she came one little step nearer. My eyes were fixed on her and blazing with the fires within. She raised hers to them and, for an instant, it seemed to me there was something unutterably sad in the depths of those passionate, dark blue eyes; but perhaps it was only seriousness as she felt a crisis in her life approaching. The light caught the almost feathery tips of the wonderfully long lashes and made the face indescribably soft and touching.

The next instant, reading her permission in that first language of the world—the looks—I had bent forward and kissed the soft, sweet lips.

Within the next hour the whole station knew that we were engaged.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning I woke up, I suppose, perhaps the happiest man in India. The bearer, bringing in the morning coffee, found me with my arms crossed behind my head gazing out through the open *jilmils* to the compound full of the cool glory of an Indian dawn. Anna belonged to me, the one woman between the ends of the earth that I wanted, that was necessary to me; and not that I wanted this hour or day, in a careless gust of animal passion, but the being, the personality that I should want all my life, without whom existence had been empty before and would be empty again, but with whom it was full, complete, rounded out, padded—stuffed, as it were—with contentment. Lucky Ethridge! The title seemed justified at last. It was curious how completely Anna fulfilled every detail of my ideal of girlhood. Ideal! It is a hackneyed word, but it must stand. It represents that which every mind, consciously or unconsciously, possesses, and mine

had been stored away in the recesses of my brain almost unknown to myself and yet sufficiently alive to turn me away from all women I had met until I saw Anna. I looked back through all those long rows of women I had known till now, and there was not one that I had felt the faintest impulse to take with me as my traveling companion down the road of life. I recollected some very beautiful—how beautiful they had been! What faces rose before me, with their delicately penciled eyebrows, perfectly modeled noses, and rounded chins to match those of statues. And now, Anna was hardly beautiful at all. She was wonderfully fresh, like the dawn in spring, but all that perfection of feature was wanting. Yet those beautiful faces had been like empty masks hung in a bazaar for me. There had been selfish hardness behind some, stupidity behind others, a sordid commonplaceness of thought and mind, or empty frivolity. And beyond all—to me—cleverness was a necessity. Then there had been clever women—how clever and brilliant!—but in this I had never found Anna's superior or equal. Never had I known in man or woman any brain like this, so clever, so logical, so gifted, so full of force of intellect, which seems to make itself felt in even the simplest words and actions of the one who possesses it. And then the other clever, great minds I had known, they had all been coupled with intolerable defects, of which hardness of heart and a cruelty in the moral nature were the most common. Anna's hardness and keenness existed in her brain and intellect alone; it left a heart, the softest, tenderest, most compassionate possible. Then yet there was another class of women—women with beautiful faces and soft, lovable natures, sweet voices and tender ways like Anna's, and passionate, sympathetic hearts like hers, and to these I had been drawn most of all; but, then, on a little acquaintance, how they wearied one! There was nothing more than this. There was no brain to be a companion to one's own; there was no comprehension of one's deepest thought, nothing to meet one's own idea, and the sweet, mild glances from the beautiful eyes at last wearied one and disappointed one and left one unsatisfied. There was no mentality to rush forward in a passionate ecstasy to meet one's own through these gates to the soul. They were beautiful gates, it is true, but less to a soul than a desert. And Anna seemed to stand before

me this morning arrayed in my mental vision just as I would have her. There was the glory of the morning, of sweet life and youth and color to charm and lead captive my senses and give to all my mental adoration of her that last touch of ecstasy that physical passion alone has the power to bestow; there was the tender, loving heart, on which a dying, bleeding soul might rest and forget its wounds, and think that death was sleep; and there was the bright, sparkling intellect, ready and eager to understand, to respond, the one gift that makes man in this brief life equal to the gods.

Yes. To me she was perfect. She was all that I wanted, all that I had ever wanted, and she was mine. I got up and dressed.

That evening I did not go to dinner, but called afterward and found the Lombards and some friends all seated outside on the stone veranda. I joined them and was accorded with a smile the chair next Anna. We all chatted together for some time, and then the general suggested somebody should sing.

“Don’t let us go inside,” said Anna, gently. “It is so much cooler here.”

“Well, Ethridge plays the guitar,” he returned. “You’ll find a guitar just inside the dining-room,” he added, turning to me. “Fetch it and start some of these young people.”

I went obediently and fetched the guitar, resumed my seat, tuned the instrument, and then announced I would accompany any one who would sing. But no one hastened to accept the offer. Then the general made an individual appeal to each in turn. Most of them made excuses, and the young man next Anna drawled out that he did not know anything to sing. When it came to Anna she said:

“I will sing you a little Greek song, if you like. I don’t seem to remember anything else, just at this minute.”

There was general acclaim at this, and everybody declared that a Greek song was what they had been most wishing for, and, indeed, almost expecting; and I thought, as I nervously pulled up the string a little higher, “Good heavens! what sort of an accompaniment will that want?”

Anna, as if divining my fears, leaned toward me and hummed the tune in my ear. It was a very quaint but

simple one, and I caught it and managed to follow her. Then she sung Anacreon's famous ode to the dove.

The tune changed in the second verse and had a most catching ring and swing in it, as the soft, expressive voice sent out the words on the still, pearly air.

Most of the men present, with myself, understood the expressive words, and it brought back curious, misty recollections of college days, which somehow seem so far off when we have once gone out from port on life's ocean; and for the women it was an amusement to hear the quaint-sounding old language and the curious, swinging tune. When she ceased there was much applause and gratitude. Only the young man next her drawled out with a most contemptuous sneer:

"Fancy having your head so full of Greek that you can't sing anything else!"

The tone was so inconceivably rude that I sprung up in my chair with a retort on my lips. But Anna was clever and her brain sharp as steel, in spite of her rose-like softness of looks, and she could quite well take care of herself when she chose. She had turned in her chair and answered, with an exact imitation of his tone:

"Fancy having nothing in your head, so that you can't sing at all."

And there was a general laugh that was decidedly with Anna.

For two days—for this reason memorable days in my life—I was happy, supremely content and satisfied. Work was light to me, hours flew by on their gilded wings like moments, and the blood in my veins seemed a mixture of fire and wine, rather than the ordinary legitimate British material. But the evening of the last of these two days brought with it a chill of apprehension. It was a something very light and slight, such as the first little cold whisper of the wind flying in front of a still distant storm. I was walking home alone through the sultry, gorgeous tropic night from a long evening spent almost alone with Anna on the veranda and in that paradise of whispering palms and bending grasses and sleeping flowers, the Lombards' compound. I had been persuading her to fix the hour, the day, for our marriage; and the soft, distressed, yet determined resistance I had met with had at first astounded and lastly frightened me. Her head had been on

my shoulder, her arms round me, our breasts pressed close till the hearts beat one against the other. Yet a chasm was opening between us, because our desires were not the same.

“No, Gerald, I really don't wish it.”

And I did wish it, and there was the great abyss between us.

Then I pressed for reasons. I asked questions. Did she love me?

Yes, she loved me with all the strength of her nature—and what a wild, passionate nature that was I alone knew, and was to know still more profoundly later. Were there any family reasons for delaying our marriage? Had her father anything to do with her answer? No. None. Nothing. It was simply her own wish.

Then how could she love me so much and not wish to marry me?

She couldn't tell. A year ago she would have consented at once; but I had delayed for a year, and now she wanted to delay a little; she could not tell how long.

Would she really have accepted me before I went to Burmah? I had asked, and oh! the agony of my heart as she had answered:

“I would have married you that same day, had you wished it. I felt, after our first meeting that first night, that you were the being in the whole world I was to love with all my soul. My whole nature went out to you and accepted you. I felt my heart opening to your smiles as a flower uncloses itself to the touch of the sun. Your arms held me in the dance, and to those arms I would have trusted myself forever. I can not explain to you why, except that love and trust and confidence in you were borne in upon my mind.”

“And when I went away without speaking you were disappointed?”

My voice was uncertain; a hot mist was forcing itself over my eyes.

“Yes.”

Her answer was so frank, so certain, so unwavering.

Then I broke out into wild protestations, my reasons for my action, my love for her, my unselfish motives, all my thought had been for her. To which she listened quietly and as quietly replied;

“ I know. You have told me. I understand. But in acting as you did, you ran the risk.”

“ But you say you still love me?”

“ I do! I do!”

And her lips were pressed to mine with a passion that went through and through me in waves of fire.

“ And no one has come between us in the interval?”

“ Could I love two men at the same time?”

I laughed.

“ Well, what is it? What is it? You are the soul of truth. Tell me why, just your reasons, and I swear I will be patient.”

“ I have told you. It is just a wish of mine to delay a little—as you did.”

“ But I had my reasons.”

“ You did not tell them to me.”

And so at last I had come away from her, confused, perplexed, puzzled, distressed beyond words and — frightened. Yes, for as a slight symptom will tell to a physician, surely and without hope, the approach of a loathsome and relentless disease, so to my brain this strange phase of her feeling foretold something, though I could not discern what, of menace to the future.

And as I walked onward, reviewing all that had been said by us both, I grew cold and chill in the sultry air. When I reached my bungalow I opened a bottle of champagne and drank half of it, and then flung myself into a long, cane chair for a smoke and I began to see things more lightly and philosophically. It was certainly very extraordinary, and all that Anna had said that evening had been most contradictory, but there might be some very simple explanation of it all. She might have some secret girlish motive for wishing to postpone the marriage, that she was too shy to confide to me. The main point, that she loved me, that her heart was mine, entirely mine, seemed to be absolutely self-evident. She really loved me; no man, I think, could mistake those thousand little evidences she gave me in every tone and action; and, therefore, loving me, she could certainly love no other. Would not any man have reasoned as I did that night?

Then it flashed upon me that she might have become *quasi-entangled* in some engagement with some man she did not love. That would account for all, including her

denial of love for any one else. (And here an error had crept imperceptibly into my calculations, for she had not given me any such denial.) The following day I would make inquiries. I would try to find out whether, in my absence, talk had connected Anna with any one in the station. There could hardly be anything existent in the way of an engagement, love-affair, or merest flirtation, that the station would *not* know of. Then I would try to straighten matters out for her; and if I once knew the point, perhaps some point of honor with her, I could help her with some counsel or consolation. Having thought all this out to my satisfaction during the smoking of seven cigarettes, I turned into bed much comforted. The next morning I immediately began my investigations with the greatest care and caution and delicacy. But evening came and found me with precisely the opposite result of my inquiries from that which I had expected. In fact, my own previous opinion of Anna had been completely ratified. Every one agreed that there was no individual in the station that Anna favored more than another. And the announcement of my engagement to her had come partly as a surprise, but more as an explanation of her exceeding seriousness of conduct and coolness of manner to every one else. She distributed her dances evenly, seldom dancing more than once with the same person. If she allowed Lieutenant Tomkins to ride with her one morning, she accorded that same privilege to Lieutenant Simkins the next. In short, the whole time I had been absent she had been noted for her gentle though cold indifference to all the officers and civilians in the station. To some extent pleased with all this, I fell back on the idea that Anna had some purely personal and fanciful reason for delaying our wedding; and I came to the conclusion that it would be best, whatever it cost myself, to humor her and be as patient as I could, to allow the subject to remain untouched upon for a week or two, and then press my petition again. In the meantime I devoted my energies to devising all sorts of entertainments. My principal object in this was to delight and amuse Anna and find excuses for having her perpetually with me. But also, undoubtedly, the station expected great things of me. The news of the fortune I had inherited spread all over the neighborhood and confirmed everybody in their envious refrain of "lucky Ethridge." Now, as a young assistant com-

missioner with no income but my pay, I had been generously entertained by every married woman in the station, when I could give little return for hospitality beyond general amiability; and now that I was installed in a big bungalow of my own, with a surplus of ready money, I was only too willing to pay off my social debts. The more I was thrown in Anna's society and the more we talked together, the more her remarkable character and intellect shone out before me. I felt somehow a vague sensation that she was not entirely suited and fitted to this humdrum nineteenth century, that her character and her mind belonged rather to some more stirring time, when personal courage was at a premium and excitement was every-day food for every one. It was not that she was not perfectly calm and irreproachable in every way, in conduct, looks, and words. She had a peculiarly graceful and fascinating manner, and every one in the station agreed she was charming. It was only when we were alone, riding or driving, and had escaped from the beaten tracks of conversation, that she said things and expressed opinions that gave me a faint, peculiar sense of her extreme independence and of something wonderfully strong in her character—something large, larger than the nature of most women, something also extremely courageous, that called for an heroic age to find its natural exercise. Among the other things I had studied, the history of the Middle Ages had always possessed a great fascination for me; and now I was suddenly drawn again toward it by the name of the girl I loved, and by the peculiar timbre of her nature that seemed familiar to me and came to me as an echo from the past. I began to read again in my odd moments of leisure between government and social work—and really the latter is nearly as hard as the former!—the volumes of medieval history I had brought out with me; and night after night, when it was too hot to sleep, I sat turning over the pages of the musty old tomes that chronicled the events of those musty old times. One night I came suddenly upon the biography of Catherine Sforza, and read it through from beginning to end. At the end of the old quarto volume was a full-page portrait of this notorious and evil woman. And I looked at it for a long time with peculiar interest. It was a fine engraving and represented the Sforza in a moment of triumph, just after she had completed to her satisfaction the

manufacture of one of her deadly poisons. She was represented in her laboratory, and having just removed her glass mask, she looked out at you from the print with a peculiar arresting gaze. There was something curiously familiar in the expression, in the look about the luminous eyes of force—great mental force and power; and all at once, in a flash, it came to me whence arose that feeling of recognition.

“Anna could look like that, I am sure she could,” I thought. I sat for a long time with the open page before me, and a strange fancy came to me that I would like to see her, just so, in this attitude, dress, and environment, and see whether, in reality, the resemblance was fulfilled. But what excuse could I give if I told her this? And everything in the picture was so unlike the surroundings one has in modern India that I certainly never should see her thus. Then another thought flashed upon me: “Get up some *tableaux vivants!*” What could be more orthodox, more commonplace than that? What would please the station more, and all the empty-headed young girls and foolish old women in it more than this—an entertainment where they could dress as extravagantly and as unsuited to their years or their faces as they pleased, and wear their hair down? Great idea! If I knew the station well in which I lived, nothing could be more popular, more universally acceptable. I shut the book and went to bed. And the Sforza with her flaming red hair stood at the foot of the *charpoy* all night, holding her glass mask and looking at me with those strange, compelling eyes.

The next morning I invited four of the youngest, gayest, and most friendly married women to luncheon with me and unfolded my scheme to them, begging them to be my managing committee.

As I anticipated, it was hailed with cries of delight.

“Mr. Ethridge, you are just too lovely for anything!” exclaimed Mrs. Sinclair, who possessed fine hair—all her own.

“It must be the greatest fun in the world, only those things cost so,” remarked Mrs. Wilson, the wife of a lieutenant, with a sigh.

I explained that I proposed to make a general fund of two thousand rupees, from which any of the committee might draw all they wanted. Costumes, curtains, lights,

wigs, every source of expense I would provide for with the greatest pleasure. Every one of my committee was to have absolute *carte blanche*. This delighted them beyond everything.

"I would so like to be Joan of Arc and wear my hair down," recommenced Mrs. Sinclair, putting up her hand to it.

"We must choose the pictures to-day," announced Mrs. Muggridge, decisively, who also had fine hair, but could not exactly have been wearing it down for forty years at least.

"What have you chosen for Miss Lombard?" demanded Mrs. Tillotson, who was young and keen of mental vision.

I knew that perfect frankness with women, who always see through you whether you are frank with them or not, was the only safe policy, and luncheon being over, I rose and got down the heavy quarto volume, found the place and opened it there, in silence, before them.

"That dreadful woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Sinclair.

"Why, Mr. Ethridge, that's not a bit like Anna!"

"How very strange!" murmured Mrs. Muggridge.

"Now, I was going to suggest Gretchen sitting at the spinning-wheel. That fair hair of Anna's, you know, in two plaits, and then her coloring, so Saxon, almost German, one might say."

"Gretchen is not in the least the type of humanity that Anna is," I returned, "and I can not imagine her spinning."

"But, good gracious! you don't imagine Anna is like this type of woman?" asked Mrs. Wilson, in a shocked tone.

"No, I don't," I said at once with energy. "Only there is a certain link between them. I don't quite know what, but I think it is the link of courage and intense mentality."

The three women looked at me with that deferential blankness of expression one meets so often in society when one is not in the least understood. Mrs. Tillotson bent over the picture in silence for a minute, then she nodded approvingly.

"What do you think?" I asked her.

"She will do it," she returned, laconically.

And so, without further opposition, that was decided upon for Anna. The rest of the afternoon was spent in arranging the general plan of the entertainment and choosing pictures for the four on the committee. I had a whole library of great volumes, and in gratitude for their cordial support, I diligently searched away in them till pictures for each one of them had been found that supremely satisfied them. Mrs. Sinclair was furnished with a most striking Joan of Arc, bound to a stake, with hair to an indefinite extent streaming round her, as one sees in the advertisements of Edwards's Harlene. Mrs. Muggridge was easily persuaded that she alone could do justice to her favorite Gretchen. A certain stoutness of figure was not wholly unsuited to the florid style of German maidenhood, and her hair was certainly light and would lend itself to two plaits. Mrs. Wilson, who was the wife of the lieutenant on two hundred and fifty rupees per *mensem*, revelled in the picture of the "Queen of Sheba," loaded with the most astounding silks and jewels. Mrs. Tillotson, tiny, slight, dainty, small-footed and agile, fluttered the pages of innumerable volumes contemptuously, then, opening a book of French travel, she hit upon the picture "A Paris Gamin." This young gentleman, in ragged coat, shirt, and trousers, with a shock of untidy hair and fun-loving eyes, was depicted in the act of throwing a somersault, and was practically standing on his hands, head downward, with his bare feet in the air. She would be that or nothing, she declared. The remainder of the committee was shocked.

"And you couldn't do it, my dear. You couldn't maintain that attitude," urged the kind and maternal Mrs. Muggridge.

"It will have to be a short *tableau*," coolly returned little Mrs. Tillotson, "a snap-shot, as it were," and she gazed lovingly at the gamin's high-poised feet—the most striking thing in the picture.

What a chance to display those little feet of hers—the only ones in the station that could wear a No. 2 shoe! She had no hair to boast of, so that the downward hanging shock head did not trouble her. And finally she had her way. At five o'clock they left me, burning to carry the news to the station, and I sat down to write to a Bombay firm the order for the material I wanted for the Sforza's

gown, and to others for the accessories such as glass masks, mortars, etc.—things which can not be found in the highly respectable shops at Kalatu. That same evening I had my bearer carry the volume, containing the picture, to the Lombards. I showed Anna the picture and told her my ideas. She looked long at the picture, then she said:

“Catherine Sforza was a cruel and a wicked woman. I do not want to poison any one, and should never be at all likely to do it.”

“No, I know!” I exclaimed, eagerly. “Oh, Anna! you have the tenderest heart in the world. You have nothing in common with this woman, nothing except the force of character, the courage, the strength of brain she must have had to live the life she did. Her crimes were the crimes of her century. Her great mental force threw itself into crime, because crime was the order of her time; and you have that same force, which you would throw into great and heroic deeds if they were to be done.”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” returned Anna. “But I’ll try to fulfill your expectations as to looking like this picture, though I really do think you might have found some more orthodox person for me.”

“I do not think that would have been nearly so suitable, you see,” I returned, laughing.

For the next fortnight I hardly knew my own house. The committee took possession of it, and my sedate Mohammedan servants, I believe, gained the impression that I was inaugurating a *seraglio*. It was not altogether comfortable to be so invaded, but I was amply repaid by the freedom it gave me of Anna’s society. It was very delightful, coming back from my work at five, to find Anna and Mrs. Tillotson sitting on a carpenter’s bench in my front drawing-room, with cups of tea, supplied from my pantry and kitchen, in their hands, chatting together, and watching the work that was going forward in the back drawing-room, namely, of transforming the wide-pillared arch between the two rooms into a colossal picture-frame, and with the floor all round them, and every chair and table covered with silk scarves, gilt crowns, jewels, antique prints, and wood shavings. Then Anna would look up and say:

“Oh, Gerald! we’ve been waiting for you to advise us about this!”

And I would sit down by them, and then Mrs. Tillotson would go off to fetch something, and Anna and I would be left alone on the carpenter's bench, in the disordered room, with only the native workmen at the other end of it hanging up gilt moldings.

But if I had looked forward to seeing Anna pose and repose before me, I was disappointed. "Somehow," she said, looking hard at the picture, "I can work myself up to looking like this once; but if I rehearse it I shall lose the spirit of it, and I sha'n't be able to do it. You had better give me all the things and tell me what has got to be done, and I'll try to do it when the time comes."

I told her I was having the dress made exactly as it was in the picture; but the *darsi* would want to fit her some time, and that I had sent to Bombay for a box of powder for her hair.

"Catherine had red hair, hadn't she? How are you going to make mine red?"

I looked at her sunny, yellow hair, running into flaxen or gold in its different creases.

"If you put this bright red powder all over it thickly, it will be the Sforza's hair. Do you see how it clusters and waves in the picture? With the red powder yours will be the very thing."

"I don't see why you should be so anxious to see me in such a horrid character," she said, discontentedly, staring at the print and knitting her delicate, marked eyebrows. "That woman murdered dozens of people. Now, I couldn't murder anybody."

"Yes, you could, my Anna, only with a good motive, I know; but if you had that, you would not hesitate, I am sure of it."

She was staring at me with wide eyes.

"Gerald! How can you say such dreadful things? Why, I can't bear to kill anything. I won't let the *meteranni* kill the spiders in my bedroom, though I hate them. I wouldn't kill anybody to save my own life—even in self-defense."

"No," I said, gently, "I know all that; but to save another you would—me, for instance."

She looked at me, laughed, and colored.

"What nonsense we are talking! Here comes Ethel back again. Now, be sensible."

Ethel Tillotson reappeared, bringing in her train two angry-looking girls. They were the two prettiest girls in the station—a Miss Johnson, tall and lithe, with dusky hair and skin and midnight eyes, and Miss Jeffries, short and round and fat, with Saxon hair and skin, and eyes like great, flat turquoises under a brow of snow.

“Now,” said Mrs. Tillotson to Anna, “you are to be a Solomon and settle this matter. Here are two May Queens! What are we to do about it?”

Anna looked at both the girls quietly—flushed, wrathful, and confused at finding me there, whom they evidently had not expected.

“You should be the May Queen of England,” she said, calmly, to the Saxon girl without the least hesitation, while Miss Johnson opened her eyes and glared at her wrathfully. “And you,” she added, turning to the other, “will make a magnificent Rosière—the Rose Queen of France. Won’t that do? The pictures are almost identical, only you will each be types of the two different countries, and the pink of the roses will suit you much better than English May.”

The girl bent over the picture of the “Rose Queen of France,” and her wrath disappeared.

“How clever you are, Anna!” she said, with a gay smile over her shoulder as she went away with the engraving.

“Well done, Solly,” said Mrs. Tillotson, patting her head. “Now you’ve just got to leave Mr. Ethridge and come and show me how to fix this chair so that it won’t be seen by the audience. I must have it to lean upon when I am standing on my head.”

Anna rose with a bright parting smile at me, and Mrs. Tillotson carried her off behind the scenes.

Now, as every one knows, there is nothing so efficacious as private theatricals for bringing out the innate selfishness, conceit, and smallness of human nature, and I fully experienced this through the next fortnight; but among all the pettiness, the malice and unkindness, the fret and fussing of all these women, Anna stood out alone as unmoved and unspoiled by it. She said very little about her own part, and took all the chaff and remonstrances about the “horrid woman” she was to personate, and her “hideous red hair” in good part.

“Gerald wishes it,” was all she said in answer to jests, questions, and mockery.

She helped prettier girls than herself to dress their hair and choose their garments to the most advantage. She lent generously from her own wardrobe and jewel-case. She smoothed out quarrels, and turned the venomous remarks of one woman to another aside as often as she could; and praised, consoled, complimented, and softened the temper of them all. And in those days I grew to know her and love her better than ever. There was no meanness, no small cruelty, no hardness in her character. It was like some of our Indian stuffs, woven true, both sides, upper and under alike, and velvety all through.

At last the eventful evening came, and I, who had not once seen her stand for the picture, was full of wonder and curiosity as to how far she would catch the spirit of it. From early afternoon my whole house had been in a turmoil, like a bee-hive in which there is an internal revolution. But by eight o'clock, when the curtains were to be drawn aside from the first picture, everything seemed to be in perfect order. The audience were all seated, and, as far as they could judge, perfect peace and calm reigned behind those heavy maroon curtains. I, who had seen the back of these for the past two weeks, doubted the last proposition; but appearances were admirably maintained. The front drawing-room was an enormous room, and now, cleared entirely of furniture, it accommodated a large number of chairs. All the station had been invited and quite three-fourths of it had come.

I hardly noticed the other pictures. Anna's was the sixth on the list, and I waited for that one with my heart beating and my eyes hardly seeing the others as they passed before me. When the curtains were drawn aside for the sixth *tableau*, they revealed Anna standing alone in the center of the stage. There was little to distract attention from her. The whole picture was that one figure, the wonderful pose and expression of the face. She stood at her full height, but leaning a little forward toward the audience. In one hand she held the transparent glass mask, and in the other the marble basin holding the just-manufactured poison. Her eyes—naturally large, and painted now for stage requirements—looked out straight before her, over the heads of the audience, burning, full of

light and a strange, mystic fire; a curious smile curled her lips slightly, a smile of elation, of triumph in her success, and yet half-tender, as if she were moved with pity and regret for what she had done. The people sat motionless in their seats and gazed silent and fascinated at that face. To me it showed a perfect conception of the character, and I sat wrapped in an intense satisfaction, feeding my fancy, carried back absolutely to the Middle Ages, seeing her at last, as it seemed to me, in her true form and guise. She stood perfectly immovable; the rich green-blue silk, that had cost me so much trouble, falling in the most statuesque folds and reflecting curious, vivid gleams of light from the heavy, swinging lamps which hung directly above her head. Her hair, powdered till it was crimson as the pictured hair of the Sforza, was pushed back from her temples and forehead, and fell in thick masses just on the nape of her neck and behind her ears. The sleeves of the dress were long to the very wrist, and ruffled according to the fashion of the day; and from their edge a deep fall of lace concealed the hand almost down to its slim, white fingertips. But though her arms were covered, her neck was not. The full, white throat was bare, and the light from above struck the white shoulders where, just at the top of the close sleeve, they seemed to have burst through their silken bands. I sat and steeped my eyes in the sight of her—my realized dream standing in front of me.

My care had not been expended in vain on the picture. It, too, was entirely true to the medieval idea. Somber curtains of heavy stuff and color formed all the background; a tripod of bronze, crucible, and furnace stood at her right hand, and on her left a stand covered with glass masks, mortars, pestles, and jars without number, of the most approved medieval shapes and patterns. It made a very striking and curious picture, to which the wonderful expression on the girl's face lent all its life and reality. The audience had the Sforza before them, and their breathless silence and immovability showed they felt the same fascination that was so fatal to her lovers in the past centuries. It was very different from the other *tableaux*, and met with a different reception. For a second after the curtains closed, instead of the light laughter and applause that had greeted the others, there was a dead silence, then a deafening clamor. The audience realized that the pict-

ure had vanished, and that unless desperate efforts were made, they would not be able to recall it. With one accord every one present clapped and cheered. The *blasé* or sleepy elderly officers, and the fatigued and languid women in the front row seemed electrified, while the young, unbridled subalterns I had massed at the back kicked, yelled, and stamped, after the manner of their kind when gratified. In a few seconds they succeeded in making the curtains divide and recalling the seventeenth century.

Catherine gazed over and beyond them, and the light gleamed on her glass mask and her mortar of poison, and her red hair for another seventy-five seconds, and then the curtain closed upon her as before. And the crowd at the back yelled again, and the rows in front risked making themselves hot with clapping.

The poisonous fascination of the Sforza seemed to work as well on the nineteenth century as on the seventeenth. Four times she looked out upon them, calm, triumphant, tender, and vindictive; yet the applause was undiminished. The curtain, however, remained closed and dark. Then, when the clamor and *encores* from the front and kicks from the back were at their loudest, a sudden silence fell on them, as if a pall had been dropped on the audience from the ceiling. Catherine herself moved in front of the great curtain and faced them. She lost nothing of the character in so doing, and the audience were enraptured; she moved, she looked, she stood, an image of the past.

“I am tired of mixing poisons,” she said; and though she did not seem to raise her voice at all, it went all through the crowded room, and it seemed calm and a trifle arrogant—such a voice as, indeed, the Sforza may have had. “Please excuse me now,” and she bowed very easily and naturally, moved across the stage in front of the curtain, and disappeared before the astonished audience had recovered themselves.

I left my seat and went round to the back of the stage. As I passed the door of the room that answered to a green-room I heard animated voices inside, and just as I approached I heard Anna’s voice saying, with perfect good humor:

“Well, who asked me to come to your stupid old *tableaux*? You wanted me as much as any one.”

I entered and saw the Sforza leaning back in a long

chair, with her slim, terrible fingers crossed behind her head and its red hair, and facing her stood an irate little May Queen, in a muslin dress, whose flushed cheeks and puckered-up brows looked the reverse of queenly. Round the two stood the remaining pictures—those who had appeared and those who had not. Feeling, apparently, was running a little against Catherine, since she was the only one who had been favored with an *encore*—and she had taken four! They all turned at my entrance and, seeing who it was, looked confused and uncomfortable. The Sforza looked across at me, nodded and smiled.

“Here’s Rosa abusing me because I kept her waiting so long that her complexion has all melted off and run down her neck,” she said, lightly. “It’s all your fault for choosing a picture that took their fancy so. I had very little to do with it.”

By this speech, in which she negatived the idea of her own charms having had any weight with the applauders, she evidently mollified the women somewhat. They looked less gloomy, and the May Queen put her crown straight and began to rub more powder over her face. Catherine herself got up and arranged her dress for her, and put a tiny touch of *rouge* on each cheek, which made the girl of the turquoise eyes look so pretty in the mirror that Catherine was holding up before her, that peace was restored, and the May Queen hurried away to the front. All the remaining women began talking at once, and they soon took the Sforza, so unruffled, so unelated by her four *encores*, back into favor.

I stood listening with impatience, longing for some moment when I should be alone with the Sforza. It did not come in the green-room. There was endless chatter and bustle there, pictures coming in and out, gossiping, arranging their hair and gowns in front of the long glass, talking, laughing, and saying alternately pleasant and spiteful things about one another. In the midst of it all Catherine sat resting coolly, with true medieval calm; and I, not liking to deliberately ask her to come away from the others, stood by her side. At last, when all the pictures had been shown and we were getting hungry, there was a general move made in the room. The curtains were closed for the last time, and the stage was being cleared, when, sudden-

ly, to our surprise, we heard cries from the still-seated audience:

“Catherine Sforza! Catherine Sforza!”

A silence fell on the room, and the women all looked toward Catherine with envy mingled with surprise. “Why is all this fuss made about her?” their looks said plainly; “she is not beautiful; she is not half so good-looking as many of the others here!” Which was strictly true, but oh! the charm, the magnetism in her which was wanting in those others!—at least so it seemed to me; but then I was prejudiced.

Catherine heard the shouts as plainly as the rest, and, after a moment, she rose indolently from her chair.

“What a bore those people are,” she said; “d——d bore, I think!” she added, in a mischievous undertone to me, with a laugh that disclosed a flash of her white teeth, and she nodded assent to the servants who came to know if they should set up the alchemistic interior for Catherine again.

I rushed round to the front again and hastened to my seat, not to lose a moment of that—to me—fascinating picture. And when it had disappeared for the last time and the audience were slowly disengaging themselves from their seats, I found the pictures all trooping out of the green-room, anxious to mingle with the spectators and hear compliments at close range.

It had been decided that each picture should maintain its dress and character throughout the evening, so here they all were—the May Queen and Rosière, Gretchen and the Queen of Sheba, the Dancing Girl, Joan of Arc, and a host of others, and—the Paris Gamin. Mrs. Tillotson was delighted; her *tableau* had been greeted with roars of laughter and genuine applause. In fact, she could have taken an *encore* had she felt inclined to stand on her head seventy-five seconds longer, but she hadn't. And here she came, sparkling, mischievous and pretty, her short, shock hair tumbling into her eyes, and her ragged shirt, making the excuse for a charming piece of *décolleté* work, which showed very daintily a V of gleaming white bosom; while her little, ivory feet, perfectly bare, tripped fearlessly about beneath her ragged trouser-ends. Next to the Sforza, she was decidedly the most popular picture among the men of the evening. The two crowds met and mingled

with much laughter, flattery, and jesting; and simultaneously made for the head of the short, broad staircase leading to the dining-room. Half-way down was an alcove leading to the conservatory, draped by *portières*, and hidden from view of the staircase. As I saw the Sforza come from the green-room, I took her arm and hastened her down the few stairs to the recess, drew her behind those heavy, friendly curtains and then gathered her up into my arms recklessly, half-choking and bruising her.

“My darling! my Old-World darling!” I murmured, straining her closely to me, and so for a moment soothing the pain and the passion that struggled and tore each other in my poor, aching heart. “You were splendid to-night—perfect!”

“Was I?” she said, very softly, nestling up close to my heart and putting her arm around me. “I am so glad you were pleased with me.”

When with me all her arrogance, coldness, and contemptuous indolence of manner, with which she often treated her enemies or faced the world, disappeared. With me, whatever pride she might possess she put at my feet. To me she was always yielding, submissive, clinging, loving, and simple. This change, this distinction she made for me had in it a subtle and intoxicating flattery.

I crushed her up to me and kissed her again and again, on her red hair and painted eyes and fresh mouth, and she yielded herself passionately to me.

“I don’t want to be the Sforza,” she whispered in my ear, “nor anybody, except just your own little girl.”

“But you are not my own yet,” I whispered back, my heart beating so violently that it seemed as if it would leap from my throat.

“I didn’t say I was. I said I wanted to be.”

“Then what prevents you?” and my voice sounded harsh and strange to myself, it was so strained with nervous passion.

“Hush! There are people coming! Let me go! Be patient with me a little while!”

There were feet passing the alcove, and some one even brushed and almost swept back the curtains behind which we stood. We paused a moment, drawing back and keeping silence; then, as the steps and voices went on down the stairs, I gave her my arm and we went out and down to

the supper-room like a couple in the calmest frame of mind.

The room had been arranged under my own eye, and it certainly presented a pleasing vision as we entered. Hosts of little tables, just large enough for two people, stood everywhere under the swinging lamps that sent out different-colored rays from their varied glass shades. Wreaths and hanging bands of roses, common in India as daisies in England, were looped from lamp to lamp, so that the guests sat under a veritable canopy of roses, and the air was laden with their fragrance. At one side of the room ran a long table, piled up with large blocks of natural uncut ice. The bowls of punch and all the various dishes and wines for the supper veiled under the shade of innumerable *epergnes* of flowers. At this table waited a line of native servants, noiseless, white-clad figures, ready to serve. The number of tables corresponding to the number of couples, people found their places easily and without formality; and when they were all seated I joined Anna at the table I had chosen for her—one set at the upper end of the room beside a heavy blue velvet *portière*, and decorated entirely with white roses, while the Eastern glass casing to the lamp above it shot down violet and crimson rays on the Sforza's hair. Every one was hungry and thirsty apparently; at any rate, the room was soon filled with the clatter of knives and forks, the continued report of flying corks, and the bubbling of laughter and talk across the tables.

Anna was very silent through the supper. She sat gazing at me steadily and earnestly with those wide, innocent, appealing blue eyes of hers, that could be so brilliant or so passionate as she chose; and then quite suddenly, toward the close, when there was much noise and laughter in the room, and much champagne had been drunk, so that nobody was any longer very critical as to what others were doing, she leaned across the little table between us, and looking up quickly and full into her face, I saw her eyes were veiled a little by drooping lids and those long, voluptuous lashes, and a curious fire was burning under them. I recognized instantly something I had never seen in her face before. It was her womanhood looking out behind the mask of her girlhood. Then a whisper came to my ears—a little, faint, shy half-whisper, but one that had a

new accent in it; and my heart recognized that, as my eye had recognized her expression:

“Gerald, you are loved as very few men are. You are, indeed.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE evening of the *tableaux* was over and I was alone in my room. I was sitting at the long window looking with idle, unseeing eyes out into the tangle of foliage and blossom in the hot moonlight. Every pulse beat hard with joy; there seemed one long, triumphal note ringing through my head. Anna's glance and whisper to-night had transformed the air to rose color about me and filled it with music.

There was no question about the truth, the genuineness, the spontaneity of those few words. Everything had been pushed aside for the moment, and Nature had come forward herself and spoken to me from under those veiling lashes and in that quick, half-frightened whisper. I did not sleep at all that night, nor even attempt to. I sat looking out into that fertile wilderness of beauty before me and watching the liquid moonlight spilled among the quivering leaves.

It so happened the following day I could not find one moment for my own in which I could go to see Anna. Duty, business, and the commissioner, who seemed suddenly that day to grow from an ordinary English gentleman into the most exacting tyrant, kept me all day. And when in the evening I went round to the white bungalow in the palms I was told by the servant that the Miss Sahib was lying down and could not be disturbed. I would not go again to make an ordinary call and have to talk, perhaps, commonplaces with her and her father for an hour or so. It was not what I wanted. I decided to wait until she had retired for the night and then steal into her compound and up to her window and gain a few delicious moments with her alone, and say and hear a few sentences that were worth to me, just then, all our other conversations put together.

So, after dinner, I had my long cane chair put outside the bungalow and sat there, waiting impatiently until it should be ten o'clock. As soon as the hour came, the silent

sais appeared with my horse; and, slinging my guitar across my shoulders, I flung myself into the saddle and cantered out of the compound with a light heart. My horse's footfalls fell without sound on the soft, red roads; the air was still and heavy; and as I neared the Lombards' bungalow the rich, stealthy odor of the stephanotis hedges crept out toward me and suffused itself all round me, as I approached. When I reached the gates I dismounted and fastened the Arab to one of the posts. Then on foot I entered, and, leaving the main path, struck across through the pomegranate bushes and rose-trees by a side-walk that I knew led beneath her room. As I pushed aside the fragrant branches and made my way on silently, the wonderful glory of the night and the scene came home to me, absorbed and fired though I was by other thoughts. Above me rose the white stone pile, snowy as the purest marble in the moonlight—and even the moonlight is not cold in India; it seems warm, lustrous, and mellow; unlike the lights of the Northern moon. The open balustrade work round the square, flat roof stood out sharply; and over it in places, drooping to the garden, fell like purple rain the great blossoms of the tropical parasites. Above the roof rose the palms, motionless in the heavy, heated air; and through their branches I could see the wheeling stars and the great, glittering Scorpion, head downward in the violet sky, preparing for his plunge beneath the horizon. As I advanced farther through the tangle of the roses, the heavy breath of stephanotis and tuberose grew more and more oppressive, until at last, when I stood beneath her window, it weighed upon the senses. I glanced round me. There was deep, hot stillness everywhere. The whole of Anna's room was built out from the house—being really nothing more than an extended veranda—and from the casement ran down to the compound a little, light iron stair-way, which white *convolvulus* and passion-flowers and magnolia had embraced with their twining arms, till it seemed like a stair-way of flowers. I passed round behind this, and then was standing practically under the floor of her chamber. All was profoundly still. I slipped the guitar round and had it in position against my breast. I bent over it, and was just going to sound one of the strings that I thought might have slipped in coming, when a whisper, a breath—it was hardly more—struck upon my ear.

I looked up, my heart beating to suffocation. Anna's window was set wide, and from there I knew the sound had floated out upon the tranquil air. For the first moment I thought she had been awake and seen me coming, and my heart leaped up with joy. The word "Anna!" rose in a joyful cry and had almost burst from my lips, when it stayed frozen there. Another whisper came down to me, clearer than the last:

"*Ke khubsurat ho!*" ("How beautiful thou art!")

It was Anna's voice and speaking in Hindustani. Her voice, and yet as I had never heard it. There seemed a deep contralto note in it—a vibration of intense passion. And I stood beneath, immovable, stunned, and paralyzed. Thick, intense, palpable silence for many seconds, and then again that deep whisper in the air, terribly distinct to my distended ear.

"*Tumko ashik karti hun!*" ("I love you!"), and then two long sighs, and then silence again, so long, so absolute that it seemed to mock all sound as a dream.

I stood there rigid, tense. Then I looked up. Why did not the sky fall or the stars rush together or the white wall above me crumble upon me? But no, all was unchanged. The glorious sky looked down upon me and her unmoved. The wilderness of white and pink roses stretched round me. The heavy scent still weighed upon the silent, dreaming air. I can not say what I felt. Looking back upon those moments, I can remember nothing but a horrible blank of pain. I stood there a long time, forgetting I had limbs to move away. Then, at last, mechanically grasping the guitar, I took my way silently back along the little rose-path by which I had come, and found myself eventually at the compound gate. I unfastened the Arab, who stood pawing the soft, red sand and arching his neck, and mounted him. Then I shook the reins loosely and gave him his head, and he plunged forward into a long gallop, like the wind, toward the sea.

At Kalatu, between cantonments and the sea, there lies the desert, a band of it two miles in width. The sand is yellow, and the desert wind passes over it, rippling it with waves like the sea. There are countless green tussocks scattered over it where the coarse, dry grass bends unhurt beneath the burning wind. Across this, with heads toward

the sea, we went, and clouds of sand rose silently from the Arab's flying hoofs, and miles and miles of undulating sand stretched away on each side under the starlight. For hours I was mad—as mad, I think, as any madman confined in an asylum. Rage, unreasoning anger, jealousy, and disappointed physical passion flung back upon itself swept down upon my brain, and tore at it between them, as wild dogs tear at a carcass. My fingers quivered on the reins, and when the motion beneath me seemed ever so slightly slackened, I urged the animal onward without rest. So in a wild gallop we came to the edge of the cliffs, and here the Arab stopped and planted his feet, nearly flinging me from the saddle, and snorted, as he saw the declivity before us and the silver sands and sea far below.

I paused to let him rest, for I felt him quivering beneath me with fatigue and strain, and stroked his neck with my hand. Reason was coming back to my brain, reason and self-control and all those qualities that bar the man from the brute. Self-respect rose again from where it had lain trampled, and ordered the dogs of rage and lust back into their kennels, and I grew calm. There was a sandy, winding path down the face of the cliffs, and I put my horse to it and we walked slowly down it to the sand. The tide was receding, and great stretches of wet shore lay exposed and glimmering. The moon was sinking now, and blood-red in the mist near the horizon, it gave the water a reddish tinge; and the slow, languid, red waves lapped soundlessly upon the slimy sands.

What had I been doing? I asked myself. I had been distrusting her. I ought rather to have distrusted my own senses. And suppose I had heard her murmured whispers. Might she not have been murmuring them to the empty air? Might she not have been reading or reciting some Hindu love-poem or tale? Might she not even have been speaking to some child or some pet in her rooms? It was unjust, unfair, unworthy to let such thoughts enter my mind as had been borne in by those words; and not, perhaps, so much the words as that vibrating accent that still seemed thrilling all the air around me. I was calm now, and the judicial attitude, natural to my mind—to investigate, to inquire, to assume nothing—was coming back to it. But in my heart there seemed a dead weight, a crushing chill that had stamped out all its ardent life of

an hour ago. The brain may reason and weigh and wait to judge, but the heart is unreasonable and can only feel.

I rode till day-break, slowly now, for that first fierce fire had burned itself out, and with it had gone forever the dew, as it were, of my life; the first freshness of a first love. When I saw the quivering pallor in the east that precedes the dawn, and noted the lines of the sand-hills defining themselves against it, I turned my horse's head and rode homeward.

To change my clothes and take away all traces of the past night's employment and eat a hurried breakfast was the work of an hour, then I had to bend my mind to statistics of the native States—a volume of much importance, which the commissioner was preparing, with my help, for the press—for four long hours, and then, feeling almost in a lethargy, such is the effect of overexcited anxiety, I drove to the Lombards' and entered the open house-door.

I went in and found her sitting in the soft, subdued light of the shaded drawing-room, in a low wicker-chair, perfectly dressed in white, as usual, with her feet slightly raised on a low Persian stool, and her hands lying idle in her lap. Beside her on a table stood a spray of white roses in water, and her fair face bloomed through the soft light, fresh and immaculate as the morning. As she sat there she would have formed a good artist's study for a picture to be called "Innocence," "Maidenhood," "Purity," or any other similar and equally suitable title. As I advanced into the room she rose to greet me, and I took her into my arms and kissed her.

She looked up at me with those warm eyes of hers full of soft, caressing light.

"You look terribly pale and ill, Gerald. What is the matter?" she asked, and the voice I had heard last night in those terrible whispers that had scorched life and hope out of my heart, seemed to fall strangely on my ears now.

"Yes, I do feel very ill," I answered, sitting down beside her; "but it is more a mental illness than physical. Anna, I have come to say you must fulfill your promise to me now, at once. We must be married within the next few days, or I shall leave for the hills, and when I return we shall meet as acquaintances only."

The light and color died out of her face suddenly; but

she took the situation exactly as it was, and answered me as directly as I had spoken.

“I should have said what I am going to say long before now. I can not possibly marry you now or at any time.”

“Why?” I asked, simply.

“Because,” she answered, facing me, her steady eyes fixed on mine beneath their level brows, “because I should have to tell you certain facts first. This I do not want to do; and if I did, you would not marry me. So it is at an end,” and she drew from her finger the band of sapphires I had given her, and laid it on a little console table that stood in front of us.

She was very pale, and her eyes were painfully dilated and looked black; but she, apparently, like myself, was determined to be calm and stifle all emotion which might prevent her saying what she had to say. I had judged her rightly. She did not mean, had never meant, to marry me with lies on her lips.

“And suppose I know already these things?” I said, quietly, leaning toward her across the arm of my chair and looking steadfastly at her face. “What then, Anna?”

I could not be angry with her, wounded, sore, and cut to the quick as I was; and, to my own surprise, my voice was tender instead of stern.

She started, and her eyes sought mine in terrified questioning. For an instant, I think, she believed her lover had betrayed her.

“What is it you know?” she said, in a low voice, and growing paler and paler; but her eyes still looking unflinchingly into mine.

“I came beneath your window last night to serenade you, and heard you speaking in Hindustani to some one who shared your room—speaking as I would give heaven and earth, Anna, for you to speak to me. Tell me it is not true. Tell me it was not your voice, that I was mad or dreaming—anything—and I will believe you.”

I stretched out my hands to her. The terrible emotion I was repressing flowed into my voice and broke and choked it.

Anna looked at me for one instant and then burst into a passion of tears and flung herself on her knees on the floor at my feet, laying both hands on my knees and looking up at me through her streaming tears.

“I can't tell you that. It was my voice. It is true. It became so while you were away in Burmah; but all the same, I love you, Gerald, as I do no other human being, as I never can love any one else. That is why I have not broken our engagement sooner. I could not give you up. The other is passion, madness, anything you like, but not love. I love you with all my soul and heart and brain; all those are yours forever and ever.”

“They are hardly enough for me,” I said, bitterly. “I am not ethereal enough for those to entirely content me.”

“Well, why did you not take me before you went to Burmah?” she exclaimed, passionately. “I was innocent then and willing to become all your own. I loved you the first night I saw you. I told you so by my eyes and smiles as far as I could. If you had spoken then I would have followed you to Burmah, or to Hades if you wished, or I would have waited here for you five years or ten or an eternity. But you did not. You left me without a word to tell me you loved me, and all the presumption I could make was the other way. You were a man. You had the right and freedom to speak if you chose. You did not choose. That was all I could conclude.”

“I wrote to you,” I murmured.

The sickening self-reproach that swept over me, the sense that all had been in my hands and that I had myself cast it away, to be irrevocably lost to me, seemed to be stifling and strangling me.

“Wrote to me!” returned Anna. “Yes, and your very letters that came, full of everything but love, seemed to me confirmation of what I thought. What was in them? Admiration, understanding, intellectual communion, and sympathy with me. That was all. You never sought my passion or my love. What you sought, I gave you. Could I do any more?”

I was silent. Words seemed useless, inadequate. She was still on her knees before me, and the touch of her hands seemed to burn into my flesh.

“For months after you left, I lived here a tranquil, empty existence. You know how empty this frivolous idle life is; how there seems no depth, no intellectuality, no sympathy anywhere. There seems nothing in it. No emotion, nothing to stir one. Well, then, suddenly, this great passion came across my life. It was like the sirocco

entering a rose-garden. Perhaps the roses, tired of eternal silence and dew, like to feel its scorching breath, even though it withers and kills them. So the sirocco swept over me, and I bent to it and accepted it because it had something of life in it, something of the joy of living, and I married this man—unknown to any one, of course.”

“Married him?” I echoed, lifting my heavy eyes and staring fixedly at her.

“Yes,” returned Anna, looking at me half-angrily now in her turn. “What else? I thought you understood. Didn’t you say just now you heard us together last night in my room?”

“Yes,” I said, hardly audibly, “I knew that.”

I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes. I was overwhelmed. Thought even seemed dead within me. Anna drew nearer to me and put one arm round my neck, and I felt her stoop and kiss me on the lips with her tears falling on my face.

“Gerald, don’t look so ill and so wretched. I love you—you know I do—better than any one else in the world. You have always been so kind to me, and I love your beautiful face and those beautiful eyebrows. Oh, why did you not take me to Burmah with you? I should have been so happy!”

“Do you mean that you are in love with two men at the same time?” I asked, opening my eyes and looking at her. They seemed darkened, and I could hardly see her.

“I suppose it must be so, unless you recognize that what I feel for him is only passion, not love—not love at all. I would not breathe its name with that of love.”

“Passion without love, Anna; even men are ashamed when they feel that.”

Her head drooped a little and she colored. Then she looked up again as before.

“I feel it too like that,” she murmured, “but it has come so. It is not my fault. When I first loved him I shut my eyes to all his faults. I invested him with heaps of qualities I love, and I could have worshiped him, been devoted to him, if he had let me. But his character in many ways I loathe. He is hard and mean and cruel, and when he shows me these things, I feel I hate him; yet I can not tear myself away from him. His lips lie to me all day, and I know it, and I could strike them; yet, when

they come to kiss me, I am only too glad to submit. It is horrible to feel in that way, to feel your soul and body fighting together and your body forcing your soul to submission. Oh, you don't know what it is to lie prisoned in arms that you love and whose touch delights you, to lean your head upon a breast that is heaven to you, and yet to know that the heart beneath is mean and narrow and full of cruelty and treachery! To loathe, to feel an unutterable contempt, to feel your own mind struggling to get away from those arms, and to feel your own limbs and body turn and throw you back irresistibly into their embrace! That is my life now, one horrible imprisonment and degradation, in which I keep longing for you, striving to get out of it and come to you, only, I—can't—somehow—give—him—up."

She dropped her head upon my shoulder as if utterly exhausted, and I sat speechless still. Her words—what a view they showed me! What a terrible vista they opened before me! And was I not partly responsible? Had I not helped, by awakening her dawning emotions and then leaving them unsatisfied, to precipitate her into this?

There was a long, unbroken silence.

"Who is this man?" I asked, at length. "A native?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"Gaida Khan."

Just as she pronounced the name, I heard a faint sound at the side of the room, the familiar click of the glass beads on the swaying *chick*; and, turning my head, I received the impression of a figure just withdrawn. The *chick* was still swaying.

Anna looked at me and read my thoughts.

"It doesn't matter if he does see us together. He knows that I am openly engaged to you. What do these blacks not know? It is useless to try to keep anything from them. He recognizes your position and my love for you. I know when you first came back I ought to have told you all this; that I had married in your absence, and I know I could have trusted you with my secret; but, oh, the delight it was to see you again, to hear you say that you loved me, the rapture it is to be with you, to feel you kiss me! I could not forego it. Gerald, you only half-

realize what love I have for you. Do you remember what I said the night before last?"

Her soft face, glowing now with a hot color, was close to mine, her eyes looked appealingly into mine. The clearest truth shone in them. I knew, I felt that, as always, she was speaking the simplest, barest truth to me; however strange, horrible, or criminal it was, still it was the truth. There was no artifice, no talking for effect, no making of a tragical scene with me. Truth, perfect truth, came from her lips, I knew; and to the saddest, most wounded heart, what comfort is there in that knowledge!

I put my arms closely round her yielding shoulders, looked down into those wells of blue fire, as her eyes seemed in their passion to become.

"I do, indeed, remember," I said, in a strained voice. "But how can it be? You love me and him at the same time. I can not understand it; it does not seem possible. I never heard—never could have conceived it—can not now."

She looked at me in silence for a moment, biting her lips violently as if unable to find words to explain. Then, suddenly, they came to her wildly, impetuously, and she spoke so fast I could hardly follow her.

"They are different kinds of love. I admire you, worship you, love you with a love that makes it ecstasy to be with you, to hear your voice, to feel the touch of your hand. You are the light of existence to me; I can not bear to be separated from you. With Gaida it is different. He is a beautiful toy to me. He is like some pet, some lovely Persian kitten. Can't you imagine that? He is a possession that I value. I like to know he belongs to me; I like to feel I have the right to clasp my hands round his wonderful neck when and if I wish; but I do not care to be with him. I do not crave for his presence, as I do for yours. I do not feel ecstasy at his proximity. I care little for his society. As you know, my time has been passed with you. I see little of Gaida. I want to see little of him. What link can there be between his brain and mine? You understand, Gerald, he was first my servant, as far as a man of the hill tribes is ever any one's servant, and I was content to keep him as that; but he—he—oh! his passion was something terrible—resistless. He would go, or he would possess me. He would not stay in the house

otherwise. And so, to keep him, I yielded to the idea of marriage with him, thinking you had passed out of my life. Now, if I could turn him into stone and marble and so always possess him, I would be willing to, I swear. Now you can see—can you not?—how it all is. Suppose”—she added, swiftly—“I had a tame leopard or panther that I loved, even a dog, say—oh, you don’t know how passionately I love anything that I love at all—yet you would not dream of objecting to that, and Gaida is little more to me.”

“Oh, but it is different, Anna, totally,” I murmured. “This man is your lover—your husband.”

“Yes,” she said, in a lower voice, and one tense with feeling, “I am married to Gaida, and for that mere reason I love him, I cling to him, I know. My feelings cling round him simply because of that, and in that one way he has a stronger hold on me than you. Oh, Gerald, take me too in that way! Let us marry; then nothing could touch or break the love I have for you.”

A throb of unspeakable joy went through me. I strained her to me, and pressed my lips on hers suddenly.

“You will give him up,” I said in her ear, in a low voice, suffocated with hope and joy.

Anna gave a sob which seemed to break the slight, lovely figure in my arms.

“Oh, don’t ask me! It would be like cutting my heart from me. Let me keep him too, for a little while—at first.”

A revulsion of feeling, a shock almost of loathing passed through me. I pushed her from me and sprung up.

“Anna, I can not believe it is you who are speaking. You must be mad or I am. Englishmen do not share their wives. It must be at an end, as you said.”

And hardly knowing what I was doing, I walked from her to the door. But Anna had risen and followed me, and now stood between me and the *chicks*.

“Wait! wait! give me time! Love like ours can not be done with or set aside in a few words. I will try—I will try to give him up. Let me have time to think. This evening I will tell you. Do not throw me aside. I can not bear it.” Her broken, passionate words, still more the agonized look upon her face, turned the terrible impulse of anger to an equally terrible grief.

“This evening? You will be at the Delanys’ dance? I will see you there. Do not speak to me any more now. I can not stand it.”

Then, catching again her grief-stricken and pathetic eyes, I drew her up silently to my heart and pressed her there. Taking up the ring from the table, I slipped it over the delicate, white, trembling finger.

“All remains as it was outwardly,” I said. “What has passed is forever buried between ourselves. I shall never throw you aside, my darling. It is for you to decide if you will belong to me entirely, or only as now.”

Then, before she could answer, I passed through the *chicks* and into the hall.

I found my carriage waiting at the door, but sent it home, and left myself free to find my way back on foot. I felt as if the walking would help my shattered thoughts. It was the close of the afternoon, and, therefore, the loveliest part of the Indian day. I turned aside from the broad, red road, down which my carriage disappeared, and entered a winding lane that, in spite of many twists and vagaries, yet maintained a parallel direction with it and would lead me home in the end. It was narrow and grassy, being little trodden except by the bare feet of the natives; and the rose and syringa hedges came forward from each side at places and entwined their leafy arms and lingered to gossip in the middle of the road undisturbed. Overhead the giant sago-palms towered into the blue sky, majestic and far away from small and earthly things; while, between, the cotton-trees dropped and rustled their little leaves, and threw shade on the mortals passing underneath. Down this silent, fragrant alley I walked slowly, thinking of many things and trying to realize the position I had taken up. How strange it all was, I thought with a bitter smile; and how the station would stare could they get a glimpse now into the brain of the most envied man in it! What was I, practically, I asked myself. The *fiancé* of a woman living with, loving, and married to another man. It was ludicrous. I laughed aloud, and my laugh startled a cushat on its nest and a green parrot, that flew screaming from the tall hedge above me. I wondered if any man had ever been exactly in my position before or had listened to the propositions and spent the hours I had that morning; and, if they had been,

how they had acted; and what the whole set of young officers and civilians in the station, to whom by rank and age I belonged, and yet from whom in thought and feeling I so widely differed, would say of me and my conduct, if they knew all. These thoughts flashed through my brain, and then I dismissed them with a contemptuous smile. What was the world or its opinions or judgment to me? I was of the world in the sense that I lived in it, worked in it, entertained and drank wine in it, with the rest; but my mind was not modeled after its patterns.

At the tutor's, where, with six other students, I had read for the service, I was nicknamed "the Philosopher" and "the Athenian," because the problems of life and death interested me more than geometry; and I had been detected more than once reading Plato's "Euthydemus" and "Phædrus" out of studying hours. That, indeed, which had put me into the first place in the examination, as shown by the marks' list, was the extraordinary superiority over all other candidates in Greek; and this was not acquired in laborious construing under a tutor's fostering care, but in long, silent, lonely nights of intense excitement, when I had sat reading the dead tongue for pleasure, and seeming to grasp the very hand of the dead philosopher across the gulf of centuries of modern thought and learning; so that, probably, I looked at the whole matter with different eyes from the average young Englishman. But in the emotions we are all more nearly on a level, and that which I felt most keenly as I walked quietly on was pain—hot rushes of pain—in which my heart seemed burning to a cinder, succeeded by a cold, sick hopelessness and despair. But I did not regret what I had said or done in the moments of clear reason between those of resentful agony. I realized that nothing could have been gained by thrusting her from me and regaining my freedom.

Freedom! What a mockery the mere word was, when her presence and her smile still meant for me all that was most precious in life. And if, in time, I had learned to put away the thought of her, what then? Was there any other woman here or elsewhere in the world that could, I will not say equal her but, be to me what she was? Where else could I find that exquisite sensibility, that quick response to every thought and feeling, that intellectuality

and brilliance that had not made her hard, but had linked itself to the softest and tenderest heart, and the most caressing, yielding ways? Above all, that capacity for passion—I do not mean only physical, but mental passion—and all forms of intense feeling that showed in her shining eyes and swift, supple movements.

She appealed to me, spoke to all the impulses and moods within me in a hundred voices. It was as if the spirit of the Greek Agathon had come back to earth in another form; and, like Plato, I too seemed to feel my soul slipping through my lips and being drunk in by hers when I kissed her. Psychology had always been my favorite study and humanity my favorite book, and here, in Anna, I had come upon a curious yet lovely page. Even if I had not loved her, I should have been fascinated by that page and kept my eyes upon it, until I understood it and could translate it clearly.

No, it was better as it was. Better to have the nominal right I had. Better this possession by her promise and in public opinion, than none. Besides, had I not much more? I knew, even without that confession of hers this morning, that I was possessed of her soul and heart and brain. All, all, in fact, except—and here the fierce pain broke out in me again; pain and anger and fury rising up and obscuring my mental vision like smoke before the eyes. But I crushed them under, and my thoughts fought their way painfully but steadily through the brain. I saw that of whatever length the interim of suffering would be, beyond it there was hope. Physical passion, when it is real and genuine, especially when, from opposing circumstances, it can not reach satiety, is hard to kill and long in dying. Still, it wears thin under the continual battling and striving of the imprisoned soul against it. As the unworthy object keeps revealing more and more traits that shock and repulse its lover, so the force of contempt and loathing grows in the lover's struggling soul; grows until at last it is strong enough to vanquish the clinging senses. For no new beauties of body or charm of passion have been reinforcing them. They are bound by the same ties as at the beginning, while the soul's loathing, that it brings down upon those ties, has increased a thousandfold. Then is the moment when they break and the lover stands free. Such a moment must come to Anna. Well, I would wait for it;

I saw that without external aid of circumstances, a bondage of soul, such as hers by the senses, could not last.

As she had said, Gaida was tearing huge rents in the mantle of passion she had thrown over him, and soon it would fall in mere remnants from him.

Besides, that was the farthest termination. A hundred accidents might give her to me any day, any hour. With all my help and care and protection—for she should have them all—the slender foundation on which she had built her happiness might be swept away. How insecure the whole fabric was! How unlikely that secrecy could be long be preserved! And one breath of scandal would blow it down. I would not hasten that hour of grief for her, if I could, by a raising of the eyebrow.

I could work without her knowledge against this man if I chose; have him killed or imprisoned, as far as that went, and Anna need never know. But she trusted me entirely. I held her in my hand as one can hold a little hedge-sparrow, and she knew it and did not even flutter in my clasp. She felt safe there, and she was. My conquest would be accomplished in other ways. My plan of action was clear before me as a general's when he takes the field. I would protect them and their secret as long as it was possible, and if the storm broke upon them, I would acknowledge their marriage and receive them into my own house. What I did, the station would do. Was I not the station, in fact? And I smiled in contempt at the thought of the men and women who flocked to my house because I fed and wined them well; and who, for the sake of that food and wine, would condone anything I did.

Yes, Anna should have from me nothing but protection, consolation, comfort, love. She should find that one other besides herself knew how to love, whatever my pain and suffering and ultimate reward. Whatever I might be to others, she at least should never turn to me in vain. I would crush myself into nothing and she should be all. I would, if called upon, give everything and receive nothing.

I came to this conclusion slowly and by careful thought. Then I registered the resolution within myself and steeled myself to the endurance of all it might mean. Yet I had my consolation; it was the knowledge she was worth it—by character, by intellect, by grace, by charm, by every-

thing that makes a human being of worth in this world, she was worth it. And she could do what so few other men and women can—she could understand and appreciate. I knew that not one pang of mine, not the smallest sacrifice, would pass unnoticed and unweighed, or fail to bring me more than five times its value in gratitude and love. What hardship is there in serving such a mistress? To me none. There are instances recorded—or at least supposed to exist—where men have poured out a life-long devotion at the feet of some senseless idol that cared little for them, nothing for their suffering, and laughed at their love. Such self-abnegation seems to me degradation, and can only exist where the worshiper is as worthless as the idol. But for Anna I would have given up my life as cheerfully as men in all ages have died for their gods, while and because they believed in them. When they ceased to believe, they ceased to die.

When I reached my bungalow, I went into the library, threw myself on the couch, and closed my eyes. I felt sleep would come to me now, and I gave myself over to it. Until my interview with Anna I had felt restless, eager, excited, a prey to a stormy rage of anger; yet full, unconsciously, of an expectation that there would be some explanation of it all; that Anna, in a few clear words, would dispel the whole horrible nightmare, as it almost seemed to be; and that I should return from her presence, calm, soothed, full of joy, as I had so often been before.

But now, now that everything was settled and there was nothing to do but face the blank loss and sorrow I had had, I felt no more unrest, no excitement, only exhaustion and longing for oblivion. The heavy air pressed on my eyelids, and in a few moments I passed into the blank darkness of sleep.

When I awoke it must have been some hours later. It had grown dark outside, and inside the assiduous butler had lighted up all the lamps and left the *chick* invitingly parted so that I could see the table laid for my dinner in the dining-room beyond. I stretched myself as I lay on the broad couch and threw my eyes round the room, and they rested on the little book-case at my feet, in which I kept different volumes in the various languages and dialects of the East. The most prominent among them, and the one which pressed its title in Gujerati to the glass, was

the "History of Draupadi," and I read it over and over in the curious characters, and it seemed to have a peculiar bearing on my own frame of thought. Draupadi is one of the dearest Hindu ideals. She is the feminine character in their literature round which clings, perhaps, the most sacred reverence. She is the type of pure, trustful womanhood and faithful wifehood answering to the Greek conception and British acceptance of Penelope.

As it is represented in India, the legend of Draupadi is a singularly beautiful one. Yet the principle of it is the subdivision of a woman's love. It portrays the woman in the dawn of life, consecrated, not to one husband, but to five. To each of the five brothers who wed her simultaneously, and who share her among them, as they share their common tent, Draupadi is a faithful and devoted wife, and eventually bears a son to each. Her counsels guide them, her love and fidelity save them from surrounding dangers, and they unite at all times to protect and defend the chastity of the woman they revere and cherish.

Strange and—to Englishmen—perverted idea; yet thousands of cultivated and enlightened individuals through many ages have been able to comprehend it and to associate it with an ideal of purity. And was I wholly justified in the revolt and loathing I had felt of Anna when she made her final suggestion to me this afternoon?

This query flashed upon me suddenly as I lay there, as if a sudden flash of lightning had revealed a before-unobserved picture on the wall opposite me. But could I marry her and share her with another? I could not, I knew I could not. The blood rushed to my brain. I clinched my hands and pressed them to my head, vainly striving to shut out the thoughts that came and seemed to madden me. Yet there came almost immediately the insidious idea creeping upon me that had been suggested and had underlain her own words to me. As things stood, he was in the superior, I in the inferior position. He was, so to speak, the master of the house, and I but a poor beggar before the door. He was received within the citadel, I was but sitting down before it. Naturally, the victory was with him. But let us both be within that house or citadel, and which then would have the power to throw the other out? She loved me as passionately as she did him, and mentally far more; but this last advantage on my side was

overwhelmed by his superior position. But let the positions be equal, and all the advantage would be with me.

I sprung from the couch and paced the room, a terrible delirium in my brain in which rational thought was hardly possible. The shock and horror of the first discovery that she loved another, as I supposed, instead of, or better than, myself; had been followed by the hardly lesser one of hearing it was not instead of, or better than, but as well as, and in addition to, myself; and then all had culminated in that suggestion of an equal partnership in love that seemed so revolting, so terrible, and yet whispered to the simply passionate part of my love with a secret and poisonous allurements. After all, for how short a time it would be. Could I not, loving her as I did, turn that heart of hers, so full of love for me already, to myself, and fill it so entirely there would be no room for any other there?

What was this love of hers for Gaida? Was it not a mere morbid growth that had sprung up in my absence, a result partly of the awakened and ungratified impulses of that love I had stirred; and would it not be steadily pushed aside as the real love strengthened and developed? But no, no; I could not enter into such a horrible, disgraceful compact with her, whatever its grounds might be and its possible results and reward. I would not and could not desecrate this feeling I had for her, which was something infinitely higher than a mere love through the senses; would not and could not use it as the means to an end, however worthy the end might seem. Where would my own self-respect be? It must be sacrificed, and with it also hers; and with the sense of honor lost between us, our love, instead of being, as it now was, something infinitely tender and holy, might insensibly degenerate into the same mere love of pleasure and self-gratification that bound her and Gaida together. No, I would fight the battle and take my chances of victory from the ground where I stood. The contest should be won by the perpetual contrast of one love with the other, and there should be no moral compulsion, no coercion, not even that coercion of the sentiments that intimacy produces and that Gaida was swaying her with now. I would wait for that hour when she would, of her own accord, turn to me as her protector and deliverer, her asylum and her hope.

All that I could do by patience and the extreme of fidel-

ity and tenderness should be done, but I would not buy influence over her senses by degrading my love to the level of my rival's. I might have done it with a woman I loved less than Anna; but, rightly or wrongly, reasonably or otherwise, Anna had roused and held all the very best and the most selfless emotions that I was capable of. My eye could not light on that delicate, beautifully balanced form, or meet those soft, ardent eyes, without a rush of tenderness and devotion filling me, different far from what most men understand by love. And I had seen her, met her, been loved by her in the first fresh, pure unfolding of her heart, and I had left her. And now I had returned and found her enveloped in a horror and a darkness worse than death.

I saw her, as it were, standing smiling on a gulf of hideous, unknown dangers, and I alone knew and saw and could save her.

Could I desert her? Married to a native! One needs to have lived in India to fully understand the horror contained in those words. Aside from the moral degradations of life shared with one who, according to the British standpoint, has no moral sense, of being allied with a race whose vices and lives are beyond description; there is the daily, hourly physical danger from a native's insensate jealousy, unreasoning rage, and childish, yet fiendish, revenge.

A smile bestowed on another, one of those hundred little social amenities or functions fulfilled by his wife, not understood in its right sense by the unlettered, unthinking barbarian; and a naked corpse, with breasts cut off, and mutilated beyond recognition, flung out upon the *meidan*, are but likely cause and probable result.

Why had I not taken her with me to Burmah? Oh, fool that I had been, with blinded eyes! How much better that disease and death that I had so dreaded for her from the Lihuli swamps, than this!

My servant entered and stopped, amazed, at the door, to see his sahib pacing wildly backward and forward with clinched hands and the sweat pouring unnoticed from his face. He made a profound salaam as he caught my wandering eye.

"Will not the sahib eat? It is hours past the appointed time."

I waved him away with impatient anger. The sight of

black face was hateful and abhorrent to me, at that moment.

“Go, go!” I said, “and see that neither you nor any one disturbs me till the morning. Clear the table. I shall not eat to-night.”

Silent and wondering, the man withdrew, and I heard him and other servants clearing away the set-out but untouched dinner in the adjoining room. Then they returned to their quarters, and I was left alone in the silence. I looked at my watch. It was ten. I must dress and go to the dance, or I should fail in my appointment with Anna. I went upstairs and began my toilet with feverish haste.

I was fairly early at the Delanys', and Anna had not yet arrived. For that matter, she generally did come late. I met a girl that I had not seen for some time, and who had now become a married woman. By her I took my seat where I had the whole length of the room before me, and I could watch for Anna's appearance. At a quarter to twelve she entered, and I could distinguish her in a moment. What was there that made her figure so charming? She was tall, but not of that height which makes a woman formidable instead of caressable. She was only tall when you actually measured her. At other times, the only impression her figure gave was of extreme grace and suppleness. Her waist was slim and low, her shoulders broad, and hips slight. Perhaps there was something in this proportion that gave the whole its peculiar, insinuating charm.

She wore this evening a gown of heavy, white silk, as usual, with a train of great length and weight; and the whole dress had, or was lent by its wearer, an incomparable distinction. As she came nearer we could see that she was wearing at her bosom a cluster of her favorite white roses, and a small spray was intertwined with the beautiful double plait of fair hair on her neck. I watched her with my usual delight, and then as she came closer I sprung to my feet with an almost uttered exclamation of dismay. Her face was terrible to look at. For a minute I could not believe that this was the rounded, smiling, rose-like face I knew. It was colorless and in some indescribable way seemed blighted. The eyes had a strained look of intense suffering and exhaustion, and the pale lips had a terrible line round them I had never seen,

We met and pressed each other's hands in a conventional way, and then Anna said, hurriedly:

"Let us go outside, somewhere, where we can speak for a few moments, and then I am going home. I can not stay here."

We went in silence toward the veranda, which led to the compound beyond and a wild jungle of flowers and palms, where a hundred couples might walk unscen by one another, and yet where the music of the ball-room would reach them all. As we passed out I heard one woman say to another by whom she was sitting:

"How dreadfully ill Miss Lombard looks this evening."

And the other answered:

"Yes; this season is really extremely trying."

Anna's lips curled in a faint smile; but we neither of us spoke till we had got far away from the house, down by the end of a tiny path that stopped by a rustic seat and open summer-house, surrounded by a perfect thicket of rhododendrons. Here Anna sat down and I by her side, and the silence between us seemed like some great, palpable curtain which we were both afraid to lift. At last I said, very gently—for her looks were enough to move the most indifferent to pity:

"You look most unhappy, Anna. Speak to me and let me comfort you."

She turned her eyes upon me and said, in a low tone:

"I have suffered intensely all day, since you left me. I have fought with myself and been defeated. I can not give him up. I feel now that I must lose one of you, and to lose either will kill me."

Her face was such an unconscious confirmation of her words that I could not look upon them as a mere hysterical expression. Only once have I seen such a look on a human face, and that was on the face of a woman suffering from a terrible disease, just after she had learned the truth and three weeks before her death from it. That other horrible feminine face, with the seal of death set on it, rose suddenly before me as Anna looked at me, and my heart seemed literally wrung with fear and pain, as if giant hands had clutched it and twisted it to breaking point.

"If I keep him," she went on, quietly, with an accent of desolation that was pitiful, "you will leave—desert me—and I shall lose you."

That was all, and again there was a great silence. In it I thought and ratified my own decision. I am prepared for all men to condemn me; to say I acted wrongly and weakly; to say I should have risen and left her there; to say that I had done all that I could, and that since she had decided upon her course, I had nothing to do but to accept that decision and leave her to follow the fate she had decided upon. Perhaps I was weak. Perhaps, if we look closely, we should see that all unselfishness is a form of weakness. Be that as it may, I saw that she was suffering, I loved her, and I could alleviate her suffering by speaking, and I spoke.

“No, Anna, I will not desert you. If you can not break with this man now, I will wait. I foresee that the day will come when you will long to break this tie and will call upon me to help you. Till that day comes I am your protector and your friend.”

I put my arms round her and her head fell upon my breast with a long-suppressed, terrible sob of pain; and we sat on, motionless and in silence. From the gay, brilliant windows of the Delanys' bungalow the music streamed out to us, and we heard occasionally on the other side of the rhododendrons a laugh or a whisper as steps went by, with the trailing swish of a ball-gown on the grass.

Light feet, light hearts, light love, light flirtations were passing gayly on the other side of that crimson hedge, and we sat there drenched in an agony too great for words. Deep emotions, great passions are out of place in this little world of ours. They are but for the immortal gods, who possess all eternity in which to suffer and recover from them. Conventionality! How calm, how comfortable, how suitable it is to our little, limited lives! How it might be said of that, rather than of wisdom:

“Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.”

Time passed. Dance after dance was played and finished, and at last Anna raised her head.

“Take me home, Gerald. To-morrow come and see Gaida. It is justice to me that you should see him. I will be in the drawing-room at two exactly. Come to me there.”

We rose, and to avoid passing through the crowd, I led her to an open lawn that impinged upon the road where all the carriages were drawn up waiting. I went among them and found hers, and then brought her to it and put her in and gave her my promise I would see her at the hour she wished the next day. As I put my hand for a moment on the door, she drew it within the carriage and kissed it. Then the carriage drove onward and I went to seek my own. I could not face a return to the idle, callous, light-hearted crowd within and hear comments on Anna's illness and change of looks. I drove away and reached, thankfully, the lonely darkness of my own house.

The following morning, after a sleepless night, I rose early and went early to my work that I might be free by two, and at a few minutes before the hour I had reached the bungalow and was in her drawing-room.

She met me at the entrance to the room and herself drew aside the *chicks* to admit me. She was deadly pale to her very lips. She seemed intensely excited, and I did not feel surprised that she should be so. Coming to receive two lovers, both of whom I knew she loved, and to show one to the other! As for me, I felt in a dream. All seemed unreal to me. Were we really two ordinary, flesh-and-blood British mortals? Was this ordinary life, or were we shades acting in some grotesque farce? She motioned me to a chair, far removed from her and in the darkest shade of the shaded room. I sunk into it mechanically. The chair seemed real and ordinary enough, and there were other chairs and tables and ordinary things round me in this ordinary room, where Anna was wont to laugh and talk society chatter with her ordinary English friends. But what a heart of strange emotions beat under that calm, white breast! What thoughts passed and repassed behind that smooth, white brow, while the lightest nonsense was slipping from her lips! What self-possession and self-control she must have had to meet this curious position and to live this twofold life! What courage and nerves of steel to give herself to a man whose very breath of life is cruelty, whose jealousy means atrocity, whose anger means death! True, she was my Anna Lombard, that I had thought of when I had first heard her name, stepped out of the Middle Ages before me. And I looked at her, sitting not far from me, pale, calm, composed as a statue; and my eyes

seemed to see, only through a mist of pain, a shade from those times of blood and lust and passion and crime; times when swift poisons were made by white fingers, and when women loved as men, as strongly, and often as briefly; when they laughed at the idea of one lover, yet were ready to die with, for, or by the hand of any one of the many; times when the very air they breathed seemed charged with treachery, cunning, and danger. From these a shade had returned and confounded itself with the clear white soul of an English girl, in a body beautiful and innocent to look upon as the sunlight of a summer day.

She sounded a gong on a table near her, and almost simultaneously the swaying *chick* divided, and a figure came into the room—a room so large and dark that I, in my far corner, half-concealed by a *portière*, would not be seen unless by one searching for me.

I sat motionless, hardly breathing, in my chair in the shadow. All my senses seemed absorbed in that of vision. This, then, was Gaida Khan. He moved into the room like a king coming to audience. He was of great height, and his form evidently, from its motions, as perfect as the perfect face. I sat frozen, rigid, while a great hopelessness settled on my heart and seemed to kill it. A woman whose eyes had been once opened so that she could see that beauty, one whose senses were captured by it, would never be free, entirely free, till death released her. This was the thought that seemed festering round my heart, chilling and crushing it to nothing. At first, when I had heard from her lips that my rival was a native, a feeling of contempt and scorn had given me some comfort and security. His age, too, that of a mere boy; and rank, that of the bazaar. Everything had seemed in my favor. But now that I saw—all arguments, all reasons, all considerations of this and that were swept away when brought suddenly face to face with him. Later, I learned that there were thousands of such men in northern India, serving in the native regiments: soldiers, weavers, grass-plaiters, men walking with bare feet in the dust of the highway, to be seen and found in all sorts of occupations, to be met every day in the streets of Peshawur; and that Gaida was but a good and handsome specimen of his extraordinarily gifted race. But I, though five years in India, had never before met a Pathan, or, seeing one, had had my eyes and

thoughts elsewhere. And now, with my eyes actually sharpened by jealous pain and wonder, I looked at this man and he seemed almost superhuman. I had again, for an instant, that feeling of unreality as I watched him advance with an easy, stately grace and dignity. Anna made a slight motion of her hand to the *jilmil* beside her, and Gaida moved toward it and set it wide open, letting a flood of the bright yellow light from the desert in upon his face—doubtless, as she intended. It is difficult in the slow, cold words that follow one another on paper to convey any idea of the glory of beauty that the hand of God has set upon this race. The face was of the Greek type in the absolute oval of its contour, and the perfectly straight features, the high nose chiseled in one line with the forehead, the short, curling upper lip, and the full, rounded chin; but curiously unlike the Greek type, which shares, with almost all statuesquely beautiful features, a certain, hard emptiness and fixity, this face was full of fire, animation, and brilliance. The skin was smooth and soft as velvet, of the tint of burnished copper, but glowing and transparent; and eyes full of intellect and pride looked out from dark-marked eyebrows that swept the smooth brow in a wide arch above them. On his black hair, which curled closely round the ears and nape of his neck, he wore a high, scarlet turban, the two ends of which fell as low as his waist at the back, and seemed to add still greater grace to the exquisite poise of the head, that was supported by a neck like a massive column of warmed and tinted marble. What a marvel of humanity, what a *chef-d'œuvre* of its Creator! That beauty was like a sort of magic, as she had said. I realized it with my whole soul in those few moments. If that had been a woman, I might have been as faithless to Anna as she was now to me, for his sake.

As it was, I sat paralyzed and gazing at him, feeling crushed and without hope. I knew then what a woman feels who finds herself in the blaze of another woman's beauty which has scorched out light and love from her own life.

"Thank you," Anna said, speaking in Hindustani, "and have you any new fans to show me to-day, Gaida?"

The Pathan smiled, and it was as if a sword cut me. The smile was irresistible, sweet as might be painted on the lips of Botticelli's cherubs. A soft light played all over

the youthful face, and the delicately carved lips parted from the faultless lines of even, milky teeth.

“Look at this *punkah*,” he replied, taking from his right hand to his left a fan of plaited grass, worked so finely one could not imagine fingers had woven it together.

“Lovely, indeed,” returned Anna, taking it from him. “How long did it take you to do this?”

“Oh, a day and a half, I think,” replied the Pathan, lightly. “The Mohurrum festival will be here soon. Do you like my dress for it?”

He turned round before her as he spoke, displaying the festival dress, and with it the magnificence of his shapely form. The dress was exceedingly rich, the attire of the Mohammedan for a *fête*. The zouave jacket was of turquoise silk embroidered in gold, over a fine white tunic of muslin, thin as a spider’s web. The trousers were the full Turkish shape, and of fine white linen, and gold-embroidered sandals were on his feet.

“It is very pretty—perfect, I think. Gaida,” she answered. “I am glad you showed it to me. You and all the servants, except my own bearer, can have a holiday the entire day. You can tell them.”

Gaida nodded and smiled again.

“I want you to be there to see us,” he said. “Will you come down to the sahib’s office in the city and see us pass by?”

“I will try,” said Anna. “And now I have things to do; I must see to them, Gaida.”

She rose from her chair, and then the two figures were standing close together and made a perfect picture, such as one could seldom see, in the warm radiance of light falling in upon them from the open *jilmil*. Anna, tall and graceful, in her long, flowing white muslin, with her fair English face and her sunny hair crowning her upraised head, and Gaida, taller still, magnificent in his Oriental dress, with his regal head inclined a little as he looked down on her. It seemed like a page torn from the “Arabian Nights,” and put before me.

“Good-by,” I heard Anna say gently, and then before my straining, starting eyes, I saw the Pathan take her right hand, very gently and reverently—as I myself would have done—and draw her a little closer to him. He bent his head down and kissed her on the lips. Every move-

ment of the proud neck and shoulders was grace and dignity incarnate. Then they unclasped hands, and he turned away and walked toward the *chick*, erect and easily as he had entered, passed through it, and was gone. My hands were clinched on each chair-arm till the bones almost started; my brain seemed bursting, my eyeballs seemed to strain beyond their lids. What had passed before me had been an idyl of purity and dignity and grace. No kiss could have been given or received with more perfect chastity of look, gesture, and action. And every motion of his frame, from the stretching out of his hand to the bending of that kingly head till his lips touched hers, would have been an ideal for a painter drawing a monarch bestowing a kiss upon his betrothed. And he was a barbarian who trod the streets of a bazaar with naked, dusty feet! But, against myself, my instincts, to a certain extent, justified Anna. What wonder that, with her eye so sensitive to beauty, her brain so saturated with poetry and romance of feeling, she should be fascinated beyond power of resistance by this presence that compelled even my admiration—I, who had lost all through him; I, who hated and loathed him; I, whose life was devastated by him. Yes, even I, looking through her eyes, could see and feel and realize the overpowering influence that rushed through her and dominated her and made her yield to that kiss, even here, now, before my eyes.

What a strange and extraordinarily fascinating mixture he was! That extreme sweetness and most caressable and appealing youthfulness when he smiled, contrasted how sharply with the cold, serene beauty of his profile in repose, the *hauteur* of that curling lip, the proud step and carriage, the calm authority of that last embrace.

After he had left, I neither moved nor stirred. I felt I could not. There was utter silence in the room between us. Then Anna came over to me, knelt beside my chair, and laid her head down on my knees.

“Gerald.”

“Yes.”

“What do you think of him?”

“I understand now.”

The words were just a hoarse whisper. I could not articulate more. I stretched out my hand and laid it gently on her soft hair.

“Yet I do not love him as I love you,” she declared, passionately, raising her head and looking at me with clear, burning eyes. “But, oh, the influence he has upon me when I see him enter the room, when I look at him, and when I think of losing him—”

She did not finish; but the shudder that went over her, and the gray pallor that drove out the rose color in her face, finished it for her. I passed my arm round her and kept it there. I felt as if she had wounded me and I was bleeding to death; yet to caress her was still a pleasure, and she knelt beside me willingly, inclining toward me, absorbed in me. It was strange. She did love me, there was no doubt. What was this horrible mystery of a double love?

There was a long silence, then I murmured, hardly conscious that I was thinking aloud:

“It is impossible, inconceivable, unprecedented! No woman has ever done it.”

“What?” asked Anna, with straining eyes wandering over my face.

“Been in love,” I answered, mechanically, “really and passionately in love with two men, at the same time.”

“If you had stayed and been with me, and I had met Gaida,” she answered, in her peculiar, trenchant way, when her voice, coming down with each word, seemed like a hammer falling true on its nail, “I do not think I should have cared or taken any notice of him, any more than of the thousands of beautiful faces round one, out here. But you were not here, and I had no idea you would ever return to me. I do love Gaida now, and you, too—both of you. It may be inconceivable, impossible, unprecedented, as you say, but it is so. If I could kill my love for him, I would; for I want to be free from him. I love you so much, I want to be with you, live with you, spend every minute of my life with you; but something—some intangible, fearful something—binds me to this man, and I can’t loose myself.”

She spoke the last words, slowly, fearfully, and her face grew pale and her eyes dilated. She gave one fleeting, half-terrified glance round the room, as if seeking to see with physical vision this terrible, compelling force that was overmastering her.

“How can it possibly be kept a secret—your marriage?”

I asked, after a moment. "It seems as if such a thing must be known all over the station directly."

"It may be," she answered back, in a half-audible whisper, "at any moment. There is so much chance in these things. They may or may not be found out to-day or to-morrow or any time. There is no certainty. But all the servants are afraid of Gaida. They think he has some supernatural power over them for harm if they betray him, and he has told them that if his secret gets known, no matter how, he will run amuck and kill them all. They are all anxious to cover it up and to prevent any possibility of its becoming known, rather than to gossip about it. They are terrified at the mere idea of its being discovered. They feel Gaida would not wait to find out who had told. If it became known, he would simply rush upon them all with his knife and kill all he could. It becomes, then, a matter they all wish to keep from disclosure. They are in terror of him—a sort of superstitious terror."

"And how were you married?" I asked after another long pause, and which I tried to bend my thoughts on these questions I wanted to ask her.

"Not here," she answered in the same undertone, as if she were afraid of the very walls and swaying *chicks*. "It was when we were on a visit to Peshawur. One night he got me to come away and go through the marriage ceremony among his own people. He took me, veiled, to a queer sort of house, and we went through some ceremonies he said meant marriage. Of course I could not tell nor say if they were so or not; but I think so, because, you see"—and a little sad, bitter smile swept over her face—"he is anxious to tie me to him in every way in his power. The next day we were leaving, and after a week or two's travel we came back here—papa and I, I mean—and all our servants, of course, including Gaida, came back too."

Just at this moment, and before she could rise from her knees, the *chuck* parted and the butler entered with cards on a salver.

"Captain Sahib and Mem Sahib Webb, *aya*," he said, and I rose to go.

When I was leaving the veranda I heard Anna's light, clear, well-bred tones welcoming her guests.

"This is good of you to come and see me. It is terribly hot to-day, isn't it?"

And I went away painfully marveling at her and at it all.

CHAPTER V.

FROM that day commenced a curious, strained existence which would have been intolerable to most men and was nearly so to me. Yet I had determined on a particular line of conduct. I saw victory at the end, however long and tedious the battle; and at the end of every other course I saw only loss. This thought nerved me again and again when it seemed I had come to the last remnant of my strength.

At times, the mere anxiety for her seemed to be a strain greater than I could bear. It seemed to me impossible that such a state of things could continue, such a relationship could remain a secret for long and how it would be discovered and what she might be tempted or forced to do; above all, what the man might do when he realized himself to be on the point of losing her—were questions that rose in blood-red letters before my eyes at all times and came between me and my work and my sleep. I dreaded to open the papers lest I might see the story there; I dreaded to halt my carriage in the bazaar lest I might hear her name bandied about by the native crowd. My heart beat when I saw a group of natives discussing together on the road or in the compound. They might be discussing her. But, so far, my fears and apprehensions were not fulfilled; as, in this life they so seldom are. It is something we do not fear and have never apprehended that leaps out upon us from the future and devastates our lives.

The days slipped by quietly without event, and Anna lived her double life and divided herself between two loves undisturbed. Circumstances seemed to lend themselves completely to her wishes, and Fate herself seemed interested in keeping her secret. The Lombards' bungalow was very large, and Anna's room—in fact, a whole suite of rooms, only used by her—was on the opposite side of the house from her father's. The large, open windows that naturally stood wide all night; the outside spiral staircase hidden under its wealth of foliage reaching from her window to the compound; the compound itself, a perfect jungle of flowers and trees no eye from outside could

pierce, and that included all the native servants' dwellings—all these things made it easy for her to receive Gaida as soon as the general had retired and the bungalow was dark and still. In the day she never saw him or sent for him, except in his capacity as servant; and he was in no way favored in money, dress, or quarters above the other servants. The superstitious terror with which they had come to regard him, shut off that greatest source of scandal—native gossip. In the day, Anna was entirely with me, and if slander could have touched her at all, it would have connected her name with mine and none other. Yet, even so, it seemed to me as if the whole matter must rise to the light in some way; and I waited in dread for the hour of discovery.

The more I studied Anna the more incomprehensible and terrible this strange dual passion of hers became for me; but, also, I became more and more convinced I had decided rightly in not abandoning her to herself. Neither would she have deserved my desertion. For this miserable love that had overtaken her she was no more to be held responsible than she would have been for any physical malady she might have been stricken with. She loved me with the same faithful, tender devotion she had given me from the first; and it seemed, when we were alone together, impossible to me that she could be living the life she was. But, indeed, her love for Gaida seemed to have no sort of influence upon her love for and her relations with me. It was a thing utterly separate and apart from that self which she gave to me. Within her the two loves, the higher and the lower, seemed to exist together without touching or disturbing the other; just as in a river sometimes one sees two streams, one muddy, the other clear, flowing side by side without mixing.

That such a state of things should have arisen, that such feelings, which would have been designated by the ignorant and unthinking as mere wantonness, should have sprung up in this nature, seemed the more unreasonable and terrible, because it appeared to be one unusually chaste, pure, and refined. In all her intimate conversations with me, there had never been one coarse word, never the faintest suggestion of a dullness of the moral sense, never even a suspicion of indelicacy in her wit. Moreover, she was an extremely religious girl, not perhaps religious in a

very open and ostentatious way, but in that infinitely truer way, religious in the deepest inner life of the soul. I did not recognize this fully at first; but as she admitted me more and more into her confidence, this side of her nature stood out before me so clearly that it seemed to make the situation and her actions incredible. I met her one Sunday afternoon, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, coming down the steps of the church, just after the service was over. It was a quiet, drowsy afternoon, and the neighborhood of the church was almost deserted. Only a few children under the care of their *ayah*, and one or two old ladies who tottered down the steps and drove off in their waiting carriages, represented the congregation; for the fashionable time was the early morning service, when it was cool enough for the women to enjoy their elaborate toilets, and they knew the church would be full of eyes to admire them. In the hot Indian afternoon one only wanted to lie under a *punkah* and go to sleep. I was very much surprised, therefore, to see Anna at this time and place; and I stood still, unobserved, to look at her. She was very simply dressed, and clasped in her hands a small, white ivory prayer-book. The sun shone down on her unshaded face, which was a little pale; and her eyes looked very pure and innocent, as if still full of prayer. Thinking in my mind she was not unlike the poetical conception of Marguerite leaving the cathedral, and reflecting bitterly that suffering not unlike Marguerite's lay before her, I went forward and she saw me.

"This is very nice to meet you here," she said, smiling.

"Have you been to church?" I said, abruptly, though the fact was obvious, as I placed myself by her side and we walked on very slowly.

"Yes. I like the afternoon service. It is so quiet and peaceful, with no people to disturb you, no staring faces nor rustling gowns."

"Anna, do you believe all that is in that prayer-book?"

"Oh, no," she said. "The prayer-book is a thing of man, and may, like other human things, be full of errors and mistakes. I don't know that it is; but I, personally, do not feel that I believe in it. But then I believe in the general idea that this Church and prayer-book stand for."

"Do you believe in a God?"

"Yes, Gerald, I do. I believe in some supreme power;

something that is above us; something above our own powers and understanding. I may be wrong. There may be nothing, but I feel that there is, and I have always felt very near that God. I am always praying to him, asking him, consulting him about something. If I am miserable, I pray to him; if I am happy, I thank him; if I am in danger, I pray to him; and I feel his hand is round me, inclosing me, and nothing can hurt me."

I stared at the calm, serious face beside me.

"And what about offending this deity?" I asked.

"I try never to do what I feel is wrong," she said, in a low tone.

"And you are satisfied in your relations to this man?" I said.

"A great love came into my heart for him and I married him. I feel sorry because it would grieve my father, if he knew. Otherwise—morally, I mean—is it any different from marrying any one else?"

"And your deity also approves of your being in love with two men at the same time, I suppose?" I said, with a bitterness I could not suppress.

Anna paused in her walk and turned and faced me. We were quite alone in the sleepy stillness of the Sunday afternoon; the leaves flickered and swayed over our heads and threw light shadows on the little gravel path before us.

"Gerald," she said, looking steadily at me, "I have told you that feelings can not be controlled beyond a certain point. If you came to me and found me suffering with a violent headache and said, 'Anna, this headache is sinful, you must get rid of it,' what could I do?"

"You could cure the headache and the love," I answered, sullenly.

"Yes, if the Divine Father willed; and if not, not. I suppose it is some power beyond our own that wills us to love at all. Certainly, love enters our hearts without our own volition; and I, apparently, have been willed to love two men instead of one, and what can I do?"

"Anna, this is all sophistry. We are not reading Plato now; we are looking at life, and you profess to be looking at it from a religious standpoint. If you look upon yourself as being regularly married to this man and as being his wife, how can it be right to entertain love for me?"

"I don't entertain it," answered Anna, wearily; "it

forced itself upon me. I loved you for a whole year before I saw Gaida. Do you wish me to banish you from me? I could do that, but I could not destroy my love for you."

"Well, but the other—" I said, desperately.

"Gaida has been and is very good to me. Do you think, if I threw him aside, it would be specially pleasing to God—supposing God is interested in my actions at all?"

I was silent. She possessed, somehow, the art of confusing one's thoughts as she did one's senses. I found nothing to answer her with immediately, and, after a second, she added, "Two men love me and are very good to me, each in a different way; and I love them both, each in a different way; and why all this is so, I do not know; but I feel I can do very little in it. 'And for these unknown matters, a God shall find out the way,' " she quoted very softly from the familiar Greek.

We both walked on slowly and in silence; and a little farther on there was a stone seat, grown over with moss and shaded by a cotton-tree and climbing *convolvulus*. Here we sat down by common consent, and I looked at her face with its pale tranquillity and serious calm. It was possible that a God was holding her in his hand and for his own ends made her suffer and feel differently from other women; and it was possible, too, that the same God would, as she said, discover the way of deliverance for her. That was evidently her faith.

"Let us go home," she said, after a silence. "It was a very long service, and, then, talking of these things with you, Gerald, always tires me out."

She rose, and we wended our way slowly back to her bungalow, where I left her and went on to my own, to spend the rest of the afternoon in a gloomy meditation by myself.

Whatever she might say or feel could not alter my own idea of my duty toward her; which was to draw her—not violently or by coercion, but gently; and, in the end, with her consent—from her relation to Gaida, which she might, but I could not, look upon as marriage. It was not my duty to consider him or care for him. It seemed to me my duty to try and extricate her from this position, so full of dangers and horror that she, in some inexplicable way, failed entirely to realize.

I entertained more than ever. I was constantly devising a luncheon, a dinner, a picnic, a dance. All were given in rapid succession, and then the circle recommenced. Anna was always invited and always came, hardly going anywhere else, in fact, that she might be sure of not being obliged to refuse me. At these dinners or dances, outside of my duties as host, I devoted myself to her; and this, in view of our acknowledged position, was indulgently accepted by all.

In a little while the station began to feel that there must be some complication, which was preventing the course of our love flowing smoothly into matrimony. For weeks they waited eagerly for the date of the marriage to be given out. Then expectation almost ceased, and speculation on the nature of the obstacle took its place. This was all the more excited and curious as, I think, it must have been evident to all that two people were seldom so passionately moved toward each other as we were. Anna's face was only the most delicate screen to her soul, and love, anger, grief, passion were all reflected in it and played over it, if any of these were swaying her spirit; and as she sat beside me or spoke to me, her eyes flashed and melted and grew dark by turns. Her voice had the softness of love. She smiled when our glances met across a table or crowded room. She yielded all—or nearly all—her dances to me; and showed in every way that she came to my house for its host alone. Moreover, it was not only at entertainments that we met. We passed almost the whole day together, walking or riding or driving, breakfasting on the general's veranda or mine. The station rarely saw one of us, without the other being present.

Then with wealth and youth and health and love and equality on each side, what could this incomprehensible cause for delay consist in? The station racked its brains and had headaches over it, but could not decide the question. Some of the less excitable and curious said it was just a young girl's caprice, to put off a little longer the serious part of life. Anna had, after all, but just come out from England and, practically, school. She wanted to have a little more gayety and frivolous amusement before taking up a position as a married woman. Others argued that if she was going to be so wholly devoted to one man in society as she was to her *fiancé*, she might as well

be married to him; and a great number of mammas and young girls, who had hardly looked at me before I went to Burmah, lamented and wondered over Anna's folly in not immediately seizing upon the prize I presented. Many of them amiably attempted to console me for and lure me from my unrewarded service. Such efforts caused me amusement, mingled with pain. It seemed a pity they should waste them on me, a pity I could not tell them how utterly and entirely my soul was anchored in Anna's breast, explain to them how all my desires were bound up in this one woman. And she grew dearer to me every day. Her constant society did not weary me nor let me come to the end of her learning and brilliance. It only drew me closer and closer to her. Her mind and heart and soul opened more to me each day, and the farther I looked into them the more I loved her, the more restless and desperate I became to have all this empire to myself.

We often began our day together by a ride before breakfast—a ride through the great, cool, dewy gardens, where the pomegranate buds were unfolding, and then breakfasted together with the general on his veranda. Then a break through the morning of my official duties; but a return to lunch with her again in the middle of the day, to consult with her on a thousand points of difficulty that had presented themselves that morning or previously and to hear her elucidating them and straightening them out for me or else merely listening to me with great eyes fixed on me, all attention and sympathy. A little more work in the afternoon, and then afternoon tea in the shade of her rose-scented drawing-room or beneath the banana-trees in the compound, from where we could see the miles of desert sand and the dancing, sapphire sea, like a line of jewels on the horizon, and in the foreground a string of camels winding slowly across into the light of the west. Then dinner at my house and a dance afterward, and the intoxication of the music and the movement with Anna held close to my bosom, in my arms, till four, perhaps, in the morning; and then—the rending apart, the yielding her up, and the black dejection that would come over me. Sometimes, when she and all my guests had gone, I would fling myself into a chair in the deserted room, and so sit through the night, with teeth set and my nails sunk deep into the palms of my hands; till the dawn crept in, gliding the

compound. Those horrible hours passed over my head without count. I was so absorbed in intense thought, intense suffering, that when the morning light filled the room round me it seemed merely like the flash of a few minutes since Anna had left me. Then, knowing I was due to ride with her or share her *chota hazeri*—or first breakfast—on the veranda, I would go straight to my dressing-room to change my clothes; and for many nights together the mosquito-nets on my bed would remain undisturbed. Food, too, I could hardly touch. The mental anxiety and excitement in which I lived seemed to close my throat against it. Those terrible nights of desperate pain left me for the succeeding day strung up to that degree of nervous tension when one can think clearly, speak well, transact all business, and do all mental work with great speed and ease; but can neither eat nor sleep nor give one's attention to trivial, restful things. I felt strained to the utmost limit. To be with Anna so constantly; to love her so dearly; to long for her so passionately; to see the terrible danger in which she stood; to feel that on me alone depended all hope of drawing her from that quicksand of passion in which she was sinking; to know that a moment's relaxation of my efforts would undo weeks of care; to feel that, strive as I would, my position was infinitely less powerful, less advantageous, than the man's who could take her in his arms, hold her to his breast, and call her his; to know that after a day of painful effort, when she had been drawn toward me and much had been gained, he, in one embrace that night, would probably regain her wavering will and chain her to himself again—all this strove hard (and how nearly successfully I shall never know) to turn my brain from its balance. But I tried to keep my firmness and coolness, tried to dismiss the thoughts of Gaida and his influence, and merely exert my own to the fullest; tried to see the proofs that I was succeeding and draw fresh encouragement from them. But at infinite cost. I hardly recognized my own eyes now, when they looked back from the glass at me. They looked so large and burning in the pale face, and I often wondered, dully, as I was shaving, almost as an outsider would, how the whole thing would end. If I could have felt certain that I was on the right path, it would have been different; but great doubts would seize me, and the knowledge that a few moments with

Gaida was perhaps enough to undo hours by my side, stared me in the face. In fact, a certain night came which showed me how little way I had actually progressed, and what a terrible uphill, stony path rose yet before me.

Toward the end of the month a great *fête* was to be given in the commissioner's gardens, for both Europeans and natives. Now, these mixed *fêtes* are naïvely supposed by the complacent Indian Government to bring the two classes together. They are a concession to that section of the community that thinks the native should be brought up to the level of and treated as a white; and to the uninitiated, to those who have never been to one, this form of diversion seems as if it might bring about a delightfully social and friendly intercourse—at least for that particular afternoon or evening. The reality, however, hardly impresses one that way. What happens is this. The gates of a magnificent public or private garden—a trifle of two hundred acres or so—are thrown open to black and white alike, but *not* the house of the host; that is for the whites alone. The natives come in and pour over the grounds, looking exceedingly picturesque and beautiful in their Oriental dress, and crowned with flowers, as the Greeks of old time. A little later the whites begin to arrive. The natives loll and lounge about and stare at them, but they are not allowed, on pain of arrest, to speak to them or—as the Government calls it—to “annoy them.” Nor could the whites, except a few of the men in official positions, understand a word of their many languages, if they did. Refreshments are served from the house, but not to the natives. They have to buy theirs, at little native stalls at the gates. There is a band playing; but all seats, stands, and inclosures are reserved for the whites. The natives can stand outside or hang over the rails if they can get near enough. For the rest, wherever seen, however occupied or idle, standing, walking, or sitting, the native is hustled out of the way by a policeman, should a white or whites be coming down the same path or approaching the same bench. And the whites move about as if absolutely unconscious that such a thing as natives existed. He looks through them and over them, walks—by the aid of a preceding policeman—through them and over them; and, in fact, the natives have about the same place in the *fête* that the tropical flowers in the grass beneath the white men's feet have; which flowers they

greatly resemble, lending beauty and local color to the scene.

On Lieutenant Blundell and myself, the commissioner's practical *aides-de-camp*, fell the burden of all the arrangements, decorations, and commissariat. Anna seemed delighted at the idea, and showed so much animation that all the *ennui* I usually felt over such work left me, and I threw myself into it with enthusiasm. She never met me now without asking what I was doing for the *fête* and saying how much she was looking forward to it. On one of these occasions, her motive flashed upon me suddenly and my heart died within me.

"Is Gaida Khan going to be there?" I asked, abruptly.

A flood of crimson swept over her face as she looked down and murmured, half-inaudibly:

"Yes."

"So that is why you are so interested in the *fête*!" I said, bitterly.

"Not entirely," Anna said, hurriedly, and with the deprecating air she always had when this name was mentioned, as if imploring me not to be angry with her. "But there will be a sword dance by the Pathans and he will be in it. It will be very beautiful. I want you to see it."

"I am aware that Gaida is very handsome," I said, coldly. "I have seen him once."

This man and the horrible, triangular position we were in, though always in my thoughts, were seldom touched on between us; and the pain of hearing her speak of him and in this eager way was, to a certain extent, unfamiliar and almost overpowering.

Anna grew pale and silent as she always did when the least displeasure crept into my voice, and the thought shot through me that she feared me, and fear is the road to hate, not love. With an effort that seemed almost beyond my strength I crushed back the anger and sense of injury and said, gently:

"Well, Anna, when will you be there? I shall be at your service all the evening to see dances and everything else. Blundell will do all the honors overlooked by the commissioner."

A smile of confident pleasure broke over her face again.

"I think about nine," she said, softly, and with a grate-

ful inflection that said plainly to me, "Thank you, for not being angry."

The evening of the *fête*, that was to begin about five and continue till midnight, was exceptionally lovely. The breeze from the sea died away, and, though the heat was consequently intense, the calm of earth and sky in their perfection was singularly beautiful. When all was ready and the commissioner had thanked me for the special service I had rendered to the cause, and a few of his guests had already arrived, I strolled away to the lower parts of the gardens, leaving him and Blundell on the steps of the veranda as a reception committee. The sky overhead gleamed like mother-of-pearl with rose color. The languid branches of the palms, steeped in gold, drooped motionless in the still air. In the west shone already a planet with silver radiance, and the moon rose slowly, pale, ethereal, a transparent disk in the roseate sky. I walked down a narrow alley between masses of pomegranate-trees and roses and hibiscus and rhododendron, growing all over one another, and stifling one another and fainting in one another's embrace, walked away from the direction of the bands and lost myself at last in the heavy quiet of the garden. I wanted to find a little rest and pull myself together. A dreadful tiredness, like coma, seemed creeping over me. Nights of sleepless pain and thoughts, days of anxiety and torment were beginning to tell. I felt as if the store of vitality I had been drawing and living on was exhausted. I walked on slower and slower, soothed, unconsciously, by the perfect tranquillity around me, when suddenly the scent of sandal-wood and attar of roses struck me, and I raised my eyes from the path, expecting to see natives near me. There was a single figure only a short distance from me, and advancing in my direction. One glance seemed to drive all the blood in my body to my heart, and there it seemed held and freezing. It was Gaida Khan. He was not in such rich holiday dress as the last time I had seen him; in fact, there was nothing notably festive about it, except that the full, white linen trousers were brilliantly white, the loose, blue tunic he wore over them seemed new, and the scarlet turban on his head was of silk instead of cotton. I controlled myself sufficiently to walk calmly on, though my feet almost stopped and seemed rooted to the ground at the first sight of him;

but I went slowly that I might see him well as I passed. He advanced without changing his pace, with his head held high on its superb column of neck, and the evening light falling softly on the delicate and perfect face. He came up to me and passed, glancing at me full as he did so; and it seemed to me he raised his head still higher, and a suspicion of an arrogant smile replaced the exquisitely sweet expression that was natural to the face. For a moment our eyes met across the rose and golden light, in the perfect peace and stillness of the garden. We looked at each other. Two men who represented nearly completely the two extremes of humanity; between whom lay a gulf as wide, perhaps, as could exist between two creatures of the same species—and the one on the lower side was the one that was victorious and triumphant. I, rich in all the world values; with my brain crammed with all sorts of learning, useful and useless; accustomed to the best this world can offer. He, without one anna or a hut; unable to read or write or understand any tongue but his own and a few words of another. We, the rivals, looked at each other.

He had something for which I would have exchanged all I had. He was the envied, the fortunate, the rich. He had passed me, and the way was so narrow that his clothes brushed me and the scent of sandal-wood flooded me. He was taller than I, though I stood six feet; and his disdainful eyes swept over me contemptuously from beneath the crimson turban as he went by. In that moment all the Saxon blood rose in my veins and seemed to be living fire. The impulse came to spring at his throat and bear him under me to the ground. It passed before me in a flash: the opportunity, the place, the quiet, the solitude; the certainty, the impunity of my vengeance. I was older and, doubtless, stronger than he; an accomplished athlete and, besides, had the strength at that moment of mad fury. He was, probably, of the usual weak, native constitution and untrained. A short struggle and I could leave him strangled in the narrow way. When his body was found, who could know or prove it was I that was responsible?

And even if that were known, the slightest excuse of mine—an insult offered to me; momentary anger on my part, leading to an unfortunate accident—how easily it would be accepted. What was the life of one miserable

native, a *chetai-wallah*, a man who walked with bare feet in the dust of the highway? But I restrained myself and he walked by unharmed. Then I turned and looked after him as he continued his way with the incomparable majesty and grace of movement that is the special gift of the Pathan. With eyes dim with anger I followed his figure and Kipling's lines went dully through my head:

" He trod the ling like a buck in spring,
And looked like a lance at rest."

I paused there till the thicket of rose and magnolia had closed between him and me. Then I walked forward, feeling almost blind and, suddenly, dizzy, sick, and hopeless.

I did not regret in the least that I had let Gaida go by unharmed. If I wished for his death, there were other ways of accomplishing it then by a personal struggle. The impulse I had felt had been merely the natural physical impulse of jealousy and hatred. I did not wish his death; that is to say, I did not intend to bring it about. I had decided that long ago; and nothing in the world is more fatal than reversing in a moment of anger, or any similar madness, the decisions we have arrived at in cold hours of logical thought. If, when the madness comes, you can not remember your reasons or your logic; if, in fact, these then seem to you like folly, at least you can remember you have made such a decision and adhere to it simply because you have made it. This feeling it was and this mechanical remembrance that had allowed Gaida Khan to pass by me in peace.

I found a gardener's water-tank beside my path, and some moss-covered stones. On these I sat down and buried my head in my hands and rested. Yet I can not claim that I thought much. I allowed myself, as it were, to drift on a blind stupor of fatigue and pain. An hour, perhaps, went by, and I knew I must be returning to my post of duty. I rose and turned back along the path I had come.

When I had retraced my steps to the bungalow the air had darkened, the rose in the sky had changed to purple, and the stars burst forth in it. Beneath, among the blossom-laden trees, hung countless thousands of colored lamps and lanterns, and figures began to pass me in the narrow paths. The commissioner's house was in a blaze

of light. Light poured from all the windows and from the decorated and illuminated veranda, so that the lawn was bright as day.

Throngs of people, Europeans and natives, covered it, and were crowding up the shallow, white steps toward the long windows. One of the bands was playing, and laughter and voices mingled with the strains of music. Servants flitted here and there with trays of wine and ices among those who did not care to leave the freshness of the garden for the house. Groups of natives, looking like animated Greek statues in their white clothing and with garlands of white clematis on their heads and round their throats, lingered and leaned and talked and gazed toward the house while carriages dashing up to the lower end of the lawn deposited every moment fresh consignments of young English girls in white silk and muslin, and young men in nineteenth-century attire; and behind the white corner of the bungalow roof and the palms the great, mellow, voluptuous moon climbed steadily and looked down upon it all. Exactly at nine, Anna arrived. I was waiting on the veranda to receive her. Coming into the strong light, she stepped upon the terrace looking fair and fresh as one of the immortals.

I went forward to greet her, and I felt my face was pale and grave and there was a pained smile on my lips. I suffered so much mental pain now and so continually that I seemed growing old under the strain of it. Life and its joyousness, even youth and youthful impulses, seemed dying within me. But, as her affianced lover, I went forward, as a hundred eyes were turned upon us in the brilliant veranda, and welcomed her and drew her arm through mine. She looked up at me with a smile full of love and pleasure that all those eyes could see, as floods of light were falling on her fair face and white-clothed figure, and, doubtless, many men present hated me as one supremely blessed and favored.

"What time does the wonderful dance begin?" I asked, gently.

"About a quarter-past nine, I think," she answered, "and it will be at the farther side of the gardens. Those people passing down the lawn are going now, I think. Come with me round the house. I know a lovely path down the gardens, that will take us there."

There was a general stir among all the guests, natives and Europeans, and Anna and I separated from the general mass and went round to the back of the bungalow, where, as she said, a narrow and lovely alley, arched completely over by the bending cocoanut-palms, opened in front of us. Here and there the moonlight fell through their fan-like branches and seemed to splash like molten silver on the path before us. In one of these irregular pools of light Anna slackened her footsteps and I saw her raise her face and look at me steadily.

“You looked so handsome, Gerald, this evening,” she breathed, softly, “when you came forward on the terrace to meet me. So dark, so pale, so beautiful! Kiss me,” she added, and stopped short in the path.

I stopped too, and took her wholly in my arms and kissed her.

“Give him up for me,” I said in her ear. “Am I not worth it?”

I felt her bosom strained against mine heave spasmodically, and her arms tremble against my neck. At last a choked whisper reached me:

“Oh, I *do* want to, you know; but, somehow, since I have given myself to him—you don’t understand, perhaps, but it is such a tie for a woman.”

I put her from me suddenly.

“Anna, we must not talk of these things,” I said, with a suppressed vehemence that made her shrink from me, “if you want me to remain a reasoning being. I am strained to the utmost limit as it is.”

We walked on in perfect silence through one cool, fragrant alley after another, where the moonlight, filtered through the palms, softened and silvered the heavy-scented air, till we arrived in the open again and the crowds of figures told me we were near the appointed ground.

When we reached the spot I saw at once that our clever, little commissioner had selected and arranged it with his usual incomparable taste in such things. The luxurious undergrowth, the long, rank grass and rampant parasites and blossoms, had all been cut away for a large, circular space; which had then been swept clean and surrounded by a light iron railing, about three feet high. Outside this railing a grassy, lawn-like space stretched away till a ring of cocoanut-palms, and all their accompanying under-

growth of rose and pomegranate, pressed forward again, making the natural, verdant, fragrant wall. Raised on the grassy lawn, facing the clean-swept ring, a grand-stand came into view; and line upon line of chairs in it were being taken up as we approached. On the opposite side, the Grenadier band had taken its position; while natives and English pressed up all round the circle to the railings. It was as light here as at noonday, thousands of colored lamps being swung in long strings of light from pole to pole above our heads, and the roof of the grand-stand itself being one blaze of rose and gold.

"Where will you go?" I asked Anna, as we came up.

"Oh, to our seats in the stand," she replied, indifferently, as if she had no other possible interest in or connection with the spectacle than the merest onlooker. No one, certainly, could have dreamed, as she quietly descended the crowded stand to its two best seats, reserved for her in the very front, and calmly crushed the white silk of her costume into their narrow limits and took her place with a certain cold grace that was all her own, that this fair-skinned, light-haired Saxon girl—so thoroughly English in every look and gesture, and with, apparently, all the cold pride of the English—had come to see her husband dance his barbaric dance there in the dust before us. I felt a bitter pain as I watched her and took my place beside her, and yet I was glad in a sort of bitter way. I carried a wound—a raw, terrible wound—in my breast; but, if she could prevent, none should ever know it, none of those eyes round us should peer delightedly into its bleeding recesses.

The stand was quite full, packed from end to end now, and might itself have been some beautiful tropical flower, it so glowed with silk and bright colors and brilliant, laughing faces. The band opposite began to play, and trays of sweetmeats, ices, and champagne were brought and passed along in front of the tiers of seats. Anna would not take anything, and, looking at her closely, I saw that though the center of her lips was of the usual bright rose, the corners were white and burned-looking. The commissioner and Bundell had their seats in the tier directly above and behind ours, and toward the half-hour past nine he bent down to Anna and murmured:

"Here they are."

We looked toward the ring. The band had ceased its English airs, and in perfect silence forty Pathans, each with a flashing, naked sword three and a half feet long and curved slightly at the point like a cimeter, walked slowly into the circle. They were all of great and uniform height, dressed entirely in white, full Mohammedan trousers, straight tunic over to the middle of the thigh, with loose, wide-open, falling sleeves; on their heads, surmounting their magnificent faces, was wound to the height of a foot, perhaps, a snow-white turban.

A little shiver and flutter passed in a ripple over the stand. Whatever the men may have thought of the "dogs" and "pigs" of natives before them, the women were not and could not be quite unmoved by the sudden display, for their benefit, of this male beauty, this physical perfection. Fair, fluffy heads leaned suddenly together, and whispers were exchanged behind fans. "Aren't they handsome!" "Beautiful!" "Just like statues," ran in feminine murmurs from seat to seat. The Pathans advanced slowly till they all faced the stand, and the full glare of the rosy, yellow light fell on them; showing to us all distinctly the splendid foreheads of pale, burnished bronze; the narrow, delicate, sweeping eyebrows over the lustrous, flashing, midnight eyes; the perfectly modeled noses with the carved, proud nostrils; the firm, cruel, yet exquisite mouths and beautiful chins.

They looked up at the eager, surprised, admiring white faces above them, salaamed and smiled. As before I had noticed with Gaida, the smile is the last touch of the Creator's hand upon their marvelous faces of beauty. The cruel, beautiful lines of the lips dissolve, the lips part from even teeth of flashing pearl, and a sweetness that can only be faintly represented by saying "as of heaven" is lent to the irresistible countenances. A little shiver of delight swept over the women as that smile, like sunlight on a brook, passed over the faces of the Pathans. And I, sitting in my place, thought wonderingly, "How strange and deceitful Nature is at times! Who could believe that these men are the most bloodthirsty, perhaps the most fiendishly cruel, and certainly the most depraved and vicious race of the earth?" and I passed my hand over my eyes for a moment to shut out those god-like forms and faces, while I thought of all I had heard and read of them

—stories that would almost sear the paper they were written on, and scorch out Saxon eyes with shame to read. And to think that she—this girl beside me, whose slender, delicate, white fingers held my soul and brain and heart in their hold, who controlled the very rush of blood through my veins; she, with all her delicacy and refinement of thought and feeling, was in the hands of one of these! I turned to her now with all this savage pain confusing my thoughts, and, altering some of them enough to give her sharp senses the clew to them all, I said something about the men before us being mere devils; and she turned her face fully to me, meeting my gaze with her eyes full of cool, insolent courage. It was the same look that shone in her father's face when he led his men up the defiles of death in the Border campaigns; the same look that shines in the eyes of the Saxon the world over, and makes him what he is—the world's master.

“I am not afraid,” she said, simply, answering all she knew was in my thoughts; and she turned to look down to the arena again.

I followed her eyes and at that instant the dance commenced. The Pathans had all fallen into line, one behind the other, forming a circle the entire circumference of the inclosure. At the first crash of the opening chord of music, forty flashing swords leaped into the air and were whirled, each one gleaming, round the head of each white-robed Pathan as he plunged forward, breaking into a wild, musical chant in unison with the music. Now, I do not know what step was used in that dance, nor can I possibly conceive any European foot making one like it. I can only say that the Pathans moved round in that perfect circle, of which the proportions never varied, with marvelous rapidity, the broad blades of their swords playing like lightning above their heads the whole time, and their gait in the dance was the gait of the Pathan when he walks, somewhat rolling and sensuous, but when fitted to such forms of extreme grace and symmetry, one that reaches the climax of beauty in motion.

Their curious, swaying movement from side to side seemed to bring into play every one of the muscles of those shapely forms. The powerful shoulders and flanks, the line of the spine, the somewhat too-developed muscles of the hip and waist, all were moving; and their play could

be seen distinctly under the one surface of fine white linen over them.

As the dancers swung around the ring, it was a sensuously beautiful sight; and, as such sights are generally rendered by women for the benefit—or otherwise—of men, I glanced round with a faint feeling of amusement, questioning in my mind what the women thought of this reversing of the order of things, in their favor. The stand was mainly filled by women, and that they were affected by the unexpectedness and beauty of the scene before them and moved by the sudden call it made on the senses, was evident. Their faces, as they leaned forward, were pale; and a dilated eye, the slight, nervous movement of a fan, the parted lips or sudden flush of color on the cheeks told the emotions that the otherwise coldly well-bred crowd failed to betray. I brought my eyes back and they rested on Anna. She was pale, too; and I saw her nostril quiver, dilate, and beat nervously. But for that, she was motionless, calm as a statue.

There was nothing, one might say, voluntarily sensuous or sensual in the spectacle. The dance was not a licentious, but a martial one; and the management of the swords that they kept whirling and flashing in horizontal and vertical circles round them, was magnificent.

There was perfect order and concert in each movement in spite of their intense rapidity; for each man was so closely following the other that the slightest misstep, stumble, or lagging of the pace on any one's part must have resulted in a fatal accident. Each whirling sword was timed to a second to rise and descend, and each only cleared by an inch or so the white-turbaned head directly in front of it, and its backward whirl over each man's head as they swept triumphantly round their circle cleared by hardly so much the brow of the man behind him. It was a splendid, inspiring sight; breathing of courage and bravery, dexterity and skill, and the madness and triumph of victory. And what of sensual element there was in it came involuntarily and unavoidably from the wonderful physical beauty displayed, and the sumptuousness of Oriental form and outline, not from studied trick and gestures as in the Nautches.

I looked on fascinated, and drew my breath still with a curious feeling each time that Gaida passed, with his face

flung upward on its column of bronze throat, beneath its white turban, and between a sword and a sword.

And as the music grew louder and faster and the dance more abandoned and the encircling swords more dangerous in those flying, glistening circles, the faces of even the quiet British officers flushed up with animation. On Anna's left sat the colonel of the regiment to which most of the dancers belonged; for, with the exception of Gaida and a few others, chosen for their personal beauty and skill, the men before us were all soldiers enrolled in one of the Pathan regiments and officered by Englishmen who are able to turn the splendid fighting qualities of these men, their love of danger and death in battle, their reckless courage, their very appetite for blood, to the best account. This old colonel, who had mixed with Pathans, studied and commanded them for twenty years, gazed down now at his men with flushing face and queerly glittering eyes. They were his children, practically, and he had seen their irresistible rush in battle, their fierce onsets, their mute, smiling courage, their uncomplaining deaths; until, by the side of these things, their horrible lives, when not in war, and unspeakable vices seemed to grow small to his almost parental eye.

Anna leaned toward him and murmured:

"What splendid fellows, colonel. Are you not proud of them?"

"I am! I am!" he returned, with beaming eyes, and raised his hands to clap them loudly.

This was the signal, and a perfect storm of applause broke from the crowded stand. At the same moment the music ceased, as it had begun, with one sudden crash; and on the instant the almost flying forms became motionless and the lifted swords made an arrested wave of gleaming light round the ring. Then the swords were lowered. The Pathans smiled and salaamed as before, and filed silently—a procession of kings one would have said—out of the inclosure.

The stand full of whites began to flutter and whisper and laugh, as they rustled out of the seats; and Anna and I very slowly followed in silence. Almost without a word we walked through the grounds and entered her carriage. When we arrived at the house, the general alighted first

and went up into the veranda, and we were left alone at the foot of the steps, while the carriage drove away.

“You will receive him to-night?” I said in a low voice.

“I suppose so,” she said, raising her hand to her lips, which parted in a little, nervous yawn; “he is my husband.”

My brain seemed scorching as if with fire.

“And what am I?” I asked, in desperation, standing so as to bar her farther path.

She stood still and looked up at me. Then she opened her arms to me tenderly.

“You are my *fiancé*; so we must kiss and say good-night.”

I turned from her in a silence too bitter for words; felt, rather than saw, that her arms dropped to her sides, and that she, too, turned and went into the house.

I walked away toward my own bungalow, feeling that I had drunk up the draught of life; that my mouth was full of bitter lees and dregs; and that the cup was empty.

When I reached the house I went straight to my room, undressed, and threw myself on the bed. I felt the round patch of burning fire, that foretells Indian fever, kindled in both palms, and I knew that in an hour or two I should be mercifully oblivious for a time of all surrounding things. My days and sleepless nights of suffering, capped by this terrible evening, the mental fever in which I had been living so long, had culminated at last in physical fever. My finger-tips were still of normal temperature, and doubling them into my hands I felt the little fire growing in the palms and extending its circle every minute. I felt chilly and languid, with intense pain in the back; and I drew a thick, soft blanket all over me, though the thermometer marked ninety-six degrees. And then I lay still, dreamily giving myself over to that strange sensation of growing heat and languor, that intense fiery stupor creeping insidiously all over me, and melting away one's mental feelings, perceptions, and pains, as in a natural crucible. I lay still, sinking deeper and deeper into a sort of heat coma, in which I seemed wrapped round and round with flames—flames that did not burn, but only heated—heated to a point where bones and limbs and brains were all fused together, and one was nothing any longer but an inert mass of dreamy heat,

Then came a blank of unconsciousness, and my next memory is that I was struggling like a madman, at the open window, with my trembling Afghan bearers; and some one, that they afterward told me was myself, was screaming with a queer sort of laughter that rang out over the quiet, moonlit compound. After a little while I was back in bed again with some one holding me down by both arms; and the doctor was there beside the bed, with a wine-glass in his hand. I knew it was the doctor, for I remembered his long Roman nose, and now—so funny!—his nose had grown so long it reached out as far as the bed, and I tried to wrench my hand loose from the bearer's hold, because I knew I was expected to shake hands with it. Then he put the wine-glass down to my lips, and I seized the rim with my teeth and bit a piece out of it. Glass is a queer food to give a sick man. And then a stream of icy liquid splashed all over my face and throat, and I fought desperately because the icy drops seemed killing me. Then they bound me down to the *charpoy* with cloths, and enormous hands came down on my face and held my mouth open, and something went cold and freezing down my throat, and I twisted and strained and wrenched, and there was a loud creaking, and I heard a voice saying, far off in the distance—I think it was at the end of the world:

“He will break up the bed.”

And there was pain at my wrists and ankles. They came and sawed at them with red-hot saws, and I screamed and twisted and they sawed the faster; and then there was black, black night, and nothing more.

In the morning I opened my eyes. There were two servants by the bed and the doctor sitting beside me. I felt very quiet and very weak. I stretched out my hand and touched the chair beside me. It felt warm. Then I knew the fever had left me. I looked at the doctor and smiled.

“You had a pretty sharp attack last night,” he observed, “and, by Jove! what strength you have! I never recognized fully your splendid physique until now.”

“Thank you, doctor,” I returned, weakly; “I am afraid it was rather troublesome than otherwise last night.” Then, as a thought of fear suddenly struck me, I added, “Was I delirious?”

“Delirious!” exclaimed the doctor, “well, I should rather think so. First you tried to jump out of the win-

dow, then you bit up a wine-glass, then you tried to break down the bed, screaming all the time. We had a lively time with you, I can assure you."

"What did I say in my delirium?" I asked, paling. Good God! Suppose I had betrayed Anna's secret!

"Oh, nothing coherent at all. You were past that. Don't be alarmed, my boy, you have not given yourself away. You just shrieked like a maniac and strained so when we bound you, I thought you'd break your wrists."

I glanced at my wrists. They were livid and swollen double. Then I closed my eyes. How inestimably thankful I was that I had uttered nothing about her.

Then I was given some beef-tea and left to myself, covered up with blankets; and I sunk into a long, restful coma.

I was roused toward noon. My bearer stood by my bedside with a great bunch of white roses on a salver and a card.

"The Miss Sahib Lombard was here and would so much like to see the sahib," said the servant.

I was too weak to lift the flowers; but I motioned the servant to set the tray, card, and flowers on the bed, and said I would see her.

I glanced round the room. Like most Indian rooms, it was large, with an infinity of windows, all standing open to the fresh Kalatu breeze, and more like a sitting-room than a bedroom. In fact, my one narrow, wooden-frame *charpoy* was the only thing in it that suggested a sleeping-room. My bearer closed the doors into my bath-room and dressing-room, drew an easy-chair to the side of the bed and retired.

I watched the door by which she would enter, and in a few seconds she came in. In white, and with a white sailor hat on her bright hair and a faint, pale rose glow on her cool, white skin, she looked, as usual, a type of the morning.

She stopped short at the door with a look of dismay. I suppose I may have had a ghastly appearance, after the efforts of the previous night. Then she advanced, almost running, and, stooping over the bed, would have kissed me; but I put both my hands on her chest and held her from me.

"Did you receive him last night?" I asked, looking up

at her. And I felt the fever beginning to awake in my veins again.

“Yes.”

“Then don’t kiss me. Your kisses are loathsome to me,” and I turned my head away from her on the pillow.

She drew back as if my hands had been daggers that stabbed her breast, and sat down in silence in the chair close by me. There was silence, and I felt the excitement, resentment, anger, grief, and sorrow that her presence caused in me, rushing through me and relighting the devouring fever in every tissue. I turned my head to look at her, after a minute. She was sitting silently gazing at me with wide-open, pathetic eyes, and great tears were forming in them and overflowing and pouring down the long, black lashes.

I stretched out my hand a little nearer to her on the coverlet.

“Forgive my violence,” I said, gently. “I was like a madman last night, and my brain has not recovered its usual balance yet.”

She ungloved one white hand and laid it over mine.

“I heard you were very ill,” she said in a trembling voice.

“No, not very ill,” I murmured, turning my head restlessly on the pillow—for a furious pain was beginning there. “Only a little Indian fever—and other kinds.”

Anna did not answer; she only sat and cried more.

“Don’t cry,” I said, “that does not alter things.”

Then I closed my eyes. The fever had taken hold of my head and it was being held in a vise of steel, while red-hot pincers tore slowly at the brain-tissues.

When I opened my eyes again I saw the sunlight had shifted its position in the room, and I knew an hour or more must have passed. Anna still sat by me, holding my hand and still crying; only now the fair skin was colored red with tears, the blue eyes were lost in a red mist and had dark, purple patches round their lids.

“Find the doctor and tell him to give me more anti-febrine,” I muttered, “and then go. Don’t sit here and cry, spoiling your face.”

Whether she went or stayed, I don’t know. The rest of that day and night is a blur to me. The next clear point to me was the following morning, when I was calm and

out of pain and I saw the doctor's face again above my bed. It was much graver than on the previous morning—in fact, I laughed a little as I saw it. It reminded me of a London undertaker.

“You have been so much worse than I anticipated,” I heard him saying after a minute, “I think change of air is imperative. You seemed to grow suddenly worse yesterday after Miss Lombard's visit, and you raved terribly in the night.”

Again that fear! What was he saying? Change of air? Go away! Certainly! Yes, that was it. Go away, before I had betrayed Anna. Go away among strangers, where what I said would not matter.

“Yes, doctor, yes, I think so. Get me away. What did I say last night?”

“I really don't know,” returned the doctor, rather crossly, I thought. “I don't pay any heed to fever patients' rambling; but you mentioned Miss Lombard's name a great many times.”

It was time to go! I started out of bed and stood upright for a second. Then I fell in a heap, and the doctor gathered me up and put me into a chair.

“You are very, very weak,” he said. “I don't think you can go at present.”

“I tell you I am going to-day. The bearer can carry me to the carriage, if I can't walk. Help me get dressed, doctor, and tell the men to put up some things for me. The commissioner will give me a fortnight's leave, I know. Then you put me on a train for the hills. Get me away, doctor, or I'll die on your hands; I will, indeed, and be a lasting discredit to you!”

The doctor looked very grave, and felt my hand.

“You have no fever now,” he said, doubtfully, “but you are so deplorably weak. Where do you intend to go?”

“Oh—to Peshawur.”

“Why take such a long trip as that? I would suggest—”

“No,” I interrupted, angrily, “I am going to Peshawur. Call in my servants. Let me see—that black trunk—yes, that will do. Now, doctor, just hand me my socks. I can't get up for them.”

I was intensely weak and most anxious to use all my mental faculties while they were clear. I knew that even-

ing would bring back the fever and incapacity; but then, if I were on the train, without a soul to hear my ravings, it would not matter. And Peshawur! Yes, that idea fascinated me. I would go up to the capital of the Pathans, to Gaida's birth-place, and learn something of the wonderful race—learn something of him, too, perhaps. I began feverishly to pull on my socks. My fingers trembled and my bones cracked loudly as the fever had licked up the oil in their sockets. Everything was intense fatigue, but my mind urged me on and kept me up to my work. I could rest on the train. Once on the train I could lie and lie, and rest and rest, until they picked me up and carried me out at the other end. But now I must work. The doctor had left me for a few minutes, and I had to dress myself as well as I could, and get about the room by clinging on to the furniture. Then he came back, bringing my butler and bearer, and they packed my trunk, and I sat on the edge of the *charpoy* with a brain rocking queerly—as it does after fever, as if a seesaw were in your head—and my vision all distorted. But I managed to write a check for the butler, who would take all the tickets and would want money for the journey, and one for the doctor, and a note to Anna, and one to the commissioner. The end of it all was, at five o'clock that evening, in a giddy mist of pain, I was put on the train, in a private compartment with my two servants, and shipped up to Peshawur.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR weeks I lay ill at Peshawur. Simple Indian fever would have given way quickly and easily to the keen, light air of the hills; but no cool winds nor mountain air could sweep away in a day or two the ravages of those long, terrible nights of mental anguish, that long strain of anxiety and restless passion that had been put upon my brain. Days without food and nights without sleep, Nature deeply re-resents; and at last, if you continue that treatment of her, she strikes you down in a passion—as she did me.

My servants had secured a good position for my bungalow; and from the sick-room, in which I lay through the long, fever-stricken days and nights, I could see, without raising my head from the pillow, the light, turquoise sky and the deep blue lines of the hills. It was rather pleas-

ant, rather a relief to me, this intense physical weakness, in which the brain ceases to bother one with its ideas and pictures, its thoughts and desires. This bodily preoccupation with bodily pain and sufferings swept one's brain clear and left it blank, like a little child's. After hours of delirium and fever, there came long hours of blank, quiet weakness; in which I lay—content to be without sensation of any sort—gazing out through the open *jilmils* into the clear, light, placid air beyond. Then I slowly began to get better; and I almost dreaded recovery. Recovery meant taking up again the burden of responsibility and anxiety that the utter helplessness of disease slips from one's shoulders. I gained strength slowly each day; and I knew that with my strength would come back desires and longings and hopes and cares without end.

In all this time I heard constantly from Anna, and her letters had always the same burden: her love for myself, her gratitude, her devotion, and her piteous longing to be free from "her bondage," as she called it. But it was a bondage that none could free her from; and no one could understand that better than I. Let there be no misunderstanding here. It was Anna's own love that held her captive. She wished to crush out that love, to annihilate it, perhaps; but she could not; and no human aid could help her. As the drunkard longs to kill the desire for drink, yet goes on drinking; so she might wish to kill her love, yet she continued loving. Had the bondage been any other than this; had she been tied to this man by the tie of marriage without love, I would and could, possibly, have freed her. But in this case, since her love was the disease and her captivity but, as it were, the symptom, it was useless to attack the latter and set her free until the disease itself, torn from its roots, was eradicated. Forcible separation from Gaida would not free her; it would simply martyrize and idealize him in her thoughts, and she would be bound to him by the chains of a thousand memories; and for the one who caused that separation she would feel nothing but resentment. Even if she gave herself to me, it would be with that memory of him standing like a shield between us. And that should not be. No, the terrible passion must be killed or die; and until that time came about she could not be released. And I, forced to remain passive, yet was comforted, knowing that one man had the

power to kill it; and, he, probably, was working surely to that end—and that man was Gaida himself.

I could not answer her letters fully; but I sent her little pencil notes as often as the fever, the dysentery that followed it, the recurrence of the fever, and all the weakness in between, permitted.

And then at last there came a day when I left my bed and was dressed again with a white collar round my neck, and I sat up by the window of my room and looked downward, instead of being on my back and looking upward, as I had for so long.

There was a pile of newspapers on the chair beside me, and I looked at one printed at Kalatu and let my eye stray over it from column to column. Ever since I had shared Anna's secret with her, I had never been able to take up a paper, European or native, without a vague dread that I might find her name in it, coupled with suspicion, some veiled story or even open scandal; and so, from habit, my eye flitted nervously over both sheets until all the headlines had been noted, and I was about to lay the paper down with relief when I saw in an obscure, out-of-the-way corner of the last page, two or three lines headed "The Epidemic," and read as follows:

"The cholera epidemic remains at present unabated, despite the stringent measures adopted for its suppression by our able commissioner. Three hundred and twenty deaths were reported yesterday, against two hundred and ninety of the day before; and there are seventy-five fresh cases to-day."

That was all—absolutely all. Just that little foot-note at the end of the sheet. I turned over the four pages of the paper vainly to find some other allusion to it. There was none. Political articles were there as usual; complaints against the corrupt municipality; and, in the local news columns, account after account of this dinner, that garden party, this little dance, Mrs. So-and-So's picnic, gay jokes, *bon mots*, descriptions of gowns, with list of successes or failures in the weekly *gymkhana*. These things filled up the sheet; just as if Kalatu was the healthiest station imaginable and in the gayest and most light-hearted of humors, with no deadly stream of disease flowing round it and stealthily lapping up its victims at an

average of three hundred a day. Well, not for nothing have we British our reputation for phlegm. And Anna was there, and, like the true Briton she was, thought the plague too insignificant a matter to be mentioned in her letters. Then I recollected she had not written to me for a week. Could the general have sent her away for safety? It was not likely. I had experience of these things. I know how the British in India treat the plague. I had been through an epidemic before in another station and had noticed their demeanor—when I was fresh from England, too, and, therefore, I had noticed it; from England, where, if a navy dies with stomach-ache in the hot August weather, somewhere down by the docks, the morning papers have big head-lines, set in capital letters: “Case of cholera in London. Great alarm felt. Message from the queen.” But things are different in India, and this is how they do them there. First, in a native paper, appears a statement of five deaths from cholera. A week goes by, and then, in a European paper, one reads that by order such-and-such wells have been closed and the public tanks and wash-houses shut up “as a precautionary measure.” The following week the public is informed, without comment, that “deaths from cholera are now averaging one hundred and fifty a day, and bounds have been established, the line being set at the native city”—which is, perhaps, five miles from cantonments. This means that no white person shall drive in his carriage, ride or pass by on foot, or in any way whatever cross the set line and return. All beyond the line is infected. Day by day passes, and the number of deaths per day creeps up steadily, and that line is drawn tighter and tighter, closer and closer round the whites as that deadly black sea of cholera encroaches and encroaches on all sides. The line or boundary being set down by the native city at first, one can ride or drive from there to the coast, one can still canter through the public gardens, shop in upper town, attend the band-stand, or visit distant bungalows out on the desert. Presently, the line is drawn up into a narrower loop, and one by one cuts out the upper town; for the advancing tide of cholera has crept into that. Next, the gardens go, the line is put between them and you; next, the drive to the sea or the desert is forbidden, and the line contracts into a puny circle, which embraces the principal bungalows, half a mile,

perhaps, of level ground for driving, and the band-stand. Within this you trot and canter and your coachman turns twenty times in half an hour, and cholera stares you in the face from every side from over the line.

Meanwhile, in spite of the strenuous measures adopted by the sanitary inspection committee, the board of health, the health commissioner, and many other untiring and conscientious officials; in spite of quarantines and isolations and closed wells and disinfectants, the deaths reach, perhaps, four hundred per diem; and the English go on with their dancing and dining, picnic in compounds—because everywhere else is beyond the line—and charade parties. It is not considered etiquette to allude to the plague in any way or at any time; and any one committing such a solecism is immediately frowned down by the rest of the company present. If an expected guest is absent from his place at a dinner-party, and his sudden death is handed to his hostess as his excuse, no inquiry is made as to his illness. It is taken for granted it is the prevailing epidemic; and, of course, no one would be so ill-bred as to mention that. Very few of the women or children are sent away; at any rate, not until the mortality among the whites is very great. Beyond the line, the native population sickens and dies; and the list of its losses are sent in, day by day, as an item to the newspaper; and within the bounds, the whites laugh and dance and flirt and listen to their bands playing dance music and read obituary notices of their best friends, and the funereal tom-toms never cease throbbing over the line.

Well, so it is in India—at least in the stations where I have been—and so here it evidently was in Kalatu. And General Lombard and his daughter were among that gay, *insouciant* crowd, listening to dance music and reading obituary notices like the rest. But, though the British may scorn danger and deride death, the Briton has to die like the rest of men; and though he die with a smile on his lips, that does not comfort any particular friend who wanted him alive.

All these reflections and recollections passed quickly through my brain, as I sat with the open paper on my knees and my eyes staring vacantly out toward the Kaiber hills. Then I turned and called up my servants and bid them

pack up my trunks and make all ready to go down to Kalatu the following day.

There were one or two little hand-cases that I always packed myself, and, as I bent over these, the thought would keep driving through my brain: "I have not heard for a week. Suppose she should be ill!" And a companion thought followed quickly: "Suppose she should be dead!" And yet a third: "Suppose she should be dead and buried!" One never knows in India. An eighteen-hours' absence, for the matter of that, is unsafe. Twelve hours is enough for cholera to do its work in, and six hours after that the corpse is buried. So that, on Monday evening one may hold a form close in one's arms, alive and brilliant with health, and on Tuesday, at noon, on going to call, one may learn that it is shut away with eight feet of cemetery earth barring one from it forever. Leaning over my trunk, I d——d my weak foolishness for having such thoughts. Were there not three hundred white women and girls in Kalatu, and why should Anna be stricken more than they? And would not General Lombard have wired me if my *fiancée* were ill? Yet that horrible, haunting possibility, that idea that I might never again feel that soft heart beat against my own; never see those eyes deepen and darken as they looked into mine; never have those gentle, slender arms clasped about my neck again, stood beside me or behind me all that day, goading me.

"The sahib packs badly," observed my bearer, judicially, from over my shoulder, as he stood watching me throwing in my things recklessly. "Even I can pack superior."

It is a tedious journey down from Peshawur; and the train, when it does arrive, brings you in at five in the morning—not the most convenient hour. Kalatu seemed unchanged as I drove from the station. Its broad red roads, with their border of emerald-green moss at the edges, looked cool and pleasant enough to the eye, in the early dawn. The bungalows had their customary quota of servants moving about them; and the sun, climbing over the edge of the level plain to the east, threw long, cool shadows from the broad-leaved banana-trees.

I learned from the coachman that Lombard Sahib and the Miss Sahib were both well, and perhaps that made the drive seem very supportable. At nine o'clock, tubbed and

shaved, I was turning over the papers in the club reading-room and having the absence of several familiar faces explained to me; by half-past I had reported myself to the commissioner; and at ten I was ready to make my way over to Anna's.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN I reached the bungalow, breakfast was over and the general had already left. Anna met me on the veranda, and I looked over her critically, expecting to see some change in her, after a month of the kind of life she had been leading. But no; there was all that same slim grace and freshness unimpaired, and the pallor and grief of her face was evidently only the result of sudden and recent shock. She was pale, and her eyes looked very large and dark; but that only seemed to make her face even more expressive than usual.

"Oh, Gerald, why did you come?" were her first words. "I do so wish you hadn't. It would be safer to keep away, for a little while."

"Since I came down from Peshawur entirely to see if I could be of any use to you, I think my presence here is quite natural," I answered, smiling.

It was very sweet to me to even see her again. After all, the mere sight of the loved one is a great and precious thing.

"Did you really—really? How good of you!" she said, looking up at me with melting eyes. "Isn't it horrible? The whole station is down with it. No one knows who will be the next one. We have it here in the house among the servants."

I guessed the truth from her voice and accent, and my heart almost stood still as I put the question:

"Has Gaida it?"

"Yes; he is the only one who has at present."

My heart seemed to give a great bound as I heard; but the throb of exultation and triumph, if it were really that that went through me, was checked instantly by the look of blighting anguish on her face.

"I believe he is going to die," she said.

The words are simple enough; but she spoke as the pris-

oner may speak who is stretched on the rack, with writhing lips and every nerve wrenched with agony.

I looked at her face and understood how the approach of death had raised all her waning, dying passion again to its highest pitch. All his faults and offenses were forgotten, doubtless, when he was stricken before her; and her whole being was clinging wildly to its love for the beautiful human frame, the source of so much passionate pleasure to her and now claimed by disease and death. I saw it all, and ground my teeth that it should be so; but still, being so, my own line of action was clear.

“Let me see him. I have some knowledge of the disease and its treatment.”

Anna started.

“You? Why? What would you do?”

“I will bring him through, if I can,” I answered, simply.

“I think the danger is too great. You might get it from him.” There was a minute’s silence, while we both looked at each other. Then her eyes swam suddenly in tears, and she caught my hand and pressed it up to her breast. “Oh! you know, you know, if I had to choose between you, it would be *you*. Your life is infinitely more to me than his. You are always first. However much I love him, I love you more. I can’t bring you into the contagion.”

Her voice was so passionate, her whole face and form so expressive of her strange, double emotion that, for a second, I felt unbalanced and longed to gather her into my arms and kiss her. Then I recalled myself and said, merely:

“I don’t believe in contagion through the breath or touch. I shall not eat or drink in Gaida’s room, so I shall be all right. Take me to him.”

She hesitated for a moment, then, apparently, the pressure of my will in the matter overcame her own—as was usual in our intercourse—and she turned, and we went down the steps of the veranda and round the house, across the rose-garden, by the very same little track I had taken on that memorable night of whispers. And the memory of all those terrible, savage emotions swept over me; but not the emotions themselves. I understood now so much better. The girl’s respective passions of the mind and

body were one of those terrible, complex problems that life is continually holding out to our gaze. It was something beyond her own power, will, or comprehension. She was but the innocent, will-less plaything of some of those extraordinary forces that govern and sport with humanity; that push it and pull it hither and thither, and can suddenly wrench asunder the strongest ties, though their victim bled to death at the severance.

I was not now the deceived and cheated lover of a faithless mistress. I was simply her co-sufferer from the hidden, relentless laws of life.

My feelings did not differ very widely now, I think, from what they would have been if I had known her stricken with some fearful disease. There was the same sorrow; the same crushing resentment against destiny; the same sense of selfish, personal loss; the same anxiety, pity, and sympathy for her.

The ancients, indeed, considered passion and all love a disease, and openly called it such. But as such—though in this case the effects upon my feelings were much the same—I do not regard it. Passion is, rather, the effect upon us of some mysterious, hidden power in Nature that sways irresistibly the senses, but has no control over the soul. And so our body is driven often, as it seems, with intangible blows and irresistible coercion, as Anna's was, toward some object that the soul rejects and abhors. Subsequently that same power, invisible as a storm wind and as powerful, often with the same blows that one can not meet, but yet can feel, binds down the body there, and with it the struggling soul.

If I had seen Anna carried from me by some beast of prey, crying to me for help, holding out her arms to me, and longing for me in her death-agony; I could not have understood more clearly or felt more free from anger with her than I did now, now that I had once gazed into this problem and read it.

So I followed calmly her light, quick footsteps—for she was almost running now, like a deer to its mate in the thicket—and in a few minutes we had reached the quarters of the natives at the far end of the compound. No one was stirring. It was high noon, and any of the natives not engaged in the house were sleeping behind the grass mats hanging before their hut doors,

At one of these, in no way marked out from the rest, Anna stopped, and, lifting the hanging mat with her hand, stooped and passed in underneath, and I followed. Never, as long as I retain memory of anything, can I forget that scene of desolation, squalor, and misery, as it seems to Europeans, that seemed to burn in upon my eyes. The hut was perfectly square, with unpapered, uncovered brown mud walls. There was one unglazed aperture a foot square, in the wall opposite, which let in the only light; the mats over the door having fallen again after our entrance and blocking out the sunlight there. The roof was of mud and laths, and, perhaps, half a foot higher than my head. The floor was of soft mud, trodden by many feet into a sodden paste. The whole of the center was taken up by a large, square *charpoy*, that possessed no drapery, no bed-clothes of any kind save one thin, gray blanket. There was only just space for one person to pass all round the room, between the bed and the mud walls. Other furniture there was none. One cracked china tea-cup and a bent tin spoon were stuck upright in the mud of the floor by the bed. And there, stretched on the bed, in the dim twilight of this human stable, with a few, white cotton rags on him, lay Gaida, dying in the grip of the black cholera. He had turned his head toward the entrance as Anna raised the mat. I made a step forward and stood by the bed. As his eyes lighted on me their narrow oval filled with a fury of anger and scorn.

“Son of a sow!” he muttered, raising himself, and then fell back with a groan of agony. His lips were blue. Then he turned to Anna. “Why dost thou bring him here?” he said, in a hoarse voice. “Is it not enough that I am leaving thee to him? Canst thou not wait till I am dead?”

Anna knelt beside him on the mud floor, stretching her arms out on the bed in a passion of tears.

“He has come to aid thee—cure thee,” she answered. “Allah has sent him.”

“Men do not aid and cure their rivals,” the Pathan muttered in reply, turning his head wearily from side to side.

“The English do,” returned Anna, between her heart-rending sobs. “I tell thee he is a medicine-man. He is

skilled in many things. He will restore thee to life for my sake. Accept him. Allah sends him."

"True. What Allah wills is. If he has sent him to kill, I die. If to cure, I live. He may come."

Anna rose joyfully from her knees, and I advanced to the bed and looked keenly at him. He was still in the first stage of cholera, and could be saved, I thought.

"Gaida Khan," I said, gently, "I am going to cure you for your wife's sake. You know Englishmen do not lie. Trust me."

A semblance of that former smile, which had been the crowning beauty of that marvelous face, passed over it.

"My trust is with thee," he murmured, and closed his eyes.

I opened a pocket medicine-case and took out a preparation of opium and gave him a few drops. He took them calmly and lay motionless. I turned to Anna.

"Give your servants orders to carry him over to my house," I said. "I can treat him better there, and air and space are essential."

Anna clasped her hands against her breast in dismay, and looked at me with streaming eyes.

"Do you want to take him away from me now?"

"You can come there—stay there, if you wish," I said, hurriedly; "but he must be moved. Give your orders at once. Seconds now mean life or death."

Anna grew paler, if that were possible; but she did not hesitate longer. She raised the swinging mat and slipped out into the burnished light of the compound. I stood by the bed ready to give more opium, if there should be the slightest sign of an approaching cramp. But he lay still, and there was no sound within or without save the gay call of a *maina*, now and then, swinging on a bough outside.

In a few seconds Anna reappeared with four servants, two of whom went to the head of the *charpoy* and two to the feet, and they lifted it with ease. Anna and I tore down the mats from the front of the hut, and left a free and open way for the *charpoy* and its bearers to pass out. The compound was silent and deserted in the blazing solitude of noon, and we threaded our way across it between the pomegranate-trees and out to the side-gate that opened on to the road leading to my house. This, too, was quiet and empty, lying arid and parched under the pitiless glare.

Anna drew one of the thin, cotton cloths entirely over Gaida's head and face, as the natives themselves do before going to sleep, and so we passed swiftly up to my compound with our burden, that lay motionless under the coverings as if already a corpse. When we reached my house, I had him taken to one of the rooms on the west side—a large, cool, lofty room with a wide veranda beyond, into which its windows opened. This veranda being filled with palms and ferns, hourly watered by a watchful gardener, formed a natural thermantidote. The fierce desert wind blew through it, and its scorching breath came into the room, a cool zephyr, bearing the moist scent of ferns. From his own *charpoy* Gaida was lifted to a bed of stretched canvas, cool and yielding as down. He opened his eyes, as he sunk back upon it, and gazed round. The tranquil, shaded quiet, the refreshing atmosphere seemed to surprise him, after the close heat of the mud hut with the sun rays pouring down upon its cow-dung roof. Anna had to return, to be present at the house when the general came back and preside over his luncheon; so that I and Gaida were left alone.

I worked against the disease all through that day, and toward evening seemed to have made some headway. I had had great experience with cholera, having nursed many of my servants and others, usually natives, to recovery. I was absolutely without fear of the disease myself; why, I can not say, except that fear is such a curious, relative emotion. No two people seem to feel the same degree of fear for the same thing. I have known personally a young lieutenant who fled from his post in abject terror before the cholera, and shortly afterward picked up an unexploded shell, with the lighted fuse attached, and carried it some distance in his hands with unshaken coolness and bravery.

As that long Indian day—a day of splendor and gorgeous color—wore away beyond the luminous green of the veranda, I worked and watched, never leaving his bedside for a moment. I did not dare to let my thoughts dwell on the relative positions that would be mine if he died and if he recovered. I shut out everything from my thought, except the strenuous desire to save him. It was the easier to me to do this, since it was but the consistent following out of the policy I had decided upon from the very first, and had been pursuing through so many weary months.

To serve Anna, to protect in every way this man—since that was her wish—and leave the ultimate issue entirely to powers beyond my own, had been the line of action from which I had never wavered. How often the old Greek cry to the Deity rose in my heart. I did not wish to stretch out my own hand to the rudder of my fate. Loving Anna as I did, made it impossible for me; since my reaching the port of my desires, might mean her shipwreck. I sat, therefore, as it were, a simple oarsman, rowing humbly in the boat, obeying orders, and trusting blindly to the hand upon the helm. So now my immediate duty was to save this life that was ruining my own. That was my last order, and I was obeying it even cheerfully and with my utmost strength; for I had beaten down my own desires and my own self to a point which made it possible.

Toward evening, as I sat watching him, I saw that some stimulant was needed. There was improvement, certainly, since the morning; the great coolness, the perfect rest, and silence and pure air had all helped him; but now he seemed failing and sinking; and I saw I must bring about a reaction or he was lost. Raw brandy was what was needed, and I crossed the room to my chest and uncorked a bottle. Then I looked at it doubtfully. Being a Mohammedan, he would not touch it, I knew, unless I could successfully disguise it. I selected an empty medicine-bottle with a large, attractive label, and filled it with the brandy, pouring some essence of peppermint into it. Then I walked to the bed with the bottle and glass, and aroused him. He seemed heavy and sleepy.

“It is time to take some more medicine,” I said; and he rose a little, obediently, and I filled the glass and held it to his lips. He swallowed two mouthfuls, then, as the brandy burned his throat and chest, he recognized in a flash and intuitively, what it was. He sprung to a sitting position, with his eyes blazing, and dashed the glass out of my hand to the floor, where it broke to atoms.

“Base born and cursed! Dog! Thou wantest to steal my soul from Allah! Thou wouldst have me live, but in sin; drinking what he has forbidden, like an unbeliever.”

“Gaida,” I answered, bitterly, in the same tongue, “you talk foolishly. It would be better for me if I let your soul depart immediately to Allah. I have no wish to keep you here in sin or otherwise. But to drink wine for

medicine is different from drinking it for pleasure. Drink it now to get well, but abjure it afterward. Allah will forgive you."

"Thou wouldst seduce me," he muttered, sullenly, eying me suspiciously.

He was still sitting up, and I noticed he pressed his hands low down on his chest, and I knew the frightful internal cramps were beginning.

"If you will not take it, you must die," I urged.

"Then I die," he returned, and flung himself back on the bed.

He had hardly spoken, before a horrible convulsion seized him. His head bent backward till the veins in the purple throat seemed cracking, his spine arched upward till nothing touched the *charpoy* but his feet and head. His hands were knotted into balls beneath him, and his arms turned livid to the elbow. The next moment he had rolled over on his face, with a muffled scream of agony; his knees drawn upward to the chin. I turned to get my hypodermic injector, and as I did so he was seized with vomiting—and that vomiting of cholera! Surely there is no other sickness like it. It seems to rack the whole body and stretch every nerve to splitting point. I put my hand on his forehead to support his head, from which the wild eyeballs seemed literally staring. At first, in the basin over which he hung strained and quivering, there was only a dark, almost ink like fluid; but in a few moments it became brightly stained with blood, and I saw that some vessel in the throat or stomach had been ruptured. A red stream, mingled with the darker one, continued to pour from his lips, as spasm after spasm of vomiting passed through his tortured frame. Then he sunk back suddenly, almost slipping through my arms to the pillow, and lay as if dead, drenched with sweat and a red froth of slime and blood covering the blue lips.

At this moment Anna entered and paused at the door. I looked at her, my heart wrung with pity and alarm; but she neither screamed nor fainted nor gave any sign. On her face was the look of one who has gone through the acme of human agony, and who expects nothing, hopes nothing more from life. She crossed the room calmly and looked at the bent, crooked, blackened remnant of life and beauty on the bed; that lay there as a young tree lies in the

forest, that has been struck and shivered by the lightning, burned, blistered, and useless; and then at the basin I held.

She bent over him, and with her handkerchief wiped his lips dry; and I brought her a small piece of ice to put between them. After a minute she straightened herself by the bed and looked at me, as if inquiring an account of my charge.

“He was improving steadily,” I answered, “and would have done so up till now; but I could not persuade him to take any stimulant. It will be difficult to save him without.”

“No,” she answered, looking at the broken glass and spilled brandy, “he would prefer to die, I know.”

“So he said.”

“Is there no substitute?”

I thought for a few moments.

“Nothing, I think, so good; but I will try this,” and I took a bottle from my cabinet and poured out a dose from it.

This he took submissively enough; and as Anna took a seat by the bed he looked up with a smile and clasped her hand feebly in one of his. He turned toward her on his side and closed his eyes; and for one hour he seemed to rest in peace, while we sat in silence. Then the light grew a richer shade of gold, and a clock chimed somewhere in the house.

“I must go back to be present at dinner,” Anna said, looking at her watch, “and stay with papa through the evening; but, as soon as every one is in bed, I will come back here.”

I felt it was quite useless to try to dissuade her, to warn her of her own danger or the risk she ran in every way in leaving her own house at such an hour as she proposed and walking over to spend the night in mine. But even to me, things looked so differently under the wing of death that was spread over us all, from how they would at other times. Everything that was not life or death seemed small.

So I assented, and Anna left me toward six and drove back to her bungalow; there to be tender, quiet, and calm; to listen to the account of the general's doings during the day; to sit at the head of his table and take soup and drink wine with smiling lips, and ask and answer ordinary ques-

tions with a natural voice, while her heart was beating itself to death beneath that smooth, white breast.

It was past eleven before she returned. I had ordered all the doors of the house to be left open, nominally that we might have more air; and so she stepped straight from the compound into the veranda of the sick-room and then into the room itself. She sunk into the nearest chair, closing her eyes; and I saw her face was white, while the sweat stood out in large drops on her forehead. The way between the two houses was short; but it was over a heavy road of soft dust; and in the oppressive heat of that air, which it was labor even to breathe, the exertion of walking that distance was very great. I went to her and lifted her drooping head against my breast.

"How is he? How has he been?" she asked, lifting her heavy eyes to mine. "Will he recover?"

I looked down at her.

"I can not say," I murmured. "His powers of resistance are wonderful; but I am afraid—"

"So am I," whispered Anna, with trembling lips.

She remained with us through the night, sitting with her eyes fixed on the bed; and I, in the intervals of waiting upon him, sat and watched her. Outside, the moon rose slowly and poured its cold, clear, silver light down on our pestilence-stricken station. The stars rose, wheeled, flashed on their courses, and sunk again behind the horizon. Hour after hour of the hot, silent night rolled heavily by; and we waited and worked in silence. It was a curious situation: Anna here in my house with me through those midnight hours, the woman I loved and whom all the station thought mine; and the man, whose life stood between me and the sunlight, lying on my bed and my hands trying to wrench him backward, as he slipped toward the grave; and me, myself, if I really were myself—Lucky Ethridge—watching them both, dazed and tortured and battling against this death, that would be the only thing to deliver me. Yet so it was, till the white light of the dawn broke in through the *jilmits*. Anna staggered to her feet with a face as terrible almost as the one on the pillow; and, drawing a veil over her head, prepared to go back to her bungalow. Gaida was sleeping. She came up to me and put her arms round me and kissed me, a burning kiss on the neck; then she stepped out through

the veranda down into the blighted, withering compound and took her way through the dust to the road.

The kiss seemed to speak to me in a language I can not translate. I only know that I prayed then, fervently and honestly, for the power to save this man to be put into my hands. And I worked and watched strenuously by his bedside every golden second of that long, golden day. But the *fiat* had gone forth against him. There was no longer any rally or response. All that I could do kept back, weighted, and made slower those steps; yet, in spite of me, they crept onward, onward persistently to the shadow.

It was five o'clock on this, the second afternoon.

Gaida was sinking rapidly; his feet were already cold. The last glory of the afternoon sun was rushing into the room through the western window and filling it with warm radiance. It fell all over the bed and over Anna sitting beside it, crushed and hopeless. Her face, always wonderful for its power of reflecting what was passing in her soul, had now upon it the stamp of absolute horror and despair. Cheeks and lips were bloodless, and the eyes so unnaturally dilated that the black pupil almost eclipsed the blue iris. She sat drooping, smitten, helpless beside him; and I watched them both. In a few minutes his eyes opened on the splendor of the sunlight that filled the room, and he looked at her. It was the rally before death.

"I am leaving thee," he said, in the hoarse, choleraic whisper; and stretched toward her his pinched, blue arm—only three days before so powerful and shapely.

Tears came gushing to Anna's strained eyes and fell in drenching rain down her white face as she flung herself forward on the bed and put her arms about him.

"Tell me that I shall not lose thee; that thou wilt not forget me for the hours of Paradise. Tell me thy soul will wait there for mine." Gaida opened wide his dying eyes, and there was a look of love and tenderness in them. He raised his hand and put it softly on her head. "Thou art a female; thou hast no soul," he said; and I heard a low, anguished sob break from her breast, as if he had driven his knife there. "Farewell, thou light of my eyes," he said; and Anna, in a frenzy of grief and agony, bent her face to his and kissed him on his blackened, cholera-tainted lips. "Go from me," he murmured, feeling the supreme moment approaching; "let me die."

I drew Anna from him. His breast was arching in a horrible paroxysm of death; his teeth were clinched, and the black, blistered lips rolled back from them. There was a moment's tense struggle between that noble frame and its despoiler, then his nostrils dilated suddenly. "Allah! Allah!" he called, raising his right arm. It fell, and he lay motionless.

"Gerald, he is dead! dead!" and Anna flung herself full length upon the floor and struck her forehead again and again on it, like one mad.

I caught her up in my arms. She was insensible. It was a whole hour before I brought her back to consciousness. I had taken her into another room, and when she opened her eyes she was in my arms and met my gaze looking down upon her. She turned to me, clung to me, and wept on my shoulder in a flood of frightful, scalding tears, that I thought would never cease. At last, however, she raised her head and looked about her. It was growing dark.

"Gerald, I must go back. Take me back. Nothing of this must be known, for your sake. My life belongs to you now. Let us go home."

I ordered my carriage, locking the doors and windows of the room where Gaida lay, and we went back together.

She sat beside me in the carriage, rigid and pale, quiet and wonderfully controlled. I held her ice-cold hand in mine and pressed it hard; but we did not speak. She gave her directions to the coachman perfectly clearly when she alighted.

"I will rejoin you in a few moments," I said, as she ascended the steps of the veranda.

She inclined her head, and I drove back rapidly to my bungalow. Here I made all the arrangements for the burial of Gaida, exactly as if it had been one of my own favored servants who had died. My servants were devoted to me, and orders were obeyed as soon as given. Within a couple of hours I was free to return to Anna, and I went to her; being afraid of things I could not name to myself.

When I reached her sitting-room and parted the *chicks*, I saw her lying on a low couch at the opposite end. In her hand she held a little bottle that she was holding against the light and gazing at. I went forward and saw it was a vial of chloroform. I put my hand on her wrist.

“Anna, what were you thinking of?”

She raised her ghastly face and looked up in my eyes.

“Of how nice it would be, if you would let me die,” she said.

“But you have promised me.”

“Yes, I know. My life is not my own; it belongs to you. Could you give me a little; so that I might be insensible, just a little while?”

“I will give you this,” I answered, taking away the chloroform and putting another little bottle into her hand. “Go upstairs and to bed and drink this, and you will know nothing for some hours.”

Her hand clasped on the bottle; and she rose and went out of the room, as if in a dream.

I took down word that she was not feeling well and could not be with us at dinner; and I and the general sat down alone. When it was over, I told him, as gently and cautiously as I could, that there was great likelihood of Anna being attacked with cholera; and I begged that I might remain in the house that night, to be with her the first moment.

General Lombard heard me with perfect silence and composure. He seemed, like his daughter, able to draw over his face a mask of stone, when he wished. He called up a servant and gave orders that a room was to be prepared immediately for the sahib next the Miss Sahib’s room; and when the man had withdrawn, he turned to me and said, quietly:

“Where do you think she has taken the disease?”

“Possibly by attending to the servants here,” I answered; “and, then, the whole air is full of it.”

“I should have sent her away,” he said, as if to himself; and then I noticed how all the ruddy color had died away from his face, leaving it gray; and sudden lines stood out, making it haggard and drawn.

“You acted like all we British act,” I answered; “scorn danger and brave it, and sometimes the danger has its revenge.”

He sighed heavily in reply, and, after a minute, rose from his seat.

“I will go up and see her,” he said; and I was left alone, staring through the open door into the luminous, hot darkness of the night.

I felt a strange, curious triumph and calm. All around me was death. It lurked in every shadow. It was behind each rose-petal; the breath of the syringa was poison. There was death in the heavy, languid air, the whole atmosphere was feeding one with death; but I did not think I should die, nor she. I believed she would pass through the shadow; but I did not think the time had come for her to die. I can not explain this confidence; but it flooded my whole soul, and I watched the great, glittering Scorpion plunging through the sky before me, and felt tranquil and secure in the great stillness around me, which I knew was the stillness of desolation and death. Where lights had gleamed out through the foliage of the compounds, now there was blackness. The indefinite sounds of distant music and laughter, that had formerly floated up the flower-laden alleys, were replaced by a brooding silence in the poison-laden air. There was not a house from which the occupants had not fled or were preparing to flee or was not full of mourning or terror. Kalatu, in all its glory of tropic beauty, was but a pest- and charnel-house.

Yet I felt calm. Gaida was dead. Nothing now but grief stood between her soul and mine; and grief for the loss of physical passion is as short as grief for the loss of a passion of the soul is lasting.

When I reached my room that night, my head seemed reeling. I craved nothing but sleep. I saw the doors leading into Anna's room, that communicated with mine, and I knew she was sleeping behind them. Sleeping or weeping? But all was dull except that great longing for sleep that obliterated all else. My eyes were dim and my eyelids seemed fallen on them already. Without any power to raise them I descried in one corner the outline of the bed and staggered toward it as if blind or drunk. Then, fully dressed, I threw myself, face downward, on it and fell asleep. I awakened suddenly with a violent shock. It was still dark. A terrible cry of agony came from Anna's room:

“Gerald!”

I sprung from the bed and to the intermediate door and threw it wide open. A night-lamp burned on the table and shed its light through the room. I saw Anna standing in the centre in her white night-gown, with her fair hair falling to her waist, her hands pressed to her sides,

her figure bent nearly double to the floor in a paroxysm of agony. I rushed to her and raised her in my arms. The spasm passed over, and her body lost its tenseness and leaned heavily against me; the head fell to my shoulder; the face was piteous, pinched, and blue.

"Oh, those terrible cramps!" she murmured. "And this is what he suffered!"

A rain of tears burst from her eyes and fell warm on my hands that held her. The next instant she had struggled from my arms and thrown herself on the bed.

"Oh, Gerald, let me die!"

I bent over her and raised her hidden face, blue with the shadow of the disease and drenched in her unavailing tears.

"Anna, do you not owe me something? Promise to try and live for me."

She could not answer. Suddenly her lips were drawn back and curled up from the perfect white teeth, and her body arched from the bed in a writhing, horrible convulsion. I took out two morphine pills and passed them between the blackening lips; and after a second or two her body fell inert, and, as if lifeless, back to the bed. Her eyes were closed. The sweat rolled heavily from her face and fell to the pillow, and the linen grew dark with it all round her head.

The room was full now of figures. The servants had all heard that terrible cry and were standing mute, submissive, waiting to be used, by the doors and at the bed-head. One had summoned General Lombard, and her father came now across the room with a steady tread and that same set look with which he faced the bullets and the Afghans' knives.

"Brandy," I said to him as soon as he reached me, "and champagne. Let me have bottles of it and a tin cup, lest she should break the glass; and tell the servants to bring boiling water—large tubs of it—and the heaviest blankets."

He turned away to give the orders, and I leaned over her and whispered in her ear:

"I can not save you, if you wish to die. Will yourself to live, Anna—for me."

She opened her eyes and looked into mine. Perhaps something of all my burning agony was in them, and she read it there and pitied me. Her voice came with diffi-

culty and was low and hoarse. It was the voice of cholera that spoke through her lips.

“I will it, then, if you do.”

That was all; but it poured new life and energy through my veins. My soul was prostrate in an agony of prayer to God.

When the servant brought the wine and brandy to the bedside, I poured out half a pint in equal parts into the cup and held it to her lips. She lay collapsed and cold. I put my hand upon her bosom. It was cold and drenched in clammy sweat. I saw the disease in her case would run a short and violent course. She had already passed the first or convulsive stage and entered the second or cold stage, within two hours. In twelve hours, or perhaps less, all would be decided. I slipped my arm beneath her head and raised it. She drank the contents of the cup and the same quantity twice again, and the liquid which would have produced intoxication in health was all lapped up, as it were, by the disease. Her eyes were clear as they met mine. She lay passive, inert, cold.

“Those blankets,” I said, turning to the silent servants, who had brought in a bath of boiling water from which the steam rose in clouds, “plunge them in for two or three seconds, then wring them out and give them to me.”

They did as I ordered, though it must have left their hands almost raw.

“Here, sahib,” they said a minute later, holding out the blanket, and then I lifted Anna from the bed.

Her night-gown was heavy and black with sweat, and the touch of her body through it was as ice. With one hand I tore it from her, from the neck downward, and it fell with a heavy plash to the floor; and so, for one brief instant, the lovely form met my eyes which had ached so long for the sight of it in vain—the exquisite casket of that soul I loved far better than my own.

Strange that this should be my first sight of it; my first, and perhaps my last. It was but a flash; the next instant the blanket enveloped her in its folds. I held her in my arms, and through the clouds of burning steam that rose between our faces I saw her open her eyes and seek mine. She put her lips close to my ear and I heard her murmur;

“I am glad your eyes have rested on me once, before the grave closes over me forever.”

I bent my head and put my burning lips on hers, now nothing but a shriveled, blue line; and for one second human love, the love I had for her, conquered the sense of danger, the presence of disease, the nearness of death.

“Not even the grave shall shut you from me,” I answered. “We will lie in it together.”

She sighed—it seemed to me a natural, relieved sigh—and, after a minute, murmured:

“I am warmer now; it is nice to feel warm again.”

I called for another blanket and wrapped that tightly over the other one, and then placed two dry ones that they brought burning and scorched to smoking straight from the fire.

“Dry and heat the bed,” I said to the servants; and when this was done, I laid her back on it.

Her head sunk to the pillow, with a weary sigh. I looked at her keenly. Still there was not that reaction that I wanted, though her face now seemed whiter and less blue. I filled the cup again to the brim with brandy and she drank it, as a child drinks water. Then she turned a little on her side.

“I am sleepy,” she said. “Give me your hand and let me go to sleep.”

She was swathed in the coverings and her arms bound by them straight to her side; but I laid my hand upon her shoulder and she seemed content. The next second she was asleep. I motioned silently to the general to approach.

“She will live, I believe,” I whispered. “This is the sleep that ends, not in death, but recovery.”

The old man, who had stood silent, with set face, beside us all the time, clasped his hands involuntarily, suddenly, and turned away.

Anna slept on for ten hours, and I sat without stirring in my place. The dawn had long since broken before she fell asleep, and I saw it break into the glorious Indian day. Noon came, with its deadly heat and stillness. The servants came and went in the room, with their noiseless steps, their bare feet unheard on the matting. Sometimes they slept on the floor beside me; but more often sat on their

haunches watching, with great patient eyes, the figure on the bed.

It was two hours past noon, when the glare of the day was beginning to soften ever so slightly, and a faint, hot wind off the desert came sighing through the *jilmils*, that she awoke and turned to me with a sigh and a smile.

“Gerald,” she said in a whisper, “you followed me into the Valley of the Shadow and brought me back. I am all your own now, forever and ever.”

And, feeling as if some perceptible bond were put round us, drawing us together, that nothing could break, from which we ourselves could not escape if we would—I stooped and kissed her.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANNA regained her health very slowly. This surprised her father, who expected the rapid rebound natural to her youth and strength; but it did not surprise me. I knew it was the weight of the previous shock and grief, which was crushing her vitality under it. It was that that she needed to recover from, far more than the cholera.

In those days immediately following her illness we were inseparable. The fact that I alone knew everything, and that there was no necessity for disguise or constraint with me, drew Anna to me; and she clung to me and found comfort in my presence. The general noted this and pressed me to stay on in his house; so that Anna and I were almost constantly together. She was extremely weak, and would sit for hours in a cane chair in the veranda, doing nothing; with her eyes circled by a bluish shade and often brimming over with tears, gazing out into the sunlit compound. At such times it was a consolation, she told me, to have me near her; and her little, cold hand would steal into mine and often her head would drop on my shoulder.

“The mere contact with you, seems to take all the pain out of me,” she said once; and constantly she would fall into a quiet sleep thus, with my arm for a pillow.

Those days were very sweet to me and inclosed a happiness all their own. Every hour of them welded our two souls more into one, and Anna opened her heart more and more to me. My attitude toward Gaida, and my last

efforts to save him, however unwise and, perhaps, reprehensible they had been, had, at least, secured me one thing, and that was Anna's complete and absolute confidence. I had become almost part of herself, and she withheld none of her thoughts from me. They became mine. She talked freely to me, when we were alone, of Gaida and her relations to him; and I let her do so, even encouraged her, knowing that is the only way to treat and finally heal a deep sorrow.

The constant talk, the long stream of confidences, poured out from a heart full of pain and grief, is as the blood flowing from a poisoned wound, which carries the poison with it, and allows the wound in time to heal. And in that time I realized very clearly that she had yielded to his passion for her, and not to hers for him. Her feelings had been rather an indefinite, abstract love of his beauty; a romantic, poetic sentiment which he—as man invariably does—had dragged down to the level of physical desire.

She was very sweet to me, indeed, during all these days; and so grateful for all I had done, that I began to feel ashamed of myself and wonder I had not done more for her, been more patient and more kind.

She said to me, laughingly, but with serious eyes, that I had made her my little slave-girl and chained her to me with chains of gratitude for all time. And day by day I watched her freeing herself more and more from the old ties, memories, and feelings; and becoming more absorbed in the present and in the enjoyment of my love. She waited and watched for my coming, and would run down the house-steps into the compound to meet me with face and eyes alight with pleasure; and when others were present with me she hardly noticed them. As she grew better and stronger each day, I realized what an infinite relief it was to know that she was free and safe, with her secret, in all probability, forever buried with the dead Pathan. I could not help sometimes the shock of asking myself whether, when I tried to save him, had I not been really working against her? Was it not foolishly inconsistent of me, knowing and fearing and feeling all I had, to exert myself to fight against his death; which was unquestionably the best thing that could have happened for her? Yet to my nature it would have been impossible to have acted otherwise. The eternal question is ever presenting itself:

Are we to act as we think best for one we love, or to act as the loved one wishes and commands? I do not pretend to answer this question for others; but for myself, and loving Anna as I did, the last was the only way possible to me. Love in the highest sense makes the lover only a subordinate part of the loved one. The lover asks nothing, expects nothing, wills nothing, and he has no rights, no claims; the loved one's will is all; and often—how often!—does this highest love conquer irresistibly and end by enslaving the loved one, as Anna declared now she was enslaved to me.

I could not shut my eyes to the fact that if I had succeeded in saving Gaida's life, as I had tried to do, the practical result would have been to prolong her dangerous position. But, even then, the theory of doing all that the loved one wishes, might have been vindicated in the end. Who could say how much my action would have strengthened my hold on her and loosened Gaida's? Who could say that feelings might not have sprung up in her; feelings as powerful to free her from him, as death itself had been?

“These things are all so very curious,” she said to me one afternoon, when we were sitting under the shade of a heavy stone, magnolia-covered porch, looking out into the burning desert. Our chairs were set close together, her hand was in mine, and her head was leaning against my arm. “We are surrounded—hedged in, as it were—all our life long by invisible forces. We have no idea how helpless we are, until we get into opposition with them. Passion, for instance, is so strange. It seems to me like a great monster possessed of one long tentacle, with an immensely powerful claw at the end. When we come into contact with it, out shoots the tentacle, and the claw comes down upon us with tremendous force and holds us motionless; it has fastened us firmly. As long as we remain perfectly still and do not struggle, we hardly feel it; we do not recognize what strength it has nor how it is holding us. But try to get away, try to throw it off; then you feel the claw upon you. You feel that it has sunk into your being and paralyzed you; that there is no getting away from it; that, if you struggle, the claw will reduce you to a bleeding, crushed mass beneath it. Sometimes, of course, by strong will one can cut the tentacle and be free; and then

one has to carry about the horrible claw inside one, festering in one's heart. It is terrible, when one really thinks of it all and realizes how helpless one is. That claw may come down on one at any time, and one does not notice it at all, until one tries to get away, any more than you notice my hand on yours now; but if you were to get up, then you would know I was holding you."

I was silent; feeling how much truth there was in what she had said. Had not this very claw she spoke of come down upon me and fastened itself into my breast and bound me to Anna; so that, though my life might have been spoiled through her, I could not tear myself loose. Even had I cut the tentacle, the festering claw would still have poisoned me.

"And then, again," and she went on, dreamily, "love is a different organism, floating about in life's ocean, that seems like one of those shining, iridescent sea-anemones, armed with a thousand little soft, clinging tentacles. And it stretches out first one soft, little feeler and then another, and at last you find them all clinging round you and yourself bound fast by them. And if they are very numerous and all have fastened round you, you can never get away. Love has thousands of those little tentacles. For instance, one is attraction, another is gratitude, and another is memory of joys together, and another is memory of griefs together, and so on."

And I knew there was truth in this metaphor, also.

"I don't think we could very easily get free," she added, looking up at me with a smile beneath her arched eyelids. "The claw has come down upon us, and all the little, soft feelers in addition."

"I like my captivity," I whispered.

"Yes, the claw and the feelers both hypnotize one into an exquisite trance, when one has not to struggle against them. But when the claw of passion came out upon me from Gaida's beauty and pinioned me and I wanted to get away from it, that was horrible."

She had grown quite white, and shivered in the hot, dry air. I bent over her.

"Don't dwell on it. What does it matter? It is over."

"Yes, I think it is over," she answered. The next minute she closed her eyes. "I feel so tired; I should like to go to sleep."

I resettled my arm behind her head, and she turned her cheek on it and fell into that sudden sleep of physical weakness.

A few days later I moved back into my own bungalow. I had many things to arrange there. Anna seemed sufficiently recovered now to return to her normal life. She had persuaded the general to give a ball to the station, to celebrate her recovery; and I hoped that our marriage would follow it in a few days.

She improved now at a faster rate each day; and even the week that intervened before the ball, made a great difference to her. On the morning of that day, I saw her for a few minutes, and she seemed to have regained almost all her former glow of color and life.

“Come into the drawing-room,” she said, “and I will play you a little thing and sing you something that seems to express the feelings in my heart.”

We went in together, and she sat down at the piano and played. There was something electrical in her way of playing, that morning. The music sounded like the opening of a triumphal march. Her fingers rose from the notes sharply, and there was an *éclat* and fire in the piece, whatever it was, that arrested and held the ear. Suddenly the music changed to a joyous accompaniment for a song; and her voice, unusually clear and resonant to-day, swelled through the room.

“Vitoria, Vitoria, Vitoria,
Non lagrimare piu
E scholta d'amore,
La Servitu.”

That was all. There was a truly victorious roll of chords, and then she sprung up and closed the piano. She smiled at me and I smiled back. It had been a very beautiful burst of music and song, exactly such as one might catch through an open window when a victorious army was marching by; and I knew all that the words meant to convey.

She looked animated, fresh, and vigorous in her simple morning cotton dress, and I wanted to take her in my arms; but she receded, smiling.

“Not now; not now. I know you are busy and must go back to the office; but this evening come early and wait for me in the second drawing-room.”

So, early, indeed, that evening I went to her and paced impatiently the little, second drawing-room, as she had indicated, that led into the larger one beyond.

When she had finished her toilet she came to the door between the two rooms and opened it, standing in the frame of the door-way. Her dress was white and long, very long, as usual; cut at the breast lower than I had ever seen it, and entirely sleeveless; the whole responsibility of the bodice being thrown on two narrow, slender shoulder-straps. I looked at her, and the magic that the sight possessed for me emptied itself slowly into my veins. It was not that the figure was exceedingly opulent, or that there was any remarkable development; quite the contrary: but there was something in the wonderful purity of the skin, whiter than the satin below it and absolutely unstained by the faintest course of a vein or the smallest mole, and something in the modeling of the shoulders and the turn of the neck that seemed to speak to one. The beauty of her body, like that of her face, was not in the form, not in the flesh. It was the beauty of intense expression. The cool courage of her spirit seemed expressed in that firm, smooth expanse down to the curve of her low breasts; and all the passionate abandonment of which she was capable, in the pose of her shoulders and the long, soft, white line from shoulder to elbow.

She came toward me, faintly smiling, and gave herself into my arms; and her face and body spoke to me so clearly there was no need of words between us. She meant to convey to me—and I understood her—that she had for my sake conquered her grief and broken her memories; that she was no longer sacred to another or to the contemplation of the past; that she had come back to life and the enjoyment of it; and that my period of self-restraint and self-denial was over. And I, seeing that she wished and expected it, permitted myself the touch and the kiss of passion.

A little later, when Anna, with an old general, led off the dancers, she was radiant; and the eyes of the crowd followed her instinctively, attracted and held by the curious exuberance of vitality that seemed speaking in face and form. As we danced together and she gave herself up to me, fitting all the smooth undulations of her movements to mine; as my arm pressed the warm, bare flesh of her

shoulder and our eyes looked into each other's and our breath intermingled, my thoughts were borne back to the first evening we had met, and I contrasted that slight, loose bond of attraction, based on the pleasure of the senses, with the steel-like chain that held us now.

How infinitely dearer to me now she was; after the pain and the sorrow gone through together, after the suffering and the waiting, after the exquisite trust and confidence, the intimacies of the soul, and the birth of that gratitude and love in her heart which is deathless. At the end of the long waltzes together, we went out and sat on the darkest, quietest side of the lawn in silence, unwilling to speak or to be spoken to.

At four in the morning—when the daylight had already broken over the plains and filled the lawn and gardens with its cool, white light, though it was shut jealously from the ball-room—we stepped through the windows for the last dance. Anna was claimed by the colonel of the regiment, and I went to seek my partner. At the close of the dance—a galop—I had just passed Anna and the colonel, and she had smiled at me over his shoulder, when she fell suddenly and her whole weight, thrown unexpectedly on her partner, brought him to his knees. Every one thought she had simply slipped on the polished floor; and though she was immediately surrounded, the general expectation was to see her rise directly herself without, or with very little, aid. I was at her side the first, and as I bent over her I saw it was no question of slippery floor or lost balance. She had fainted; and she lay now before us all, white and unconscious, helpless, oblivious of everything, on the shining floor.

I felt a curious shock pass over me, a prescience that in some way the incident was more serious than it seemed. As I lifted her, and, with the help of another man, carried her to a divan at the side of the room, she lay unconscious, with her head supported on my arm.

One of the women—with unnecessary haste, I thought—cut open her satin bodice, that could not have impeded her breathing in the least, and unbuttoned her stays; but, as Anna's figure was one that needed no compression or artificial restraint, and received none, this measure hardly helped matters.

She did not recover until a couple of glasses of water had

been thrown on her face, and then she slowly opened her eyes. I looked into them and was startled by the expression of terror and mental distress that met me. It seemed incomprehensible. Then, the next moment, she sat up, and realizing where she was, forced a smile, and gathering her cut and disordered clothing together over her breast, thanked those nearest her for their help. Her father was beside her and also a doctor, one of the guests; and they supported her between them from the room, while the crowd, with expressions of sympathy and allusions to the great heat and the fatigue of so long a ball just after her illness, began to break up and depart.

I followed the general, after a few moments, to her room, and was surprised to hear that Anna had gone to bed and would not see me again, just then. The general told me this outside her room, so, after a good-night to him, I turned disconsolately to go over to my own bungalow.

I was leaving the Lombards' hall when the doctor overtook me and offered to go across with me, his house being in the same direction as mine. He seemed to think Anna's fainting fit was not at all to be wondered at, considering the heat and exertion of dancing so long.

"But all that might make her tired, but it shouldn't cause her to faint, if she is all right?" I objected.

"Are you a doctor, my dear sir, or am I?" returned the little man, snappishly. "I examined that girl, a little while ago, myself. There is nothing the matter with her. She has a marvelous constitution, wonderful vitality, every organ perfect. You will be very foolish if you allow a little fainting fit like that to alarm you."

"I don't know that it does alarm me," I answered. "I merely don't understand it, and I don't think the explanation you give of it adequate, that's all."

The doctor edged up nearer to me and stuck his elbow into my side. The general's champagne had made him loquacious and facetious.

"Well, if you want another reason for her faint, I'll give it to you. Nervous excitement—that's more to do with that young woman's health than anything else. Dances with you. Kisses on the lawn. Eh? And so on. Thought so. Go ahead and marry her just as soon as you can. That's the best thing you can do."

It is so extremely pleasant to be told that one ought to do what one wants to do, and so extremely rare also, that I forgave the doctor his familiarity on the spot and felt quite friendly to him and inclined to believe all he said. When we came to my house, I shook hands cordially and wished him a good morning's sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

I WAS just finishing breakfast the following day and in the happiest frame of mind. Everything seemed now to promise sunshine in the future, bright as that streaming golden light outside. I sat back in my chair and gazed with satisfaction round the room. For weeks past it had been my employment and delight, for all spare hours, to work upon the beauty and the comfort of the house she was so soon to enter. All that money and care and orders from the largest Bombay furnishing-house could command had been obtained; and now, as my eyes rested on the floor, it gave back the glow of Persian and Turkish rugs, velvet cloths worked in gold of Burmese art draped the tables, and curtains of the finest lace floated beside the bay-windows. The drawing-room and Anna's *boudoir* had been the objects of much care and thought; but the point where every energy had been concentrated to bring about perfection, had been the room which would be our sleeping-room. I occupied still the veranda-room on the opposite side of the house; but every day I came and looked into this one, to see if anything struck me as wanting or if any improvement could be made.

The bed I had designed and arranged after the manner of my own in Burmah, where I had passed so many lonely, wakeful nights; only the draperies, instead of being red, were blue, to match my Anna's eyes and contrast with her fair hair. And when it was finished it was a thing of beauty, with its silken curtains and its fine veils of azure-tinted mosquito-net. The goddess Parvati, the Indian Venus, molded in silver and supported by silver chains from the roof, swung above it, holding in her hands a lamp of scented oil, where the flame burned in a perforated silver globe.

Everything throughout the house was ready for the presence that was to light and beautify it all; and as I re-

viewed things in my mind this morning and could recall nothing that was wanting, I pushed back my chair with a satisfied smile.

"The Mem Sahib is here," said the servant, suddenly, behind me; and, turning, I saw Anna step over the threshold. With a cry of delight, I stretched out both hands as I went to meet her. She put hers into them and said, in a strained voice:

"Send all the servants away, Gerald. I have something to tell you."

Her face looked deadly white in the morning sunshine; and with a sick sinking of the heart I ordered all the servants to leave us. Then I sat down in an arm-chair and drew the trembling girl into my arms.

"Now, what new trouble is it?" I said, gently, stroking her soft hair with one hand.

"Oh! so dreadful, so utterly dreadful that I can't tell you," she muttered, with both hands clasped over her face; and her voice had all the accents of shame and terror.

"Gerald, I am nothing but a worry and a misery to you. Why didn't you let me die when I had the cholera?"

"Because I wanted you for myself," I answered, gently; "because I shall always want you, whether you are a worry or not."

There was silence for a minute; then I pressed her a little closer, and said, softly:

"Well, what is it?"

"I can't say it. I can't breathe it," she replied, in the same desperate voice. "Can't you guess what I have discovered?"

Then it all flashed upon me, and the reason of her swoon last night; and for an instant the whole bright, throbbing sunshine seemed blotted out; the worth and use and beauty of life all seemed obliterated. For a second I could have thrown her from me in anger and loathing; so bitter was my disappointment, crushing in just now on my bright hopes and expectations. But only for a minute, for my love for her was something more than love and hope for my own pleasure.

"You are angry," she said. "Kill me; strangle me; I am ready to die. I should be glad to."

Her voice and its stricken despair roused me.

"No, I'm not angry. This is but the consequence of

the past. I forgave your marriage long ago. It would be absurd to quarrel with the consequences."

I spoke mechanically, and what I said was logical enough; but yet, in this world, is it not always the consequences and not the sins that we do quarrel with? Sins we can forgive; it is virtually the results that are unpardonable.

"I can't understand it," she said, in the same smothered voice; "and after the cholera, too, Gerald. I accepted that. I was glad of it. I thought it made this impossible. Oh, it is horrible; I can't bear it."

She was sitting on my knees, where I had drawn her; but now she tried to rise. I caught sight of her averted face, and the unutterably agonized look upon it was terrible. It went to my heart. I knew she had been made for better things.

"Just when I was trying to free myself from all that abasement in the past, when I thought I was free, and giving myself entirely to thoughts of you and loving you as I do and wanting to wholly belong to you; then to be forced back, as it were, into all that has gone by; to live it all over again for months to come; now, when all the passion that held me to Gaida is dead, at last. It is something beyond words. I could tear myself in pieces. You understand, don't you?" she went on after a moment. "If Gaida had been worth it—worthy of my love—I should never have taken it from him. I should not have cared what I had done for him, what I had suffered. I gave him all that I had in the world; I threw all that I had at his feet; but he was *not* worthy, and in a little while my love died. Then still, for a long time, the passion lingered on; but it could not survive; it is dead, and I loathe the very memory of him—his very name; and now— Good God! His child! What can I do? I feel I can not live and keep sane."

She really looked so intensely ill, so peculiarly different from her usual self, that all other feelings were swallowed up in alarm for her life and reason. Strangely enough, I had seen her once before look like this, and that was when there had been the threatened severance from Gaida.

"There is nothing to be done but to accept it all and as bravely and as calmly as you can. After all, what are a few months out of a life-time? They will pass over and

you will forget them, as you have been forgetting your days of cholera. And it is not as if you had to bear it alone. I am here, knowing everything and sympathizing with everything. Do you think there is anything we can not meet together?"

I had pressed her head to my shoulder, and she let it stay there, hiding her face against the shelter.

"I think our marriage had better take place at once. The whole station is expecting it—"

I broke off, for she had started in my arms as if an electric current had passed through her.

"Marriage!" she exclaimed; but her voice was only a dry whisper. "Oh, I can't, I can't marry you now. How can I? Accept every advantage from you, take everything and bring you nothing, nothing but this— What can you think of me?"

"Why," I said, with a sad smile, "after all this time, we do not seem to understand each other a bit. If you are in distress, is not that just the time to come to me? When others are likely to reproach or misunderstand you, you come to me because you know I never shall. If you were in a storm, should I not hold out my arms to you and try to cover you with my cloak? That is my idea of love, Anna. That both should give everything and expect nothing in return. You gave all to Gaida; you would have given all to me, but for my folly. What has happened since, I look upon as my punishment for that. This is part, it seems to me, of our mutual punishment. Let us accept it and bear it together."

Anna had clasped both her arms round my neck, and was lying passive and quiet.

"You are so very good to me that it seems I *can not* let you—"

"No, it is not goodness," I answered, sadly. "I am only doing what I must. You have become a part of myself, and I want to shield you from everything that would hurt you and end in your loss to me; just as I would try to save my arms from amputation."

"It is such happiness to be so loved," she answered, under her breath, "and it is so terrible to give you nothing but unhappiness in exchange."

"I am glad I am here to protect you," I answered, drawing the cold, trembling form still tighter against my

breast. "That is not unhappiness." I did, indeed, feel such keen pity for her, that all sense of the part I would have to bear in the punishment was lost. "Are you quite sure it is so?" I asked, stroking one of the little, ice-cold hands.

"I can't be absolutely sure," she answered, half-inaudibly; "but I think so from several things, and especially from last night. Oh, don't ask me about it, it's so dreadful!"

I was silent. My great fear was for her reason. I knew she was differently organized from the majority of women. I knew that to her exceptionally excitable and sensitive brain circumstances unfortunate enough in themselves assumed an additional horror. She undoubtedly felt more keenly both the pleasures and the pains of this life than the average human being is intended to do, and both were exaggerated and magnified by her view of them.

"Listen to me, Anna. You have read and studied philosophy by the bookful. Now is the time to practice some of it."

"I could, if this only affected myself," she murmured in a stifled voice.

"That can not be helped. We can not, either of us, consider ourselves separately any longer. When we love another, we double our pains and sorrows just as we double our pleasures; but that is quite fair. We must face this, just as we would any other trial, together, and as calmly as we can. I shall give out the announcement of our marriage this afternoon. How soon will you be ready? What day shall I say?"

"I don't know."

"It must be done at once," I urged. "After your marriage you are, to some extent, secure; and life itself is such an uncertain thing, Anna, we can only count on the moment in our hands. I may, for instance, meet with some accident. I might die, and then you would be left as you are now, and—unmarried."

"It would not matter," said Anna, who was sobbing now. "I should come with you."

"But, my sweet, it would make me very unhappy in my last moments to feel that I had not done all that lay in my power for you, while I was alive. I know this is not a thing to be put off. It is all important now that the mar-

riage should take place at once, before anything intervenes which might make it impossible. Once married, you are safe from the outside world, at any rate; whatever private griefs and sorrows we may have. The world can know nothing and say nothing."

"I was looking forward to it so much, I wanted it so much—till now," she sobbed, brokenly.

"So did I," I answered, "and now I want it more than ever. So it is settled," I added, kissing her. "The wedding takes place at once, and I will make all the arrangements for it."

"Let me get up; I feel stifled; I believe that dreadful fainting is coming on again."

She struggled out of my embrace, and I rose. Her face was white and her eyes uncertain and unbalanced.

I put my arm round her waist and drew her toward the table. The spirit-lamp under my coffee-urn was still burning, and the coffee above boiling unnoticed. I poured her out a cup of it and pressed her gently into a chair. She drank the coffee obediently and began to look more natural again.

"We shall soon be having our breakfast together, as an ordinary matter," I said, smiling.

My great idea was to turn her thoughts into a lighter vein. I saw that she felt the position acutely, felt it to a degree that might affect even her reason; and I felt I must, if possible, lift the strain from her brain; if only from moment to moment. She played with the little, green coffee-cup, turning it round in the saucer, and her eyes wandered about the room.

"It is so nice to come to you," she said, softly. "I feel so rested, almost happy, when I have been with you a little while; and I dreaded this—telling you, I mean. Last night I suffered so; I felt I could never, never tell you nor see you again, and yet, through all the suffering, I longed for you so much."

"I wondered why you would not see me last night," I answered. "Dear child, you would have slept better if you had told me at once, and let me comfort you."

"You have been so very good to me and done so much for me—one thing after another; but it seems as if you, even you, must get tired of it all, must feel angry with me, must fail me some time. I keep on disappointing you so."

“Well, this is the last,” I returned, smiling. “You will be my own after this, and I will take care of you better.”

She was sitting in one of my large arm-chairs, leaning one elbow on the table and shading her face with her hand. She looked up at me now.

“I don’t think we can marry immediately,” she said, with a painful blush. “I mean not hurriedly at all. That would only attract attention. I have been so much, so very much with you, and all the station has talked so of our attachment, that—that—they would never guess the truth—if they thought anything—they would think it was you—it was your fault.”

I bit my lips suddenly. I saw in a moment the truth of what she said.

“What is said of me matters very little,” I answered, after a second. “But, of course, I don’t wish to make it seem hurried, so as to throw suspicion into people’s mind. I want to save you from anything of the sort, whether connected with me or in any other; but a fortnight hence I think would be a reasonable date. Don’t you? I feel a little anxious now about delaying it as long as that; but, perhaps, as you say, it must be so.”

“Yes, I should think a fortnight from the ball yesterday, when I was supposed to have recovered, would be about what they would expect,” she answered in a low tone.

“That shall be so,” I said. “And now you are here, Anna, come and see the house, and tell me what you think of all I have been doing. I forbid you absolutely to think of the future any more just now, or what it may have for you. The anticipation of everything in life is the keenest part, both in pleasures and trials. Things are smaller when we actually come to face them. Each day brings its own strength with it.”

Anna got up from the chair, and, in obedience to my wishes, gave a little, faint smile; and we went out of the dining-room together through the different rooms of the house on the ground floor; then up the staircase to the upper rooms and verandas; and, last, I brought her to the bedroom at the end, which covered the whole width of that part of the bungalow. She sunk in one of the chairs, and I went over the windows to open them and let in the light and air.

There was a long pier-glass at the end of the room, and as I walked toward it I caught her reflection. She was sitting contemplating the bed with such a look of hopeless misery on her face that I left off what I was saying about the flowers on the veranda and went back to her.

"What is the matter? Don't you like it?" I said, gently.

Her eyes filled with great tears which rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Oh, yes, it is beautiful, too beautiful," she said at once, taking my hand, as I stood beside her. "And I see you have put there Parvati. She is suitable for me."

"Why, dear?" I asked, disturbed at the bitterness in her tone. "What are you thinking of?"

"Don't you know the legend of Parvati?" Anna answered, gazing at the little, silver figure, absently. "She was sitting waiting in the forest one day for her lover—Shiva, I think it was—and a little, gray squirrel ran by her. Parvati stretched out her hand idly and caught it, and the squirrel ran through her grasp and escaped; but her fingers were so burning with the fire of love that they scorched the fur on its back; and forever after, to this day, the squirrel bears three black stripes along its back where the fingers of the goddess burned them. My hands used to burn like that when you were away at Burmah."

And she put them over her face.

"I didn't know the legend," I said, simply. "But I will take down the image and throw it in the garden if you wish."

"No, no! not for worlds; let it stay there."

"You should not regret that fire," I said, putting my hand on her downcast head. "It is a gift of Nature to you, just like your red lips or curling hair; and it gives you much of your power over men, Anna, and makes them your slaves—as I am," I added.

Anna looked up.

"No, not a slave, an idol," she murmured, passionately, taking my hands and kissing them. Then she rose. "I must go. I have been here too long already."

I made no effort to dissuade her; and we went to the door and left the room together.

"Did you have no hat?" I asked in an ordinary tone;

and we passed into the dining-room again, where the butler was arranging the sideboard.

"No; I came in a *gharry*, and had it all closed," she said. "How long the coachman must have thought me!"

I went with her to the door, and there her servant was waiting with a large, white parasol, to shade her with it to the carriage, waiting at the foot of the steps. I waited till she had disappeared and the carriage had driven off. Then I retraced my steps into the dining-room and sat down.

There was almost a smile on my lips as I thought bitterly how life seems to get hold of some men and play with them, mock them, cheat them, toss them about for sport. It had done so with me; but I would conquer life in the end; I would come out the victor. This woman, whom I had desired when I first saw her, and who had been removed and removed from me by various devices of circumstances, each time I had thought to possess her, should be entirely my own at last; with not the shadow even of a thought I did not know, between us.

I went, as usual, in the evening to the Lombards', feeling full of anxiety; but my apprehensions died away, as soon as Anna entered the room. She looked pale and subdued, but quite calm and mistress of herself, and I saw she had summoned all the strength of her nature to meet the situation. There were only a few people present—familiar friends. Mrs. Tillotson, the Paris Gamin of the *tableaux*, among them. I smiled to myself as I saw her peering sharply at Anna. Keen-witted, as I knew she was, and keen-sighted, I felt that Anna could defeat easily any one who tried to pry into her life; and that once she had gathered up the reins and fixed her eyes on the goal, she would drive her chariot and steer her course straight through the gaping crowds that line the ways of life, watching for the accidents of those who do more and dare more than they can.

That evening she was orthodoxly charming. She laughed the requisite amount, neither too much nor too little, and talked the prescribed idiotic babble of ordinary society—which I knew was always an effort to her—with the greatest fluency and ease. She played and sung for us the most delightfully twaddly society songs, and did not even touch her favorite Wagner till the close of the evening, when she gave us the "Festspiel und Brautlied" from "Lohen-

grin." It was Liszt's arrangement, and she played the opening—in fact all the "Festspiel"—with the magnificent energy and fervor of her temperament; and I, listening, thought, "Anna is speaking to me now. This is the first glimpse of her real self that I have had this evening."

Then, from out of that intricate maze of brilliant chords and *arpeggios* floated suddenly, softly, and delicately as an evening breeze, the Bridal Chorus. The melody filled the room and fell like a charm over us all. The faces of the married women took a dreamily reflective expression, and the unmarried girls one of eager hope and expectancy. When she had finished there was much smiling applause.

Anna rose.

"That's what I feel like," she said, simply, and with a glance at me.

The announcement that our wedding was to take place two weeks from the night before, had been given out that afternoon, and every one laughed indulgently; and there was a great deal of whispered confidence and hushed laughter between her and all the women, as they broke up for the night.

Anna, standing, saying "good-by" to them, was the happy, innocent, unthinking bride-elect to perfection. When they had all gone and the general had retired, we stood for a moment alone together.

"You don't misunderstand me?" she said in a low tone. "You don't think me callous, nor that I don't feel the horror of the whole thing; but this is what you wish me to be, is it not? This is how you wish me to act?"

"Do you think we could misunderstand each other?" I said, looking into her eyes, so sad now that the affected mirth had died from them. "I think you are most good and brave. I want you to be inwardly as philosophic and resigned as you can, and outwardly as bright and happy as you can. Nothing we can do can alter things now, and we must try and minimize them, not exaggerate them to ourselves."

"You poured courage and life into me this morning. You were so good to me, and I am so grateful."

Nothing else was said; but her tones were weighted with feeling and, as I folded her gently in my arms for a good-night kiss, I felt that each new trial, which might have

sundered others from each other, had only brought us into a more exquisite relationship.

During the next fortnight the final preparations for the wedding occupied both of us. For me, a great deal of the life and spirit had been taken out of them. I had had a blow and received a wound that I could not recover from; since the wound must, necessarily, remain an open and bleeding sore for months to come. At the same time I did not suffer so much as a man whose love was differently constituted. For me, Anna's presence near me in itself, even if sick, sorrowing, and burdened with the chains of her dead passion, would still be a delight beyond words. Moreover, having once fully determined to accept the situation as it was, I rarely allowed myself to dwell on it, and tried as far as possible to put away the thought and remembrance of the secret she had given to my keeping; and which seemed mocked and made unreal, each time I was with her, by her fair, innocent, girlish look. I think she herself had determined in the same way to crush it under silence now; for she never alluded to it when we were together, and when others were present she showed a soul of gayety and happiness, not, I think, forced; and seemed interested in the selection of all the countless treasures submitted by the Kalatu merchants for the Mem Sahib's wardrobe.

One morning, rather early, I entered the drawing-room a little unceremoniously, and found her trying on a just-finished gown; because, as she naïvely explained later, "There was a long glass there and none in her bedroom, and she had not expected visitors."

The gown was one of rose-colored silk, and suited admirably the rose of her skin. She was just surveying herself, as I came in; and the eager, happy, interested look in her eyes, bent on her own reflection, delighted me. When she caught sight of me, however, the dress seemed forgotten, and she responded eagerly to my caress, crushing up the delicate lace and ruffles on her breast against my coat, dusty with the ride over.

"Gerald, when I woke this morning, a bird was singing exquisitely at my window, and a *maina* was calling from the banana-tree. I felt so happy to think only three mornings would go by and then I should wake up under the

smile of those serious eyes of yours, that never do anything but smile upon me."

Another morning I found her leaning back in a long chair surveying the goods of a native dealer in Oriental trimmings, who had his wares opened out in a circle on the floor all round her. And another time I came in to see her the center of a crowd of young girls of her own age, who were all eating sweetmeats and drinking iced coffee and discussing the approaching event; but each time she was gay, contented, smiling. So the time passed till the eve of the marriage came; and then, by prearrangement, I went to her to take her for a drive with me before sunset. I found her sitting in her chair waiting for me on the bungalow steps; a delicate, charming figure with a large, white hat that turned up at the side, where a few tiny, soft, light curls lay against it.

"Let me sit on the left side, where your hat turns up," I said, laughing. "I don't wish even a hat-brim to be between us."

And she laughed and obeyed.

"We will drive to the Burra Bagh or the Great Gardens," I said, and so directed the coachman. The evening was still with a heavy, dreaming stillness, that the drone of a thousand insects seemed only to intensify. The carriage-wheels made no sound on the soft roads, bordered by emerald turf; the hedges gave out their heavy odor of syringa and tuberoses. All around the sunshine fell in a burnished golden haze, deepened and enriched by the approach of the sunset. Overhead, through the fan-like, spreading branches of the cocoanut-palms, that the sun burned into glinting gold, the sky was beginning to blush softly; and small, gold-tipped, rosy clouds floated across it. Occasionally, a huge, heavy, black, carrion bird flapped lazily across from side to side, too indolent to creak and too lazy to even fly properly and in a straight line. He just flapped heavily and obliquely through the warm, still air from one syringa-laden hedge to another. I leaned back in the carriage, giving myself up to the restfulness of my surroundings and letting my eyes rest on the soft, cool cheek of the girl beside me, rising, as it did, above the white ruffles of lace round her neck.

We were quite silent for a long while, as we often were when together. Conversation is pleasant, but there is no

actual need of it between minds so closely linked as ours were.

After a time she slipped her hand out of her glove and laid it on mine.

"I shall never forget how good you were to me the morning—I told you," she whispered. "You must never think that because I don't speak of it, that I forget."

"I think you were very brave and good to come and tell me," I answered, quietly. "Many women would have left me no choice. They would have married and said nothing about it."

"Would they?" returned Anna, turning upon me a startled gaze. "Oh, I could never have done that, any more than I could marry you as you wished, and as I longed to, while Gaida was alive, and not told you of his existence."

I looked into the wide-open, fearless eyes, truly great wells of living light, with truth at the bottom of them.

"I know you could not," I said, simply. "The lying and deceit that come naturally, it seems, to most women are not among your faults, my Anna."

"I have enough without them," she answered, sadly.

"You're not to be sad now," I said, authoritatively, "on the eve of your marriage to me. I can't have it."

"I am not," she said, smiling. "I can not help feeling so pleased to think I am going to belong to you after to-morrow. Fancy not being one's own mistress any more, having no will indisputably of one's own. Fancy not being able to get up when one wakes and feels ready to, but when some one else wakes and is ready to; and no longer being able to ring and order luncheon when one feels hungry, but having to wait until some one else is hungry; and having to sit up at night until some one else gets tired. How funny it all seems, and, to me, very delightful."

"Is that your idea of married life?" I asked, smiling.

"Is not that what it must come to, practically?" she returned, smiling, too. "You know, when two people live together there can be only one will between them, and I think it is the woman's place to give way. Nature has given her the part of submission in the whole drama of love. She can't take the initiative; she can only respond. She is fitted to do that, and that is where she gets

her best happiness. When I marry you, I put my will in your hands. I make you a present of it. I have no further use for it. The only thing of importance henceforward is yours. And, it seems to me, that is only a small part of the whole surrender a woman makes in marriage. Even now, for instance, you decide the moment when you shall kiss me, and I am very glad to submit. Well, on the same principle, I can submit when you decide other things for me, and find pleasure in it."

"You are terribly unfashionable in your views," I said, laughing. "Just now, when woman is fighting to take the lead in everything. You don't seem to belong to the nineteenth century."

"I don't think that I do," she answered. "The nineteenth century is nearly over, any way. Perhaps I am a product of the twentieth, and come too soon."

It was growing dark all round us, the beautiful, luminous dark of the East, full of mysterious rose and violet.

"No, not too soon," I answered, and as our eyes met each other's, through the soft-colored dusk, there was a moment's keen realization that all the centuries to come could not give to each other two that were as nearly one as we were.

The following day, late in the afternoon, we were married; not quietly as we would have wished, and in Anna's drawing-room, but in the presence of all the station. So far did we sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the people who knew us. There followed a long reception at my house; and then, at last, we were alone.

It was a little after nine. In a few hours more the night would be over and the light would be dawning on the plains. Anna turned to me, and we stood for a moment together, when our guests had gone, under one of the lamps which threw a veil of light over her and turned her hair to flame color.

"Surely I am the least deserving and the most fortunate of any one in the world," she said in a low voice. "Gerald, in spite of everything, I am so happy."

We passed out of the room and went upstairs to the one in which I had worked so hard for her sake, and which she was entering at last. It was full of a soft radiance of light, such as she delighted in, from swinging lamps in slightly veiled shades; and the great pier-glass at the op-

posite end of the room, facing the door, reflected her figure as she stepped over the threshold. I closed the door behind us. The windows, with their *jilmils*, stood wide open to the four quarters of the violet sky, studded with different patterns traced in blazing stars, so that they looked like four slides from a kaleidoscope. The servants had all retreated to their quarters; the sea wind, that sweeps restlessly over the desert sand all day, had sunk. Not a breath disturbed the heavy, sultry air.

We crossed the room involuntarily to the mirror there, and stood looking into it at her reflection; and she put up her hands to her neck to unfasten the necklet I had given her. Then she dropped them again.

"You do it for me," she murmured; and I unclasped the diamonds and replaced them with kisses.

Then I took the great, doubled-up plait of her hair and, untying the white ribbon that held it double, began to un-plait it, letting each soft strand slip through my fingers, as I released it.

"And so you love me?" I said, softly, when it was all loosened and fell like sunlight over her neck and shoulders.

Anna leaned back against me and put her arms round my neck, turning her face upward so that her mouth, like an opening flower, was close beneath my own.

"I do not love you," she said, with her voice quivering and the pulses beating hard in her throat. "I worship and adore you."

And it is not a little thing for a man to hear from the woman he loves.

Hours later, wide awake, I raised myself on one elbow, where I lay beside her and gazed down upon her. The dawn was just beginning to softly fill the room. Anna had fallen asleep; fallen with her face turned and her arms a little extended toward me, into the happy, trustful, innocent sleep of a child beside its mother. And I, to whom she was as sacred now from the approach of passion as before she became my own and held my name, looked down upon her and realized that in self-renunciation, self-abnegation, self-denial for another, lies the keenest, purest pleasure of humanity. This was my marriage night, and what had it brought me? No abandonment to personal pleasure, no sensual delight of any sort, no gratification of the desires or the senses; nothing that the promise of its

name implies; only self-repression and self-restraint, a total denial of the physical will. Yet out of all this rose a supreme happiness; and, I suppose, no man ever felt at the final abandonment to him of a mistress or the possession of a wife the same passion of delight and triumph that I did when Anna lay down beside me and sunk to sleep with a happy, contented sigh. Out of the stress and the violence and the selfishness of passion, she had come to the shelter of an absolute love. She was happy, protected, safe; and I was the one who gave her that happiness, protection, safety. In the whole world there is no privilege that Fate can give equal to this: the power to bestow these three where one loves. I gazed down upon her now in the quiet room, where the soft light was diffusing itself, seeming like the presence of the Divine Spirit sanctioning our union; and my heart swelled within me with a peace and calm and joy that nothing in my life has equaled. She slept beside me tranquilly as a child, with her loosened hair thrown back and straying over the pillow and her breath coming and going softly, almost imperceptibly, in her glad, confident slumber.

What did it matter to me the unappeased longings of the senses, the gratification of which has but one final end, satiety, and the absence of the falsely designated "real," that is, physical, pleasures?

In that mental exaltation that filled me, as I gazed at that calm face and form wrapped in the mystery of sleep, I was unconscious of my physical being; and it is in these moments when the soul and brain take up the supreme command of man that he discovers the essence of joy.

CHAPTER X.

THE note that had been struck on my marriage night was the key-note of my married life—self-renunciation; but, as on that night it had brought me nothing but the height of happiness, so it continued to be from day to day the source of delight to me. It was Anna who was dissatisfied with herself.

"I am no good to you, dear Gerald," she would say. "What can I do?"

And I could only answer the simple truth, "You are everything to me, Anna. I am more than satisfied."

It was so. Her presence alone seemed to fill up my life with contentment. There was an extraordinary tie, as it seemed, between us; invisible, but, at times, almost tangible. It was as if she held one end of an elastic thread and I the other, and that this thread would not stretch beyond a certain distance, nor for longer than a certain time. If either strained at it, it pulled us irresistibly together again. There seemed a curious balance of electricity between us; one must have possessed just the amount which the other lacked.

When we were together, both felt calm and satisfied; but for those hours in each day—if there were any—in which we were separated, there was always a sub-consciousness of restlessness and discontent till we were together again. Thus it often happened that when I went down into the city to attend a trial or other business, if I were detained there, a knock would generally come on my office-door; and, on opening it, I would see Anna with a deprecating look on her face.

“Why have you come down, dear?” I would ask generally, *pro formâ*; though I knew by my own instinctive feelings why she had come.

And she would look at me, helplessly, for a moment or so, and then laugh and say, “I don’t know.”

She would install herself quietly in one corner of the room and read, or often do nothing until my work was over; and then we would both descend the stairs, get into the carriage, and drive home together; and that simple little detail of every-day life would seem something delightful to me, because it was done with her. I could not shake myself free from the feeling of pleasure it gave me; though it seemed unreasonable, even to me, to feel it so keenly. I can not explain why it was so except by the theory that we exerted some force each over the other, that some electrical condition in me had been disturbed by her absence and was put right by her presence, in the same manner as some people suffer from headache during a thunder-storm and feel relieved and soothed when it is over.

And existence has no more perfect charm than this duality, than this feeling of the strong, elastic thread binding together the two lives; yielding, giving, and stretching as the individuality of each requires, but always drawing them toward the other.

People in the station began to look upon us as the most extraordinary couple possible, because, even after we were married, we were hardly ever seen, except together; and the average Briton seems to expect a man, when married *de facto*, to seldom appear with his wife.

"I don't know how it is," said Anna to me one day, with a puzzled smile, "but other people don't seem to love at all in the same way we do, or live the same life. They aren't together, as we are. There's Ella Barrington, you know; she never sees Barrington all day. In the morning she goes down to the town and shops, then she drives back for luncheon; and he doesn't come back for that, because he is so far off. Then, in the afternoon, she pays calls all alone. He does come back to dinner; but then in the evening she very often goes to a dance and he goes to bed because he is tired, or he goes to his work again and she goes to bed because she is tired. I could not lead that life."

"Perhaps they don't hit it off very well," I suggested.

I was writing in my office, and Anna was at a little table by my side copying the official correspondence for me, as I finished it. I had three clerks, but they had not her accuracy and speed, and then also—

We had just paused for a moment in the work to drink a large glass of soda, in which the ice clinked musically, and to give ourselves up to the fanning of the *punkah*. Outside the closed *jilmils* the thermometer registered one hundred and fifteen degrees Fahrenheit, and inside here the short curls on Anna's forehead were wet.

"But that is the life of all the married women in the station," she objected. "It's most funny. You've no idea how different we are. And other people think it is so odd, too, that we should want to be together, now we are married. It's becoming quite a scandal," she added, with her eyes full of laughter. "It is fortunate we had such a big wedding and every one saw it with their own eyes, otherwise they'd get up some story that we weren't married. They would, really."

I laughed. "Quite likely," I answered.

"It's so intensely nice being with you," she continued, pushing her chair a little closer to mine. "If I go down to choose a pair of gloves, you come with me, and that makes choosing the gloves as much pleasure as going to an

opera. Then, when I make my calls, you come too, and that makes it all interesting; just as when I used to meet you at the places when we were engaged. And in the evenings, think! I should never go to a dance, while you went to bed or to your work. I would much rather be where you were. But every one thinks it awfully funny, and so, perhaps, it is. I noticed Mrs. Pearson looked quite surprised, and, don't you know, almost—well, shocked, when I refused to drive home with her and Captain Green, because I was waiting to drive you back from the office. 'Surely, my dear,' she said, 'your husband doesn't expect you to drive him back every evening?' and I said, 'I don't know, Mrs. Pearson, but I like to do it.' And then she raised her eyebrows and Captain Green stared at me through his eye-glasses, and they both drove on with the air that they considered me a harmless maniac."

I nodded and laughed.

"The men think it odd, too, that they never see me at the club now, and that I won't stay the whole afternoon gossiping with them or reading the papers; but prefer to come back to walk or ride with you. They are nearly all married men. I suppose we are different from other people," I concluded.

"There is not one married woman here who lives the life I do," she said, meditatively. "She is interested in her children, her house, her servants, her calls, her golf; and her husband is interested in his work, his horses, his duties, his club. Their lives are quite apart and full of different ideas and aims. We are just like one person, are we not? And," she went on after a pause, "the people who are only just married are only a little better. Even they are rarely together. One does not seem necessary to the other at all."

"I give it up," I said, laughing. "And now we must get back to work. The Government, I'm afraid, will object to paying me for using its time to discuss metaphysical problems."

And we emptied our iced soda-water glass and went back to the correspondence.

About three months after our marriage we were transferred to another station—a hot, dry place out on the plains. It was large; and I think I have never seen so many handsome faces among the English girls in India as

were crowded into that one station. On the second day after our arrival, when we had to be at home to receive calls, I saw Anna looking from one to another as they came in; and to me, who knew her face so well, her thoughts were perfectly clear. Nothing, however, could make her ungracious in manner; and whatever irrepressible envy she might feel, it was not in her nature to stoop to the spiteful meanness, the petty warfare of sneering words that most women adopt to their rivals. She was graciousness and gentleness itself to them all, and moved about the room and dispensed tea to her guests with her usual quiet ease. That same evening, after dinner, we were sitting on the couch together, looking over some papers that I had brought up from the commissioner's, for her consideration as well as my own, when she said, suddenly, to me:

“Gerald, I wish you were not so handsome.”

I laughed; knowing quite well what was in her thoughts.

“Why?” I said.

“Because all these girls and women will be falling in love with you, I know.”

“I don't think that is at all likely; but suppose they did, would that matter very seriously?”

“No—no—” replied Anna, hesitatingly. “Not if you—”

And then she stopped, looking at me. The blood seemed beating up to my head in great waves.

“Do you think that I don't know the exact value of a pretty face or smooth shoulders?” I said, quietly; trying to overcome the strange excitement that was rising in my veins. “The passing trifles good to help one through a tedious hour. Do you think, for the pleasure they would bring, that I would throw aside a love like ours?”

Her face, at the end of the sofa, seemed to swim before me, with its arched brows and eyes welling over with light. They looked a little startled, a little surprised. Heavens! Did she not know, did she not realize what my life beside her was? Was it possible that I had overacted my part of self-repression, which I had taken up for her sake? A horrible moment of weakness came over me. It was so long, this trial. Perhaps my attitude was misunderstood by her. Perhaps it was unnecessary, absurd. An insidious temptation was at my side, fiercer even than that of my marriage night. I was strung up then to a pitch of exaltation, in

which everything was possible. The first onslaught of desire is far easier to withstand than its slow, continued pressure eating into the brain through weeks and months. Why, I do not know; but it seemed as if in that moment, when she spoke so lightly of the other women, all the long struggles of past nights, all the anticipations, the longings, the visions of feverish moments in the day, reached their culminating point. Other women! Other faces! The passing physical pleasure of a mouth that pleases, of a touch that stings. What were they to me?

The flesh has but one voice with which it calls to kindred flesh; but the soul, the intellect, the brain, have a thousand voices, and all of these called to me from the woman before me.

It would be worth something to feel those lips quiver beneath one's own, to light up a torch in those eyes, to feel that breast heave beneath one's own. It would be the final, the only adequate and satisfying expression of our love; and it was possible, if I delayed, it might never be ours. Had she not in a few months—months!—to descend into the shadow of death, from which she might never return to me? And she was my own, my absolute possession; and there was no bar between us. No one could reproach me. I was her husband.

At that second I was sitting upright at the end of the couch, looking at her, and bending to breaking point a paper-knife between my burning fingers. The next I had thrown myself forward on her. My arms were round her. Her face looked up at me from the couch. I seemed to see it through a mist. The lips were faintly smiling, the eyes were luminous with a new light. She gave herself to me willingly. As she had said, my will was hers. Her conscience, also, she was content for me to guard. What I did was right. And it was this that saved me. Had she resisted me in the least, that resistance would have challenged the brute force within me, that longs to dominate by force. Her passivity, her trust in me spoke to the mind that seeks its victories in other ways.

After all, what would this pleasure be in which the soul could not share? Nothing would give me the real joy of possession, but the future. I let her fall from me suddenly, and drew back.

She put her hands over her face and burst into tears,

“Forgive me,” I said. “It is so hard to keep one’s self-control unbroken. And never speak to me again about other women. If you had any idea of all I suffer on your account, you would know it was quite unnecessary to be jealous of any others.”

“I am so sorry,” Anna sobbed from the couch; “but, do you wish—”

“I don’t wish,” I said, coldly. In fact the reaction was so strong that ice seemed to have replaced the fire in my veins of a moment ago. I sat down beside her, calmly now, and took her hand. “You know, as well as I do, what I really wish. In our final union I want you to come to me free of all previous ties. I want to be able to take you for my own, without a shadow between us. Nothing else will satisfy me. To take you now is but to discount our pleasure in the future. A pleasure which will bring no reproch with it, as it would now. The nominal right the law has given me is as nothing, to my view, beside the law of Nature. While you are bearing Gaida’s child you are still his. I can not understand why I am so weak to-day. I do not think it will happen again.”

That night I did not go to her room, but walked about until past midnight, and then went to my own former veranda room where the hot, sand-laden wind was driving through the slits of the *jilmils*, and threw myself on the *charpoy* of stretched canvas, beneath the windows; and, after an hour or two, fell into a restless, nervous sleep.

The following morning, when I woke in the narrow camp bed and looked round the bare, unfamiliar room, a curious sense of loss seemed to come over me. I got up and went to Anna’s room, turning the handle of the door and going in; for the key was never turned against me. I went up to the bed where she was sleeping. It seemed that she had sobbed herself to sleep, for there were blue and scarlet patches round her eyes; marks which I knew the tears always left on her light skin. She opened her eyes after a minute, and there was a cry of delight as she saw me standing looking down at her. She stretched up her arms to me.

“Oh! I had such a wretched night without you. I couldn’t sleep at all. And I did not like to go and try to find you. Please, come back to me. You will come to-night, won’t you?”

And I promised I would.

Owing to our official rank in the station, we had incessant invitations and a great deal more society than we desired. I kept watch upon myself in all this time that I should not seem to be drawn away from Anna by all these social functions, most of which were forced upon me. I knew she was acutely sensitive; and, as she had given me the index to her thoughts, I was put on my guard. I do not mean that she was tiresomely or childishly jealous. She never sought to bar me from other women, quite the contrary; and if I expressed the most casual admiration for any particular one of the station's favorites, that one was always invited by Anna to the house. She herself would often urge me to accept invitations I should have declined.

"You must get tired of being so much with me," she would say. "Do go, if you like, and see any of these people."

But, as a matter of fact, I seldom wanted to leave her. Most people—nearly everybody—seemed to bore me and tire me; and it was always with a sense of relief and pleasure that I came back from them to her.

The passion that we had for each other was a passion of the brain, as much or more than one of the senses; and no amount of custom, no time, no familiarity, had any effect on that, except to strengthen it. All physical pleasures decline with gratification; but those of the brain increase. When the body is hungry, food satisfies and then stops its hunger. How different is the brain when hungry for knowledge! The learning and study given to it as food utterly fail to satisfy. They do no more than stimulate an increased craving.

Before our marriage I had been content to sit with Anna through a whole evening; because, for one reason, she made a very beautiful picture sitting opposite me, and my sense of vision had been delighted and satisfied. That was one reason, but not the only one. The far stronger one was that my brain was moved and fired by all she said; it was satisfied and delighted by her presence, just as my eyes by her face. And now that the lines of beauty in her form were blurred and distorted, when only a pale face met my eyes, it was still a keen pleasure to return and sit opposite her; keener far than any afforded me by the pink

cheeks, the idiotic babble and senseless giggle of the belles of the station. And I was inexpressibly thankful, sometimes, that no evil fate had thrown one of these to my lot as a life's companion. One may gaze on a pink cheek for half an hour; one may listen to babble for an hour; one may stand insensate giggling even for two; but in days and weeks and months and years, how shall these satisfy all the longing, straining, striving, restless, nameless desires of the human brain?

The curious, or what to most men may seem the curious, part of our existence now was, that as weeks passed on and Anna's condition became evident, it drew me to her, rather than repelled me. I became infinitely attached to her, and more and more in proportion as I saw the situation grew more depressing and terrible to her. She entirely lost her health; and, as she said to me one morning, she only awoke now to suffer. But with that loss of health, with long hours of pain, periods of sickness and weary, restless nights, came none of that peevishness and irritable fretfulness that most women combine with their suffering. Anna's nature seemed to become sweeter and gentler, the greater the strain that was put on it; and the yielding, unquestioning docility and tenderness she had always displayed toward me, linked themselves now to an almost painful humility.

I saw, as plainly as if the thoughts that came and went in her brain were visible objects, that she dreaded, in her ill health and in this strange position, to become repellent to me. That she felt in some way my debtor, and to show her gratitude, in some way to make even the score she fancied was so much against her, she made use of all the seductive charm that was her gift from Nature. She never complained; it was only from my own observation that I knew how much she suffered, both mentally and physically, but far more the former than the latter. And this suffering united her to me in a far greater degree than the loss of all her physical charm could sunder her. I loved her infinitely more now, and could be far more tender and patient than in the time before our marriage, when, so to speak, she was arrayed with Gaida against me. Now she was suffering with me, and she and I were arrayed together against a common sorrow. The sight of her bearing a long punishment, day by day, wiped out utterly from my mind

all remembrance of any fault she might ever have committed against me, roused all my sympathy and pity, and drew the deepest love out of the reserves of my nature. And, in spite of the religious scruples and moral ideas that opposed themselves to possession in the commonest acceptance of the word, yet, in the highest sense, I knew she was altogether my own. The passionate hate, that, she confessed to me, would rise in her, in spite of all her efforts, of the child she was to bear, seemed like a seal on her love for me. Moreover, it was ingrained in my nature to care for and lean toward anything that depended upon me and clung to me; and Anna, nervous and excitable as she was, viewed her coming trial with a mental terror and turned to me continually for comfort, like a frightened child in the dark.

As day followed day, we were each more and more bound up in the other. Nature can make a habit of loving as she can of anything else. And with some temperaments—as with mine—love nourishes itself. It is the memory of what we have done for another, far more often than the memory of what that one has done for us, that softens us in reflection. And when love is poured out as mine for Anna, for one who longs for it, demands it, lives by it, and gives back tenfold, there is an intoxication and delight in the exchange, enough to fill two of the blankest lives.

Anna made such a wonderful companion. I had felt that she would do so, during all the time I had known her; but I had never realized what a mere, poor foreshadowing that broken-up companionship had been of the perfect, smooth, intimate union in the life lived day by day, night by night with her.

When she accompanied me to my office, I found she was of more use to me than my three clerks together. She had such a gift of grasping the sense and import of things. It was never any trouble to explain to her. Whatever mental nut, as it were, was offered to her, her intellect seemed to grip it at once and split it open; and the kernel, neat and round, was lying before you. I have found this to be a very rare gift. The brain that can do and create, can form ideas and hold opinions is less uncommon than the one which can really understand. As a rule, explaining to one's subordinate what has to be done and how it is to be done, is so much effort and attended with so little

success, that to do the work one's self is the lighter task. One day I had spent the whole morning in endeavoring to put my assistants in the way of making for me a *précis* of some native evidence, which was required for the following day; and the result was an intolerably confused document, utterly useless to me or the court. I told them to leave the matter alone; that I would see to it myself in the afternoon; and, having already an impossible amount of work on hand, that prospect did not improve my temper. Tired and savage, I drove home to luncheon, not without a delightful consciousness that for an hour at least I should have perfect rest and peace, and found Anna, as usual, waiting in the cool, shaded dining-room. She came herself to my side and poured out some wine for me and asked me why I looked so tired; and, during luncheon, I told her. My nerves were shaken by overwork and the peculiarly irritating kind of work I had had that morning; and I upbraided the Government for giving me fools to work with, and lamented the idiocy of mankind in general and the hard fate that made me an Indian civil servant. Anna listened very quietly, making hardly any remark; which was wise, for any remark would have irritated me then. But when I had quite finished and was exhausted, she agreed with everything I had said, which is something; and sympathized with me in every look and tone, rather than in words, which is tranquillizing. When I rose, I said, remorsefully:

"I am sorry to have been so annoyed. I expect I spoiled your luncheon. You look very white. What have you been doing all the morning?"

And, indeed, her face had a settled look of pain on it, that was distressing.

"It is nothing much," she answered, smiling. "I have had a dreadful pain in my side, but it has gone off now." Then she came close to me and said, timidly, "Please let me come down this afternoon and do the *précis* for you."

"Dear child," I said, gently, in surprise, "I don't think you can."

"Well, let me try."

"Come, by all means, if it will amuse you; but I am afraid you can't help me in any way."

Anna made no reply, but put on her hat with a delighted air; and we went out to the carriage and drove down to

the city together. It was a pleasure to have her beside me. Even when she did not speak she looked intelligent; and I knew, if I spoke to her, I should meet with some other response than the bewildered and vaguely questioning "sahib?" of my clerks. When we reached the office I gave her a chair and a table to herself, in one corner, and piled on the latter the material from which the *précis* was to be made. Such a pile it was! Fragments of old, torn letters; a dying deposition taken in an opium den of the bazaar, and of which the paper was yellow with smoke and dirt; columns of notes taken from testimony in court, and loose odds-and-ends of papers of all sorts that might or might not—probably not—throw light on the case. All these in the native tongue—Hindustani—and written in the Hindustani character by hurried, careless, or inexperienced penmen. Anna looked over them coolly.

"Now, Gerald, tell me exactly what you want," she said, fixing her eyes on me, in which I noticed the pupils beginning to widen and dilate, as they always did with special activity of the brain. I explained to her what I wanted and the previous history of the case, and it seemed to take five minutes, whereas, in the morning, I had expended as many hours; and it was no trouble to explain to her, either. Her large, bright eyes seemed to lead one on. Her keenly interested voice: "Yes, I understand." "I see." "Go on," was encouraging. Her acute attention, absolutely given to the matter in hand, was inspiring. One seemed face to face with an intelligence; whereas, with most people, the fleshy screen between their brain and yours seems terribly thick.

"I understand it now," she said, finally. "I will work it out for you."

And I went over to my own desk. Four hours of the long, golden afternoon wore away in silence, and I managed to get through most of my own work. Then I looked over toward her and saw she was still absorbed. I leaned back in my chair and watched her. The table before her was a model of neatness and order. The papers had, apparently, been classified, and were now all ranged in separate piles. She was working on a large sheet before her. I got up and went over to her.

"Don't work too long upon that. You'll make yourself so tired," I said.

“Just finished,” she answered—as indeed she had—and she blotted the last line and then gave me the five large sheets of the *précis* and leaned back in her chair with a laugh, to see my surprise and pleasure.

It was admirable. Every paper had been translated and the pith of each extracted and set down with perfect clearness. The letters and testimony were translated and copied with the greatest accuracy; and correct references had been put against each item, by which one could find at once the original.

“Thank you,” I said, very earnestly. “You have done that wonderfully. Far quicker than I could. How have you attained such a faculty for grasping things?”

“I don’t know. I suppose I always had it. I remember my mathematical tutor said to me, when I was first learning Euclid, that I could always see the propositions quicker than any of his other pupils; and in reading Tacitus I often saw what the passage meant before the tutor did. Anyhow, I am awfully glad I helped you with the *précis*; and now let’s go home. I want my tea.”

The next day the deputy-judge complimented me on the “very masterly way in which the evidence had been condensed and reduced from a mass of confusion to a remarkably clear and lucid statement.”

But it was not Anna’s knowledge of Greek and Latin, nor even her capability of *précis* writing that made her so infinitely valuable to me each day of my life—such an incident might only occur once in many months. It was her intense sympathy. A sympathy that emanated naturally from her, as perfume from a flower. And the fount of that sympathy was in those clever brains of hers. Now, the sympathy that comes from the brain as well as from the heart is infinitely more comprehensive and satisfying than that which comes from the heart only. That good-natured sympathy that is offered sometimes by a warm heart beating in an uneducated person’s breast! How often is it galling and irritating in the extreme! It is uncertain, also. It reaches out to a toothache and extends over bad colds and accidents. It stretches into the region of linseed poultices and physical comforts. But to those deeper wounds and keener pains of the soul it can not reach. To a brain like Anna’s, there was nothing in the human emotions too difficult to understand. Knock in any way you would at

the door of her soul, and it would always fly open to you immediately. She would never meet you with the blank, dull stare of hopeless non-comprehension. You knew she would never disappoint you. The little troubles of life and the large, the physical pains and the mental, she could understand them all. All of them—from a finger jammed in a door or an insult from the head of a department, to the loss of an appointment or the destruction of an art treasure—came within her province of sympathy. And, under her influence, I felt that my own character was changing too. Unconsciously to myself, at the time, I grew less selfish. It never seemed any trouble to do anything for her, she was so grateful; and, insensibly, her habit of throwing herself always into my mood, whatever it might be, and interesting herself in anything I was interested in, gradually taught me also that secret of sympathy with another that alone is capable of smoothing out the rugged lines of life. And in this way the weeks and months passed by of not the happiest period, but still a happy one, of my existence. The cloud of the dread that I might so soon lose her, hung over it and obscured the sunshine. The last day of November came, and in this station of the plains it was terribly hot and sultry. The air seemed to thicken and thicken, as night approached, until one felt suffocation in breathing it. Toward dark, as I was standing for a moment by an open window, watching the great tridents of lightning playing on the horizon, Anna came up to me and touched my arm.

“Gerald, I am in such horrible pain,” she whispered.

I turned instantly and looked at her. Her face was white to the lips, and an ungoverned terror looked out of her eyes. I put my arm round her, and I felt she was trembling as one trembles in ague. As I drew her closer I could feel her heart was leaping in great, irregular beats, her hands were cold and as wet as if they had been dipped in water.

“Hold me,” she whispered. “I am so frightened. I don’t know what it will be like. And the pain, Gerald, you have no idea; when it comes on, it is something beyond words; it annihilates one.” Then putting her lips close on my ear, she murmured, “Oh, if it were only something I was bearing for you; if it was only pain that I was suffering for your sake, then I should delight in it!”

I pressed her to me in silence, too far moved for words, and she clung to me.

"I can't bear to inflict the sight of my pain on you; but—but—if you were with me—if you stayed with me, I should not be so afraid."

"Do you think I could be anywhere but with you, knowing you were suffering?" I answered. "Dear little girl, of course I will stay with you all the time."

She put back her head and looked at me, and her lips opened to answer me; then they twisted suddenly into a half-smothered groan of pain. I had one glance of fleeting terror from her eyes, and then she fell forward against me unconscious.

I carried her upstairs and laid her on her bed and summoned her own attendants, the nurse and the doctor, whom I had staying in the house with us. Then I sat down by the bed, holding her hand in mine and realizing that that little, helpless hand held the whole globe of the world in it for me.

"I don't think we shall need you, sir," said the English nurse.

"My dear fellow, you had better not stay here," urged the doctor.

"I intend to remain," I answered; and they said no more.

Through the whole of that terrible night I stayed beside her; and whose was the greater suffering, it would be hard to say. The physical agony dominated her completely; but she was still blindly conscious of the touch of my hand and of my presence, and kept the teeth on her lip till the blood came, to hold back her screams for my sake.

The long hours stretched out their moments to infinite length over their heads, and it seemed to me impossible that any human frame could wrestle with agony and withstand it for so long. It seemed as if, in those wild struggles, the soul must get loose, free itself, and fly from me. In the last moments of terror, when my own heart was beating in my throat in dread, she tore open her eyes and fixed them on me. The fear in them was heart-rending, yet not only fear was there. There was a desperate appeal to me for that help and comfort she always turned to me to gain. She told me afterward my face had given her strength and courage for the supreme effort. Just as the

dawn broke over the plains and the first soft light crept tranquilly into that room of agony, her child was born, and she herself fell back nerveless, it seemed lifeless. I bent over her and she told me later that she had felt my face close above hers; that she had longed to open her eyes, to smile, to speak, to reassure me, to thank me; but that her power was gone. Not even strength remained to raise the eyelids; they lay like lead upon her eyeballs; her hand would not obey her desire to close it on mine. And while I heard a voice telling me she was alive and safe, she lay, pallid and motionless, with closed eyes before me. I stooped and kissed her; and, for the only time, there was no response.

CHAPTER XI.

A SQUARE landing with a door half-open into a room full of daylight. A bed with its white curtains looked back, and Anna lying there half-raised upon one elbow, and the white light of morning striking on her rapt, downward-gazing face. I was crossing the outside landing, and I paused and looked in and then remained there.

That look of rapture on her face held me motionless, and even my heart-beats seemed to grow still as I watched her. On her left arm lay Gaida's child, asleep; and, unconscious of my presence, unconscious of all else in the world but it, she was gazing down into its face.

"My darling, my sweet love," I heard her murmur. "You are all my own! How good God has been to give you to me!"

She was silent for a moment, lost in contemplation; and then, suddenly, in a passion of delight, she threw herself forward on the child, covering it with her warm kisses.

The child awoke, and a feeble cry went through the room. Anna raised herself and shook back her long, shining hair, raising the child on one arm so that it was brought distinctly into my view, and a shudder went over me. It was hideous with that curious hideousness of aspect that belongs usually to the fruit of Eurasian marriages. As it lay on Anna's arm now, the peculiar whiteness of her skin threw up its dusky tint. Anna bent over it again, pressing her lips to its head, just darkened by the coming hair.

“ Did its mother wake it, then?” she murmured, laughing, and stopping its cries by kisses on its eyes.

The child cried violently, and thrust its tiny hand up to the silken masses of her hair, and she threw her head back, laughing, and I saw her face gleaming with happy light and her lips parted in smiles and her eyes full of joy. Then, as the child continued to cry, she bent over and kissed it again, as if her lips could never be satiated, on its tiny, struggling hands and feet, on the little, red knees, that kept drawing up, on its heaving chest and open, crying mouth; and all her face expressed passionate adoration, and all the movements of her body joyous emotion; and I stood still, without the open door, watching her, transfixed.

It seemed some strange illusion of the senses that I stood outside watching my Anna—or, at least, the Anna that had been mine—absorbed in this worship of another life; and I realized that I was face to face with Nature and her laws. In that small, dark object on the bed, that I could crush with one hand, was made manifest a force before which I and my life and my love and service were as nothing. Anna was now a mother, and with her maternity had come the insensate idolatry, the passionate absorption of maternity; and those feeble fingers of the child, beating the air, would sweep from her heart the record of our love—the love that had withstood all the blows that shame and sin and sorrow could hurl against it.

I stood, gazing on the scene before me, realizing that I was helpless; that, strong as I had been and as my love had been, for her sake, I was now in the presence of a force to which I must yield; for Nature’s own hand was uplifted against me, and Anna and the child were but helpless exponents of her eternal laws. That the child was hideous—horrible in its suggestion of mixed blood; horrible as the evidence of a passion long since dead, and from which she had, in suffering, freed herself—made no difference to her blinded eyes. It was her child; and, blindly following the instinct grown up in her, she loved it to the exclusion of all else—as the jealous maternal instinct commands.

Within the room all sound had ceased; for the mother had gathered the child to her bosom and opened her breast to it, and the light fell now on her head drooping over it, and her face was rapt and dreaming, as the small, dark mouth drew life from her breast.

I turned silently and descended the stairs with noiseless feet, and gained a lower room and sat down with my head upon my hands. This, then, was my hour of liberation. This was the hour of my reward. This was what I had waited for through all these months.

I recalled her fevered words to me only a week ago, uttered in a voice almost smothered in distress and shame.

"I shall hate it, Gerald, so much; I never want my eyes to rest on it. You will have it taken away from me at once, won't you? Sent away from me where I can never see it; and then I shall be all your own, and nothing can come between us any more."

That is what she had thought and fancied; and I, why had I not foreseen the truth? But I had not; and quite suddenly, after the suffering and hoping and longing for months for our emancipation and reunion, when it came, this iron law had risen between us; and she went forward blindly where it directed, and I fell backward, unnoticed and forgotten.

She was not to blame. As the child had been the consequence of her passion for Gaida, so this new maternal passion was the consequence of the birth of the child. Thus the chain of the past goes on, ever stretching into the future.

Some days passed, and I existed in Anna's life as some shadow, undefined, that an artist puts in the background of a scene. She lived in the child. She was not the least unkind or ungentle to me. When I spoke to her, she answered me without looking at me; and when I kissed her, she kissed me back with absent lips. She was apparently unconscious of me and my presence, except when her own worship of the child failed to satisfy her and she wanted others to be charmed by it and render it homage with herself, and then she would call me to the bedside to admire it and rejoice with her over it.

The child, as the days passed, lost a little of its first repulsiveness; and to no eyes but those that knew the secret of its birth would it have seemed different from a European's. I myself being so dark, the child was supposed to "favor me" and "resemble me;" and these phrases fell upon my ears many times in those long, empty days from Anna's friends that came to congratulate us. But these small stabs affected me little. The one great grief encom-

passed and numbed me, and I felt only it: that she was no longer mine. Far less so now than when her body belonged to another, but her mind to me. Now her mind was closed against me. She was still too frail and delicate for me to trust myself to enter into any discussion of the position with her; and I let day follow day, acquiescing in all she said and wished, and watched the color and life flowing back to her, which it did with marvelous rapidity. So that, while she nursed the child and it drew its life from hers, it seemed also as if, in some subtle way, she received back from it more than she gave; and her face grew more brilliant and her laughter lighter and stronger each day.

And I watched her and waited and said nothing, asking myself a thousand times a day, "What should I do?"

For herself, she seemed completely to have forgotten all that she had begged and entreated of me before the child was born. All the arrangements that had been made for its care and future home, far from Anna, I canceled without consulting her. She never alluded to them. All the frenzy of hate she had expressed to me in shamed whispers, seemed like something I must have heard in a dream. The child's actual presence had effaced, apparently, all those months and the feelings that belonged to them, as if they had never been.

One day, when a little over a month had passed since the birth of the child, I was sitting in my study at work, when she sent down for me and asked me to come to her. I went at once with my heart beating. It was possible, I thought, that the first abandonment of maternal love was past, and she wanted to take me back into her thoughts and life. Perhaps I had been unjust and impatient in my judgment of her. If, in the first blindness and intoxication of her love, she had passed me over and neglected me, it was wholly natural and to be forgiven; but now it was over, and she had remembered me.

With hope in my eyes and heart, I knocked gently at her closed door, and in answer to her gay "Come in" I entered, and all the hope died out. She had, apparently, been dressing the child, for the room was littered with lace and linen and veils, and the child itself was supported by cushions in its bassinette, and sat up like a doll in a voluminous cloud of muslin. With her head half-turned

backward to the cradle, she came to the door and took my hand and drew me over to it.

“Look, Gerald; doesn't he look lovely in his new clothes? Isn't he a darling?”

I stood silent and rigid by the cot. What a bitter thing is jealousy! And that first deadly sip of it that we take from the cup, generally held to our lips by the hands we have loved and trusted till then—that is the worst moment. That surpasses in pain the tragedies and open warfare that may come afterward. That first moment of tasting it, which we do with smiling lips because we will not admit, we do not know, we are poisoned; that is the worst.

“Don't you *like* him in this new dress?” she pursued, not heeding me, but stooping over the cradle to tie a ribbon by the child's shoulder. “Gerald, I never was so utterly, so perfectly happy as I am now. I never could have believed I could be so happy.” She finished tying the bow and rose from her knees. “Isn't he sweet?” she said, drawing off a little way and regarding him. “Don't you want to kiss him? You may, if you like,” she added, laughing joyously.

Still I could not speak nor move. I seemed bound there and voiceless, and I suppose my silence penetrated at last even her self-absorption. She looked up suddenly in my face. I do not know what she may have read there, but she gave a little cry and pushed me from the cradle.

“Gerald, you're jealous.”

I turned away to the window and put my arms on the edge of the open *jilmil* and said nothing. Words seemed so inadequate. The situation seemed so cruel beyond all hope.

“Gerald!”

There was astonishment, anger, reproach in her voice, and it stung me beyond endurance.

I turned and faced her.

“Anna,” I said, and the tone was the hardest and sternest she had ever heard from me, “there is no need to educate you in the emotions, surely, or has your maternity quite blinded and changed you and swept away your intellect entirely?”

Anna stood facing me with wide-open eyes and a gradually blanching face. At first she did not seem to under-

stand, and her eyes kept their usual expression now, of seeming to look at without seeing me. But after a few minutes the expression grew more conscious, then keenly so, and at last sorrow, sympathy, and contrition rushed over it together.

"What have I done?" she said. "Have I been very selfish? Have I been unkind to you?"

She was awakened now, and her eyes no longer looked past me, but hard into mine. She stretched out her hands pleadingly, and her lips opened and quivered questioningly. I took her hands and drew them gently to my breast.

"Have you forgotten all we said a little over a month ago, and how we have both waited for our perfect union till now; and now, have we been nearer together or farther apart just lately? Have I been taken more into your life or less?"

There was a long silence. And it seemed to me that the old Anna, that had belonged to me, was struggling to awake in this new Anna that belonged to her child. Then at last she said, brokenly and suddenly:

"I understand. Yes, Gerald, I remember; but when it came it was all so different. It seemed I never could have meant all I had said. And I thought you understood, too. And now, what can I do? I do love it so. Even if I tried, I could not conceal that love from you. The child is between us, I see it; but what can I do?"

"Nothing," I said, bitterly; "there is nothing to be done."

And I went away out of the room, leaving her standing in the center of the tumbled dolls' clothes, and the child in the bassinette at her side. I feared I might say something of which I should repent, and I went out and rode across the desert until it was late afternoon. When I returned, Anna's *ayah* was sitting on my library door-mat waiting for me.

"The Mem Sahib has been crying, crying all the afternoon," she said, "and told me to find the sahib and send him to her when he returned."

I went up the few short stairs without waiting for another word and entered the room alone. It seemed empty; but a little, glad cry guided me to the bed. Anna lay in it, white and exhausted. She stretched out her arms toward me as I approached and whispered as I bent over her:

“All this is so dreadful. We must do something.”

I sat down beside the bed holding one of those very, very slim, delicate hands in mine, whiter almost than the embroidery of the sleeve above it. The child lay sleeping on the other side.

“It is another of those great, invisible, iron laws that we have stumbled against, that gird this life all round and make it what it is,” I said, wearily. “It is natural for a mother to love her child; that is the law, and it is not our fault that this terrible position has grown up. We did not either of us foresee it, and it is simply the working out of all that has gone before.”

She was looking at me intently. I sat facing the window, and the vivid glory of tawny light flung up from the desert came in upon my face. She seemed to see something there that arrested her eyes beyond removing.

“Gerald,” she said at last, “in return for all you have done for me always, I am killing you.”

I smiled a faint, weary smile. I could not contradict her. In truth, more than half of me seemed dead already.

“It is not your fault. These laws are greater than we are.”

There was a long silence, and the tawny light died away outside and within, and then, out of the gray shadows, came her voice:

“I will be above the law—for your sake.”

I smiled again. When we are young, we all talk lightly of the laws of life, even when we recognize their existence at all, which we generally do not do until we have stumbled against them in the dark and fallen back crushed and bleeding. As we grow older we know more and speak less lightly. I pressed her hand and rose.

“Go to sleep, dear child, and grow well and strong again, and do not try to arrange life. Life is stronger than you.”

I was about to turn and leave her, but she called me back.

“Come here. Bend down and look at me.” I did as she asked, and the fire of those eyes burned into mine. “Do you forget that I am Anna Lombard, and I love you, I love you, I have always loved you? I understand everything. You shall have the reward of your long, long service. The law shall break to give it to you.”

I thought she was excited and light-headed. I stooped and kissed her.

“Try to sleep. Whatever happens, one law will always remain. I shall always love you.”

And I left her and walked down to the lower room and then on to the veranda, where I sat gazing out over the desert with unseeing eyes.

“What should I do?” I asked myself. “How should I dispose of my life?” It seemed but a battered remnant that was left me. Take that in my hand and go with it—whither? It was impossible to stay living on beside Anna, seeing her wholly devoted to and wrapped up in the child. I had tried a similar experiment that had left me dying at Peshawur once before. And then there had been hope. Now there was none, I saw clearly, and refused to be deceived. This was a growing evil; one that would grow with the child’s life, expand and blossom with its growth. It would absorb the whole of that passionate soul, once my own, that seemed to know no limit between affection and adoration. No, I would not undertake it. I would not allow it to enter my thoughts as a possible consideration. The only thing to be settled was to provide comfortably for Anna and her child and leave them both. Life stretched before me as dreary as the desert itself. Something of the old feeling I had had before I met her, was with me now; only then it had been mixed with the freshness and vigor of unsullied youth and the impatience and fever of overmuch strength. Now it was mixed with the dreadful languor of exhaustion. Life had caught me in its vise and wrung and twisted and bruised and battered me so, that I felt as an old, old man.

The next two or three days I noticed a change in Anna. She grew extremely grave and silent; never addressing me in any way, and starting visibly when spoken to. She seemed to have awakened from the ecstatic dream that the realization of her maternity had plunged her into. She gazed long and earnestly at my face whenever I was with her, as if trying to read the solution of the problem she was studying there; and I noticed an effort to conceal the child from me, whenever I approached. She spoke no more to it nor of it in my presence, and her eyes were shaded and darkened with the shadow of heavy thought.

From all of this I drew a sad satisfaction. She was, at

jeast, something more of my Anna again. She was no longer merely the absorbed mother, seeing and recognizing nothing but her child's face and hearing nothing but her child's voice. She was again allowing me some share in her thoughts; though what that share was and in what kind of thoughts, I had no idea, and she gave me no clew. I saw her look at me long and hungrily as I sat beside her, and then turn her eyes toward the little hump under the sheet where the child lay; but she would not answer me when I questioned her as to her thoughts, though once she burst into passionate tears and begged me to leave her room. I divined that she, like myself, was gazing into the dark mirror of the future and, like myself, shrinking from what it held for us—we who had really loved. Perhaps I ought to have known what all this portended and seen where it was leading her. But not the faintest foreshadowing or premonition of the truth was vouchsafed to me. Nor should I have been able to influence her nor prevent what followed, had I been forewarned. In that singularly soft and gentle temperament there existed an underlying force and violence which, when aroused, dominated irresistibly everything opposed to it. During those few days I, too, was preoccupied with the problem my own future offered; but I saw in a dim way, that became clearer to me afterward, that she was wrestling in the throes of some terrible struggle with herself.

One evening, toward sunset, when the day's work was over, I was sitting alone, as usual now, in my library. Anna and the child were upstairs. Since the day when she had looked into my face and read everything there, all her rapid convalescence, all that exuberant rebuilding of Nature had suddenly stopped. She had gone steadily backward, and lay now, day after day, pale and silent on her bed. I felt guilty and reproached myself. I should have withdrawn from her when I was no longer needed and left her to this new joy which had filled her life. Yet even that could not have been done without explanation and understanding. But I felt I had awakened her too roughly. Why does it seem fated, I asked myself, when one strives and strives to do well for another, that there should be always some moment of weakness, of selfishness that overtakes one and undoes all that one has done? I saw now clearly that the old love, reawakened in her heart, was

struggling there with the new and tearing her between them in the struggle, just as in former times. Surely the best that I could do was to leave her to the fulfillment of the natural law and the natural destiny of women; to withdraw myself now, and so end the struggle for her. To that I must summon my strength. And yet, as I realized it—realized that I was to finally renounce this thing that had been my pleasure and my pain, my anguish and delight and, through all, so entirely my own—I shrunk back dismayed. What should we be, one without the other; we, whose every thought even had been divided and shared? She was interwoven with me in such intimacy that to leave her, to lose her, seemed as impossible and absurd as if my right arm could drop from me and assume a life of its own. I looked up at her portrait on the wall and met the strangely powerful, gleaming eyes through the dusk, and said to myself aloud in the silence:

“This impossible thing is to be!”

There was a step behind me, a movement in the room, and I turned and saw that Anna had entered. She came close up to me, and quickly, like some one who has a message to deliver. When she was directly in front of me she stopped and lifted her face. I bent forward, and a whisper I could hardly hear went through the room.

“I have expiated my sins to you, at last. I have killed it.”

“Killed what?” I said in a vague horror.

Her words conveyed no sense to me.

“I have killed the child.”

She said it very simply and naturally. I searched her face with terror. I thought she had lost her reason. But there was no insanity in that countenance, only a dreadful grief and sorrow, pathetic, tear-filled eyes and quivering lips that could hardly frame the words. Before I could speak, before I could collect my thoughts or realize it all, she went on:

“I saw all. It was all revealed to me in a sudden flash of light. I saw all your feelings these last weeks. I looked back through all the previous months; then I looked into the future and saw what that would be. One had to be sacrificed, either you or the child. And could it be you? Was this to be your reward for all you have done and suffered for my sake? Had it lived, it would have

taken all my life. Now my grief will take me for a few months. Spare me to it for that time; and then, after that, I am all your own, forever and ever. While you live, I will live for you and in you; and when you die, I will die with you."

She spoke in a trembling voice, and her face was wet with the streaming tears that welled inexhaustibly out of her eyes. She took one of my hands and kissed it with cold lips, wet with tears. I stood still, dazed, horrified, frozen. What had she done? Was it all true and real or was she raving?

"What have you done?" I said, hoarsely. "I don't understand. Where is the child? Let me see it."

"Come upstairs," she said, simply, and turned to the staircase, and I followed as in a dream.

When we reached the landing at the head of the stairs I stopped still; a sort of numbness came over me. I felt I could not face what lay before me in the room. Then, as in a vision, I saw Anna turn back and take my hand and lead me into the room. It was only half-lighted; everything was dim, except the white *charpoy* in the center, and on it lay the child, as I had often seen it sleeping. Anna drew me forward, and lifting one of my hands when we stood beside the bed, laid it on the child's forehead. It was quite cold. I looked at it. The dusky, little form looked very, very small and helpless now. Yet what a terrible power it had possessed in life, a power before which our full lives had been as nothing, because Nature had invested it with the power of her law. Then I looked at the mother. Anna's eyes were fixed upon me with a devouring anxiety in them. In the dusk we looked at each other over the tiny, quiet form of the child. Then she stretched out her hands to me.

"Gerald, you *do* understand? I have done this for you."

And I whispered back, "Yes, I understand."

And our hands touched each other's and there was silence. The room was very quiet and the dusk grew deeper and deeper round us. At last, in the darkness, Anna's voice broke out with a great cry, as she slipped to her knees beside the bed.

"Oh, how could I do it? It was my own, dear, little child, and I loved it so!"

CHAPTER XII.

JUST a week had passed over, a horrible week like a nightmare; but it had passed and left me and Anna—if this frail, attenuated specter were really Anna—alone in the bungalow, as in former times. There was no other presence; no call to summon her from my side; no duties to take her from me; no small, clinging vine running over the tree of our love and stifling it. Anna, or her sad shadow, was my own again. She was sitting opposite me in the veranda, a thin, narrow figure in black, with all her hair put back from her face, that was colorless and death-like as a nun's.

She sat with her hands stiff and white in her lap and her eyes looking out vacantly into the sunshine.

"I want you to go away for a time, Gerald," she was saying. "I want to try and understand things. I want to lead the life of a penitent. I want to feel sure, before I can begin to be happy again, that God understands and forgives it all. It seemed right to me at the time; but now—now, I don't know." She paused a minute or two, and then went on, "You know, when the doctor came and questioned me about the child's death, and I said I must have suffocated it beneath me while I slept, then it came home to me. I felt I was guilty—and I was. What a mist of lies grew up round me, and this grief—great God!—that is so real, it is killing me, even that seems all untrue and unholy, because every one believes it is grief for what I could not help, not for my own deed."

I was silent. What could I answer her?

"And I should like to be quite alone to pray and pray and pray and fast and think and get near again to God, as I have always felt I have been in my life; and whatever I have done, I have never done what I thought wrong. I have never felt that God was angry with me. Now I feel so lost, so alone."

Her voice shook and dropped. I went over to her and stood by her.

"I am here," I said, gently.

"Yes, dear Gerald, I know; but the soul is a thing apart and has a life of its own, an utterly separate life that

belongs to God, and no mortal can come into it. To my brain and heart and body you are all, but to my soul you are nothing. It does not know you nor recognize you. In the hour of my death, though your arms hold me and your love is all round me and your lips on mine, yet my soul will slip away from you into the darkness all alone." We were both silent, and the horror of this life and death seemed all round us, glaring at us from out of the gold sunlight. "And so," she went on, after a pause, with an effort, "if I have done wrong, I want to repent. I want to get back that peace of mind, that unity with God I always had before. Will you go and leave me for a time?"

"I will always do whatever you ask me, you know; but why send me away—now of all times? I ought to be with you, surely."

Anna shook her head.

"No; I shall think too much of you, become too much drawn into your love, become too comforted and consoled. I must be alone, and suffer and work out some sort of repentance for myself which will be accepted, and I shall be forgiven." She looked hard into my face and then murmured, in her old, tender tones, "I know it is hard upon you, too. But it is only one little trial more, one sorrow to bear for a time, for I feel God means you to be happy. As for me, I deserve nothing; but he will forgive me, perhaps, for your sake, and let me be at last an instrument of happiness to you; but it can not be just yet. Leave me to suffer a little while. Be patient, just a little while longer."

I looked down at her; at the emaciation of the figure in its close, black dress; at the fragility of the hand which I held in mine; at the white transparency of the face; at the eyes that were dry now, worn out with excessive weeping.

"Anna, I can't leave you like this!" I exclaimed. "More suffering, more sorrow, and you will go from me altogether."

She shook her head, and a little smile that was full of power came into her face.

"No, I think not. I shall try to live, to do better than I have done. Only leave me to myself."

"But for how long?" I asked, desperately.

"I think it should be a year," she said in a low tone and with downcast eyes.

I groaned.

“A year! Exile for a year! But why— Anna, it's absurd!”

“If I should feel I were forgiven sooner, I would write to you,” she answered in a low voice. “But oh, Gerald! don't make it harder for me than it is!” she cried, suddenly, with a rush of tears. “Help me to do something which I think is right. Think what I am, what I have done.”

“Dear child, your will is mine. It has always been, you know. Tell me when you wish me to go and when to return and it shall be so.”

She was leaning back against me, exhausted.

“Go to-morrow,” she whispered, faintly, “and come back when I send to you,”

“It will seem so strange,” I murmured, mechanically. “What will every one say to see you alone, and I—”

A ghost of a mocking smile came to her lips and eyes.

“Have we ever cared what they said?” she whispered.

And the following day I went into exile. These things are easy to arrange when one is in high places and money is at hand.

Anna's good-by to me was pitiful, pathetic as the young nun's to her parents when she has renounced the world; but it was as pure and unimpassioned.

Passion to her suddenly seemed revealed as a sin. It jarred with her grief, and she shrunk from the kiss of my lips and turned hers away.

After I had left her I recalled the parting with wonder; and it seemed as if the Anna Lombard I had known had vanished with the death of the child into the past.

For a whole year I stayed away in exile. I had plenty of work, for I only exchanged stations; and in one a thousand miles away I went through the same duties I had in my own. But my inner life seemed at a standstill. My own pleasure was dead. Anna had so long been the center of my thoughts that when that was cut away they seemed unable to rally round any other object. I saw other women and met them and danced with them and dined with them, but I felt as a deaf man at an opera. Some idle show is passing before his eyes which means nothing to him and can not reach him through his closed ears. I lived in the moment when I should return to her and in her let-

ters. They were not very frequent, and they were subdued, even a little cold; but I felt in them a growing confidence in herself, a tone of increasing peace and calm, and I was satisfied. She was really working out her repentance, and when that was accomplished I knew she would summon me to her. Her past had been another's and her present was now her own; but her future belonged to me, I knew. And I waited and kept my patience. At last the summons came. It was very short.

“I believe I am forgiven, and that it is right to recall you. Come back to me. ANNA.”

And that same night I started to return. A heavy, sul-
len, orange sun was hanging low in the western sky over the rolling plains, as I rode from the station toward the bungalow on the third day. The light, parched dust rose in little whirls before me, as the hot desert wind ran over it and licked it up here and there. Otherwise there was no moving thing, and the silence was complete except for the thudding of my own heart as we rode forward. I wondered how she would receive me, and I remembered how I had left her. Was I coming back to that same black-robed penitent? Was the old, loving, impetuous, erring Anna shut away from me, forever, behind the invisible door of the past? It was fated, apparently, that I should love her through all time and metamorphoses; but my heart sunk as I thought of those firm, red lips faded to a nun-like paleness; and that curling, amorous hair, that held the changing lights, subdued beneath a veil, as I had seen it last; and all the buoyant passions of her nature tamed and put to sleep.

A chill seemed to surround me in the midst of the hot breath of the desert, and the huge burnished disk ahead of me sunk lower in the mist.

As the last long undulation of the sandy plain was surmounted, the roof of the white bungalow and the encircling palms rose into sight; and, drawing my breath almost still, I urged the horse forward.

There was no sign of life, as I approached. I descried the long windows of the upper story and the covered balcony where the child had slept. The garden beneath bloomed like one single rose in its wealth of blossom, and a cool air came from it and diffused its fragrance. I drew

ny horse in at the compound gate; and at that instant there was a step upon the gravel, and I turned and saw her.

A figure in white with the sunlight in the eyes and hair. It was the same Anna Lombard I had left a maiden sleeping in the garden. Only now it was Anna awakened, with the look behind the eyes of one who has read all the secrets of life, and the look above the brows of one who has met life and conquered it.

She ran down toward me with feet that hardly touched the ground; then, when a few paces from me, she stopped, and with one turn of her hand brought over her shoulder the bright, shining twist of hair that had captured my senses long ago, and she paused, gazing at me, expectantly.

“Do I please you?” she whispered.

Her eyes were shining, her whole face was lighted from within, her body seemed expanding and dilating with the force of her nervous joy. She had in those moments a beauty beyond description. My eyes swam as I looked at her.

“Dearest Anna, you are beautiful; but it is not for these things that I love you, you know.”

“I know, I know,” she murmured, throwing herself into my arms, putting her own soft ones about my neck, and pressing the rose of her mouth against my cheek. “But you are human and you like to have them, and I am human and I like to give them, and we have both suffered so much no one would grudge us our happiness now. Oh, I have so prayed for God to give me back my good looks to reward you with, and that he has done so is a sign of his forgiveness; don’t you think so?”

And I answered, softly, “Yes, dear.”

THE END.

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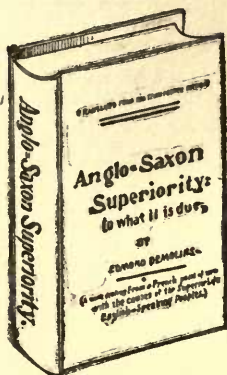
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The
Beth Book

*Being a Study
of the Life of
Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure
A Woman of Genius*

BY
Sarah Grand

IAGO. Come, hold your peace.

EMILIA. 'Twill out, 'twill out:—I hold my
peace, Sir? no;

I'll be in speaking, liberal as the
air:

Let heaven, and men, and devils,
let them all

All, all, cry shame against me, yet
I'll speak.

SHAK

E
S
P
E
A



New York:
D. Appleton, 1897.

"I cannot gather the sunbeams out of the east, or I would make them tell you what I have seen; but read this and interpret this, and let us remember together. I cannot gather the gloom out of the night sky, or I would make that tell you what I have seen; but read this and interpret this, and let us feel together. And if you have not that within you which I can summon to my aid, if you have not the sun in your spirit and the passion in your heart which my words may awaken, though they be indistinct and swift, leave me, for I will give you no patient mockery, no labouring insults of that glorious Nature whose I am and whom I serve."—RUSKIN.

"The men who come on the stage at one period are all found to be related to one another. Certain ideas are in the air. We are all impressionable, for we are made of them; all impressionable, but some more than others, and these first express them. This explains the curious contemporaneousness of inventions and discoveries. The truth is in the air, and the most impressionable brain will announce it first, but all will announce it a few minutes later. So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour."—EMERSON.

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CHAPTER I

THE day preceding Beth's birth was a grey day, a serene grey day, awesome with a certain solemnity, and singularly significant to those who seek a sign. There is a quiet mood, an inner calm, to which a grey day adds peculiar solace. It is like the relief which follows after tears, when hope begins to revive, and the warm blood throbs rebelliously to be free of the shackles of grief; a certain heaviness still lingers, but only as a luxurious languor which is a pleasure in itself. In other moods, however, in pain, in doubt, in suspense, the grey day deepens the depression of the spirits, and also adds to the sense of physical discomfort. Mrs. Caldwell, looking up at noon from the stocking she was mending, and seeing only a slender strip of level gloom above the houses opposite, suddenly experienced a mingled feeling of chilliness and dread, and longed for a fire, although the month was June. She could not afford fires at that time of year, yet she thought how nice it would be to have one, and the more she thought of it the more chilly she felt. A little comfort of the kind would have meant so much to her that morning. She would like to have felt it right to put away the mending, sit by a good blaze with a book, and absorb herself in somebody else's thoughts, for her own were far from cheerful. She was weak and ill and anxious, the mother of six children already, and about to produce a seventh on an income that would have been insufficient for four. It was a reckless thing for a delicate woman to do, but she never thought of that. She lived in the days when no one thought of the waste of women in this respect, and they had not begun to think for themselves. What she suffered she accepted as her "lot," or "The Will of God"—the expression varied with the nature of the trouble; extreme pain was "The Will of God," but minor discomforts and worries were her "lot." That much of the misery was perfectly preventable never occurred to her, and if any one had suggested such a

thing she would have been shocked. The parson in the pulpit preached endurance; and she understood that anything in the nature of resistance, any discussion even of social problems, would not only have been a flying in the face of Providence, but a most indecent proceeding. She knew that there was crime and disease in the world, but there were judges and juries to pursue criminals, doctors to deal with diseases, and the clergy to speak a word in season to all, from the murderer on the scaffold to the maid who had misconducted herself. There was nothing eccentric about Mrs. Caldwell; she accepted the world just as she found it, and was satisfied to know that effects were being dealt with. Causes she never considered, because she knew nothing about them.

But she was ill at ease that morning, and did think it rather hard that she should not have had time to recover from her last illness. She acknowledged to herself that she was very weak, that it was hard to drag the darning-needle through that worn stocking, and, oh dear! the holes were so many and so big that week, and there were such quantities of other things to be done, clothes mended and made for the children, besides household matters to be seen to generally; why wasn't she strong? That was the only thing she repined about, poor woman, her want of physical strength. She would work until she dropped, however, and mortal man could expect no more of her, she assured herself with a sigh of satisfaction, in anticipation of the inevitable event which would lay her by, and so release her from all immediate responsibility. Worn and weary working mothers, often uncomplaining victims of the cruelest exactions, toilers whose day's work is never done, no wonder they welcome even the illness which enforces rest in bed, the one holiday that is ever allowed them. Mrs. Caldwell thought again of the fire and the book. She had read a good deal at one time, and had even been able to play, and sing, and draw, and paint with a dainty touch; but since her marriage, the many children, the small means, and the failing strength had made all such pursuits an impossible luxury. The fire and the book—who knows what they might not have meant, what a benign difference the small relaxation allowed to the mother at this critical time might not have made in the temperament of the child? Perhaps, if we could read the events even of that one day aright, we should find in them the clue to all that was inexplicable in its subsequent career.

In deciding that she could not afford a fire for herself, Mrs. Caldwell had glanced round the room, and noticed that the whisky bottle on the sideboard was all but empty. She got up hastily, and went into the kitchen.

"I had quite forgotten the whisky," she said to the maid-of-all-work, who was scraping potatoes at the sink. "Your master will be so put out if there isn't enough. You must go at once and get some—six bottles. Bring one with you, and let them send the rest."

The girl turned upon her with a scowl. "And who's to do my dinner?" she demanded.

"I'll do what I can," Mrs. Caldwell answered. The servant threw the knife down on the potatoes, and turned from the sink sullenly, wiping her hands on her apron as she went.

Mrs. Caldwell rolled up her sleeves, and set to work, but awkwardly. Household work comes naturally to many educated women; they like it, and they do it well; but Mrs. Caldwell was not one of this kind. She was not made for labour, but for luxury; her hands and arms, both delicately beautiful in form and colour, alone showed that. Her whole air betokened gentle birth and breeding. She looked out of place in the kitchen, and it was evident that she could only acquit herself well among the refinements of life. She set to work with a will, however, for she had the pluck and patience of ten men. She peeled vegetables, chopped meat, fetched water, carried coals to mend the fire, did all that had to be done to the best of her ability, although she had to cling many times to table, or chair, or dresser, to recover from the exertion, and brace herself for a fresh attempt. When she had done in the kitchen she went to the dining-room and laid the cloth. The sulky servant did not hurry back. She had a trick of lingering long on errands, and when at last she did appear she brought no whisky.

"They're going to send it," she explained. "They promised to send it at once."

"But I told you to bring a bottle!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, stamping her foot imperiously.

The girl walked off to the kitchen, and slammed the door.

Mrs. Caldwell's forehead was puckered with a frown, but she got out the mending again, and sat down to it in the dining-room with dogged determination.

Presently there was a step outside. She looked up and listened. The front door opened. Her worn face brightened; backache and weariness were forgotten; her husband had come home; and it was as if the clouds had parted and the sun shone forth.

She looked up brightly to greet him. "You've got your work over early to-day," she said.

"I have," he answered drily, without looking at her.

The smile froze on her lips. He had come back in an irritable mood. He went to the sideboard when he had spoken, and poured himself out a stiff glass of whisky-and-water, which he carried to the window, where he stood with his back to his wife, looking out. He was a short man, who made an instant impression of light eyes in a dark face. You would have looked at him a second time in the street, and thought of him after he had passed, so striking was the peculiar contrast. His features were European, but his complexion, and his soft glossy black hair, curling close and crisp to the head, betrayed a dark drop in him, probably African. In the West Indies he would certainly have been set down as a quadroon. There was no record of negro blood in the family, however, no trace of any ancestor who had lived abroad; and the three moors' heads with ivory rings through their noses which appeared in one quarter of the scutcheon were always understood by later generations to have been a distinction conferred for some special butchery-business among the Saracens.

Mrs. Caldwell glanced at her husband, as he stood with his back to her in the window, and then went on with the mending, patiently waiting till the mood should have passed off, or she should have thought of something with which to beguile him.

When he had finished the whisky-and-water, he turned and looked at her with critical disapprobation.

"I wonder why it is when a woman marries she takes no more pains with herself," he ejaculated. "When I married you, you were one of the smartest

girls I ever saw."

"It would be difficult to be smart just now," she answered.

He made a gesture of impatience. "But why should a woman give up everything when she marries? You had more accomplishments than most of them, and now all you do, it seems to me, is the mending."

"The mending must be done," she answered deprecatingly, "and I'm not very strong. I'm not able to do everything. I would if I could."

There was a wild stampede at this moment. The four elder children had returned from school, and the two younger ones from a walk with their nurse, and now burst into the room, in wild spirits, demanding dinner. It was the first bright moment of the morning for their mother, but her husband promptly spoilt her pleasure.

"Sit down at table," he roared, "and don't let me hear another word from any of you. A man comes home to be quiet, and this is the kind of thing that awaits him!"

The children shrank to their places abashed, while their mother escaped to the kitchen to hurry the dinner. The form—or farce—of grace was gone through before the meal commenced. The children ate greedily, but were obediently silent. All the little confidences and remarks which it would have been so healthy for them to make, and so good for their mother to hear, had to be suppressed, and the silence and constraint made everyone dyspeptic. The dinner consisted of only one dish, a hash, which Mrs. Caldwell had made because her husband had liked it so much the last time they had had it. He turned it over on his plate now, however, ominously, blaming the food for his own want of appetite. Mrs. Caldwell knew the symptoms, and sighed.

"I can't eat this stuff," he said at last, pushing his plate away from him.

"There's a pudding coming," his wife replied.

"Oh, a pudding!" he exclaimed. "I know what our puddings are. Why aren't women taught something sensible? What's the use of all your

accomplishments if you can't cook the simplest dish? What a difference it would have made to my life if you had been able to make pastry even."

Mrs. Caldwell thought of the time she had spent on her feet in the kitchen that morning doing her best, and she also thought how easy it would have been for him to marry a woman who could cook, if that were all he wanted; but she had no faint glimmering conception that it was unreasonable to expect a woman of her class to cook her dinner as well as eat it. One servant is not expected to do another's work in any establishment; but a mother on a small income, the most cruelly tried of women, is too often required to be equal to anything. Mrs. Caldwell said nothing, however. She belonged to the days when a wife's meek submission to anything a man chose to say made nagging a pleasant relaxation for the man, and encouraged him to persevere until he acquired a peculiar ease in the art, and spoilt the tempers of everybody about him.

The arrival of the family doctor put an end to the scene. Mrs. Caldwell told the children to run away, and her husband's countenance cleared.

"Glad to see you, Gottley," he said. "What will you have?"

"Oh, nothing, thank you. I can't stay a moment. I just looked in to see how Mrs. Caldwell was getting on."

"Oh, she's all right," her husband answered for her cheerfully. "How are you all, especially Miss Bessie?"

"Ha! ha!" said the old gentleman, sitting down by the table. "That reminds me I'm not on good terms with Bessie this morning. I'm generally careful, you know, but it seems I said something disrespectful about a Christian brother—a *Christian* brother, mind you—and I've been had up before the family tribunal for blasphemy, and condemned to everlasting punishment. Lord!—But, mark my words," he exclaimed emphatically, "a time will come when every school-girl will see, what my life is made a burden to me for seeing now, the absurdity of the whole religious superstition."

"O doctor!" Mrs. Caldwell cried, "surely you believe in God?"

"God has not revealed Himself to me, madam; I know nothing about Him," the old gentleman answered gently.

"Ah, there you know you are wrong, Gottley," Mr. Caldwell chimed in, and then he proceeded to argue the question. The old doctor, being in a hurry, said little in reply, and when he had gone Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, with wifely tact—

"Well, I think you had the best of that!"

"Well, I think I had, poor old buffer!" her husband answered complacently, his temper restored. "By the way, I've brought in the last number of Dickens. Shall I read it to you?"

Her face brightened. "Yes, do," she rejoined. "One moment, till Jane has done clearing the table. Here's your chair," and she placed the only easy one in the room for him, in the best light.

These readings were one of the joys of her life. He read to her often, and read exceedingly well. Books were the bond of union between them, the prop and stay of their married life. Poor as they were, they always managed to find money for new ones, which they enjoyed together in this way. Intellectuality balanced the morbid irritability of the husband's temperament, and literature made life tolerable to them both as nothing else could have done. As he read now, his countenance cleared, and his imaginary cares fell from him; while his wife's very real ones were forgotten as she listened, and there was a blessed truce to trouble for a time. Unfortunately, however, as the reading proceeded, he came to a rasping bit of the story, which began to grate upon his nerves. The first part had been pleurably exciting, but when he found the sensation slipping from him, he thought to stay it with a stimulant, and went to the sideboard for the purpose. Mrs. Caldwell's heart sank; the whisky bottle was all but empty.

"Oh, damn it!" he exclaimed, banging it down on the sideboard. "And I suppose there is none in the house. There never is any in the house. No one looks after anything. My comfort is never considered. It is always those damned children."

"Henry!" his wife protested; but she was too ill to defend herself further.

"What a life for a man," he proceeded; "stuck down in this cursed hole, without a congenial soul to speak to, in or out of the house."

"That is a cruel thing to say, Henry," she remonstrated with dignity.

"Well, I apologise," he rejoined ungraciously. "But you must confess that I have some cause to complain."

He was standing behind her as he spoke, and she felt that he eyed her the while with disapproval of her appearance, and anger at her condition. She knew the look only too well, poor soul, and her attitude was deprecating as she sat there gazing up pitifully at the strip of level greyness above the houses opposite. She said nothing, however, only rocked herself on her chair, and looked forlornly miserable; seeing which brought his irritation to a climax. He flung the book across the room; but even in the act, his countenance cleared. He was standing in the window, and caught a glimpse of Bessie Gottley, who was passing at the moment on the opposite side of the road, and looked across at him, smiling and nodding invitingly. Mrs. Caldwell saw the pantomime, and her heart contracted with a pang when she saw how readily her husband responded. It was hard that the evil moods should not be conquered for her as well as for Bessie Gottley.

Bridget came in just then, bringing the belated whisky.

"Oh, you did order it," he graciously acknowledged. "Why didn't you say so?" He opened the bottle, and poured some out for himself. "Here's to the moon-faced Bessie!" he said jocularly.

Mrs. Caldwell went on with the mending. Her husband began to walk up and down the room, in a good humour again. He walked peculiarly, more on his toes than his heels, with an odd little spring in each step, as if it were the first step of a dance. This springiness gave to his gait a sort of buoyancy which might have seemed natural to him, if exaggerated, in his youth, but had the air of an affectation in middle life, as if it were part of an assumption of juvenility.

"Won't you go on with the reading?" his wife said at last. His restlessness worried her.

"No," he answered; "I shall go out. I want exercise."

"When will you be back?" she asked wistfully.

"Oh, hang it all! don't nag me. I shall come back when I like."

He left the room as he spoke, slamming the door behind him. Mrs. Caldwell did not alter her attitude, but the tears welled up in her eyes, and ran down her haggard cheeks unheeded. The children came in, and finding her so, quietly left the room, all but the eldest girl, who went and leant against her, slipping her little hand through her mother's arm. The poor woman kissed the child passionately; then, with a great effort, recovered her self-control, put her work away, gave the children their tea, read to them for an hour, and saw them to bed. The front door was open when she came downstairs, and she went to shut it. A lady, who knew her, happened to be passing, and stopped to shake hands. "I saw your husband just now sitting on the beach with Bessie Gottley," she informed Mrs. Caldwell pleasantly. "They were both laughing immoderately."

"Very likely," Mrs. Caldwell responded with a smile. "She amuses my husband immensely. But won't you come in?"

"No, thank you. Not to-night. I am hurrying home. Glad to see you looking so well;" with which she nodded, and went her way; and Mrs. Caldwell returned to the little dining-room, holding her head high till she had shut the door, when she burst into a tempest of tears. She was a lymphatic woman ordinarily, but subject to sudden squalls of passion, when she lost all self-control.

She would have sobbed aloud now, when the fit was on her, in the face of the whole community, although the constant effort of her life was to keep up appearances. She had recovered herself, however, before the servant came in with the candles, and was sitting in the window looking out anxiously. The greyness of the long June day was darkening down to night now, but there was no change in the sultry stillness of the air. Summer lightning played about in the strip of sky above the houses opposite. One of the houses was a butcher's shop, and while Mrs. Caldwell sat there, the butcher brought out a lamb and killed it. Mrs. Caldwell watched the operation with interest. They did strange things in those days in that little Irish seaport, and, being an Englishwoman, she looked on like a civilised traveller intelligently studying the customs of a savage people.

But as the darkness gathered, the trouble of her mind increased. Her husband did not return, and a sickening sensation of dread took possession of her. Where had he gone? What was he doing? Doubtless enjoying himself—what bitterness there was in the thought! She did not grudge him any pleasure, but it was hard that he should find so little in her company. Why was there no distraction for her? The torment of her mind was awful; should she try his remedy? She went to the sideboard and poured herself out some whisky, but even as she raised it to her lips she felt it unworthy to have recourse to it, and put the glass down untouched.

After that she went and leant against the window-frame. It was about midnight, and very few people passed. Whenever a man appeared in the distance, she had a moment of hope, but only to be followed by the sickening sensation of another disappointment. The mental anguish was so great that for some time she paid no attention to physical symptoms which had now begun. By degrees, however, these became importunate, and oh the relief of it! The trouble of her mind ceased when the physical pain became acute, and therefore she welcomed it as a pleasant distraction. She was obliged to think and be practical too; there was no one in the house to help her. The sleeping children were of course out of the question, and the two young servants, maid-of-all-work and nurse, nearly as much so. Besides, there was the difficulty of calling them. She felt she must not disturb Jane who was in the nursery, for fear of rousing the children; but should she ever get to Bridget's room, which was further off? Step by step she climbed the stairs, clinging to the banister with one hand, holding the candle in the other. Several times she sank down and waited silently, but with contracted face, till a paroxysm had passed. At last she reached the door. Bridget was awake and had heard her coming. "Holy Mother!" she exclaimed, startled out of her habitual sullenness by her mistress's agonised face. "Yer ill, ma'am! Let me help you to your bed!"

"Fetch the doctor and the nurse, Bridget," Mrs. Caldwell was just able to gasp.

In the urgency and excitement of the moment, there was a truce to hostilities. Bridget jumped up, in night-dress and bare feet, and supported her mistress to her room. There she was obliged to leave her alone; and so it happened that, just as the grey dawn trembled with the first flush of a new

and brighter day, the child arrived unassisted and without welcome, and sent up a wail of protest. When the doctor came at last, and had time to attend to her, he pronounced her to be a fine child, and declared that she had made a good beginning, and would do well for herself, which words the nurse declared to be of happy omen. Her father was not fit to appear until late in the day. He came in humbly, filled with remorse for that mis-spent night, and was received with the feeble flicker of a smile, which so touched and softened him that he made more of the new child, and took a greater interest in her than he had done in any of the others at the time of their birth. There was some difficulty about a name for her. Her father proposed to call her Elizabeth—after his sister, he said—but Mrs. Caldwell objected. Elizabeth was Miss Gottley's name also, a fact which she recollected, but did not mention. That she did not like the name seemed reason enough for not choosing it; but her husband persisted, and then there was a hot dispute on the subject above the baby's cradle. The dispute ended in a compromise, the mother agreeing to have the child christened Elizabeth if she were not called so; and she would not have her called Eliza, Elsie, Elspeth, Bessie, Betsy, or Bess either. This left nothing for it but to call her Beth, and upon consideration both parents liked the diminutive, her father because it was unaccustomed, and her mother because it had no association of any kind attached to it.

For the first three months of her life Beth cried incessantly, as if bewailing her advent. Then, one day, she opened her eyes wide, and looked out into the world with interest.

CHAPTER II

IT was the sunshine really that first called her into conscious existence, the blessed heat and light; up to the moment that she recognised these with a certain acknowledgment of them, and consequently of things in general outside herself, she had been as unconscious as a white grub without legs. But that moment roused her, calling forth from her senses their first response in the thrill of warmth and well-being to which she awoke, and quickening her intellect at the same time with the stimulating effort to discover from whence her comfort came. She could remember no circumstance in connection with this earliest awakening. All she knew of it was the feeling of warmth and brightness, which she said recurred to her at odd times ever afterwards, and could be recalled at will.

Some may see in this first awakening a foreshadowing of the fact that she was born to be a child of light, and to live in it; and certainly it was always light for which she craved, the actual light of day, however; but nothing she yearned for ever came to her in the form she thought of, and thus, when she asked for sunshine it was grudgingly given, fate often forcing her into dark dwellings; but all the time that light which illumines the spirit was being bestowed upon her in limitless measure.

The next step in her awakening was to a kind of self-consciousness. She was lying on her nurse's lap out of doors, looking up at the sky, and some one was saying, "Oh, you pretty thing!" But it was long years before she connected the phrase with herself, although she smiled in response to the voice that uttered it. Then she found herself on her feet in a garden, moving very carefully for fear of falling; and everything about her was gigantic, from Jane Nettles, the nurse, at whose skirt she tugged when she wanted to attract attention, to the brown wallflower and the purple larkspur which she could not reach to pull. There was a thin hedge at the end of the garden, through which she looked out on a path across a field, and a thick hedge on her left, in which a thrush had built a nest at an immense height above her head. Jane lifted her up to look into the nest, and there was nothing in it; then Jane lifted her up again, and, oh! there was a blue egg there; and Jane

lifted her up a third time, and the egg had brown spots on it. The mystery of the egg awed her. She did not ask herself how it came to be there, but she felt a solemn wonder in the fact, and the colour caused a sensation of pleasure, a positive thrill, to run through her. This was her first recognition of beauty, and it was to the beauty of colour, not of form, that her senses awoke! Through life she had a keen joy and nice discrimination in colours, and seemed to herself to have always known their names.

But those spots on the egg. She was positive that they had come between her first and second peep, which shows how defective her faculty of observation, which became so exact under cultivation, was to begin with. Beth also betrayed other traits with regard to the spots, which she carried through life—the trick of being most positive when she was quite in the wrong, for one; and want of faith in other people, for another.

Jane said: "Did you see the spots that time, dearie?"

"Spots just comed," Beth declared.

"No, dearie, spots always there," Jane answered.

"Spots *comed*," Beth maintained.

"No, dearie. Spots always there, only you didn't see them."

"Spots comed *now*!" Beth stamped, and then, because Jane shook her head, she sat down suddenly on the gravel, and sent up a howl which brought her father out. He chucked Jane under the chin. Jane giggled, then made a sign; and there was Mrs. Caldwell looking from one to the other.

To Beth's recollection it seemed as if she had rapidly acquired the experiences of this first period. Each incident that she remembered is apparently trifling in itself, but who can say of what significance as an indication? In those first few years, had there been any there with intelligence to interpret, they probably would have found foreshadowings of all she might be, and do, and suffer; and that would have been the time to teach her. To me, therefore, these earliest impressions are more interesting than much that occurred to her in after life, and I have carefully collected them in the hope of finding some clue in them to what followed. In several instances it seems to me that the impression left by some chance

observation or incident on her baby mind, made it possible for her to do many things in after life which she certainly never would have done but for those early influences. It would be affectation, therefore, to apologise for such detail. Nothing can be trivial or insignificant that tends to throw light on the mysterious growth of our moral and intellectual being. Many a cramped soul that struggles on in after years, vainly endeavouring to rise on a broken wing, might, had the importance of such seeming trifles in its development been recognised, have won its way upward from the first, untrammelled and uninjured. It was a Jesuit, was it not, who said: "Give me the child until it is six years old; after that you can do as you like with it." That is the time to make an indelible impression of principles upon the mind. In the first period of life, character is a blossom that should be carefully touched; in the second the petals fall, and the fruit sets; it is hard and acrid then until the third period, when, if things go well, it will ripen on the bough, and be sweet and wholesome—if ill, it will drop off immediately, and rot upon the ground.

Beth was a combative child, always at war with Jane. There was a great battle fought about a big black velvet bonnet that Beth wanted to wear one day. Beth screamed and kicked and scratched and bit, and finally went out in the bonnet triumphantly, and found herself standing alone on the edge of a great green world dotted with yellow gorse. A hot, wide dusty road stretched miles away in front of her; and at an infinite distance overhead was the blue sky flecked with clouds so white and dazzling that her eyes ached when she looked at them. She had stopped a moment to cry, "Wait for me!" Jane walked on, however, taking no notice, and Beth struggled after her, whimpering, out of breath, choked with dust, scorched with heat, parched with thirst, tired to death—how she suffered! A heartless lark sang overhead, regardless of her misery: and she never afterwards heard a lark without recalling the long white road, the heat, and dust, and fatigue. She tore off the velvet bonnet, and threw it away, then began another despairing "Wait for me!" But in the midst of the cry she saw some little yellow flowers growing in the grass at the roadside, and plumped down then and there inconsequently to gather them. By that time Jane was out of sight; and at the moment Beth became aware of the fact, she also perceived an appalling expanse of bright blue sky above her, and sat, gazing upwards,

paralysed with terror. This was her first experience of loneliness, her first terrified sensation of immensity.

Then the snowdrops and crocuses were out, and the sky grew black, and she sat on the nursery floor and looked up at it in solemn wonder. Flakes of snow began to fall, a few at first, then thicker and thicker, till the air was full of them, and Jane said, "The Scotch are picking their geese," and immediately Beth saw the Scotch sitting in some vague scene, picking geese in frenzied haste, and throwing great handfuls of feathers up in the air; which was probably the first independent flight of her imagination.

It is astonishing how little consciousness of time there is in these reminiscences. The seasons are all confounded, and it is as if things had happened not in succession but abreast. There was snow on the ground when her brother Jim was with her in the wash-house, making horse-hair snares to catch birds. They made running loops of the horse-hair, and tied them on to sticks, then went out and stuck them in the ground in the garden outside the wash-house window, sprinkled crumbs of bread, and crept carefully back to watch. First came a robin with noiseless flight, and lit on the ground with its head on one side; but the children were too eager, and in their excitement they made a noise, and the robin flew away. Next came a sparrow, saw the children, saw the crumbs, and, with the habitual self-possession of his race, stretched in his head between the sticks, picked out the largest piece of bread, and carried it off in triumph. Immediately afterwards a blackbird flew down, and hopped in among the snares unconsciously. In a moment he was caught, and, with a wild shout of joy, the children rushed out to secure their prize; but when they reached the spot the blackbird had burst his bonds and escaped. Then Beth threw a chunk of wood at her brother, and cut his head open. His cries brought out the household, and Beth was well shaken—she was always being shaken at this time—and marched off promptly to papa's dressing-room, and made to sit on a little chair in the middle of the floor, where she amused herself by singing at the top of her voice—

"All around Sebastopol,
All around the ocean,
Every time a gun goes off,
Down falls a Russian."

She wondered why her father and mother were laughing when they came to release her. Before they appeared, however, brother Jim, her victim, had come to the door with his head tied up, and peeped in; and she knew that they were friends again, because he shot ripe gooseberries at her across the floor as if they had been marbles. There is a discrepancy here, seeing that snow and ripe gooseberries are not in season at the same time. It is likely, however, that she broke her brother's head more than once, and the occasions became confounded in her recollection.

When the children went to bathe off the beach, Beth would not let Jane dip her if kicking, scratching, and screaming could prevent it. There used to be terrible scenes between them, until at last one day somebody else's old Scotch nurse interfered, and persuaded Beth to go into the water with her and consent to be dipped three times. Beth went like a lamb—instead of having to be dragged in and pushed under, given no time to recover her breath between each dip, half choked with sand and salt water, and finally dragged out, exhausted by the struggle, and certainly suffering more than she had benefited by the immersion. The cold water came up about her and took her breath away as the old Scotch nurse led her in, and Beth clung to her hand and panted "Wait!" as she nerved herself for the dip. Nurse had promised to wait until Beth was ready, and it was Beth's faith in her promise that gave her courage to go bravely through the ordeal. The old Scotch nurse never deceived her as Jane had done, and so Beth learnt that there are people in the world you can depend on.

There was one painful circumstance in connection with those battles on the beach. Beth was such a tiny girl, they did not think it necessary to give her a bathing dress, and consequently she was marched into the water with nothing on; and the agony of shame she suffered is indescribable. But the worst of it was, the shame wore off. Jim teased her about it and called her "a little girl," a dreadful term of reproach in those days, when the boys were taught to consider themselves superior beings. Beth flew at him, and fought him for it, but was beaten; and then she took off her things in the nursery, and scampered up and down before them all, with nothing on, just to show how little she cared.

It is astonishing how small a part Beth's family play in these childish recollections. Her father took very little notice of the children. He was out

of health and irritable, and only tried to save himself annoyance; not to disturb him was the object of everybody's life. Probably he only appeared on the scene when Beth was naughty, and the recollection, being painful, was quickly banished. She remembered him coming downstairs when she was standing in the hall one day, when her mother was away from home. He had a letter in his hand, and asked her if she would send her love to mamma. Her heart bounded; it seemed to her such a tremendous thing to be asked; and she was dying to send her love; but such an agony of shyness came upon her, she could not utter a word. She had a little hymn-book in her hand, however, which she held out to her father. No, that would not do. He could not send the book, only her love. Didn't she love mamma? Didn't she! But not a word would come.

All through life she was afflicted with that inability to speak at critical times. Dumb always was she apt to be when her affections were concerned, except occasionally, in moments of strong excitement; and in anger, when she was driven to bay. The intensity of her feelings would probably have made her dumb in any case in moments of emotion; but doubtless the hardness of those about her at this impressionable period strengthened the defect. It is impossible to escape from the hampering influences of our infancy. Among Beth's many recollections of these days, there was not one of a caress given or received, or of any expression of tenderness; and so she never became familiar with the exquisite language of love, and was long in learning that it is not a thing to be ashamed of and concealed.

Later that day, with a mighty effort, she summoned up courage enough to go down to her father. She was determined to send the message to mamma; but when it came to the point, she was again unable to utter a word on the subject. Her mother had gone to stay with her relations in England. Beth found her father in the dining-room, and several other people were present. He was standing by the sideboard, mixing whisky-and-water, so, instead of sending her love to mamma, Beth exclaimed, confidently and pleasantly, "If you drink whisky, you'll be drunk again."

A smart slap rewarded this sally. Beth turned pale and recoiled. It was her first taste of human injustice. To drink and to be drunk was to her merely the natural sequence of cause and effect, and she could not conceive why

she should be slapped and turned out of the room so promptly for uttering such a simple truth.

Beth was present at many discussions between her father and mother, and took much interest in them, all the more perhaps, because most of what was said was a mystery to her. She wondered why any mention of the "moon-faced Bessie" disturbed her mother's countenance. Jane Nettles, too—when her mother was out, her father used to come and talk to Jane, and they laughed a good deal. He admired Jane's white teeth, and the children used to make Jane show them her teeth after that.

"Papa says Jane's got nice white teeth," Beth said to her mother one day, and she never forgot the glance which Mrs. Caldwell threw at her husband. His eyes fell before it.

"What! even the servants, Henry!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, and then she left the room. Beth learned what it all meant in after years, the career of one of her brothers furnishing the clue. Like father, like son.

It was after this that Mrs. Caldwell went to visit her relations in England, accompanied by two of the children. It was in the summer, and Jane took Beth to the Castle Hill that morning to see the steamer, with her mother on board, go by. The sea was iridescent, like molten silver, the sky was high and cloudless, and where sea and sky met and mingled on the horizon it was impossible to determine. Numbers of steamers passed far out. They looked quite small, and Beth did not think there was room in any of them for her mother and brother and sister. They did not, therefore, interest her much, nor did the policeman who came and talked to Jane. But the Castle Hill, and the little winding path up which she had come, the green of the grass, the brambles, the ferns, the ruined masonry against which she leant, the union of sea and sky and shore, the light, the colour, absorbed her, and drew her out of herself. Her soul expanded, it spread its wings, it stretched out spiritual arms to meet and clasp the beloved nature of which it felt itself to be a part. It was her earliest recognition of their kinship, a glimpse of greatness, a moment of ecstasy never to be forgotten, the first stirring in herself of the creative faculty, for in her joy she burst out into a little song—

"Far on the borders of the Arcane."

It was as if the pleasure played upon her, using her as a passive instrument by which it attained to audible expression. For how should a child know a word like Arcane? It came to her as things do which we have known and forgotten—the whole song did in fact; but she held it as a possession sacred to herself, and never recorded it, or told more than that one line, although it stayed with her, lingered on her lips, and in her heart, for the rest of her life. It was a great moment for Beth, the moment when her further faculty first awoke. On looking back to it in after years, she fancied she found in it confirmation of an opinion which she afterwards formed. Genius to her was yet only another word for soul. She could not believe that we all have souls, or that they are at all equally developed even in those who have obtained them. She was a child under six at this time, Jane Nettles was a woman between twenty and thirty, and the policeman—she could not say what age he was; but she was the only one of the three that throbbed responsive to the beauty of the wonderful scene before them, or felt her being flooded with the glory of the hour.

Meanwhile, what her parents would have called her education had begun. She went with Mildred, her elder sister, to a day school. They used to run down the street together without a nurse, and the sense of freedom was delicious to Beth. They had to pass the market where the great mealy specimen potatoes were displayed, and Mary Lynch's shop—she was the vegetable woman, who used to talk to Mrs. Caldwell about the children when they went there, and one or the other always called them "poor little bodies," upon which they commented afterwards among themselves. Mary Lynch was a large red-faced woman, and when the children wanted to describe a stout person they always said, "As fat as Mary Lynch." One house which Beth had to pass on her way to school made a strong impression on her imagination. It was a gloomy abode with a broad doorstep and deep portico, broken windows, and a mud-splashed door, from beneath which she always expected to see a slender stream of blood slowly trickling. For a man called Macgregor had murdered his wife there—beaten her brains out with a poker. Beth never heard the name Macgregor in after life without a shiver of dislike. Much of her time at school was spent in solitary confinement for breaches of the peace. With a face as impassive as

a monkey's she would do the most mischievous things, and was always experimenting in naughty tricks, as on one occasion when Miss Deeble left the schoolroom for a minute, but had to come hurrying back, recalled by wild shrieks; and found that Beth had managed in that minute to tip up a form with four children on it, throw their books out of the window, and sprinkle ink all over the floor. Miss Deeble marched her downstairs to an empty kitchen, and left her sitting on a stool in the middle of it with an A B C in her hand. But Beth took no interest in the alphabet in those days, and hunted black-beetles with the bellows instead of learning it. The hearthstone was the place of execution. When she found a beetle, she would blow him along to it with the bellows, and there despatch him. She had no horror of any creature in her childhood, but as she matured, her whole temperament changed in this respect, and when she met a beetle on the stairs she would turn and fly rather than pass it, and she would feel nauseated, and shiver with disgust for hours after if she thought of it. She knew the exact moment that this horror came upon her; it happened when she was ten years old. She found a beetle one day lying on its back, and thinking it was dead, she took it up, and was swinging it by its antennæ when the creature suddenly wriggled itself round, and twined its prickly legs about her finger, giving her a start from which she never recovered.

Beth probably got as far as A B ab, while she was at Miss Deeble's; but if she were backward with her book, her other faculties began to be acute. It was down in that empty kitchen that she first felt the enchantment of music. Some one suddenly played the piano overhead and Beth listened spell-bound. Again and again the player played, and always the same thing, practising it. Beth knew every note. Long afterwards she was trying some waltzes of Chopin's, and came upon one with which she was quite familiar. She knew that she had heard it all, over and over again, but could not think when or where. Presently, however, as she played it, she perceived a smell of black-beetles, and instantly she was back in that disused kitchen of Miss Deeble's, listening to the practising overhead.

All Beth's senses were acute, and from the first her memory helped itself by the involuntary association of incongruous ideas. Many people's recollections are stimulated by the sense of smell, but it is a rarer thing for the sense of taste to be associated with the past in the same way, as it was in Beth's case. There were many circumstances which were recalled by the

taste of the food she had been eating at the time they occurred. The children often dined in the garden in those early days, and once a piece of apple-dumpling Beth was eating slid off her plate on to the gravelled walk. Some one picked it up, and put it on her plate again, all covered with stones and grit, and the sight of hot apple-dumpling made her think of gravel ever afterwards, and filled her with disgust; so that she could not eat it. She had a great aversion to bread and butter too for a long time, but that she got over. It would have been too great an inconvenience to have a child dislike its staple food, and in all probability she was forced to conquer her aversion, and afterwards she grew to like bread and butter; but still, if by any chance the circumstances which caused her dislike to it recurred to her when she was eating a piece, she was obliged to stop. The incident which set up the association happened one evening when her father and mother were out. Beth was alone in the dining-room eating bread and butter, and Towie, the cat, came into the room with a mouse in her mouth. The mouse was alive, and Towie let it run a little way, and then pounced down upon it, then gave it a pat to make it run again. Beth, lying on her stomach on the floor, watching these proceedings, naturally also became a cat with a mouse. At last Towie began to eat her mouse, beginning with its head, which it crushed. Beth, eating her bread and butter in imitation, saw the white brains, but felt no disgust at the moment. The next time she had bread and butter, however, she thought of the mouse's brains and felt sick; and always afterwards the same association of ideas was liable to recur to her with the same result.

But even the description of anything horrifying affected her in this way. One day when she was growing up her mother told her at dinner that she had been on the pier that morning and had seen the body of a man, all discoloured and swollen from being in the water a long time, towed into the harbour by a fishing boat. Beth listened and asked questions, as she always did on these occasions, with the deepest interest. She was taking soup strongly flavoured with catsup at the moment, and the story in no way interfered with her appetite; but the next time she tried catsup, and ever afterwards, she perceived that swollen, discoloured corpse, and immediately felt nauseated. It is curious that all these associations of ideas are disagreeable. She had not a single pleasant one in connection with food.

CHAPTER III

ALL of Beth that was not eyes at this time was ears, and her brain was as busy as a squirrel in the autumn, storing observations and registering impressions. It does not do to trust to a child's not understanding. It may not understand at the moment, but it will remember all the same—all the more, perhaps, because it does not understand; and its curiosity will help it to solve the problem. Beth did humorous things at this time, but she had no sense of humour; she was merely experimenting. Her big eyes looked out of an impassive face solemnly; no one suspected the phenomenal receptivity which that stolid mask concealed, and, because the alphabet did not interest her, they formed a poor opinion of her intellect. The truth was that she had no use for letters or figures. The books of nature and of life were spread out before her, and she was conning their contents to more purpose than any one else could have interpreted them to her in those days. And as to arithmetic, as soon as her father began to allow her a penny a week for pocket-money, she discovered that there were two half-pennies in it, which was all she required to know. She also mastered the system of debit and credit, for, when she found herself in receipt of a regular income, and had conquered the first awe of entering a shop and asking for things, she ran into debt. She received the penny on Saturday, and promptly spent it in sweets, but by Monday she wanted more, and the craving was so imperative, that when Miss Deeble sent her down to the empty kitchen in the afternoon, she could not blow black-beetles with any enthusiasm, and began to look about for something else to interest her. It being summer, the window was open, but it was rather out of her reach. She managed, however, with the help of her stool, to climb on to the sill, and there, in front of her, was the sea, and down below was the street—a goodish drop below if she had stopped to think of it; but Beth dropped first and thought afterwards, only realising the height when she had come down plump, and looked up again to see what had happened to her, surprised at the thud which had jarred her stomach and made her feet sting. She picked herself up at once, however, and limped away, not heeding the hurt much, so delightful was it to be out alone without her hat. By the time she got to

Mary Lynch's she was Jane Nettles going on an errand, an assumption which enabled her to enter the shop at her ease.

"Good-day," she began. "Give me a ha'porth of pear-drops, and a ha'porth of raspberry-drops, Mary Lynch, please. I'll pay you on Saturday."

"What are you doing out alone without your hat?" Mary Lynch rejoined, beaming upon her. "I'm afraid you're a naughty little body."

"No, I'm not," Beth answered. "It's my own money." Mary Lynch laughed, and helped her liberally, adding some cherries to the sweets; and, to Beth's credit be it stated, the money was duly paid, and without regret, she being her mother at the moment, looking much relieved to be able to settle the debt, which shows that, even by this time, Beth had somehow become aware of money-troubles, and also that she learned to read a countenance long before she learned to read a book.

She straggled home with the sweets in her hand, but did not eat them, for now she was a lady going to give a party, and must await the arrival of her guests. She did not go in by the front door for obvious reasons, but up the entry down which the open wooden gutter-spout ran, at a convenient height, from the house into the street. The wash-house was covered with delicious white roses, which scented the summer afternoon. Beth concealed her sweets in the rose-tree, and then leant against the wall and buried her nose in one of the flowers, loving it. The maids were in the wash-house; she heard them talking; it was all about what he said and she said. Presently a torrent of dirty water came pouring down the spout, mingling its disagreeable soapy smell with that of the flowers. Beth plucked some petals from the rose she was smelling, set them on the soapy water, and ran down the passage beside them, until they disappeared in the drain in the street. This delight over, she wandered into the garden. She was always on excellent terms with all animals, and was treated by them with singular confidence. Towie, the cat, had been missing for some time, but now, to Beth's great joy, she suddenly appeared from Beth could not tell where, purring loudly, and rubbing herself against Beth's bare legs. The sun poured down upon them, and the sensation of the cat's warm fur above her socks was delicious. Beth tried to lift her up in her arms, but she wriggled herself out of them, and began to run backwards and forwards between her and a

gap in the hedge, until Beth understood that she wished her to follow her through it into the next garden. Beth did so, and the cat led her to a little warm nest where, to Beth's wild delight, she showed her a tiny black kitten. Beth picked it up, and carried it, followed by the cat, into the house in a state of breathless excitement, shrieking out the news as she ran. Beth was immediately seized upon. What was she doing at home when she ought to have been at school? and without her hat, too! Beth had no explanation to offer, and was hustled off to the nursery, and there shut up for the rest of the day. She stood in the window most of the time, a captive princess in the witch's palace, waiting for the fairy-prince to release her, and catching flies.

The sky became overcast, and a big gun was fired. Beth's father had something to do with the firing of big guns, and she connected this with the gathering gloom, stories of God striking wicked people down with thunder and lightning for their sins, and her own naughtiness, and felt considerably awed. Presently a little boy was carried down the street on a bed. His face looked yellow against the sheets. He was lying flat on his back, and had a little black cap on, which was right out of doors, but wrong in bed. He smiled up at Beth as they carried him under the window, and she stretched out her arms to him with infinite pity. She knew he was going to die. They all died, that family, or had something dreadful happen to them. Jane Nettles said there was a curse upon them, and Beth never thought of them without a shudder. That boy's sisters both died, and one had something dreadful happen to her, for they dug her up again, and when they opened the coffin the corpse was all in a jelly, and every colour of the rainbow, according to Jane Nettles. Beth believed she had been present upon the occasion, in a grass-grown graveyard, by the wall of an old church, beneath which steps led down into a vault. The stones of the steps were mossy, and the sun was shining. There was a little group of people standing round, with pale, set, solemn faces, and presently something was brought up, and they all pressed forward to look at it. Beth could not see what it was for the grown-up people, and never knew whether or not the whole picture had been conjured up by her imagination; but as there was always a foundation of fact in the impressions of this period of her life, it is not improbable that she really was present at the exhumation, with the curious and indefatigable Jane Nettles.

Opposite the nursery window, on the other side of the road, was the butcher's shop, in front of which the butcher made his shambles. Late in the evening he brought out a board and set it on trestles, then he brought a sheep, lifted it up by its legs and put it on its back on the board, tied its feet, and cut its throat. Beth watched the operation with grave interest, but no other feeling. She had been accustomed to see it all her life.

Presently Beth's father and mother went out together, and then Beth stole downstairs, and out to the wash-house to find the sweets in the white rose-tree. Mildred and Jim were doing their lessons in the dining-room, and she burst in upon them with the sweets; but Mildred was cross, and said:

"Don't make such a noise, Beth, my head aches."

The next day was Sunday. Beth knew it by the big black bonnet which played such a large part in her childish recollections. She had a kind of sensation of having seen herself in it, bobbing along to church, a sort of Kate Greenaway child, with a head out of all proportion to the rest of her body, and feeling singularly satisfied—a feeling, however, which was less a recollection than an experience continually renewed, for a nice gown or bonnet was always a pleasure to her.

In church she sat in a big square pew on one side of the aisle, and on the other side was another pew exactly like it, in which sat a young lady whom Beth believed to be Miss Augusta Noble in the *Fairchild Family*. Augusta Noble was very vain, and got burnt to death for standing on tiptoe before the fire to look at herself in a new frock in the mirror on the mantelpiece. Beth thought it a suitable end for her, and did not pity her at all—perhaps because she went on coming to church regularly all the same.

After the service they climbed the Castle Hill; and there was the grey of stonework against a bright blue sky, and green of grass and trees against the grey, and mountainous clouds of dazzling white hung over a molten sea; and because of the beauty of it all, Beth burst into a passion of tears.

"What is the matter with that child?" her father exclaimed impatiently. "It's very odd other people can bring up their children properly, Caroline, but you never seem to be able to manage yours."

"What's the matter with you, you tiresome child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, shaking Beth by the arm. Beth only sobbed the more. "Look," said her mother, pointing to a small lake left by the sea on the shore when the tide went out, where the children used to wade knee-deep, or bathe when it was too rough for them to go into the sea; "look, there's the pond, that bright round thing over there. And look below, near the Castle—that great green mound is the giant's grave. When the giant died they buried him there, and he was so big, he reached all that length when they laid him in the ground."

"And when he stood up where did he reach to?" said Beth, interested in a moment.

"Oh, when he sat here, I should think he could make a footstool of his own grave, and when he stood up he could look over the Castle."

Beth, with big dilated eyes and wet cheeks, saw him do both, and was oppressed to tears no more that day by delight and wonder of the beautiful; but she was always liable to these paroxysms, the outcome of an intensity of pleasure which was positive pain. So, from the first, she was keenly susceptible to outdoor influences, and it was now that her memory was stored with impressions which were afterwards of inestimable value to her, for she never lived amongst the same kind of scenery again.

The children had the run of some gentleman's grounds, which they called The Walks. There were banks of flowers, and sidewalks where the London pride grew, and water, and great trees with hollows in them where the water lodged. Beth called these fairy wells, and put her fingers in to see how deep they were, and there were dead leaves in them; and there, on a memorable occasion, she found her first skeleton leaf, and told Jane Nettles she really didn't know before that there were such things. Once there was a wasp's nest hanging from a branch, and they met a young man coming away from it, holding a handkerchief to his face. He stopped to tell Jane Nettles how he had been stung, and the children wandered off unheeded to look at the nest. It was all grey and gossamer, like cobwebs laid in layers. Beth was an Indian scout inspecting it from behind a neighbouring tree; and then she shelled it with sticks, but did not wait to see it surrender.

They picked up horse-chestnuts from under the trees, in the season, and hammered the green rind off with stones for the joy of seeing the beautiful shining, slippery, dark brown, or piebald, polished fruit within; and also, when there were wet leaves on the ground, they gathered walnuts from out of the long tangled grass, and stained their fingers picking off the covering, which was mealy-green when it burst, and smelt nice; but the nut itself, when they came to it, was always surprisingly small. There were horrid mahogany-coloured pieces of liver put about the walks on sticks sometimes. Jane Nettles said they were to poison the dogs because they came in and destroyed the flowers. Beth wondered how it was people could eat liver if it poisoned dogs, and was careful afterwards not to touch it herself. Most children would have worried the reason out of their nurse, but Jane Nettles was not amiable, and Beth could never bring herself to ask a question of any one who was likely either to snub her for asking, or to jeer at her for not knowing. There are unsympathetic people who have a way of making children feel ashamed of their ignorance, and rather than be laughed at, a sensitive child will pretend to know. Beth was extraordinarily sensitive in this respect, and so it happened that, in later life, she sometimes found herself in ignorance of things which less remarkable people had learnt in their infancy for the asking.

These were certainly days of delight to Beth, but the charm of them was due less to people than to things—to some sight or scent of nature, the smell of new-mown hay from a waggon they had stood aside to let pass in a narrow lane, a glimpse of a high bank on the other side of the road—a high grassy bank, covered and crowned with trees, chiefly chestnuts, on which the sun shone; hawthorn hedgerows from which they used to pick the green buds children call bread-and-butter, and eat them; and one privet-hedge in their own garden, an impenetrable hedge, on the other side of which, as Beth imagined, all kinds of wonderful things took place. The flowers of those early days were crocuses, snowdrops, white roses, a little yellow flower they called ladies' fingers, sea-pinks, and London pride—particularly London pride. In the walks Jane Nettles used to teach her the wonderful rhyme of—

"London Bridge is broken down,
Grand, said the little Dee,
London Bridge is broken down,

Fair-Lade-ee."

And so the rhyme, London pride amongst the rock-work, the ornamental water, a rustic bridge, shining laurel leaves, mahogany-coloured liver, warmth, light, and sweet airs all became mingled in one gracious memory.

People, however, as has been already shown, also came into her consciousness, but with less certainty of pleasing, wherefore she remembered them less, for it was always her habit to banish a disagreeable thought if she could. One day she went into the garden with her spade and an old tin biscuit-box. She put the box on the ground beside her, with the lid off, and began to dig. By-and-by the kitten came crooning and sidling up to her, and hopped into the box. Beth instantly put on the lid, and the kitten was a corpse which must be buried. She hurriedly dug its grave, put in the box, and covered it up with earth. Just as she had finished, a gruff voice exclaimed: "What are ye doing there, ye little divil?" and there was old Krangle the gardener, looking at her over the hedge. "Dig it up again directly," he said, and Beth, much startled, dug it up quicker than she had buried it. The kitten had been but loosely covered, and was not much the worse, but had got some earth in its eye, which was very sore afterwards. People wondered what had hurt it, and Beth looked from one to the other and listened with grave attention to their various suppositions on the subject. She said nothing, however, and Krangle also held his peace, which led to a very good understanding between them. Krangle had a cancer on his lip, and Beth was forbidden to kiss him for fear of catching it. He had a garden of his own too, and a pig, and little boiled potatoes in his cottage. The doctor's brother died of cancer, and Beth supposed he had been naughty and kissed old Krangle, though she wondered he cared to, as Krangle had a very prickly chin. The doctor often came to see papa. He used to talk about the Bible, and then the children were sent out of the room. Once Beth hid under the table to hear what he said. It was all about God, whom it appeared that he did not like. He had a knob at the end of his nose, and Beth laughed at it, in punishment of which, as she used to believe, her own nose developed a little knob at the end. Her mind was very much exercised about the doctor and his household. He and his brother and sister used to live together, but now he lived alone, and on a bed in one of the rooms, according to Jane Nettles, there were furs, and lovely silks, satins, and laces, all being eaten by moths and destroyed because there was no one to

look after them. It seemed such a pity, but whose were they? Where was the lady?

Bridget used to come up to the nursery when the children were in bed, to talk to Jane Nettles, and look out of the window. Those gossips in the nursery were a great source of disturbance to Beth when she ought to have been composing herself to sleep. She recollected nothing of the conversations more corrupting than that ghastly account of how the girl was exhumed, so it is likely that the servants exercised some discretion when they dropped their voices to a whisper, as they often did; but these whispered colloquies made her restless and cross, and brought down upon her a smart order to go to sleep, to which she used to answer defiantly, "I will if you'll ask me a riddle." One of the riddles was: "Between two sticks, between two stones, between two old men's shin-bones. What's that?" The answer had something to do with a graveyard, but Beth could not remember what.

She used to suffer a small martyrdom in her little crib on those evenings from what she called "snuff up her nose," a hot, dry, burning sensation which must have been caused by a stuffy room, and the feverish state she tossed herself into when she was kept awake after her regular hour for sleep. Sometimes she sat up in bed suddenly, and cried aloud. Then Jane Nettles would push her down again on her pillow roughly, and threaten to call mamma if she wasn't good directly. Occasionally mamma heard her, and came up of her own accord, and shook her by the shoulder, and scolded her. Then Beth would lie still sobbing silently, and wretched as only a lonely, uncomprehended, and uncomplaining child can be. No one had the faintest conception of what she suffered. Her naughtinesses were remembered against her, but her latent tenderness was never suspected. Once the old Doctor said: "That's a peculiarly sensitive, high-strung, nervous child; you must be gentle with her," and both parents had stared at him. They were matter-of-fact creatures themselves, comparatively speaking, with a notion that such nonsense as nervousness should be shaken out of a child.

At dinner, one day, Beth saw little creatures crawling in a piece of cheese she had on her plate, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Those are only mites, you silly child," her father said, and then to her horror, he took up the piece, and ate it. "Do look at that child, Caroline!" he exclaimed, "she's turned quite pale."

Beth puzzled her head for long afterwards to know what it meant to turn pale.

Little seeds of superstition were sown in her mind at this time, and afterwards flourished. She found a wedding-ring in her first piece of Christmas cake, and was told she would be the first of the party to marry, which made her feel very important.

Being so sensitive herself, she was morbidly careful of the feelings of others, and committed sins of insincerity without compunction in her efforts to spare them. She and Mildred were waiting ready dressed one day to go and pay a call with mamma. Beth had her big bonnet on, and was happy; and Mildred also was in a high state of delight. She said Beth's breath smelt of strawberries, and wanted to know what her own smelt of.

"Raspberries," Beth answered instantly. It was not true, but Beth felt that something of the kind was expected of her, and so responded sympathetically. When they got to the house, they were shown into an immense room, and wandered about it. Beth upset some cushions, and had awful qualms, expecting every moment to be pounced upon, and shaken; but she forgot her fright on approaching her hostess, and discovering to her great surprise that she was busy doing black monkeys on a grey ground in woolwork. She was astonished to find that it was possible to do such wonderful work, and she wanted to be taught immediately; but her mother made her ashamed of herself for supposing that *she* could do it, silly little body. They stayed dinner, and Beth cried with rage because the servant poured white sauce over her fish, and without asking her too. The fish was an island, and Beth was the hungry sea, devouring it bit by bit. Of course if you put white sauce over it, you converted it into a table with a white cloth on, or something of that kind, which you could not eat, so the fish was spoilt. She got into a difficulty, too, about Miss Deeble's drawing-room, which was upstairs, overlooking the bay, and you could only see the water from the window, so there were water-colours on the wall. Her mother

smilingly tried to explain, but Beth stamped, and stuck to her point; the water accounted for the water-colours.

On the way home, Beth found a new interest in life. The mill had been burnt down, and they went to see the smouldering embers, and Beth smelt fire for the first time. The miller's family had been burnt out, and were sheltering in a shed. One little boy had his fingers all crumpled up from the fire. Beth's benevolence awoke. She was all sympathetic excitement, and wanted to do something for somebody. The miller's wife was lying on a mattress on the floor. She had a little baby, a new one, a pudgy red-looking thing. Mrs. Caldwell fed the other children with bread-and-milk, and Beth offered to teach them their letters.

Mrs. Caldwell laughed at her: "*You* teach them their letters!" she exclaimed. "You had better learn your own properly." And Mildred also jeered. Beth subsided, crimson with shame at being thus lowered in everybody's estimation. She was deficient in self-esteem, and required to be encouraged. Praise merely gave her confidence; but her mother never would praise her. She brought all her children up on the same plan, regardless of their different dispositions. It made Mildred vain to praise her, and therefore Beth must not be praised; and so her mother checked her mental growth again and again instead of helping her to develop it. "It's no use your trying to do that, Beth, you can't," she would say, when Beth would have done it easily, if only she had been assured that she could.

Beth had a strange dream that night after the fire, which made a lasting impression upon her. Dorman's Isle was a green expanse, flat as a table, and covered with the short grass that grows by the sea. At high tide it was surrounded by water, but when the tide was low, it rested on great grey, rugged rocks, as the lid of a box rests upon its sides. Between the grey of the rocks and the green of the grass there was a fringe of sea-pinks. That night she dreamt that she was under Dorman's Isle, and it was a great bare cave, not very high, and lighted by torches which people held in their hands. There were a number of people, and they were all members of her own family, ancestors in the dresses of their day, distant relations—numbers of strange people whom she had never heard of; as well as her own father and mother, brothers and sisters. She knew she was under Dorman's Isle, but she knew also that it was the dark space beneath the stage of a theatre.

When she entered, the rest of the family were already assembled; but they none of them spoke to each other, and the doors kept opening and shutting, and the people seemed to melt away, until at last only three or four remained, and they were just going. She saw the shine on the paint of the door-posts, and the smoke of the torches, as they let themselves out. Then they had all gone, and left her alone in a cave full of smoke. Vainly she struggled to follow them, the doors were fast, the smoke was smothering her, and in the agony of a last effort to escape she awoke.

In after days, when Beth began to think, she used to wonder how it was she knew those people were her ancestors, and that the place was like any part of a theatre. She had never heard either of ancestors or theatres at that time. Was it recollection? Or is there some more perfect power to know than the intellect—a power lying latent in the whole race, which will eventually come into possession of it; but with which, at present, only some few rare beings are perfectly endowed. Beth had the sensation of having been nearer to something in her infancy than she ever was again—nearer to knowing what it is the trees whisper—what the murmur means, the all-pervading murmur which sounds incessantly when everything is hushed, as at night; nearer to the "arcane" of that evening on the Castle Hill when she first felt her kinship with nature, and burst into song. It may have been hereditary memory, a knowledge of things transmitted to her by her ancestors along with their features, virtues, and vices; but, at any rate, she herself was sure that she possessed a power of some kind in her infancy which gradually lapsed as her intellectual faculties developed. She was conscious that the senses had come between her and some mysterious joy which was not of the senses, but of the spirit. There lingered what seemed to be the recollection of a condition anterior to this, a condition of which no tongue can tell, which is not to be put into words, or made evident to those who have no recollection; but which some will comprehend by the mere allusion to it. All her life long Beth preserved a half-consciousness of this something—something which eluded her—something from which she gradually drifted further away as she grew older—some sort of vision which opened up fresh tracts to her; but whether of country, or whether of thought, she could not say. Only, when it came to her, all was immeasurable about her; and she was above—above in a great calm through which she moved

without any sort of effort that is known to us; she just thought it, and was there; while humanity dwindled away into insignificance below.

One other strange vision she had which she never forgot. With her intellect, she believed it to have been a dream, but her further faculty always insisted that it was a recollection. She was with a large company in an indescribable, hollow space, bare of all furnishings because none were required; and into this space there came a great commotion, bright light and smoke, without heat or sense of suffocation. Then she was alone, making for an aperture; struggling and striving with pain of spirit to gain it; and when she had found it, she shot through, and awoke in the world. She awoke with a terrible sense of desolation upon her, and with the consciousness of having traversed infinite space at infinite speed in an interval of time which her mortal mind could not measure.

All through life, when she was in possession of her further faculty, and perceived by that means—which was only at fitful intervals, doubtless because of unfavourable circumstances and surroundings—she was calm, strong, and confident. She looked upon life as from a height, viewing it both in detail and as a whole. But when she had only her intellect to rely upon, all was uncertain, and she became weak, vacillating, and dependent. So that she appeared to be a singular mixture of weakness and strength, courage and cowardice, faith and distrust; and just what she would do depended very much on what was expected of her, or what influence she was under, and also on some sudden impulse which no one, herself included, could have anticipated.

CHAPTER IV

UP to this time, Beth's reminiscences jerk along from incident to incident, but now there come the order and sequence of an eventful period, perfectly recollected. The date is fixed by a change of residence. Her father, who was a commander in the coastguard, was transferred on promotion from the north of Ireland to another appointment in the wild west, and Beth was just entering upon her seventh year when they moved. Captain Caldwell went on in advance to take up his appointment, and Jim accompanied him; Mildred, Beth, and Bernadine, the youngest, who had arrived two years after Beth, being left to follow with their mother. The elder children had been sent to England to be educated. In their father's absence Mildred and Bernadine were transferred to their mother's room, Jane Nettles and Bridget, the sulky, had disappeared, and Kitty slept in the nursery with Beth. Beth had grown too long for her crib, but still had to sleep in it, and her legs were cramped at night and often ached because she could not stretch them out, and the pain kept her awake.

"Mamma, my legs do ache in bed," she said one day.

"Beth, you really *are* a whiny child, you always have a grievance," her mother complained.

"But, mamma, they *do* ache."

"Well, it's only growing pains," Mrs. Caldwell replied with a satisfied air, as if to name the trouble were to ease it. And so Beth's legs ached on unrelieved, and, when they kept her awake, Kitty became the object of her contemplation. The sides of the crib were like the seat of a cane-bottomed chair, and Beth had enlarged one of the holes by fidgeting at it with her fingers. This was her look-out station. A night-light had been conceded to her nervousness at the instance of Dr. Gottley, when it became a regular thing for her to wake in the dark out of one of her vivid dreams, and shriek because she could not see where she was. The usual beating and shaking had been tried to cure her of her nonsense, but this sensible treatment only seemed to make her worse, she was such a tiresome child, till at last, when

Dr. Gottley threatened serious consequences, the light was allowed, a dim little float that burned on an inch of oil in a glass of water, and made Kitty look so funny when she came up to bed. Kitty began to undress, and at the same time to mutter her prayers, as soon as she got into the room; and sometimes she would go down on her knees and beat her breast, and sigh and groan to the Blessed Virgin, beseeching her to help her. Beth thought at first she was in great distress, and pitied her, but after a time she believed that Kitty was enjoying herself, perhaps because she also had begun to enjoy these exercises. Beth had been taught to say her Protestant prayers, but not made to feel that she was addressing them to any particular personality that appealed to her imagination, as Kitty's Blessed Lady did.

"Kitty, Kitty," she cried one night, sitting up in her crib, with a great dry sob. "Tell *me* how to do it. I want to speak to her too."

Kitty, who was on her knees on the floor, with her rosary clasped in her hands, her arms and shoulders bare, and her dark hair hanging down her back, looked up, considerably startled: "Holy Mother! how you frightened me!" she exclaimed. "Go to sleep."

"But I *want* to speak to her," Beth persisted.

"Arrah, be good now, Miss Beth," Kitty coaxed, still on her knees.

"I'll be good if you'll tell me what to say," Beth bargained.

Kitty rose from her knees, went to the side of the crib, and looked down at the child.

"What do ye want to say to her at all?" she asked.

"I don't know," Beth answered. "I just want to speak to her. I just want to say, 'Holy Mother, come close, I love you. Stay by me all night long, and when the daylight comes don't forget me.' How would you say that, Kitty?"

"Bless your purty eyes, darlint!" said Kitty, "just say it that way every time. It couldn't be better said, not by the praste himself. An' if the Blessed Mother ever hears anything from this world," she added in an undertone, "she'll hear that. But turn over now, an' go to sleep, honey. See! I'll stand here till ye do, and sing to you!"

Beth turned over on her left side with her face to the wall, and settled herself to sleep contentedly, while Kitty stood beside her, patting her shoulder gently, and crooning in a low sweet voice—

"Look down, O Mother Mary,
From thy bright throne above;
Send down upon thy children
One holy glance of love!
And if a heart so tender
With pity flows not o'er,
Then turn, O Mother Mary,
And smile on me no more."

As Beth listened her little heart expanded, and presently the Blessed Virgin stood beside her bed, a heavenly vision, like Kitty, with dark hair growing low on her forehead and hanging down her back, blue eyes, and an earnest, guileless face. Beth's little mouth, drooping with dissatisfaction ordinarily, curled up at the corners, and so, thoroughly tranquillised, she fell happily asleep, with a smile on her lips.

Kitty bent low to look at her, and shook her head several times. "Coaxin's better nor bating you, anyway," she muttered. "But what are they going to do wid ye at all?" She stood up, and raised her clasped hands. "Holy Mother, it 'ud be well maybe if ye'd take her to yourself—just now—God forgive me for saying it."

Next morning Mrs. Caldwell was sitting at breakfast with Beth and Mildred. Every moment she glanced at the window, and at last the postman passed. She listened, but there was no knock, and her heart sank.

"Beth, will you stop drumming with your spoon?" she exclaimed irritably. As she spoke, however, Kitty came in with the expected letter in her hand, and Mrs. Caldwell's countenance cleared: "I thought the postman had passed," she exclaimed.

"No, m'em," Kitty rejoined. "I was standin' at the door, an' he gave me the letter."

Mrs. Caldwell had opened it by this time, but it was very short. "How often am I to tell you not to stand at the door, letting in the cold air, Kitty?" she snapped.

"And how'd I sweep the steps, m'em, if you please, when I'm not to stand at the door?"

But Mrs. Caldwell was reading the letter, and again her countenance cleared. "Papa wants us to go to him as soon as ever we can get ready!" was her joyful exclamation. "And, oh, they've had such snow! See, Mildred, here's a sketch of the chapel nearly buried."

"Oh, let me see, too," Beth cried, running round the table to look over Mildred's shoulder.

"Did papa draw that? How *wonderful!*"

"Beth, don't lean on me so," Mildred said crossly, shaking her off.

The sketch, which was done in ink on half a sheet of paper, showed a little chapel with great billows of snow rolling along the sides and up to the roof. After breakfast, Mildred sat down and began to copy it in pencil, to Beth's intense surprise. The possibility of copying it herself would never have occurred to her, but when she saw Mildred doing it of course she must try too. She could make nothing of it, however, till Mildred showed her how to place each stroke, and then she was very soon weary of the effort, and gave it up, yawning. Drawing was not to be one of her accomplishments.

Kitty was to accompany them to the west.

When the day of departure arrived, a great coach and pair came to the door, and the luggage was piled up on it. Beth, with her mouth set, and her eyes twice their normal size from excitement, was everywhere, watching everybody, afraid to miss anything that happened. Her mother's movements were a source of special interest to her. At the last moment Mrs. Caldwell slipped away alone to take leave of the place which had been the first home of her married life. She was a young girl when she came to it, the daughter of a country gentleman, accustomed to luxury, but right ready to enjoy poverty with the man of her heart; and poverty enough she had had to endure, and sickness and sorrow too—troubles inevitable—besides some of

those other troubles, which are the harder to bear because they are not inevitable. But still, she had had her compensations, and it was of these she thought as she took her last leave of the little place. She went to the end of the garden first, closely followed by Beth, and looked through the thin hedge out across the field. She seemed to be seeing things which were farther away than Beth's eyes could reach. Then she went to an old garden seat, touched it tenderly, and stood looking down at it for some seconds. Many a summer evening she had sat there at work while her husband read to her. It was early spring, and the snowdrops and crocuses were out. She gathered a little bunch of them. When she had made the tour of the garden, she returned to the house, and went into every room, Beth following her faithfully, at a safe distance. In the nursery she stood some little time looking round at the bare walls, and seeming to listen expectantly. No doubt she heard ghostly echoes of the patter of children's feet, the ring of children's voices. As she turned to go she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. In her own room she lingered still longer, going from one piece of furniture to another, and laying her hand on each. It was handsome furniture, such as a lady should have about her, and every piece represented a longer or shorter period of self-denial, both on her own part and on her husband's, and a proportionately keen joy in the acquisition of it. She remembered so well when the wardrobe came home, and the dressing-table too, and the mahogany drawers. The furniture was to follow to the new home, and each piece would still have its own history, but, once it was moved from its accustomed place, new associations would have to be formed, and that was what she dreaded. She could picture the old home deserted, and herself yearning for it, and for the old days; but she could not imagine a new home or a new chapter of life with any great interest or pleasure in it, anything, in fact, but anxiety.

When at last she left the house, she was quite overcome to find that a little crowd of friends of every degree had collected to wish her good speed. She went from one to the other, shaking hands, and answering their words in kindly wise. Mary Lynch gave Beth a currant-cake, and lifted her into the coach, though she could quite well have got in by herself. Then they were off, and Mrs. Caldwell stood at the door, wiping her eyes, and gazing at the little house till they turned the corner of the street, and lost sight of it for ever.

The tide was out, Dorman's green Isle rested on its grey rocks, the pond shone like a mirror on the shore, and the young grass was springing on the giant's grave; but the branches were still bare and brown on the Castle Hill, and the old grey castle stood out whitened by contrast with a background of dark and lowering sky. Beth's highly-strung nerves, already overstrained by excitement, broke down completely under the oppression of those heavy clouds, and she became convulsed with sobs. Kitty took her on her knee, but tried in vain to soothe her before the currant-cake and the motion of the coach had made her deadly sick, after which she dozed off from sheer exhaustion.

The rest of the journey was a nightmare of nausea to her. She was constantly being lifted out of the carriage, and made to lie on a sofa somewhere while the horses were being changed, or put to bed for the night, and dragged up again unrefreshed in the early morning, and consigned once more to misery. Sometimes great dark mountains towered above her, filling her with dread; and sometimes a long lonely level of bare brown bogs was all about her, overwhelming her little soul with such a terrible sense of desolation that she cowered down beside Kitty, and clung to her shivering.

Once her mother shook her for something, and Beth turned faint.

"What's the matter with her, Kitty?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, alarmed by her white face.

"You've jest shook the life out of her, m'em, I think," Kitty answered her tranquilly: "An' ye'll not rare her that way, I'm thinking."

Mrs. Caldwell began to dislike Kitty.

On the third day they drove down a delightful road, with hedges on either hand, footpaths, and trees, among which big country-houses nestled. The mountains were still in the neighbourhood, but not near enough to be awesome. On one side of the road was a broad shallow stream, so clear you could see the brown stones at the bottom, a salmon-stream with weirs and waterfalls.

They were nearing a town, and Kitty began to put the things together. Beth became interested. Mamma looked out of the window every instant, and at

last she exclaimed in a tone of relief, which somehow belied the words: "Here's papa! I *knew* he would come!" And there was a horse at the window, and papa was on the horse, looking in at them. Mamma's face became quite rosy, and she laughed a good deal and showed her teeth. Beth had not noticed them before.

"What are you staring at, Beth?" Mildred whispered.

"Mamma's all pink," Beth said.

"That's blushing," said Mildred.

"What's blushing?" said Beth.

"Getting pink."

"What does she do it for?"

"She can't help it."

Beth continued to stare, and at last Mrs. Caldwell noticed it, and asked her what she was looking at.

"You've got nice white teeth," said Beth. Mrs. Caldwell smiled.

"Have you only just discovered that?" papa asked through the window.

"You never told me," Beth protested, thinking herself reproached. "You said Jane Nettles had."

The smile froze on mamma's lips, and papa's horse became unmanageable. Beth saw there was something wrong, and stopped, looking from one to the other intently.

Mrs. Caldwell recovered herself. "What a stolid face she has!" she remarked presently by way of breaking an awkward pause.

Beth wondered what "stolid" meant, and who "she" was.

"She doesn't look well," papa observed.

"She's jest had the life shook out of her, sir," Kitty put in.

"Kitty, how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell began.

"It's to the journey I'm alludin' now, m'em," Kitty explained with dignity. "The child can't bear the travellin'."

"Well, it won't last much longer now," said papa, and then made some remark to mamma in Italian, which brought back her good-humour. They always spoke Italian to each other, because papa did not know French so well as mamma did. Beth supposed at that time that all grown-up people spoke French or Italian to each other, and she used to wonder which she would speak when she was grown up.

They stopped at an inn for an hour or two, for there was still another stage of this interminable journey. Mildred had a bag with a big doll in it, and some almond-sweets. She left it on a window-seat when they went to have something to eat, and when she thought of it again it was nowhere to be found.

"They would steal the teeth out of your head in this God-forsaken country," Captain Caldwell exclaimed, in a tone of exasperation.

An awful vision of igneous rocks, with mis-shapen creatures prowling about amongst them, instantly appeared to Beth in illustration of a God-forsaken country, but she tried vainly to imagine how stealing teeth out of your head was to be managed.

When they set off again, and had left the grey town with its green trees and clear rivulet behind, the road lay through a wild and desolate region. Great dark mountains rolled away in every direction, and were piled up above the travellers to the very sky. The scene was most melancholy in its grandeur, and Beth, gazing at it fascinated, with big eyes dilated to their full extent, became exceedingly depressed. At one turn of the way, in a field below, they saw a gentleman carrying a gun, and attended by a party of armed policemen.

"That's Mr. Burke going over his property," Captain Caldwell observed to his wife. "He's unpopular just now, and daren't move without an escort. His life's not worth a moment's purchase a hundred yards from his own gate, and I expect he'll be shot like a dog some day, with all his precautions."

"Oh, why does he stay?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"Just pluck," her husband answered; "and he likes it. It certainly does add to the interest of life."

"O Henry! don't speak like that," Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated. "They can't owe you any grudge."

Captain Caldwell flipped a fly from his horse's ear.

Beth gazed down at the doomed gentleman, and fairly quailed for him. She half expected to see the policemen turn on him and shoot him before her eyes, and a strange excitement gradually grew upon her. She seemed to be seeing and hearing and feeling without eyes, or ears, or a body.

The carriage rocked like a ship at sea, and once or twice it seemed to be going right over.

"What a dreadfully bad road!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"Yes," her husband rejoined, "the roads about here are the very devil. This is one of the best. Do you see that one over there?" pointing with his whip to a white line that zigzagged across a neighbouring mountain. "It's disused now. That's Gallows Hill, where a man was hanged."

Beth gazed at the spot with horror. "I see him!" she cried.

"See whom?" said her mother.

"I see the man hanging."

"Oh, nonsense!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "Why, the man was hanged ages ago. He isn't there now."

"You must speak the truth, young lady," papa said severely.

Beth, put to shame by the reproof, shrank into herself. She was keenly sensitive to blame. But all the same her great grey eyes were riveted on the top of the hill, for there, against the sky, she did distinctly see the man dangling from the gibbet.

"Kitty," she whispered, "don't you see him?"

"Whisht, darlint," Kitty said, covering Beth's eyes with her hand. "I don't see him. But I'll not be after calling ye a liar because ye do, for I guess ye see more nor most, Holy Mother purtect us! But whisht now, you mustn't look at him any more."

The carriage came to the brow of the mountain, and down below was their destination, Castletownrock, a mere village, consisting principally of one long, steep street. Some distance below the village again, the great green waves of a tempestuous sea broke on a dangerous coast.

"The two races don't fuse," papa was saying to mamma, "in this part of the country, at all events. There's an Irish and an English side to the street. The English side has a flagged footpath, and the houses are neat and clean, and well-to-do; on the Irish side all is poverty and dirt and confusion."

Just outside the village, a little group of people waited to welcome them—Mr. Macbean the rector, Captain Keene, the three Misses Keene, and Jim.

The carriage was stopped, and they all got out and walked the rest of the distance to the inn, where they were to stay till the furniture arrived. On the way down the street they saw their new home. It made no impression on Beth. But she recognised the Roman Catholic Chapel on the other side of the road from papa's drawing, only it looked different because there was no snow.

The "gentleman and lady" who kept the inn, Mr. and Mrs. Mayne, with their two daughters, met them at the door, and shook hands with mamma, and kissed the children.

Then they went into the inn parlour, and there was wine and plum-cake, and Dr. and Mrs. Macdougall came with their little girl Lucy, who was eleven years old, Mildred's age.

Mr. Macbean, the rector, who was tall and thin, and had a brown beard that waggled when he talked, drew Beth to his side, and began to ask her questions, just when she wanted so much to hear what everybody else was saying, too.

"Well, and what have you been taught?" he began.

Beth gazed at him blankly.

"Do you love God?" he proceeded, putting his hand on her head.

Beth looked round the room, perplexed, then fixed her eyes on his beard, and watched it waggle with interest.

"Ask her if she knows anything about the other gentleman," Captain Keene put in jocosely—"here's to his health!" and he emptied his glass.

Beth's great eyes settled upon him with sudden fixity.

"I suppose you never heard of the devil?" he proceeded.

"Oh yes, I have," was Beth's instant and unexpected rejoinder. "The devil is a bad road."

There was an explosion of laughter at this.

"But you said so, papa," Beth remonstrated indignantly.

"My dear child, I said just the reverse."

"What's the reverse?" said Beth, picturing another personality.

"There now, that will do," Mrs. Caldwell interposed. "Little bodies must be seen and not heard."

Mr. Macbean stroked Beth's head—"There is something in here, I expect," he observed.

"Not much, I'm afraid," Mrs. Caldwell answered. "We've hardly been able to teach her anything."

"Ah!" Mr. Macbean ejaculated, reflecting on the specimen he had heard of the method pursued. "You must let me see what *I* can do."

CHAPTER V

IN a few days all the bustle of getting into the new house began. The furniture arrived in irregular batches. Some of it came and some of it did not come. When a box was opened there was nothing that was wanted in it, only things that did not go together, and mamma was worried, and papa was cross.

The workpeople were wild and ignorant, and only trustworthy as long as they were watched. They were unaccustomed to the most ordinary comforts of civilised life, particularly in the way of furniture. When the family arrived at the house one morning, they found Mrs. Caldwell's wardrobe, mahogany drawers, and other articles of bedroom furniture, set up in conspicuous positions in the sitting-room, and the carpenter was much ruffled when he was ordered to take them upstairs.

"Shure it's mad they are," he remonstrated to one of the servants, "to have sich foine things put in a bedroom where nobody'll see thim."

The men came up from the coastguard station to scrape the walls, and Ellis, the petty officer, used the bread-knife, and broke it, and papa bawled at him. Beth was sorry for Ellis.

The house was built of stone, and very damp. There was a great deal of space in it, but little accommodation. On the ground-floor were a huge hall, kitchen, pantry and sitting-room, all flagged. The sitting-room was the only one in the house, and had to be used as dining-room and drawing-room, but it was large enough for that and to spare. There was a big yard and a big garden too, and Riley was in the stable, and Bidy and Anne in the kitchen, and Kitty in the nursery. This increase of establishment, which meant so much to the parents, was accepted as a matter of course by the children.

Kitty told Riley and Bidy and Anne about what Beth had seen on Gallows Hill, and they often asked Beth what she saw when she used to sit looking at nothing. Then Beth would think things, and describe them, because it seemed to please the servants. They used to be very serious, and shake their

heads and cross themselves, with muttered ejaculations, but all the time they liked it. This encouraged Beth, and she used to think and think of things to tell them.

Beth was exceedingly busy in her own way at this time. Her mind was being rapidly stored with impressions, and nothing escaped her.

The four children and Kitty were put all together in one great nursery, an arrangement of which Kitty, with the fastidious delicacy of a strict Catholic, did not at all approve.

"Indeed, m'em," she said, "I'm thinkin' Master Jim's too sharp to be in the nursery wid his sisters now."

"Nonsense, Kitty," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "How can you be so evil-minded? Master Jim's only a child—a baby of ten!"

"Och, thin, me'm, it's an ould-fashioned baby he is," said Kitty; "and I'm thinkin' it's a bit of a screen or a curtain I'd like for dressin' behind if he's to be wid us."

"I have nothing of the kind to give you," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. And afterwards she made merry with papa about Kitty's prudishness.

But Kitty was right as it happened. Jim had been left pretty much to his own devices during the time he had been alone with his father at Castletownrock. Captain Caldwell's theory was that boys would look after themselves, "and the sooner you let 'em the sooner you'd make men of 'em. Blood will tell, sir. Your gentleman's son is a match for any ragamuffin"—a theory which Jim justified in many a free fight; but, during the suspension of hostilities he hobnobbed with the ragamuffins, who took a terrible revenge, for by the time Mrs. Caldwell arrived Jim was thoroughly corrupted. Kitty took precautions, however. She arranged the nursery-life so that Master Jim did not associate with his sisters more than was absolutely necessary. She had him up in the morning, bathed, and sent off to school before she disturbed the little girls, and at night she never left the nursery until he was asleep. Out of her slender purse she bought some print, and fixed up a curtain for his sisters to dress behind, and all else that she had to do for the children was done decently and in order. She had almost entire charge of them, their mother being engrossed with her husband, whose

health and spirits had already begun to suffer from overwork and exposure to the climate.

Kitty was teaching her charges dainty ways, mentally as well as physically. When she had washed them at night, she made them purge their little souls of all the sins of the day in prayer, and in the morning she taught them how to fortify themselves with good resolutions. Beth took naturally to the Catholic training, and solemnly dedicated herself to the Blessed Virgin; Mildred conformed, but without enthusiasm; the four-year-old baby Bernadine lisped little *Aves*; but Jim, in the words of Captain Keene, "the old buffalo," as their father called him, sneered at that sort of thing "as only fit for women."

"Men drink whisky," said Jim, puffing out his chest.

"True for ye," said Kitty; "but I've been told that them as drinks whisky here goes dry in the next world."

"Well, I shall drink whisky and kiss the girls all the same," said Jim. "And I wouldn't be a Catholic now, not to save me sowl. I owe the Catholics a grudge. They insulted me."

"How so?" asked Kitty.

"At the midnight Mass last Christmas. Father John got up, and ordered all heretics out of the sacred house of God, and Pat Fagan ses to me, 'Are ye a heretic?' and I ses, 'I am, Pat Fagan.' 'Thin out ye go,' ses he, and, but for that, I'd 'a' bin a Catholic; so see what you lose by insulting a gentleman."

"What's insulting?" Beth asked.

Jim slapped her face. "That's insulting," he explained.

Beth struck him back promptly, and a scuffle ensued.

"Oh, but it's little divils yez are, the lot of ye!" cried Kitty as she separated them.

During fits of nervous irritability Captain Caldwell had a habit of pacing about the house for hours at a time. One evening he happened to be walking up and down on the landing outside the nursery door, which was a little way

open, and his attention was attracted by Beth's voice. She was reciting a Catholic hymn softly, but with great feeling, as if every word of it were a pleasure to her.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, breaking in on her devotions. "What papistical abominations have you been teaching the child, Kitty?"

"Shure, sorr, it's jest a bit of a hymn," said Kitty bravely; but her heart sank, and the colour left her lips.

Captain Caldwell was furious.

"Caroline!" he called peremptorily, going to the head of the stairs, "Caroline, come up directly!"

Mrs. Caldwell fussed up in hot haste.

"Do you know," Captain Caldwell demanded, "that this woman is making idolaters of your children? I heard this child just now praying to the Virgin Mary! Do you hear?"

Mrs. Caldwell's pale face flushed with anger.

"How dare you do such a thing, you wicked woman?" she exclaimed. "I shall not keep you another day in the house. Pack up your things at once, and go the first thing in the morning."

"O mamma!" Beth cried, "you're not going to send Kitty away? Kitty, Kitty, you won't go and leave me?"

"There, you see!" Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "You see the influence she's got over the child already! That's the Jesuit all over!"

"An ignorant woman like you, who can hardly read and write, setting up to teach *my* children, indeed—how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell stormed.

"Well, m'em, I *am* an ignorant woman that can hardly read and write," Kitty answered with dignity; "but I could tell you some things ye'll not find out in all yer books, and may be they'd surprise ye."

"Kitty, ye'll not go and leave me," Beth repeated passionately.

"Troth, an' I'd stay for your sake if I could," said Kitty, "fur it's a bad time I'm afraid ye'll be havin' once I'm gone."

"Do you hear that?" Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "Now you see what comes of getting people of this kind into the house. She's going to make out that the child is ill-treated."

"One of *my* children ill-treated!" Mrs. Caldwell cried scornfully. "Who would believe her?" Then turning to Beth: "If I ever hear you repeat a word that wicked woman has taught you, I'll beat you as long as I can stand over you."

Kitty looked straight into Mrs. Caldwell's face, and smiled sarcastically, but uttered not a word.

"How dare you stand there, grinning at me in that impertinent way, you low woman?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed with great exasperation. "I believe you *are* a Jesuit, sent here to corrupt my children. But go you shall to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I'll go, m'em," Kitty answered quietly. She knew the case was hopeless.

"There, now," said Mrs. Caldwell, turning to her husband. "Do you see? That shows you! She doesn't care a bit."

Beth was clinging to Kitty, but her mother seized her by the arm, and flung her half across the room, and was about to follow her, but Captain Caldwell interfered. "That will do," he said significantly. "It's no use venting your rage on the child. In future choose your nurses better."

"Then, in future, give me better advice when I consult you about them," Mrs. Caldwell retorted, following him out of the room.

Beth clung to Kitty the whole night long, and had to be torn from her in the morning, screaming and kicking. She stood in front of her mother, her eyes and cheeks ablaze:—

"I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin—I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin—every *hour* of my life," she gasped, "and you can't prevent me. Beat me as long as you can stand over me if you like, but I'll only pray the harder."

"For God's sake, m'em," Kitty cried, clasping her hands, "let that child alone. Shure she's a sweet lamb if you'd give her a chance. But ye put the divil into her wid yer shakin' an' yer batin', and mischief'll come of it sooner or later, mark my words."

When Kitty had gone, Mrs. Caldwell shut Beth up in the nursery with Baby Bernadine. Beth threw herself on the floor, and sobbed until she had exhausted her tears; then she gathered herself together, and sat on the floor with her hands clasped round her legs, her chin on her knees, looking up dreamily at the sky, through the nursery window. Her pathetic little face was all drawn and haggard and hopeless. But presently she began to sing—

"Ave Maria!
Mother of the desolate!
Guide of the unfortunate!
Hear from thy starry home our prayer:
If sorrow will await us,
Tyrants vex and hate us,
Teach us thine own most patient part to bear!
Sancta Maria!
When we are sighing,
When we are dying,
Give to us thine aid of prayer!"

As she sang, comfort came to her, and the little voice swelled in volume.

Baby Bernadine also sat on the floor, opposite to Beth, and gazed at her, much impressed. When she had finished singing, Beth became aware of her sister's reverent attention, and put out her tongue at her. Bernadine laughed. Then Beth crisped up her hands till they looked like claws, and began to make a variety of hideous faces. Bernadine thought it was a game and smiled at first, but finally she ceased to recognise her sister and shrieked aloud in terror. Beth heard her mother hurrying up, and got behind the door so that her mother could not see her as she opened it. Mrs. Caldwell hurried up to the baby—"The darling, then, what have they been doing to you?"—and Beth made her escape. As she crossed the hall, some one knocked at the front door. Beth opened it a crack. Captain Keene was outside. When she saw him, she recollected something she had heard about his religious opinions, and began to question him eagerly. His answers were apparently exciting, for presently she flung the door wide open to let him in, then ran to the foot of the stairs, and shouted at the top of her voice—

"Papa, papa, come down! come directly! Here's old Keene, the old Buffalo, and he says there is no God!"

Captain Caldwell descended the stairs hurriedly, but, on catching a glimpse of his countenance, Beth did not wait to receive him.

She had to pass through the kitchen to get into the yard. It was the busy time of the day, and Bidly and Anne and Riley, all without shoes or

stockings, were playing football with a bladder.

Biddy tried to detain Beth.

"Arrah, bad luck to ye, Biddy," Beth cried, imitating the brogue. "Let me go, d'ye hear?"

"Holy Mother, preserve us!" Biddy exclaimed, crossing herself. "Don't ye ever be afther wishin' anybody bad luck, Miss Beth; shure ye'll bring it if ye do."

"Thin don't ye ever be afther stoppin' me when I want to be going, Biddy," Beth rejoined, stamping her foot, "or I'll *blast* ye," she added as she passed out into the sunlight.

Fowls and ducks and Jim's pet pigeons were the only creatures moving in the yard. Beth stood among them, watching them for a little, then went to the cornbin in the stable, and got some oats. There was a shallow tub of water for the birds to drink; Beth hunkered down beside it, and held out her hand, full of corn. The pigeons were very tame, and presently a beautiful blue-rock came up confidently, and began to eat. His eyes were a deep rich orange colour. Beth caught him, and stroked his glossy plumage, delighting in the exquisite metallic sheen on his neck and breast. The colour gave her an almost painful sensation of pleasure, which changed on a sudden into a fit of blind exasperation. Her grief for the loss of Kitty had gripped her again with a horrid twinge. She clenched her teeth in her pain, her fingers closed convulsively round the pigeon's throat, and she held him out at arm's length, and shook him viciously till the nictitating membrane dropped over his eyes, his head sank back, his bill opened, and he hung from her hand, an inert heap of ruffled feathers. Then the tension of her nerves relaxed; it was a relief to have crushed the life out of something. She let the bird drop, and stood looking at him, as an animal might have looked, with an impassive face which betrays no shade of emotion. As she did so, however, the bird showed signs of life; and, suddenly, quickening into interest, she stooped down, turned him over, and examined him; then sprinkled him with water, and made him drink. He rapidly revived, and when he was able to stand, she let him go; and he was soon feeding among his companions as if nothing had happened.

Beth watched them for a little with the same animal-like expressionless gravity of countenance, then moved off unconcernedly.

She never mentioned the incident to any one, and never forgot it; but her only feeling about it was that the pigeon had had a narrow escape.

CHAPTER VI

BETH was a fine instrument, sensitive to a touch, and, considering the way she was handled, it would have been a wonder if discordant effects had not been constantly produced upon her. Hers was a nature with a wide range. It is probable that every conceivable impulse was latent in her, every possibility of good or evil. Exactly which would predominate depended upon the influences of these early years; and almost all the influences she came under were haphazard. There was no intelligent direction of her thoughts, no systematic training to form good habits. Her brothers were sent to school as soon as they were old enough, and so had the advantage of regular routine and strict discipline from the first; but a couple of hours a day for lessons was considered enough for the little girls; and, for the rest of the time, so long as they were on the premises and not naughty, that is to say, gave no trouble, it was taken for granted that they were safe, morally and physically. Neither of their parents seem to have suspected their extreme precocity; and there is no doubt that Beth suffered seriously in after life from the mistakes of those in authority over her at this period. People admired her bright eyes without realising that she could see with them, and not only that she could see, but that she could not help seeing. But even if they had realised it, they would merely have scolded her for learning anything in that way which they preferred that she should not know. They were not sufficiently intelligent themselves to perceive that it is not what we know of things, but what we think of them, which makes for good or evil. Beth was accordingly allowed to run wild, and expected to see nothing; but all the time her mind was being involuntarily stored with observations from which, in time to come, for want of instruction, she would be forced to draw her own—often erroneous—conclusions.

Kitty's departure was Beth's first great grief, and she suffered terribly. The prop and stay of her little life had gone, the comfort and kindness, the order and discipline, which were essential to her nature. Mrs. Caldwell was a good woman, who would certainly do what she thought best for her children; but she was exhausted by the unconscionable production of a too numerous family, a family which she had neither the means nor the strength

to bring up properly. Her husband's health, too, grew ever more precarious, and she found herself obliged to do all in her power to help him with his duties, which were arduous. There was a good deal that she could do in the way of writing official letters and managing money-matters, tasks for which she was much better fitted than for the management of children; but the children, meanwhile, had to be left to the care of others—not that that would have been a bad thing for them had their mother had sufficient discrimination to enable her to choose the proper kind of people to be with them. Unfortunately for everybody, however, Mrs. Caldwell had been brought up on the old-fashioned principle that absolute ignorance of human nature is the best qualification for a wife and mother, and she was consequently quite unprepared for any possibility which had not formed part of her own simple and limited personal experience. She never suspected, for one thing, that a servant's conversation could be undesirable if her appearance and her character from her last mistress were satisfactory; and, therefore, when Kitty had gone, she put Anne in her place without misgiving, Anne's principal recommendation being that she was a nice-looking girl, and had pretty deferential manners.

Anne came from one of the cabins on the Irish side of the road, where people, pigs, poultry, with an occasional cow, goat, or donkey herded together indiscriminately. The windows were about a foot square, and were not made to open. Sometimes they had glass in them, but were oftener stopped up with rags. Before the doors were heaps of manure and pools of stagnant water. There was no regular footway, but a mere beaten track in front of the cabins, and this, on wet days, was ankle-deep in mud. The women hung about the doors all day long, knitting the men's blue stockings, and did little else apparently. Both men and women were usually in a torpid state, the result, doubtless, of breathing a poisoned atmosphere, and of insufficient food. It took strong stimulants to rouse them: love, hate, jealousy, whisky, battle, murder, and sudden death. Their conversation was gross, and they were very immoral; but it is hardly necessary to say so, for with men, women, children, and animals all crowded together in such surroundings, and the morbid craving for excitement to which people who have no comfort or wholesome interest in life fall a prey, immorality is inevitable. It was the boast of the place that there were no illegitimate children; it would have been a better sign if there had been.

Mrs. Caldwell, true to her training, lived opposite to all this vice and squalor, serenely indifferent to it. Anne, therefore, who knew nothing about the management of children, and was not in any respect a proper person to have the charge of them, had it all her own way in the nursery: and her way was to do nothing that she could help. She used to call the children in the morning, and then leave them to their own devices. The moment they were awake, which was pretty soon, for they were full of life, they began to batter each other with pillows, dance about the room in their night-dresses, pitch tents with the bed-clothes on the floor, and make noise enough to bring their mother down upon them. Then Anne would be summoned and come hurrying up, and help them to huddle on their clothes somehow. She never washed them, but encouraged them to perform their own ablutions, which they did with the end of a towel dipped in a jug. The consequence was they were generally in a very dirty state. They took their meals with their parents, and papa would notice the dirt eventually, and storm at mamma in Italian, when words would ensue in a tone which made the children quake. Then mamma would storm at Anne, for whom the children felt sorry, and the result would be a bath, which they bore with fortitude, for fear of getting Anne into further trouble. They even made good resolutions about washing themselves, which they kept for a few days; then, however, they began to shirk again, and had again to be scrubbed. The resolutions of a child must be shored up by kindly supervision, otherwise it is hardly likely that they will cement into good habits.

Beth suffered from a continual sense of discomfort in those days for want of proper attention. All her clothing fitted badly, and were fastened on with anything that came to hand in the way of tape and buttons; her hair was ill brushed, and she was so continually found fault with that her sense of self-respect was checked in its development, and she lost all faith in her own power to do anything right or well. The consequence was the most profound disheartenment, endured in silence, with the exquisite uncomplaining fortitude of a little child. It made its mark on her countenance, however, in a settled expression of discontent, which, being mistaken for a bad disposition, repelled people, and made her many enemies. People generally said that Mildred was a dear, but Beth did not look pleasant; and for many a long day to come, very few troubled themselves to try and make her look so.

It cannot be said that Beth's parents neglected their children. On the contrary, her father thought much of their education, and of their future; it was the all-importance of the present that did not strike him, and so with her mother. Neither parent was careless, but their care stopped short too soon; and it is astonishing the amount of liberty the children had. They were sent out of doors as soon as they were dressed in the morning, because sunshine and air are so essential to children. If they went for a walk, Anne accompanied them; but very often Anne was wanted, and then the children were left to loiter about the garden or stable-yard, where, doubtless with the help of reasoning powers much in advance of her age, Beth had soon heard and seen enough to make her feel a certain contempt for her father's veracity when he told her that she had originally been brought to the house in the doctor's black bag.

After Kitty's departure Beth had many a lonely hour, and the time hung heavy on her hands. Mildred, her senior by four years, was of a simpler disposition, and always able to amuse herself, playing with the Baby Bernadine, or with toys which were no distraction to Beth. Mildred, besides, was fond of reading; but books to be deciphered remained a wonder and a mystery to Beth.

Jim went to the national school, the only one in the place, with all the other little boys. The master was a young curate who gave Mildred and Beth their lessons also, when school-hours were over. Beth used to yearn for lesson-time, just for the sake of being obliged to do something; but lessons were disappointing, for the curate devoted himself to Mildred, who was docile and studious, and took no special pains to interest Beth, and consequently she soon wearied of the dull restraint, and became troublesome. Sometimes she was boisterous, and then the tutor had to spend half his time in chasing her to rescue his hat, a book, an ink-bottle, or some other article which she threatened to destroy; and, sometimes she was so depressed that he had to give up trying to teach her, and just do his best to distract her. In her eighth year she was able to follow the church-service in the prayer-book, and make out the hymns, but that was all.

Sunday-school was held in the church, and was attended by all the unmarried parishioners. Mildred taught some of the tiny mites, and Beth was put into her class at first; but Beth had no respect for Mildred, and had

consequently to be removed. She was expected to learn the collect for the day and the verse of a hymn every Sunday, but never by any chance knew either. No one ever thought of reading the thing over to her, and fixing her attention on it by some little explanation; and learning by heart from a book did not come naturally to her. She learned by ear easily enough, but not by sight. The hymns and prayers which Kitty had repeated to her, she very soon picked up; but Kitty had true sympathetic insight to inform her of what the child required, and all her little lessons were proper to some occasion, and had comfort in them. What Beth learned now, on the contrary, often filled her with gloom. Some of the hymns, such as,

"When gathering clouds around I view,
And days are dark, and friends are few,"

made her especially miserable. It was always a dark day to her when she repeated it, with heavy clouds collecting overhead, and herself, a solitary little speck on the mountain side wandering alone.

CHAPTER VII

IT is significant to note that church figures largely in Beth's recollection of this time, but religion not at all. There was, in fact, no connection between the two in her mind.

Both Captain and Mrs. Caldwell protested strongly against what they called cant; and they seemed to have called everything cant except an occasional cold reading aloud of the Bible on Sundays, and the bald observance of the church service. The Bible they read aloud to the children without expounding it, and the services they attended without comment. Displays of religious emotion in everyday life they regarded as symptoms of insanity; and if they heard people discuss religion with enthusiasm, and profess to love the Lord, they were genuinely shocked. All that kind of thing they thought "such cant," "and so like those horrid dissenters;" which made them extra careful that the children should hear nothing of the sort. This, from their point of view, was right and wise; in Beth's case especially; for her unsatisfied soul was of the quality which soon yearns for the fine fulness of faith; her little heart would have filled to bursting with her first glad conception of the love divine, and her whole being would have stirred to speak her emotion, even though speech meant martyrdom. Thanks to the precautions of her parents, however, she heard nothing to stimulate her natural tendency to religious fervour after Kitty's departure; and gradually the image of our Blessed Lady faded from her mind, and was succeeded by that of the God of her parents, a death-dealing deity, delighting in blood, whom she was warned to fear, and from whom she did accordingly shrink with such holy horror that, when she went to church, she tried to think of anything but Him. This was how it happened that church, instead of being the threshold of the next world to her mind, became the centre of this, where she made many interesting observations of men and manners; for in spite of her backwardness in the schoolroom, Beth's intellect advanced with a bound at this period. She had left her native place an infant, on whose mind some chance impressions had been made and lingered; she arrived at Castletownrock with the power to observe for herself, and even to reflect upon what she saw—of course to a certain extent only; but still the power

had come, and was far in advance of her years. So far, it was circumstances that had impressed her; she knew one person from another, but that was all. Now, however, she began to be interested in people for themselves, apart from any incident in which they figured; and most of her time was spent in a curiously close, but quite involuntary study of those about her, and of their relations to each other.

Church was often a sore penance to the children, it was so long, and cold, and dull; but they set off on Sunday happy in the consciousness of their best hats and jackets, nevertheless; and the first part of the time was not so bad, for then they had Sunday-school, and the three Misses Keene—Mary, Sophia, and Lenore—and the two Misses Mayne, Honor and Kathleen, and Mr. and Mrs. Small, the Vicar and his wife, and the curate, were all there talking and teaching. Beth remembered nothing about the teaching except that, on one occasion, Mr. Macbean, the rector, tried to explain the meaning of the trefoil on the ends of the pews to Mildred and herself; but she could think of nothing but the way his beard wagged as he spoke, and was disconcerted when he questioned her. He had promised to be a friend to Beth; but he was a delicate man, and not able to live much at Castletownrock, where the climate was rigorous; so that she seldom saw him.

When Sunday-school was over, the children went up to the gallery; their pew and the Keenes', roomy boxes, took up the whole front of it. Mrs. Caldwell always sat up in the gallery with the children, but Captain Caldwell often sat downstairs in the rectory-pew to be near the fire; when he sat in the gallery he wore a little black cap to keep off the draught. He and Mr. O'Halloran the Squire, and Captain Keene, stood and talked in the aisle sometimes before the service commenced. One Sunday they kept looking up at the children in the gallery.

"I'll bet Mildred will be the handsomest woman," Mr. O'Halloran was saying.

"I'll back Beth," Captain Keene observed. "If all the men in the place are not after her soon, I'm no judge of her sex, eh?"

"Oh, don't look at me!" said Captain Caldwell complacently. "I can't pretend to say. But let's hope that they'll go off well, at all events. They'll

have every chance I can give them of making good matches."

Beth heard her father repeat this conversation to her mother afterwards, but was too busy wondering what a handsome woman was to understand that it was her own charms which had been appraised; but Mildred understood, and was elated.

Mr. O'Halloran, the squire, had a red beard, which was an offence to Beth. His wife wore bonnets about which everybody used to make remarks to Mrs. Caldwell. Beth understood that Mrs. O'Halloran was young and pretty, and had three charming children, but was not happy because of Sophia Keene.

"Just fancy," she heard Mrs. Small, the Vicar's wife, say to her mother once. "Just fancy, he was in a carriage with them at the races, and stayed with Sophia the whole time; and poor Mrs. O'Halloran left at home alone. I call it scandalous. But you know what Sophia is!" Mrs. Small concluded significantly.

Mrs. Caldwell drew herself up, and looked at Mrs. Small, but said nothing; yet somehow Beth knew that she too was unhappy because of Sophia Keene. Beth was not on familiar terms with her mother, and would not have dared to embrace her spontaneously, or make any other demonstration of affection; but she was loyally devoted to her all the same, and would gladly have stabbed Sophia Keene, and have done battle with the whole of the rest of the family on her mother's behalf had occasion offered.

She was curled up among the fuchsias on the window-seat of the sitting-room one day, unobserved by her parents, who entered the room together after she had settled herself there, and began to discuss the Keenes.

"You did not tell me, Henry, you spent all your time with them before we came," Mrs. Caldwell said reproachfully.

"Why should I?" he answered, with a jaunty affectation of ease.

"It is not why you should," his wife said with studied gentleness, "but why you should not. It seems so strange, making a mystery of it."

"I described old Keene to you—the old buffalo!" he replied; "and I'll describe the girls now if you like. Mary is a gawk, Sophia is as yellow as a duck's foot, and Lenore is half-witted."

The Keenes were ignorant, idle, good-tempered young women, and kind to the children, whom they often took to bathe with them. They were seldom able to go into the sea itself, for it was a wild, tempestuous coast; but there were lovely clear pools on the rocky shore, natural stone baths left full of water when the tide went out, sheltered from the wind by tall, dark, precipitous cliffs, and warmed by the sun; and there they used to dabble by the hour together. Anne went with them, and it was a pretty sight, the four young women in white chemises that clung to them when wet, and the three lovely children—little white nudities with bright brown hair—scampering over the rocks, splashing each other in the pools, or lying about on warm sunny slabs, resting and chattering. One day Beth found some queer things in a pool, and Sophia told her they were barnacles.

"They stick to the bottom of a ship," she said, "and grow heavier and heavier till at last the ship can make no more way, and comes to a standstill in a shining sea, where the water is as smooth as a mirror; you would think it was a mirror, in fact, if it did not heave gently up and down like your breast when you breathe; and every time it heaves it flushes some colour, blue, or green, or pink, or purple. And the barnacles swell and swell at the bottom of the ship, till at last they burst in two with a loud report; and then the sailors rush to the side of the ship and look over, and there they see a flock of beautiful big white geese coming up out of the water; and sometimes they shoot the geese, but if they do a great storm comes on and engulfs the ship, and they are all drowned; but sometimes they stand stockstill, amazed, and then the birds rise up out of the air on their great white wings, up, up, drifting along, together, till they look like the clouds over there. Then a gentle breeze springs up, and the ship sails away safely into port."

"And where do the geese go?" Beth demanded, with breathless interest.

"They make for the shore too, and in the dead of winter, on stormy nights, they fly over the land, uttering strange cries, and if you wake and hear them, it means somebody is going to die."

Beth's eyes were staring far out beyond the great green Atlantic rollers that came bursting in round the sheltering headland, white-crested with foam, flying up the beach with a crash, and scattering showers of spray that sparkled in the sunshine. She could see the ships and the barnacles, and the silent sea, heaving great sighs and flushing with fine colour in the act; and the geese, and the sailors peering over the side and shooting at them and sinking immediately in a storm, but also sailing into a safe haven triumphantly, where the sun shone on white houses, although, at the same time, it was dark night, and overhead there were strange cries that made her cower—"Beth!" cried Sophia, "what's the matter with you, child?"

Beth returned with a start, and stared at her—"I know who it will be," she said.

"Who what'll be, Miss Beth?" Anne asked in awe.

"Who'll die," said Beth.

"You mustn't say, Beth; you'll bring bad luck if you do," Miss Keene interposed hastily.

"I'm not going to say," Beth answered dreamily; "but I know."

"You shouldn't have told the child that story, miss," Anne said. "Shure, ye know what she is—she sees." Anne nodded her head several times significantly.

"I forgot," said Sophia.

"She'll forget too," said Mary philosophically. "I say, Beth," she went on, raising herself on her elbow—she was lying prone on a slab of rock in the sun—"what does your mother think of us?"

Beth roused herself. "I don't know," she answered earnestly; "she never says. But I know what papa thinks of you. He says Mary's a gawk, Sophia is as yellow as a duck's foot, and Lenore is only half-witted."

The effect of this announcement astonished Beth. The Misses Keene, instead of being interested, all looked at her as if they did not like her, and Anne burst out laughing. When they got in, Anne told Mrs. Caldwell, who flushed suddenly, and covered her mouth with her handkerchief.

"Yes, mamma," Mildred exclaimed with importance, "Beth did say so. And Mary tossed her head, and Sophia sneered."

"What is sneered?" Beth demanded importunately. "What is sneered?"

"O Beth! don't bother so," Mildred exclaimed irritably. "It's when you curl up your lip."

"Beth, how could you be so naughty?" Mrs. Caldwell said at last from behind her handkerchief. "Don't you know you should never repeat things you hear said? A lady never repeats a private conversation."

"What's a private conversation?" said Beth.

Mrs. Caldwell gave her a broad definition, during which she lowered her handkerchief, and Beth discovered that she was trying not to smile.

This was Beth's first lesson in honour, which was her mother's god, and she felt the influence of it all her life.

Later in the day, Beth was curled up on the window-seat among the fuchsias, looking out. Behind the thatched cabins opposite, the sombre mountains rolled up, dark and distinct, to the sky; but Beth would not look at them if she could help it, they oppressed her. It was a close afternoon, and the window was wide open. A bare-legged woman, in a short petticoat, stood in an indolent attitude leaning against a door-post opposite; a young man in low shoes, light blue stockings, buff knee-breeches, a blue-tailed coat with brass buttons, and a soft high-crowned felt hat, came strolling up the street with his hands in his pockets.

"Hallo, Biddy," he remarked, as he passed the woman, "you're all swelled."

"Yes," she answered tranquilly, "I've been drinking buttermilk."

"Well, let's hope it'll be a boy," he rejoined.

The woman looked up and down the street complacently.

Presently Beth saw Honor and Kathleen Mayne come out of the inn. The Maynes used to pet the children and play the piano to them when they were at the inn, and had been very good to Jim also when he was there alone with

his father before the family arrived. Their manners were gentle and caressing, and they did their best to win their way into Mrs. Caldwell's good graces, but at first she coldly repulsed them, which hurt Beth very much. The Maynes, however, did not at all understand that they were being repulsed. A kindly feeling existed among all classes in those remote Irish villages. The squire's family, the doctor's, clergyman's, draper's, and innkeeper's visited each other, and shook hands when they met. There was no feeling of condescension on the one hand, or of pretension on the other; but Mrs. Caldwell had the strong class prejudice which makes such stupid snobs of the English. It was not *what* people were, but *who* they were, that was all important to her; and she would have bowed down cheerfully, as whole neighbourhoods do, and felt exhilarated by the notice of some stupid county magnate, who had not heart enough to be loved, head enough to distinguish himself, or soul enough to get him into heaven. She was a lady, and Mayne was an innkeeper. His daughters might amuse the children, but as to associating with Mrs. Caldwell, that was absurd!

The girls were not to be rebuffed, however. They persevered in their kindly attentions, making excuses to each other for Mrs. Caldwell's manner; explaining her coldness by the fact that she was English, and flattering her, until finally they won their way into her good graces, and so effectually too, that when they brought a young magpie in a basket for Beth one day, her mother graciously allowed her to accept it.

Beth liked the Maynes, but now as they came up the road she slid from the window-seat. She knew they would stop and talk if she waited, and she did not want to talk. She was thinking about something, and it irritated her to be interrupted. So she tore across the hall and through the kitchen out into the yard, impelled by an imperative desire to be alone.

The magpie was the first pet of her own she had ever had, and she loved it. At night it was chained to a perch stuck in the wall of the stable-yard. On the other side of that wall was the yard of Murphy the farrier. The magpie soon became tame enough to be let loose by day, and Beth always went to release it the first thing in the morning and give it its breakfast. It came hopping to meet her now, and followed her into the garden. The garden was entered by an archway under the outbuildings, which divided it from the stable-yard. It was very long, but narrow for its length. On the right was a

high wall, but on the left was a low one—at least one half of it was low—and Beth could look over it into the farrier's garden next door. The other half had been raised by Captain Caldwell on the understanding that if he raised one half the farrier would raise the other, but the farrier had proved perfidious. The wall was built without mortar, of rough, uncut stones. Captain Caldwell had his half neatly finished off at the top with sods, but Murphy's piece was still all broken down. The children used to climb up by it on to the raised half, and dance there at the risk of life and limb, and jeer at Murphy as he dug his potatoes, calling his attention to the difference between the Irish and English half of the wall, till he lost his temper and pelted them. This was the signal for a battle. The children returned his potatoes with stones by way of interest, and hit him as often as he hit them. (Needless to say, their parents were not in the garden at the time.) They had a great contempt for the farrier because he fought them, and he used to go about the village complaining of them and their "tratement" of him, "the little divils, spoilin' the pace of the whole neighbourhood."

There was a high wall at the end of the garden, and Beth liked to sit on the top of it. She went there now, picked up her magpie, and climbed up with difficulty by way of Pat Murphy's broken bit. Immediately below her was a muddy lane, beyond which the land sloped down to the sea, and as she sat there, the sound of the waves, that dreamy, soft murmur for which we have no word, filled the interstices of her consciousness with something that satisfied.

She was not left long in peace to enjoy it that afternoon, however, for the farrier was at work in his garden below, and presently he looked up and saw the magpie.

"There ye are agin, Miss Beth, wi' yer baste of a burrd; bad luck to it!" he exclaimed, crossing himself. "Shure, don't I tell ye ivery day uf your life it's wan fur sorrow."

"Bad luck to yerself, Pat Murphy," Beth rejoined promptly. "It's a foine cheek ye have to be spakin' to a gentleman's daughter, an' you not a man uv yer wurrd."

"Not a man o' me wurrd! what d'ye mane?" said Murphy, firing.

"Look at that wall," Beth answered; "didn't ye promise ye'd build it?"

"An' so I will when yer father gives me the stones he promised me," Murphy replied. "It's a moighty foine mon uv his wurrd he is."

"Is it my father yer maning, Pat Murphy?" Beth asked.

"It is," he said, sticking his spade in the ground emphatically.

"Ye know yer lying," said Beth. "My father promised you no stones. He's not a fool."

"I niver met a knave that was," Pat observed, turning over a huge spadeful of earth, and then straightening himself to look up at her.

Beth's instinct was always to fight when she was in a rage; words break no bones, and she preferred to break bones at such times. It was some seconds before she saw the full force of Pat's taunt, but the moment she did, she seized the largest loose stone within reach on the top of the wall, and shied it at him. It struck him full in the face, and cut his cheek open.

"That'll teach ye," said Beth, blazing.

The man turned on her with a very ugly look.

"Put yer spade down," she said. "I'm not afraid of you."

"Miss Beth! Miss Beth!" some one called from the end of the garden.

Murphy stuck his spade in the ground, and wiped his jaw. "Ye'll pay for this, ye devil's limb," he muttered, "yew an' yours."

"Miss Beth! Miss Beth!"

"I'm coming!" Beth rejoined irritably, and slid from the wall to the ground regardless of the rough loose stones she scattered in her descent. "Ye'll foind me ready to pay when ye send in yer bill, Pat," she called out as she ran down the garden.

The children were to have tea at the vicarage that day, and Anne had been sent to fetch her.

In the drawing-room at the vicarage there was a big bay-window which looked out across a desolate stretch of bog to a wild headland, against which the waves beat tempestuously in almost all weathers. The headland itself was high, but the giant breakers often dashed up far above it, and fell in showers of spray on the grass at the top. There was a telescope in the window at the vicarage, and people used to come to see the sight, and went into raptures over it. Beth, standing out of the way, unnoticed, would gaze too, fascinated; but it was the attraction of repulsion. The cruel force of the great waves agitated her, and at the same time made her unutterably sad. Her heart beat painfully when she watched them, her breath became laboured, and it was only with an effort that she could keep back her sobs. It was not fear that oppressed her, but a horrible sort of excitement, which so gained upon her on that afternoon in particular that she felt she must shriek aloud, or make her escape. If she showed any emotion she would be laughed at, if she made her escape she would probably be whipped; she preferred to be whipped; so, watching her opportunity, she quietly slipped away.

At home the window of the sitting-room was still wide open, and as she ran down the street she noticed some country people peeping in curiously, and apparently astonished by the luxury they beheld. Beth, who was picking up Irish rapidly, understood some exclamations she overheard as she approached, and felt flattered for the furniture.

She ran up the steps and opened the front door: "Good day to ye all," she said sociably; "will ye not come in and have a look round? now do!"

She led the way as she spoke, and the country people followed her, all agape. In the hall they paused to wonder at the cocoanut matting; but when they stood on the soft pile carpet, so grateful to their bare feet, in the sitting-room, and looked round, they lowered their voices respectfully, and this gave Beth a sudden sensation of superiority. She began to show them the things: the pictures on the walls, the subjects of which she explained to them; the egg-shell china, which she held up to the light that they might see how thin it was; and some Eastern and Western curios her father had brought home from various voyages. She told them of tropical heat and Canadian cold, and began to be elated herself when she found all that she had ever heard on the subject flowing fluently from her lips.

The front door had been left open, and the passers-by looked in to see what was going on, and then entered uninvited. Neighbours, too, came over from the Irish side of the road, so that the room gradually filled, and as her audience increased, Beth grew excited and talked away eloquently.

"Lord," one man exclaimed with a sigh, on looking round the room, "it's aisy to see why the likes of these looks down on the likes of us."

"Eh, dear, yes!" a woman with a petticoat over her head solemnly responded.

"The durrty heretics," a slouching fellow, with a flat white face, muttered under his breath. "But if they benefit here, they'll burn hereafter, holy Jasus be praised."

"Will they?" said Beth, turning on him. "Will they burrn hereafter, Bap-faced Flanagan? No, they won't! They'll hunt ye out of heaven as they hunted ye out o' Maclone.

"Oh, the Orange militia walked into Maclone,
And hunted the Catholics out of the town.
Ri' turen nuren nuren naddio,
Right tur nuren nee."

She sang it out at the top of her shrill little voice, executing a war-dance of defiance to the tune, and concluding with an elaborate curtsey.

As she recovered herself, she became aware of her father standing in the doorway. His lips were white, and there was a queer look in his face.

"Oh! So this is *your* party, is it, Miss Beth?" he said. "You ask your friends in, and then you insult them, I see."

Beth was still effervescing. She put her hands behind her back and answered boldly—

"Deed, thin, he insulted me, papa. It was Bap-faced Flanagan. He said we were durrty heretics, and—and—I'll not stand that! It's a free country!"

Captain Caldwell looked round, and the people melted from the room under his eye. Then Anne appeared from somewhere.

"Anne, do you teach the children party-songs?" he demanded.

"Shure, they don't need taching, yer honour," said Anne, disconcerted. "Miss Beth knows 'em all, and she shouts 'em at the top of her voice down the street till the men shake their fists at her."

"Why do you do that, Beth?" her father demanded.

"I like to feel," Beth began, gasping out each word with a mighty effort to express herself—"I like to feel—that I can *make* them shake their fists."

Her father looked at her again very queerly.

"Will I take her to the nursery, sir?" Anne asked.

Beth turned on her impatiently, and said something in Irish which made Anne grin. Beth did not understand her father in this mood, and she wanted to see more of him.

"What's that she's saying to you, Anne?" he asked.

"Oh—sure, she's just blessin' me, yer honour," Anne answered unabashed.

"I believe you!" Captain Caldwell said dryly, as he stretched himself on the sofa. "Go and fetch a hair-brush."

While Anne was out of the room he turned to Beth. "I'll give you a penny," he said, "if you'll tell me what you said to Anne."

"I'll tell you for nothing," Beth answered. "I said, 'Yer soul to the devil for an interfering hussy.'"

Captain Caldwell burst out laughing, and laughed till Anne returned with the brush. "Now, brush my hair," he said to Beth; and Beth went and stood beside the sofa, and brushed, and brushed, now with one hand, and now with the other, till she ached all over with the effort. Her father suffered from atrocious headaches, and this was the one thing that relieved him.

"There, that's punishment enough for to-day," he said at last.

Beth retired to the foot of the couch, and leant there, looking at him solemnly, with the hair-brush still in her hand. "That's no punishment," she observed.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean I like it," she said. "I'd brush till I dropped if it did you any good."

Captain Caldwell looked up at her, and it was as if he had seen the child for the first time.

"Beth," he said, after a while, "would you like to come out with me on the car to-morrow?"

"Deed, then, I would, papa," Beth answered eagerly.

Then there was a pause, during which Beth rubbed her back against the end of the couch thoughtfully, and looked at the wall opposite as if she could see through it. Her father watched her for a little time with a frown upon his forehead from the pain in his head.

"What are you thinking of, Beth?" he said at last.

"I've got to be whipped to-night," she answered drearily; "and I wish I hadn't. I do get so tired of being whipped and shaken."

Her little face looked pinched and pathetic as she spoke, and for the first time her father had a suspicion of what punishment was to this child—a thing as inevitable as disease, a continually recurring torture, but quite without effect upon her conduct—and his heart contracted with a qualm of pity.

"What are you going to be whipped for now?" he asked.

"We went to tea at the vicarage, and I ran away home."

"Why?"

"Because of the great green waves. They rush up the rocks—wish—st—st!" (she took a step forward, and threw up her little arms in illustration)—"then fall, and roll back, and gather, and come rushing on again; and I feel every time—every time—that they are coming right at me!"—she clutched her

throat as if she were suffocating; "and if I had stayed I should have shrieked, and then I should have been whipped. So I came away."

"But you expect to be whipped for coming away?"

"Yes. But you see I don't have the waves as well. And mamma won't say I was afraid."

"Were you afraid, Beth?" her father asked.

"No!" Beth retorted, stamping her foot indignantly. "If the waves did come at me, I could stand it. It's the coming—coming—coming—I can't bear. It makes me ache here." She clutched at her throat and chest again.

Captain Caldwell closed his eyes. He felt that he was beginning to make this child's acquaintance, and wished he had tried to cultivate it sooner.

"You shall not be whipped to-night, Beth," he said presently, looking at her with a kindly smile.

Instantly an answering smile gleamed on the child's face, transfiguring her; and, by the light of it, her father realised how seldom he had seen her smile.

Unfortunately for Beth, however, while her countenance was still irradiated, her mother swooped down upon her. Mrs. Caldwell had come hurrying home in a rage in search of Beth; and now, mistaking that smile for a sign of defiance, she seized upon her, and had beaten her severely before it was possible to interfere. Beth, dazed by this sudden onslaught, staggered when she let her go, and stretched out her little hands as if groping for some support.

"It wasn't your fault!—it wasn't your fault!" she gasped, her first instinct being to exonerate her father.

Captain Caldwell had started up and caught his wife by the arm.

"That's enough," he said harshly. "You are going altogether the wrong way to work with the child. Let this be the last time, do you understand? Beth, go to the nursery, and ask Anne to get you some tea." A sharp pain shot through his head. He had jumped up too quickly, and now fell back on the sofa with a groan.

"Oh, let me brush it again," Beth cried, in an agony of sympathy.

Her father opened his haggard eyes and smiled.

"Go to the nursery, like a good child," he said, "and get some tea."

Beth went without another word. But all that evening her mind was with her parents in the sitting-room, wondering—wondering what they were saying to each other.

CHAPTER VIII

NEXT day Beth jumped out of bed early, and washed herself all over, in an excess of grateful zeal, because she was to be taken out on the car. As soon as she had had her breakfast, she ran into the yard to feed her magpie. Its perch was in a comfortable corner sheltered by the great turf-stack which had been built up against the wall that divided the Caldwells' yard from that of Pat Murphy, the farrier. Beth, in wild spirits, ran round the stack, calling "Mag, Mag!" as she went. But Mag, alas! was never more to respond to her call. He was hanging by the leg from his perch, head downward, wings outstretched, and glossy feathers ruffled; and below him, on the ground, some stones were scattered which told the tale of cruelty and petty spite.

Beth stood for a moment transfixed; but in that moment the whole thing became clear to her—the way in which the deed was done, the man that did it, and his motive. She glanced up to the top of the high wall, and then, breathing thick through her clenched teeth, in her rage she climbed up the turf-stack with the agility of a cat, and looked over into the farrier's yard.

"Come out of that, Pat Murphy, ye black-hearted, murdering villain," she shrieked. "I see ye skulking there behind the stable-door. Come out, I tell ye, and bad luck to you for killing my bird."

"Is it me, miss?" Pat Murphy exclaimed, appearing with an injured and innocent look on his face. "Me kill yer burrd! Shure, thin, ye never thought such a thing uv me!"

"Didn't I, thin! and I think it still," Beth cried. "Say, 'May I never see heaven if I kilt it'—or I'll curse ye."

"Ah, thin, it isn't such bad language ye'd hev me be using, and you a young lady, Miss Beth," said Pat in a wheedling tone.

"Deed, thin, it is, Pat Murphy; but I know ye daresn't say it," said Beth. "Oh, bad luck to ye! bad luck to ye every day ye see a wooden milestone,

and twice every day ye don't. And if ye killed my bird, may the devil attend ye, to rob ye of what ye like best wherever ye are."

She slid down the stack when she had spoken, and found her father standing at the bottom, looking at the dead bird with a heavy frown on his dark face. He must have heard Beth's altercation with Murphy, but he made no remark until Mrs. Caldwell came out, when he said something in Italian, to which she responded, "The cowardly brute!"

Beth took her bird, and buried it deep in her little garden, by which time the car was ready. She had not shed a tear, nor did she ever mention the incident afterwards; which was characteristic, for she was always shy of showing any feeling but anger.

Captain Caldwell had a wild horse called Artless, which few men would have cared to ride, and fewer still have driven. People wondered that he took his children out on the car behind such an animal, and perhaps he would not have done so if he had had his own way, but Mrs. Caldwell insisted on it.

"They've no base blood in them," she said; "and I'll not have them allowed to acquire any affectation of timidity."

Artless was particularly fresh that morning. He was a red chestnut, with a white star on his forehead, and one white stocking.

When Beth returned to the stable-yard she found him fidgeting between the shafts, with his ears laid back, and the whites of his wicked eyes showing, and Riley struggling with his head in a hard endeavour to keep him quiet enough for the family to mount the car. Captain and Mrs. Caldwell and Mildred were already in their seats, and Beth scrambled up to hers unconcernedly, although Artless was springing about in a lively manner at the moment. Beth sat next her father, who drove from the side of the car, and then they were ready to be off as soon as Artless would go; but Artless objected to leave the yard, and Riley had to lead him round and round, running at his head, and coaxing him, while Captain Caldwell gathered up the reins and held the whip in suspense, watching his opportunity each time they passed the gate to give Artless a start that would make him bound through it. Round and round they went, however, several times, with

Artless rearing, backing, and plunging; but at last the whip came down at the right moment, just the slightest flick, Riley let go his head, and out he dashed in his indignation, the battle ending in a wild gallop up the street, with the car swinging behind him, and the whole of the Irish side of the road out cheering and encouraging, to the children's great delight. But their ebullition of glee was a little too much for their father's nerves.

"These children of yours are perfect little devils, Caroline!" he exclaimed irritably. Mrs. Caldwell smiled as at a compliment. She had been brought up on horseback herself, and insisted on teaching the children to regard danger as a diversion—not that that was difficult, for they were naturally daring. She would have punished them promptly on the slightest suspicion of timidity. "Only base-born people were cowardly," she scornfully maintained. "No lady ever shows a sign of fear."

Once, when they were crossing Achen sands, a wide waste, innocent of any obstacle, Artless came down without warning, and Mildred uttered an exclamation.

"Who was it made that ridiculous noise?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, looking hard at Beth.

Beth could not clear herself without accusing her sister, so she said nothing, but sat, consumed with fiery indignation; and for long afterwards she would wake up at night, and clench her little fists, and burn again, remembering how her mother had supposed she was afraid.

Artless went at breakneck speed that day, shied at the most unexpected moments, bolted right round, and stopped short occasionally; but Beth sat tight mechanically, following her own fancies. Captain Caldwell was going to inspect one of the outlying coastguard stations; and they went by the glen road, memorable to Beth because it was there she first felt the charm of running water, and found her first wild violets and tuft of primroses. The pale purple of the violets and the scent of primroses, warm with the sun, were among the happy associations of that time. But her delight was in the mountain-streams, with their mimic waterfalls and fairy wells. She loved to loiter by them, to watch them bubbling and sparkling over the rocks, to dabble her hands and feet in them, or to lie her length upon the turf beside them, in keen consciousness of the incessant, delicate, delicious murmur of

the water, a sound which conveyed to her much more than can be expressed in articulate speech. At times too, when she was tired of loitering, she would look up and see the mountain-top just above her, and begin to climb; but always when she came to the spot, there was the mountain-top just as far above her as before; so she used to think that the mountain really reached the sky.

When they returned, late that afternoon, Riley met them with a very serious face, and told Captain Caldwell mysteriously that Pat Murphy's horse was ill.

"What a d——d unfortunate coincidence," Captain Caldwell muttered to his wife; and Beth noticed that her mother's face, which had looked fresh and bright from the drive, settled suddenly into its habitual anxious, careworn expression.

Beth loitered about the yard till her parents had gone in; then she climbed the turf-stack, and looked over. The sick horse was tied to the stable-door, and stood, hanging his head with a very woebegone expression, and groaning monotonously. Murphy was trying to persuade him to take something hot out of a bucket, while Bap-faced Flanagan and another man, known as Tony-kill-the-cow, looked on and gave good advice.

Beth's fury revived when she saw Murphy, and she laughed aloud derisively. All three men started and looked up, then crossed themselves.

"Didn't I tell ye, Pat!" Beth exclaimed. "Ye may save yourself the trouble of doctoring him. He's as dead as my magpie."

Murphy looked much depressed. "Shure, Miss Beth, the poor baste done ye no harm," he pleaded.

"No," said Beth, "nor my bird hadn't done you any harm, nor the cow Tony cut the tail off hadn't done him any harm."

"I didn't kill yer burrd," Murphy asserted doggedly.

"We'll see," said Beth. "When the horse dies we'll know who killed the bird. Then one of you skunks can try and kill me. But I'd advise you to use a

silver bullet; and if you miss, you'll be damned.—Blast ye, Riley, will ye let me alone!"

Riley, hearing what was going on, and having called to her vainly to hold her tongue, had climbed the stack himself, and now laid hold of her. Beth struck him in the face promptly, whereupon he shook her, and loosening her hold of the wall, began to carry her down—a perilous proceeding, for the stack was steep, and Beth, enraged at the indignity, doubled herself up and scratched and bit and kicked the whole way to the ground.

"Ye little divil," said Riley, setting her on her feet, "ye'll get us all into trouble wid that blasted tongue o' yours."

"Who's afraid?" said Beth, shaking her tousled head, and standing up to Riley with her little fists clenched.

"If the divil didn't put ye out when he gave up housekeeping, I dunno where you come from," Riley muttered as he turned away and stumped off stolidly.

During the night the horse died, and Beth found when she went out next day that the carcass had been dragged down Murphy's garden and put in the lane outside. She climbed the wall, and discovered the farrier skinning the horse, and was much disgusted to see him using his hands without gloves on in such an operation. Her anger of the day before was all over now, and she was ready to be on the usual terms of scornful intimacy with Murphy.

"Ye'll never be able to touch anything to eat again with those hands," she said.

"Won't I, thin!" he answered sulkily, and without looking up. He was as inconsequent as a child that resents an injury, but can be diverted from the recollection of it by anything interesting, only to return to its grievance, however, the moment the interest fails. "Won't I, thin! Just you try me wid a bit o' bread-an'-butter this instant, an' see what I'll do wid it."

Beth, always anxious to experiment, tore indoors to get some bread-and-butter, and never did she forget the horror with which she watched the dirty man eat it, with unwashed hands, sitting on the horse's carcass.

That carcass was a source of interest to her for many a long day to come. She used to climb on the wall to see how it was getting on, till the crows had picked the bones clean, and the weather had bleached them white; and she would wonder how a creature once so full of life could become a silent, senseless thing, not feeling, not caring, not knowing, no more to itself than a stone—strange mystery; and some day *she* would be like that, just white bones. She held her breath and suspended all sensation and thought, time after time, to see what it felt like; but always immediately there began a great rushing sound in her ears as of a terrific storm, and that, she concluded, was death coming. When he arrived then all would be blotted out.

The country was in a very disturbed state, and it was impossible to keep all hints of danger from the children's sharp ears. Beth knew a great deal of what was going on and what might be expected, but then a few chance phrases were already enough for her to construct a whole story upon, and with wonderful accuracy generally. Her fine faculty of observation developed apace at this time, and nothing she noticed now was ever forgotten. She would curl up in the window-seat among the fuchsias, and watch the people in the street by the hour together, especially on Sundays and market-days, when a great many came in from the mountains, women in close white caps with goffered frills, short petticoats, and long blue cloaks; and men in tail-coats and knee-breeches, with shillalabs under their arms, which they used very dexterously. They talked Irish at the top of their voices, and gesticulated a great deal, and were childishly quarrelsome. One market-day, when Beth was looking out of the sitting-room window, her mother came and looked out too, and they saw half-a-dozen countrymen set upon a young Castletownrock man. In a moment their shillalabs were whirling about his head, and he was driven round the corner of the house. Presently he came staggering back across the road, blubbering like a child, with his head broken, and the blood streaming down over his face, which was white and distorted with pain. They had knocked him down, and kicked him when he was on the ground.

"Oh! the cowards! the cowards!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. Beth felt sick, but it was not so much what she saw as what she heard that affected her—the man's crying, and the graphic description of the nature and depth of the wound which another man, who had been present while the doctor dressed it, stopping at the window, kindly insisted on giving them, Mrs. Caldwell being obliged to listen courteously for fear of making herself unpopular. The man's manner impressed Beth—there was such a solemn joy in it, as of one who had just witnessed something refreshing.

There were two priests in the place, Father Madden and Father John. Captain Caldwell said Father Madden was a gentleman. He shook hands with everybody, even with the curate and Mr. Macbean; but Father John would not speak to a protestant, and used to scowl at the children when he met them, and then Mildred would seize Bernadine's hand and drag her past him quickly, because she hated to be scowled at; but Beth always stopped and made a face at him. He used to carry a long whip, and crack it at the people, and on Sunday mornings, if they did not go to mass, he would patrol the streets in a fury, rating the idlers at the top of his voice, and driving them on before him. Beth used to glance stealthily at the chapel as she went to church; it had the attraction of forbidden fruit for her, and of Father John's exciting antics—nothing ever happened in church. Chapel she associated with the papists, and not at all with Kitty, whose tender teaching occupied a separate compartment of her consciousness altogether. There she kept the "Blessed Mother" and the "Dear Lord" for her comfort, although she seldom visited them now. Terms of endearment meant a great deal to Beth, because no one used them habitually in her family; in fact, she could not remember ever being called dear in her life by either father or mother.

Since the day when she had run away from the great green waves, however, her father had taken an interest in her. He often asked her to brush his hair, and laughed very much sometimes at things she said. He used to lie on the couch reading to himself while she brushed.

"Read some to me, papa," she said one day. He smiled and read a little, not in the least expecting her to understand it, but she soon showed him that she did, and entreated him to go on; so he gradually fell into the habit of reading aloud to her, particularly the "Ingoldsby Legends." She liked to hear them again and again, and would clamour for her favourites. On one

occasion when he had stopped, and she had been sitting some time at the foot of the couch, with the brush in her hand, she suddenly burst out with a long passage from "The Execution"—the passage that begins:—

"God! 'tis a fearsome thing to see
That pale wan man's mute agony."

Captain Caldwell raised his eyebrows as she proceeded, and looked at his wife.

"I thought a friend of ours was considered stupid," he said.

"People can do very well when they like," Mrs. Caldwell answered tartly; "but they're too lazy to try. When did you learn that, Beth?"

"I didn't learn it," Beth answered.

"Then how do you know it?"

"It just came to me," Beth said.

"Then I wish your lessons would *just come* to you."

"I wish they would," said Beth sincerely.

Mrs. Caldwell snapped out something about idleness and obstinacy, and left the room. The day was darkening down, and presently Captain Caldwell got up, lit a lamp at the sideboard, and set it on the dining-table. When he had done so, he took Beth, and set her on the table too. Beth stood up on it, laughing, and put her arm round his neck.

"Look at us, papa!" she exclaimed, pointing at the window opposite. The blinds were up, and it was dark enough outside for them to see themselves reflected in the glass.

"I think we make a pretty picture, Beth," her father said, putting his arm round her.

He had scarcely spoken, when there came a terrific report and a crash; something whizzed close to Beth's head; and a shower of glass fell on the floor. In a moment Beth had wriggled out of her father's arm, slid from the table, and scrambled up on to the window-seat, scattering the flower-pots, and slapping at her father's hand in her excitement, when he tried to stop her.

"It's Bap-faced Flanagan—or Tony-kill-the-cow," she cried. "I can see—O papa! why did you pull me back? Now I shall never know!"

The servants had rushed in from the kitchen, and Mrs. Caldwell came flying downstairs.

"What is it, Henry?" she cried.

"The d——d scoundrels shot at me with the child in my arms," he answered, looking in his indignation singularly like Beth herself in a stormy mood. As he spoke he turned to the hall door, and walked out into the street bareheaded.

"For the love of the Lord, sir," Riley remonstrated, keeping well out of the way himself.

But Captain Caldwell walked off down the middle of the road alone deliberately to the police station, his wife standing meanwhile on the doorstep, with the light behind her, coolly awaiting his return.

"Pull down the blind in the sitting-room, Riley, and keep Miss Beth there," was all she said.

Presently Captain Caldwell returned with a police-officer and two men. They immediately began to search the room. The glass of a picture had been shattered at the far end. Riley pulled the picture to one side, and discovered something imbedded in the wall behind, which he picked out with his pocket-knife and brought to the light. It looked like a disc all bent out of shape. He turned it every way, examining it, then tried it with his teeth.

"I thought so," he said significantly. "It wouldn't be yer honour they'd be afther wid a silver bullet. I heard her tell 'em herself to try one."

"And I said if they missed they'd be damned," Beth exclaimed triumphantly.

"Beth!" cried her mother, seizing her by the arm to shake her, "how dare you use such a word?"

"I heard it in church," said Beth, in an injured tone.

"Look here, Beth," said her father, rescuing her from her mother's clutches, and setting her on the table—he had been talking aside with the police officer—"I want you to promise something on your word of honour as a lady, just to please me."

Beth's countenance dropped: "O papa!" she exclaimed, "it's something I don't want to promise."

"Well, never mind that, Beth," he answered. "Just promise this one thing to please me. If you don't, the people will try and kill you."

"I don't mind that," said Beth.

"But I do—and your mother does."

Beth gave her mother a look of such utter astonishment, that the poor lady turned crimson.

"And perhaps they'll kill me too," Captain Caldwell resumed. "You see they nearly did to-night."

This was a veritable inspiration. Beth turned pale, and gasped: "I promise!"

"Not so fast," her father said. "Never promise anything till you hear what it is. But now, promise you won't say bad luck to any of the people again."

"I promise," Beth repeated; "but"—she slid from the table, and nodded emphatically—"but when I shake my fist and stamp my foot at them it'll mean the same thing."

It was found next morning that Bap-faced Flanagan and Tony-kill-the-cow had disappeared from the township; but Murphy remained; and Beth was not allowed to go out alone again for a long time, not even into the garden. All she knew about it herself, however, was, that she had always either a policeman or a coastguardsman to talk to, which added very much to her pleasure in life, and also to Anne's.

CHAPTER IX

ONE of the interests of Captain Caldwell's life was his garden. He spent long hours in cultivating it, and that summer his vegetables, fruits, and flowers had been the wonder of the neighbourhood. But now autumn had come, vegetables were dug, fruits gathered, flowers bedraggled; and there was little to be done but clear the beds, plant them with bulbs, and prepare them for the spring.

Now that Captain Caldwell had made Beth's acquaintance, he liked to have her with him to help him when he was at work in the garden, and there was nothing that she loved so much.

One day they were at work together on a large flower-bed. Her father was trimming some rose-bushes, and she was kneeling beside him on a little mat, weeding.

"I'm glad I'm not a flower," she suddenly exclaimed, after a long silence.

"Why, Beth, flowers are very beautiful."

"Yes, but they last so short a time. I'd rather be less beautiful, and live longer. What's your favourite flower, papa?"

She had stopped weeding for the moment, but still sat on the mat, looking up at him. Captain Caldwell clipped a little more, then stopped too, and looked down at her.

"I don't get a separate pleasure from any particular flower, Beth; they all delight me," he answered.

Beth pondered upon this for a little, then she asked, "Do you know which I like best? Hot primroses." Captain Caldwell raised his eyebrows interrogatively. "When you pick them in the sun, and put them against your cheek, they're all warm, you know," Beth explained; "and then they *are* good! And fuchsias are good too, but it isn't the same good. You know that one in the sitting-room window, white outside and salmon-coloured inside,

and such a nice shape—the flowers—and the way they hang down; you have to lift them to look into them. When I look at them long, they make me feel—oh—feel, you know—feel that I could take the whole plant in my arms and hug it. But fuchsias don't scent sweet like hot primroses."

"And therefore they are not so good?" her father suggested, greatly interested in the child's attempt to express herself. "They say that the scent is the soul of the flower."

"The scent is the soul of the flower," Beth repeated several times; then heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction. "I want to sing it," she said. "I always want to sing things like that."

"What other 'things like that' do you know, Beth?"

"The song of the sea in the shell,
The swish of the grass in the breeze,
The sound of a far-away bell,
The whispering leaves on the trees,"

Beth burst out instantly.

"Who taught you that, Beth?" her father asked.

"Oh, no one taught me, papa," she answered. "It just came to me—like this, you know. I used to listen to the sea in that shell in the sitting-room, and I tried and tried to find a name for the sound, and all at once *song* came into my head—*The song of the sea in the shell*. Then I was lying out here on the grass when it was long, before you cut it to make hay, and you came out and said, 'There's a stiff breeze blowing.' And it blew hard and then stopped, and then it came again; and every time it came the grass went—swish-h-h! *The swish of the grass in the breeze*. Then you know that bell that rings a long way off, you can only just hear it out here—*The sound of a far-away bell*. Then the leaves—it *was* a long time before anything came that I could sing about them. I used to try and think it, but you can't sing a thing you think. It's when a thing comes, you can sing it. I was always listening to the leaves, and I always felt they were doing something; then all at once it came one day. Of course they were whispering—*The whispering leaves on the trees*. That was how they came, papa. At first I used to sing them by

themselves; but now I sing them all together. You can sing them three different ways—the way I did first, you know, then you can put *breeze* first

The swish of the grass in the breeze,
The whispering leaves on the trees,
The song of the sea in the shell,
The sound of a far-away bell.

Or you can sing—

The sound of a far-away bell,
 The whispering leaves on the trees,
 The swish of the grass in the breeze,
The song of the sea in the shell.

Which way do you think the nicest?" She had rattled all this off as fast as she could speak, looking and pointing towards the various things she mentioned as she proceeded, the sea, the grass, the trees, the distance; now she looked up to her father for an answer. He was looking at her so queerly, she was filled with alarm. "Am I naughty, papa?" she exclaimed.

"Oh no," he said, with a smile that reassured her. "I was just thinking. I like to hear how 'things come' to you. You must always tell me—when new things come. By the way, who told you that fuchsia was salmon-coloured?"

"I *saw* it was," she said, surprised that he needed to ask such a question. "I saw it one day when we had boiled salmon for dinner. Isn't it nice when you see that one thing's like another? I have a pebble, and it's just the shape of a pear—now you know what shape it is, don't you?" He nodded. "But if I said it's thick at one end and thin at another, you wouldn't know what shape it is a bit, would you?"

"No, I should not," he answered, beginning to prune again, thoughtfully. "Beth," he said presently, "I should like to see you grow up."

"Shan't I grow up?" said Beth in dismay.

"Oh yes—at least I should hope so. But—it's not likely that *I* shall be—looking on. But, Beth, I want you to remember this. When you grow up, I think you will want to do something that only a few other people can do well—paint a picture, write a book, act in a theatre, make music—it doesn't matter what; if it comes to you, if you feel you can do it, just do it. You'll not do it well all at once; but try and try until you *can* do it well. And don't ask anybody if they think you can do it; they'll be sure to say no; and then you'll be disheartened—What's disheartened? It's the miserable feeling you would get if I said you would never be able to learn to play the piano. You'd try to do it all the same, perhaps, but you'd do it doubtfully instead of with confidence."

"What's confidence?" said Beth.

"You are listening to me now with confidence. It is as if you said, I believe you."

"But I can't say 'I believe you' to arithmetic, if I want to do it."

"No, but you can say, I believe I can do it—I believe in myself."

"Is that confidence in myself?" Beth asked, light breaking in upon her.

"That's it. You're getting quite a vocabulary, Beth. A vocabulary is all the words you know," he added hastily, anticipating the inevitable question.

Beth went on with her weeding for a little.

"And there is another thing, Beth, I want to tell you," her father recommenced. "Never do anything unless you are quite sure it is the right thing to do. It doesn't matter how much you may want to do it, you mustn't, if you are not quite, quite sure it is right."

"Not even if I am just half sure?"

"No, certainly not. You must be quite, quite sure."

Beth picked some more weeds, then looked up at him again: "But, papa, I shall never want to do anything I don't think right when I'm grown up, shall I?"

"I'm afraid you will. Everybody does."

"Did *you* want to, papa?" Beth asked in amazement.

"Yes," he answered.

"And did you do it?"

"Yes," he repeated.

"And what happened?"

"Much misery."

"Were you miserable?"

"Yes, very. But that wasn't the worst of it."

"What was the worst of it?"

"The worst of it was that I made other people miserable."

"Ah, that's bad," said Beth, with perfect comprehension. "That makes you feel so horrid inside yourself."

"Well, Beth, just you remember that. You can't do wrong without making somebody else miserable. Be loyal, be loyal to yourself, loyal to the best that is in you; that means, be as good as your friends think you, and better if you can. Tell the truth, live openly, and stick to your friends; that's the whole of the best code of morality in the world. Now we must go in."

As they walked down the garden together, Beth slipped her dirty little hand into his, and looked up at him: "Papa," she said solemnly, "when you want to be with somebody always, more than with anybody else; and want to look at him, and want to talk to him, and you find you can tell him lots of things you couldn't tell anybody else if you tried, you know; what does it mean?"

"It means you love him very much."

"Then I love you, papa, very much," she said, nestling her head against his arm. "And it does make me feel so nice inside. But it makes me miserable

too," she added, sighing.

"How so?"

"When you have a headache, you know. I used only to be afraid you'd be angry if I made a noise. But now I'm always thinking how much it hurts you. I wake up often and often at night, and you are in my mind, and I try and see you say, 'It's better,' or 'It's quite well.'"

"And what then, Beth?" her father asked, in a queer voice.

"Then I don't cry any more, you know."

She looked up at her father as she spoke, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER X

THAT was almost the last of those happy autumn days. Winter fell upon the country suddenly with nipping cold. The mountains, always sombre, lowered in great tumbled masses from under the heavy clouds that seldom rose from their summits. Terrible gales kept the sea in torment, and the voice of its rage and pain filled Castletownrock without ceasing. Torrents of rain tore up the roads, and rendered them almost impassable. There was stolid endurance and suffering written on every face out of doors, while within the people cowered over their peat fires, a prey to hunger, cold, and depression. Draughts made merry through the large rooms and passages in Captain Caldwell's house; the wind howled in the chimneys, rattled at the windows, and whistled at the keyholes, especially at night, when Beth would hide her head under the bed-clothes to keep out the racket, or, in another mood, lie and listen to it, and imagine herself out in the storm, till her nerves were strung to a state of ecstatic tension, and her mind fairly revelled in the sense of danger. When her father was at home in the evening, she would sit still beside the fire in the sitting-room, listening in breathless awe, and excitement wholly pleasurable, to the gale raging without; but if Captain Caldwell had not returned, as frequently happened now that the days were short, and the roads so bad, well knowing the risks he ran, she would see the car upset a hundred times, and hear the rattle of musketry in every blast that shook the house, and so share silently, but to the full, the terrible anxiety which kept her mother pacing up and down, up and down, unable to settle to anything until he entered and sank into a seat, often so exhausted that it was hard to rouse him to change his dripping clothes. His duties, always honourably performed whatever the risk to himself, were far too severe for him, and he was rapidly becoming a wreck;—nervous, liverish, a martyr to headache, and a slave to stimulants, although not a drunkard—he only took enough to whip him up to his work. His digestion too had become seriously impaired, and he had no natural appetite for anything. He was fond of his children, and proud of them, but had hitherto been too irritable to contribute anything to their happiness; on the contrary, his name was a terror to them, and "Hush, papa has come in!"

was enough at any time to damp their wildest spirits. Now, however, he suffered more from depression than from irritability, and would cower over the fire on stormy days in a state of despondency which was reflected in every face, taking no notice of any of them. The children would watch him furtively in close silent sympathy, sitting still and whispering for fear of disturbing him; and if perchance they saw him smile, and a look of relief came into their mother's anxious face, their own spirits went up on the instant. But everything was against him. The damp came up from the flags in the sitting-room through the cocoanut matting and the thick carpet that covered it, which it defaced in great patches. Close to the fire the wires of the piano rusted, and had to be rubbed and rubbed every day, or half the notes went dumb. The paper, a rare luxury in those parts, began to drop from the walls. Great turf-fires were constantly kept up, but the damp stole a march on them when they smouldered in the night, and made mildew-marks upon everything.

Good food and cooking would have helped Captain Caldwell, but the food was indifferent, and there were no cooks to be had in the country. Biddy had never seen such a thing as a kitchen-range before she took the situation, and when she first had to use the oven, she put the turf on the bottom shelf in order to heat the top one. Mrs. Caldwell made what were superhuman efforts to a woman of her training and constitution, to keep the servants up to the mark, and grew grey in the endeavour; but Mrs. Caldwell in the kitchen was like a racehorse at the plough; and even if she had been a born housewife, she could have done little with servants who would do nothing themselves except under her eyes, and stole everything they could lay their hands on, including the salt out of the salt-cellars between meals, if it were not locked up.

Towards the end of January, Captain Caldwell was ill in bed; he had wet cloths on his head, and seemed as if he could hardly speak. Beth hung about his door all day, watching for opportunities to steal in. Mamma always sent her away if she could, but if papa heard her, he would whisper, "Let the child come in," and then mamma would let her in, but would still look cross. And Beth sat at one side of the bed, and mamma sat on the other, and no one spoke except papa sometimes; only you could seldom understand what he said. And mamma cried, but Beth did not. She ached too much inside for that. You can't cry when you ache so much.

Beth day after day sat with her hands folded on her lap, and her feet dangling from a chair that was much too high for her, watching her father with an intensity of silent anxiety that was terrible to witness in so young a child. Her mother might have beaten her to death, but she could never have dislodged her from the room once she had her father's leave to stay there. Mrs. Caldwell rarely beat her now, however; she generally ignored her; so Beth came and went as she chose. She would climb up on to the bed when there was nobody in the room, and kiss the curls of papa's thick glossy black hair so softly that he never knew, except once, when he caught her, and smiled. His dark face grew grey in bed, and his blue eyes sunken and haggard; but he battled it out that time, and slowly began to recover.

Beth was sitting in her usual place beside her father's bed one day when the doctor came and discovered her. He was standing on the other side of the bed, and exclaimed, "Why, it's all eyes!"

"Yes, it's a queer pixie," her father said. "But it's going to do something some day, or *I'm* much mistaken."

"It's going to make a nuisance of itself if you put such nonsense into its head, or I'm much mistaken," Mrs. Caldwell observed.

"I shall *not* make a nuisance of myself," Beth indignantly protested.

"I shall never be able to make you understand, Caroline," Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "Little pitchers are generally bad enough, but when there is large intelligence added to the long ears, they're the devil."

Before the doctor left he said to Mrs. Caldwell, "We must keep our patient amused, you know."

"O doctor!" Beth exclaimed, clasping her hands in her earnestness, "do you think if Sophie Keene came?"

The doctor burst into a shout of laughter, in which Captain Caldwell also joined. "Just stay here yourself, Beth," he said, when he had recovered himself. "For amusement, neither Sophie Keene nor any one else I ever knew could hold a candle to you."

"What's 'hold a candle to you'?" Beth instantly demanded.

And then there was more laughter, in which even Mrs. Caldwell joined; and afterwards, when the doctor had gone, she actually patted Beth on the back, and stroked her hair, which was the first caress Beth ever remembered to have received from her mother.

"Now, mamma," she exclaimed, with great feeling, in the fulness of her surprise and delight, "now I shall forget that you ever beat me."

Her mother coloured painfully.

Her father muttered something about a noble nature.

"And that was the child you never wanted at all!" slipped, with a ring of triumph, from Mrs. Caldwell unawares—an interesting example of the complexity of human feelings.

Captain Caldwell soon went back to his duty—all too soon for his strength. The dreadful weather continued. Day after day he returned soaking from some distant station to the damp and discomfort of the house, and the ill-cooked, unappetising food, which he could hardly swallow. And to all this was added great anxiety about the future of his family. His boys were doing well at school by this time; but he was not satisfied with the way in which the little girls were being brought up. There was no order in their lives, no special time for anything; and he knew the importance of early discipline. He tried to discuss the subject with his wife, but she met his suggestions irritably.

"There's time enough for that," she said. "*I* had no regular lessons till I was in my teens."

"But what answered with you may be disastrous to these children," he ventured. "They are all unlike you in disposition, more especially Beth."

"You spoil that child," Mrs. Caldwell protested. "And at any rate I can do no more. I am run off my feet."

This was true, and Captain Caldwell let the subject drop. His patience was exemplary in those days. He suffered severely both mentally and physically, but never complained. The shadow was upon him, and he knew it, but he

met his fate with fortitude. Whatever his faults, they were expiated in the estimation of all who saw him suffer now.

Mrs. Caldwell never realised how ill he was, but still she was uneasy, and it was with intense relief that she welcomed a case of soups and other nourishing delicacies calculated to tempt the appetite, which arrived for him one day from one of his sisters in England.

"This is just what you want, Henry," she said, with a brighter look in her face than he had seen there for months. "I shall soon have you yourself again now."

Captain Caldwell's spirits also went up.

In the evening they were all together in the sitting-room. Mrs. Caldwell was playing little songs for Mildred to sing, Baby Bernadine was playing with her bricks upon the floor, and Beth as usual was hanging about her father. He had shaken off his despondency, and was quite lively for the moment, walking up and down the room, and making merry remarks to his wife in Italian, at which she laughed a good deal.

"Come, Beth, fetch 'Ingoldsby.' We shall just come to my favourite, and finish the book before you go to bed," he said.

Beth brought the book, and then climbed up on his knee, and settled there happily, with her head on his shoulder.

"As I laye a-thynkynge, the golden sun was sinking,
O merrie sang that Bird as it glitter'd on her breast,
 With a thousand gorgeous dyes,
 While soaring to the skies,
 'Mid the stars she seem'd to rise,
 As to her nest;

As I laye a-thynkynge, her meaning was exprest:—
 'Follow, follow me away,
 It boots not to delay,'—
 'Twas so she seemed to saye,
 'HERE IS REST!'"

After he had read those last lines, there was a moment's silence, and then Beth burst into a tempest of tears. "O papa—papa! No, no, no!" she sobbed. "I couldn't bear it."

"What *is* the matter with the child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, starting up.

"The vision and the faculty divine,' I think," her father answered. "Leave her to me."

Beth was awake when Anne entered the nursery next morning to call the children.

"Get up, and be good," Anne said. "Your pa's ill."

Mrs. Caldwell came into the nursery immediately afterwards, very much agitated. She kissed Beth, and from that moment the child was calm; but there settled upon her pathetic little face a terrible look of age and anxiety.

When she was dressed, she ran right into her father's room before any one could stop her. He was moaning—"O my head, my head! O my head, my head!" over and over again.

"You mustn't stay here, little woman—not to-day," the doctor said. "It will make your father worse if you do."

Beth stole from the room, and returned to the nursery. There, however, she could still hear her father moaning, and she could not bear it, so she took her prayer-book, by way of life-saving apparatus, and went down to the kitchen to "see" what the servants were thinking—her own significant expression. They were all strangely subdued. "Sit down, Miss Beth," Biddy said kindly. "Sit down in the window there wid your book if you want company. It's a sore heart you'll be having, or I'm much mistaken."

Beth sat in the window the whole morning, reading prayers to herself, while she watched and waited. The doctor sent Riley down from the sick-room several times to fetch things, and each time Beth consulted his countenance

anxiously for news, but asked no questions. Bidly tried to persuade her to eat, but the child could not touch anything.

Late in the afternoon Riley came down in a hurry.

"Is the master better, Pat?" Bidly demanded.

"Deed, thin, he isn't," Riley replied; "and the doctor's sending me off on the horse as hard as I can go for Dr. Jamieson."

"Och, thin, if the doctor's sending you for Dr. Jamieson it's all up. He's niver sent for till the last. The Lord himself won't save him now."

Beth shuffled over the leaves of her prayer-book hurriedly. She had been crying piteously to God in her heart for hours to save her father, and He had not heard; now she remembered that the servants said if you read the Lord's Prayer backwards it would raise the devil. Beth tried; but the invocation was unavailing. Before Riley could saddle the horse, a message was sent down to stop him; and then Anne came for Beth, and took her up to her father's room. The dreadful sounds had ceased at last, and there was a strange silence in the house. Mrs. Caldwell was sitting beside her husband's bed, rocking herself a little as if in pain, but shedding no tears. Mildred was standing with her arm round her mother's neck crying bitterly, while Baby Bernadine gazed at her father wonderingly.

He was lying on his side with his arms folded. His eyes were shut, and there was a lovely look of relief upon his face.

"I sent for you children," their mother said, "to see your father just as he died. You must never forget him."

Ellis and Rickards, two of papa's men, were in the room, and Mrs. Ellis too, and the doctor, and Riley, and Bidly, and Anne; and there was a foot-bath, with steaming hot water in it, on the floor; some mustard on the table; and the fire burnt brightly. These details impressed themselves on Beth's mind involuntarily, as indeed did everything else connected with that time. It seemed to her afterwards as if she had seen everything and felt nothing for the moment—nothing but breathless excitement and interest. Her grief was entirely suspended.

Mrs. Ellis and the doctor led mamma down to the sitting-room; they didn't seem to think that she could walk. And then Mrs. Ellis made her some tea, and stood there, and coaxed her to drink it, just as if mamma had been a child. Mrs. Caldwell sat on the big couch with her back to the window, and Mildred sat beside her, with her arm round her, crying all the time. Bernadine cried too, but it was because she was hungry, and no one thought of giving her anything to eat. Beth fetched her some bread-and-butter, and then she was good. People began to arrive—Mr. Macbean, Captain and Mrs. Keene, the Smalls, the curate—Father Madden even. He had heard the news out in the country, and came hurrying back to pay his respects, and offer his condolences to Mrs. Caldwell, and see if there was anything he could do. He hoped it was not taking a liberty to come; but indeed he came in the fulness of his heart, and because he couldn't help it, for he had known him well, and a better man and truer gentleman never breathed. The widow held out her hand to the priest, and looked up at him gratefully.

Beth opened the door for Mrs. Small, who exclaimed at once: "Oh, my dear child, how is your poor mother? Does she cry at all? I do hope she has been crying."

"No," Beth answered, "nobody cries but Mildred."

When Mrs. Small went in, Mrs. Caldwell spoke to her quite collectedly. "He was taken ill at eight o'clock this morning with a dreadful pain in his head," she told her. "He had suffered fearfully from his head of late. I sent for the doctor at once. But nothing relieved him. From ten o'clock he got worse and worse, and at four he was gone. He always wished to die suddenly, and be spared a lingering illness. He has been depressed of late, but this morning, early, he woke up quite brightly; and last night he was wonderfully better. After the children had gone to bed, he read aloud to me as he used to do in the old days; and he looked so much more like his old self again that I thought a happier time was coming. And so it was. But not for me."

"Poor lady!" Mrs. Small whispered. "It has been a fearful shock."

Mrs. Caldwell showed strength of character in the midst of the overwhelming calamity which had fallen upon her with such awful suddenness. She had a nice sense of honour, and her love was great; and by

the help of these she was enabled to carry out every wish of her dead husband with regard to himself. He had had a fastidious horror of being handled after death by the kind of old women who are accustomed to lay out bodies, and therefore Mrs. Caldwell begged Ellis and Rickards to perform that last duty for him themselves.

When the children went to bed, she took them to kiss their father. The stillness of the chamber struck a chill through Beth, but she thought it beautiful. The men had draped it in white, and decorated it with evergreens, there being no flowers in season. Papa was smiling, and looked serenely happy.

"Years ago he was like that," mamma said softly, as if she were speaking to herself; "but latterly there has been a look of pain. I am glad to see him so once more. You are at peace now—dearest." She stroked his dark hair, and as she did so her hand showed white against it.

The children kissed him; and then Mrs. Ellis persuaded mamma to come and help her to put them to bed; and mamma taught them to say: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*" She told them to remember they had learnt it on the day their father died, and asked them to say it always in memory of him. Beth believed for a long time that it was he who would walk with her through the valley of the shadow, and in after years she felt sure that her mother had thought so too.

Mrs. Ellis stayed all night, and slept with the children.

When their mother left them, Beth could not sleep. She had noticed how cold her father was when she kissed him, and was distressed to think he had only a sheet to cover him. The longer she thought of it, the more wretched she became, especially when she contrasted the warmth and softness of her own little bed with the hardness and coldness of the one they had made up for him; and at last she could bear it no longer. She sat up in bed and listened. She could hear by their breathing that the other children were asleep, but she was not sure about Mrs. Ellis. Very stealthily, therefore, she slipped out of bed, and pulled off the clothes. She could only just clasp them in both arms, but the nursery door was ajar, and she managed to open it with her foot. It creaked noisily, and Beth waited, listening in suspense;

but nobody moved; so she slipped out into the passage. It was quite dark there, and the floor felt very cold to her bare feet. She stumbled down the passage, tripping over the bed-clothes as she went, and dreading to be caught and stopped, but not afraid of anything else. The door was open when she reached it, and there was a dim light in the room. This was unexpected, and she paused to peep in before she entered. Two candles were burning on a table at the foot of the bed. Their flames flickered in a draught, and cast shadows on her father's face, so that it seemed as if he moved and breathed again. Her mother was kneeling beside the bed, with her face hidden on her husband's breast, her left arm round him, while with the fingers of her right hand she incessantly toyed with his hair. "Only last night," she was saying, "only last night; oh, I cannot believe it!—perhaps I ought to be glad—there will be no more pain for you—oh, my darling, I would have given my life to save you a moment's pain—and I could do so little—so little. Oh, if only you could come back to tell me that your life had ever been the better for me, that I had not spoilt it utterly, that I brought you some happiness." She raised her head and looked into the tranquil face. The flickering shadows flitted across it, but did not deceive her. She must ache on always for an answer now—always, for ever. With a convulsive sob, she crawled up closer on her knees, and laid her cheek beside his, but no tears came. She had not wept at all that day.

Beth stood for a long time in the doorway, listening to her mother's rambling talk, and watching her white fingers straying through her father's hair. She hugged the bed-clothes close, but she had forgotten why she came. She felt no cold; she held no thought; her whole being was absorbed in the scene before her.

Presently, however, something that her mother said aroused her—"Cold," she was murmuring, "so cold. How you dreaded it too! You were always delicate and suffering, yet you did more than the strongest men, for our sakes. You never spared yourself. What you undertook to do, you did like an honourable gentleman, neglecting nothing. You have died doing your duty, as you wished to die. You have been dying all these months—and I never suspected—I did not know—dying—killed by exposure—and anxiety—and bad food. You came home hungry, and you could not eat what I had to give you—cold, and I could not warm you—oh, the cruel, bitter cold!"

Beth slipped up to her noiselessly.

"Mamma!"

Mrs. Caldwell started.

Beth held out the blankets—"to cover him."

Her mother caught her in her arms. "O my poor little child! my poor little child!" she cried; and then at last she burst into tears.

During the days that preceded her father's funeral, Beth did not miss him. It was as if he were somewhere else, that was all—away in the mountains—and was himself thinking, as Beth did continually, about the still, cold, smiling figure that reposed, serenely indifferent to them all, in his room upstairs. One day, what he had said about being laid out by old women came into her head, and she wondered what he would have looked like when they laid him out that he should have objected so strongly to their seeing him. She was near the death-chamber at the moment, and went in. No one was there, and she stood a long time looking at the figure on the bed. It was entirely covered, but she had only to lift the sheet and learn the secret. She turned it back from the placid face, then stopped, and whispered half in awe, half in interrogation, "Papa!" As she pronounced the word, the inhuman impulse passed and was forgotten.

Hours later, Mrs. Ellis found her sitting beside him as she had so often done during his illness, on that same chair which was too high for her, her feet dangling, and her little hands folded in her lap, gazing at him with a face as placidly set, save for the eyes, as his own.

The next day they had all to bid him the long farewell. Mrs. Caldwell stood looking down upon him, not wiping the great tears that welled up painfully into her eyes, lest in the act she should blot out the dear image and so lose sight of it for one last precious moment. She was an undemonstrative woman, but the lingering way in which she touched him, his hair, his face, his waxen hands, was all the more impressive for that in its restrained tenderness.

Suddenly she uncovered his feet. They were white as marble, and beautifully formed. "Ah, I feared so!" she exclaimed. "They put them into hot water that day. I knew it was too hot, and I said so; he seemed insensible, but I felt him wince—and see!" The scar of a scald proved that she had been right. This last act, due to the fear that he had been made to suffer an unnecessary pang, struck Beth in after years as singularly pathetic.

It was not until after the funeral that Beth herself realised that she had lost her father. When they returned, the house had been set in order, and made to look as usual—yet something was missing. The blinds were up, the sun was streaming in, the "Ingoldsby Legends" lay on the sofa in the sitting-room. When Beth saw the book her eyes dilated with a pang. It lay there, just as he had left it; but he was in the ground. He would never come back again.

Suddenly the child threw herself on the floor in an agony of grief, sobbing, moaning, writhing, tearing her hair, and calling aloud, "Papa! papa! Come back! come back! come back!"

Mrs. Caldwell in her fright would have tried her old remedy of shaking and beating; but Mrs. Ellis snatched the child up and carried her off to the nursery, where she kept her for the rest of that terrible day, rocking her on her knee most of the time, and talking to her about her father in heaven, living the life eternal, yet watching over her still, and waiting for her, until she fired Beth's imagination, and the terrible grave was forgotten.

That night, however, and for many nights to come, the child started up out of her sleep, and wept, and wailed, and tore her hair, and had again to be nursed and comforted.

CHAPTER XI

JUST like the mountains, all jumbled up together when you view them from a distance, had Beth's impulses and emotions already begun to be in their extraordinary complexity at this period; and even more like the mountains when you are close to them, for then, losing sight of the whole, you become aware of the details, and are surprised at their wonderful diversity, at the heights and hollows, the barren wastes, fertile valleys, gentle slopes, and giddy precipices—heights and hollows of hope and despair, barren wastes of mis-spent time, fertile valleys of intellectual accomplishment, gentle slopes of aspiration undefined, and giddy precipices of passionate impulse and desperate revolt. Genius is sympathetic insight made perfect; and it must have this diversity if it is ever to be effectual—must touch on every human experience, must suffer, and must also enjoy; great, therefore, are its compensations. It feels the sorrows of all mankind, and is elevated by them; whereas the pain of an individual bereavement is rather acute than prolonged. Genius is spared the continuous gnawing ache of the grief which stultifies; instead of an ever-present wearing sense of loss that would dim its power, it retains only those hallowed memories, those vivid recollections, which foster the joy of a great yearning tenderness; and all its pains are transmuted into something subtle, mysterious, invisible, neither to be named nor ignored—a fertilising essence which is the source of its own heaven, and may also contain the salvation of earth. So genius has no lasting griefs.

Beth utterly rejected all thought of her father in his grave, and even of her father in heaven. When her first wild grief subsided, he returned to her, to be with her, as those we love are with us always in their absence, enshrined in our happy consciousness. She never mentioned him in these days, but his presence, warm in her heart, kept her little being aglow; and it was only when people spoke to her, and distracted her attention from the thought of him, that she felt disconsolate. While she could walk with him in dreams, she cared for no other companionship.

It was a dreadful position for poor Mrs. Caldwell, left a widow—not without friends, certainly, for the people were kind—but with none of her own kith and kin, in that wild district, embarrassed for want of money, and broken in health. But, as is usual in times of great calamity, many things happened, showing both the best and the worst side of human nature.

After Captain Caldwell's death, old Captain Keene, who had once held the appointment himself, and was indebted to Captain Caldwell for much kindly hospitality, went about the countryside telling people that Captain Caldwell had died of drink. Some officious person immediately brought the story to Mrs. Caldwell.

Mrs. Caldwell had the house on her hands, but the officer who was sent to succeed Captain Caldwell would be obliged to take it, as there was no other. He arrived one day with a very fastidious wife, who did not like the house at all. There was no accommodation in it, no china cupboard, nothing fit for a lady. She must have it all altered. From the way she spoke, it seemed to Beth that she blamed her mother for everything that was wrong.

Mrs. Caldwell said very little. She was suffering from a great swelling at the back of her neck—an anthrax, the doctor called it—and was not fit to be about at all, but her indomitable fortitude kept her up. Mrs. Ellis had stayed to nurse her, and help with the children. She and Mrs. Caldwell looked at each other and smiled when the new officer's wife had gone.

"She's a very fine lady indeed, Mrs. Ellis," Mrs. Caldwell said, sighing wearily.

"Yes, ma'am," Mrs. Ellis answered; "but people who have been used to things all their lives think less about them."

Mrs. Ellis was very kind to the children, and when wet days kept Beth indoors, she would stay with her, and study her with interest. She was thin, precise, low-voiced, quiet in her movements, passionless, loyal; and every time she took a mouthful at table, she wiped her mouth.

The doctor came every day to dress the abscess on Mrs. Caldwell's neck, and every day he said that if it had not burst of itself he should have been obliged to make a deep incision in it in the form of a cross. Mildred and Beth were always present on these occasions, fighting to be allowed to hold

the basin. Mrs. Ellis wanted to turn them out, but Mrs. Caldwell said: "Let them stay, poor little bodies; they like to be with me."

The poor lady, ill as she was, had neither peace nor quiet. The yard was full of great stones now, and stone-masons hammered at them from early morning till late at night, chipping them into shape for the alterations and additions to be made to the house; the loft was full of carpenters preparing boards for flooring; the yard-gates were always open, and people came and went as they liked, so that there was no more privacy for the family. Mildred stayed indoors with her mother a good deal; but Beth, followed by Bernadine, who had become her shadow, was continually in the yard among the men, listening, questioning, and observing. To Beth, at this time, the grown-up people of her race were creatures with a natural history other than her own, which she studied with great intelligence and interest, and sometimes also with disgust; for, although she was so much more with the common people, as she had been taught to call them, than with her own class, she did not adopt their standards, and shrank always with innate refinement from everything gross. No one thought of shooting her now. She had not only lived down her unpopularity, but, by dint of her natural fearlessness, her cheerful audacity of speech, and quick comprehension, had won back the fickle hearts of the people, who weighed her words again superstitiously, and made much of her. The workmen, with the indolent, inconsequent Irish temperament which makes it irksome to follow up a task continuously, and easier to do anything than the work in hand, would break off to amuse her at any time. One young carpenter—lean, sallow, and sulky—who was working for her mother, interested her greatly. He was making packing-cases, and the first one was all wrong, and had to be pulled to pieces; and the way he swore as he demolished it, ripping out oaths as he ripped up the boards, impressed Beth as singularly silly.

There was another carpenter at work in the loft, a little wizened old man. He always brought a peculiar kind of yellow bread, and shared it with the children, who loved it, and took as much as they wanted without scruple, so that the poor old man must have had short-commons himself sometimes. He could draw all kinds of things—fish with scales, ships in full sail, horses, coaches, people—and Beth often made him get out his big broad pencil and do designs for her on the new white boards. When he was within earshot, the people in the yard were particular about what they said before the

children; if they forgot themselves he called them to order, and silenced them instantly, which surprised Beth, because he was the smallest man there. There was one man, however, whom the old carpenter could never suppress. Beth did not know how this man got his living. He came from the village to gossip, wore a tweed suit, not like a workman's, nor was it the national Irish dress. He had a red nose and a wooden leg, and, after she knew him, for a long time she always expected a man with a wooden leg to have a red nose, but, somehow, she never expected a man with a red nose to have a wooden leg. This man was always cheery, and very voluble. He used the worst language possible in the pleasantest way, and his impervious good-humour was proof against all remonstrance. What he said was either blasphemous or obscene as a rule, but in effect it was not at all like the same thing from the other men, because, with them, such language was the expression of anger and evil moods, while with him it was the vehicle of thought from a mind habitually serene.

Mrs. Caldwell was being hurried out of the house with indecent haste, considering the state of her health and all the arrangements she had to make; but she bore up bravely. She was touched one day by an offer of help from Beth, and begged her to take charge of Bernadine and be a little mother to her. Beth promised to do her best. Accordingly, when Bernadine was naughty, Beth beat her, in dutiful imitation. Bernadine, however, invariably struck back. When other interests palled, Beth would encourage Bernadine to risk her neck by persuading her to jump down after her from high places. She was nearly as good a jumper as Beth, the great difference being that Beth always lit on her feet, while Bernadine was apt to come down on her head; but it was this peculiarity that made her attempts so interesting.

The yard very soon became a sociable centre for the whole idle place. Any one who chose came into it in a friendly way, and lounged about, gossiping, and inspecting the works in progress. Women brought their babies, and sat about on the stones suckling them and talking to the men—a proceeding which filled Beth with disgust, she thought it so peculiarly indelicate.

Beth stood with her mother at the sitting-room window one day to see the last of poor Artless, as he was led away on a halter by a strange man, his glossy chestnut coat showing dappled in the sunshine, but his wild spirit

much subdued for want of corn. The first time they had seen him was on the day of their arrival, when Captain Caldwell had ridden out on him to meet them. Mrs. Caldwell burst into tears at the recollection.

"He was the first evidence of promotion and prosperity," she said. "But the promotion has been to a higher sphere, and I much fear that the prosperity, like Artless himself, has departed for ever."

Mrs. Caldwell had decided to return to her own people in England, and a few days later they started. She took the children to see their father's grave the last thing before they left Castletownrock, and stood beside it for a long time in silence, her gloveless hand resting caressingly on the cold tombstone, her eyes full of tears, and a pained expression in her face. It was the real moment of separation for her. She had to tear herself away from her beloved dead, to leave him lonely, and to go out alone herself, unprotected, unloved, uncomfoted, into the cold world with her helpless children. Poverty was in store for her; that she knew; and doubtless she foresaw many another trouble, and, could she have chosen, would gladly have taken her place there beside the one who, with all his faults, had been her best friend on earth.

Her cold, formal religion was no comfort to her in moments like these. She was a pagan at heart, and where she had laid her dead, there, to her mind, he would rest for ever, far from her. The lonely grave on the wild west coast was the shrine towards which her poor heart would yearn thereafter at all times, always. She had erected a handsome tombstone on the hallowed spot, and was going away in her shabby clothes, the more at ease for the self-denial she had had to exercise in order to beautify it. The radical difference between herself and Beth, which was to keep them apart for ever, was never more apparent than at this moment of farewell. The other children cried, but Beth remained an unmoved spectator of her mother's emotion. She hated the delay in that painful place; and what was the use of it when her father would be with them just the same when they got into the yellow coach which was waiting at the gate to take them away? Beth's beloved was a spirit, near at hand always; her mother's was a corpse in a coffin, buried in the ground.

A little way out of Castletownrock the coach was stopped, and Honor and Kathleen Mayne from the inn came up to the window.

"We walked out to be the last to say good-bye to you, Mrs. Caldwell, and to wish you good luck," Kathleen said. "We were among the first to welcome you when you came. And we've brought a piece of music for Miss Mildred, if she will accept it for a keepsake."

Mrs. Caldwell shook hands with them, but she could not speak; and the coach drove on. The days when she had thought the two Miss Maynes presumptuous for young women in their position seemed a long way off to her as she sat there, sobbing, but grateful for this last act of kindly feeling.

Beth had been eager to be off in the yellow coach, but they had not long started before she began to suffer. The moving panorama of desolate landscape, rocky coast, rough sea, moor and mountain, with the motion of the coach, and the smell of stale tobacco and beer in inn-parlours where they waited to change horses, nauseated her to faintness. Her sensitive nervous system received too many vivid impressions at once; the intense melancholy of the scenes they passed through, the wretched hovels, the half-clad people, the lean cattle, and all the evidences of abject poverty, amid dreadful bogs under a gloomy sky, got hold of her and weighed upon her spirits, until at last she shrunk into her corner, pale and still, and sat with her eyes closed, and great tears running slowly down her cheeks. These were her last impressions of Ireland, and they afterwards coloured all her recollections of the country and the people.

But the travellers came to a railway station at last, and left the coach. There was a long crowded train just about to start; and Mrs. Caldwell, dragging Beth after her by the hand, because she knew she would stand still and stare about her the moment she let her go, hurried from carriage to carriage, trying to find seats.

"I saw some," Beth said. "You've passed them."

Mrs. Caldwell turned, and, some distance back, found a carriage with only two people in it, a gentleman whom Beth did not notice particularly, and a lady, doubtless a bride, dressed in light garments, and a white bonnet, very high in front, the space between the forehead and the top being filled with

roses. She sat upright in the middle of the compartment, and looked superciliously at the weary, worried widow, and her helpless children, in their shabby black, when they stopped at the carriage door. It was her cold indifference that impressed Beth. She could not understand why, seeing how worn they all were and the fix they were in, she did not jump up instantly and open the door, overjoyed to be able to help them. There were just four seats in the carriage, but she never moved. Beth had looked up confidently into her face, expecting sympathy and help, but was repelled by a disdainful glance. It was Beth's first experience of the wealthy world that does not care, and she never forgot it.

"That carriage is engaged," her mother exclaimed, and dragged her impatiently away.

In the hotel in Dublin where they slept a night, they had the use of a long narrow sitting-room, with one large window at the end, hung with handsome, heavy, dark green curtains, quite new. The valance at the top ended in a deep fringe of thick cords, and at the end of each cord there was a bright ornamental thing made of wood covered with silks of various colours. Beth had never seen anything so lovely, and on the instant she determined to have one. They were high out of her reach; but that was nothing if only she could get a table and chair under them, and the coast clear. Fortune favoured her during the evening, and she managed to secure one, and carried it off in triumph; and so great was her joy in the colour, that she took it out of her pocket whenever she had a chance next day, and gazed at it enraptured. On their way to the boat Mildred caught her looking at it, and asked her where she got it.

Beth explained exactly.

"But it's stealing!" Mildred exclaimed.

"Is it?" said Beth, in pleased surprise. She had never stolen anything before, and it was a new sensation.

"But don't you know stealing is very wicked?" Mildred asked impressively.

Beth looked disconcerted: "I never thought of that. I'll put it back."

"How can you? You'll never be there again," Mildred rejoined. "You've done it now. You've committed a sin."

Beth slipped the bright thing into her pocket. "I'll repent," she said, and seemed satisfied.

It was a lovely day, and the passage from Kingstown to Holyhead was so smooth that everybody lounged about the deck, and no one was ill. Beth was very much interested, first in the receding shore, then in the people about her. There was one group in particular, evidently of affluent people, dressed in a way that made her feel ashamed of her own clothes for the first time in her life. But what particularly attracted her attention were some bunches of green and purple grapes which the papa of the party took out of a basket and began to divide. Beth had never seen grapes before except in pictures, and thought they looked lovely. The old gentleman gave the grapes to his family, but in handing them, one little bunch fell on the deck. He picked it up, looked at it, blew some dust off it; then decided that it was not good enough for his own children, and handed it to Bernadine, who was gazing greedily.

Beth dashed forward, snatched it out of her hand, and threw it into the sea.

"We are not beggars!" she cried.

"Well done, little one," a gentleman who was sitting near exclaimed. "Won't pick up the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, eh? That's a very proper spirit. And who may you be?"

"My father was a gentleman," Beth answered hotly.

CHAPTER XII

UNCLE JAMES PATTEN sent a landau to meet his sister and her family at the station, on their arrival from Ireland. Mildred was the first to jump in. She took the best seat, and sat up stiff and straight.

"I do love carriages and horses, mamma," she said, as they drove through Rainharbour, the little north-country seaside place which was henceforth to be their home. "I wonder which is to be our house. There are several empty. Do you think it is that one?" She had singled out one of the largest in the place.

"No," said Mrs. Caldwell rather bitterly, "more likely this," and she indicated a tiny two-storied tenement, wedged in between tall houses, and looking as if it had either got itself there by mistake, or had been put in in a hurry, just to fill up.

"That *is* the one," Beth said.

"How do you know?" Mildred snapped.

"Because we're going to live in Orchard Street, opposite the orchard; and this is Orchard Street, and there's the orchard, and that's the only house empty."

"I'm afraid the child is right," Mrs. Caldwell said with a sigh. "However," she added, pulling herself up, "it is exceedingly kind of Uncle James to give us a house at all."

"He might have given us something nicer," Mildred remarked disdainfully.

"Oh!" Beth exclaimed, "he's given us the best he has, I expect. And it's a dear little place, with a little bow-window on either side of a little front door—just like the one where Snowdrop found the empty beds when the bears were out."

"Don't talk nonsense, Beth," Mildred cried crossly.

But Beth hardly heard. She was busy peopling the quaint little town with the friends of her fancy, and sat smiling serenely as she looked about her.

They had to drive right through Rainharbour, and about a mile out into the country on the other side, to arrive at Fairholm, Uncle James Patten's place. The sun had set, and the quaintly irregular red-brick houses, mellowed by age, shone warm in tint against the gathering grey of the sky, which rose like a leaden dome above them. At one part of the road the sea came in sight. Great dark mountainous masses of cloud, with flame-coloured fringes, hung suspended over its shining surface, in which they were reflected with what was to Beth terrible effect. She sat and shivered with awe so long as the lurid scene was in sight, and was greatly relieved when the carriage turned into a country lane, and sea and sombre sky were blotted out.

It was early spring. Buds were bursting in the hedgerows, birds were building, songsters sang among the branches, and the air was sweet and mild. Fairholm lay all among fertile fields, well wooded and watered. It was a typical English home, with surroundings as unlike the great, bare, bald mountains and wild Atlantic seas Beth had hitherto shuddered amongst, as peace is unlike war. Certain natures are stimulated by the grandeur of such scenes; but Beth was too delicate an instrument to be played upon so roughly. Storms within reflected the storms without only too readily. She was tempest-tossed by temperament, and, in nature, all her yearning was for repose; so that now, as they drove up the well-ordered avenue to the house, the tender tone of colour, green against quiet grey, and the easy air of affluence, so soothing after the sorrowful signs of a hard struggle for life by which her feelings had hitherto been harrowed, drew from her a deep sigh of satisfaction.

The hall-door stood open, but no one was looking out for them. They could hear the tinkle of a piano in the distance. Then a servant appeared, followed by a stout lady, who came forward to greet them in a hurried, nervous way.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, kissing Mrs. Caldwell. She spoke in a breathless undertone, as if she were saying something wrong, and was afraid of being caught and stopped before she had finished the sentence. "I should like to have gone to meet you, but James said there were too many

for the carriage as it was. He says more than two in the carriage makes it look like an excursion-party. But I was listening for you, only I don't hear very well, you know. You remember me, Mildred? This is Beth, I suppose, and this is Bernadine. You don't know who I am? I am your Aunt Grace Mary. James begs you to excuse him for a little, Caroline. It is his half-hour for exercises. So unfortunate. If you had only come a little later! But, however, the sooner the better for me. Come into the dining-room and see Aunt Victoria. We must stay there until Uncle James has finished practising his exercises in the drawing-room."

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was sitting bolt upright on a high chair in the dining-room, tating. Family portraits, hung far too high all round the room, seemed to have been watching her complacently until the travellers entered, when they all turned instantly and looked hard at Beth.

Aunt Victoria was a tall thin old lady, with a beautiful delicate complexion, an auburn front and white cap, and a severely simple black dress. She rose stiffly to receive Mrs. Caldwell, and kissed her on both cheeks with restrained emotion. Then she shook hands with each of the children.

"I hope you had a pleasant journey," she was beginning formally, when Mrs. Caldwell suddenly burst into tears. "What is the matter, Caroline?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"Oh, nothing," the poor lady answered in a broken voice. "Only it does seem a sad home-returning—alone—without *him*—you know."

Aunt Grace Mary furtively patted Mrs. Caldwell on the back, keeping an eye on Aunt Victoria the while, however, as if she were afraid of being caught.

All this time the tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of "Hamilton's Exercises for Beginners" on the piano had been going on; now it stopped. Aunt Grace Mary slipped into a chair, and sat with a smile on her face; Aunt Victoria became a trifle more rigid over her tating; and Mrs. Caldwell hurriedly wiped her eyes. Then the door opened deliberately, and there entered a great stout man, with red hair sprinkled with grey, large prominent light-coloured eyes, a nondescript nose, a wide shapeless gash of a mouth, and a red moustache with straight bristly hairs, like the bristles of a broom.

"How do you do, Caroline?" he said, holding out his big, fat, white hand, and kissing her coldly on the forehead. He drawled his words out with a decided lisp, and in a very soft voice, which contrasted oddly with his huge bulk. Having greeted his sister, he turned and looked at the children. Mildred went up and shook hands with him.

"Your sisters, I perceive, have no manners," he observed.

Beth had been beaming round blandly on the group; but upon that last remark of Uncle James's the pleased smile faded from her face, and she coloured painfully, and offered him a small reluctant hand.

"You are Elizabeth, I suppose?" he said.

"I am Beth," she answered emphatically.

She and Uncle James looked into each other's eyes for an instant, and in that instant she made a most disagreeable impression of fearlessness on the big man's brain.

"I hope, Caroline," he said precisely, "that you will not continue to call your daughter by such an absurd abbreviation. That sort of thing was all very well in the wilds of Ireland, but here we must have something rational, ladylike, and recognised."

Mrs. Caldwell looked distressed. "It would be so difficult to call her Elizabeth," she pleaded. "She is not at all—Elizabeth."

"You may call me what you like, mamma," Beth put in with decision; "but I shall only answer to Beth. That was the name my father gave me, and I shall stick to it."

Uncle James stared at her in amazement, but Beth, unabashed, stared back obstinately; and so they continued staring until Aunt Grace Mary made a diversion.

"James," she hurriedly interposed, "wouldn't they like some refreshment?"

Uncle James pulled the bell-rope. "Bring wine and cake," he lisped, when the servant answered.

Then he returned to his seat, crossed one great leg over the other, folded his fat hands on his knee, and inspected his sister.

"You certainly do not grow younger, Caroline," he observed.

Mrs. Caldwell did not look cheered by the remark; and there was a painful pause, broken, happily, by the arrival of the cake and wine.

"You will not take more than half a glass, I suppose, Caroline, at *this* time of the day," Uncle James said playfully, as he took up the decanter; "and marsala, *not* port. I know what ladies are."

Poor Mrs. Caldwell was exhausted, and would have been the better for a good glass of port; but she meekly held her peace.

Then Uncle James cut the cake, and gave each of the children a very small slice. Beth held hers suspended half-way to her mouth, and gazed at her uncle.

"What *is* that child staring at?" he asked her mother at last.

"I think she is admiring you," was Mrs. Caldwell's happy rejoinder.

"No, mamma, I am not," Beth contradicted. "I was just thinking I had never seen anything so big in my life."

"*Anything!*" Uncle James protested. "What does she mean, Caroline?"

"I don't mean this slice of cake," Beth chuckled.

"Come, dear—come, dear," Aunt Grace Mary hurriedly interposed. "Come upstairs, and see—and see—the pretty room you're to have. Come and take your things off, like a good child."

Beth rose obediently, but before she followed her aunt out of the room she said: "Here, Bernadine; you'd better have my slice. You'll howl if you don't get enough. Cakes are scarce and dear here, I suppose."

Aunt Victoria had tatted diligently during this little scene. Now she looked up over her spectacles and inspected Uncle James.

"I like that child," she said decidedly.

"In which respect I should think you would probably find yourself in a very small minority," Uncle James lisped, spreading his mouth into what would have been a smile in any other countenance, but was merely an elongation of the lips in his.

Mrs. Caldwell rocked herself forlornly. Mildred nestled close to her mother; while Baby Bernadine, with a slice of cake in each hand, took a mouthful first from the right and then from the left, impartially.

Uncle James gazed at her. "I suppose that is an Irish custom," he said at length.

"Bernadine! what are you doing?" Mrs. Caldwell snapped; and Bernadine, startled, let both slices fall on the floor, and set up a howl with her mouth full.

"Ah!" Uncle James murmured tenderly. "Little children are such darling things! They make the sense of their presence felt the moment they enter a house. It becomes visible also in the crumbs on the floor. There is evidently nothing the matter with her lungs. But I should have thought it would be dangerous to practise her voice like that with the mouth full. Perhaps she would be more at her ease upstairs." Mrs. Caldwell took the hint.

When the child had gone, Uncle James rang for a servant to sweep up the cake and crumbs, and carefully stood over her, superintending.

"That will do," he said at length, "so far as the cake and crumbs are concerned, but I beg you to observe that you have brushed the pile of the carpet the wrong way."

Meanwhile Aunt Grace Mary had taken Beth up a polished staircase, through a softly carpeted, airy corridor, at the end of which was a large room with two great mahogany four-post beds, hung with brown damask, the rest of the heavy old-fashioned furniture being to match. All over the house there was a delicious odour of fresh air and lavender, everything shone resplendent, and all was orderly to the point of stiffness; nothing looked as if it had ever been used.

"This was your mamma's room when she was a girl," Aunt Grace Mary confided to Beth. "She used to fill the house with her girl-friends, and that was why she had such big beds. She used to be a very high-spirited girl, your dear mamma was. You are all to sleep here."

"How good it smells," said Beth.

"Ah, that's the lavender. I often burn lavender. Would you like to see me burn some lavender? Come to my room, then, and I'll show you. But take your things off first."

Beth dragged off her hat and jacket and threw them aside. They happened to fall on the floor.

"My dear child!" Aunt Grace Mary exclaimed, "look at your things!"

Beth looked at them, but nothing occurred to her; so she looked at her aunt inquiringly.

"I always put mine away—at least I should, you know, if I hadn't a maid," said Aunt Grace Mary.

"Oh, let your maid put mine away too," Beth answered casually.

"But, my dear child, you must learn," Aunt Grace Mary insisted, picking up Beth's things and putting them in a drawer as she spoke. "Who puts your things away at home?"

"Mamma," Beth answered laconically. "She says it's less trouble to do things herself."

"Oh, but you must save your mother the trouble, dear," said Aunt Grace Mary in a shocked tone.

"Well, I will next time—if I remember," Beth rejoined. "Come and burn lavender."

For the next few days, which happened to be very fine, Beth revelled out of doors. Everything was a wonder and a joy to her in this fertile land, the trees especially, after the bleak, wild wastes to which she had been accustomed in the one stormy corner of Ireland she knew. Leaves and blossoms were just bursting out, and one day, wandering alone in the grounds, she happened unawares upon an orchard in full bloom, and fairly gasped, utterly overcome by the first shock of its beauty. For a while she stood and gazed in silent awe at the white froth of flowers on the pear-trees, the tinted almond blossom, and the pink-tipped apple. She had never dreamed of such heavenly loveliness. But enthusiasm succeeded to awe at last, and, in a wild burst of delight, she suddenly threw her arms around a gnarled tree-trunk and clasped it close.

There was a large piece of artificial water in the grounds, in which were three green islands covered with trees and shrubs. Beth was standing on the bank one morning in a contemplative mood, admiring the water, and yearning for a boat to get to the islands, when round one of them, unexpectedly, a white wonder of a swan came gliding towards her in the sunshine.

"Oh, oh! Mildred! Mildred! Oh, the beautiful, beautiful thing!" she cried. Mildred came running up.

"Why, Beth, you idiot," she exclaimed in derision, "it's only a swan. I really thought it *was* something."

"Is that a swan?" Beth said slowly; then, after a moment, she added, in sorrowful reproach: "O Mildred! you had seen it and you never told me."

Alas, poor Mildred! she had not seen it, and never would see it, in Beth's sense of the word.

On wet days, when they had to be indoors, Aunt Grace Mary waylaid Beth continually, and trotted her off somewhere out of Uncle James's way. She would take her to her own room sometimes, a large, bright apartment, spick-and-span like the rest of the house; and show her the pictures—pastels and water-colours chiefly—with which it was stiffly decorated.

"That was your uncle when he was a little boy," she said, pointing to a pretty pastel.

"Why, he was quite a nice little boy," Beth exclaimed.

"Yes, nice and plump," Aunt Grace Mary rattled off breathlessly. "And your grandmamma did those water-colours and those screens. That lovely printing too; can you guess how she did it? With a camel's hair brush. She did indeed. And she used to compose music. She was a very clever woman. You are very like her."

"But I am not very clever," said Beth.

"No, dear; no, dear," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined, pulling herself up hurriedly from this indiscretion. "But in the face. You are very like her in appearance. And you must try. You must try to improve yourself. Your uncle is always trying to improve himself. He reads 'Doctor Syntax' aloud to us. In the evening it is our custom to read aloud and converse."

An occasional phrase of Uncle James's would flow from Aunt Grace Mary in this way, with incongruous effect.

"Do you try to improve yourself?" Beth asked.

"Yes, dear."

"How?"

"Oh, well—that reminds me. I must write a letter. You shall stay and see me if you like. But you mustn't move or speak."

Beth, deeply interested, watched her aunt, who began by locking the door. Then she slipped a pair of spectacles out of her pocket, and put them on, after glancing round apprehensively as if she were going to do something wrong. Then she sat down at a small bureau, unlocked a drawer, and took out a little dictionary, unlocked another drawer and took out a sheet of notepaper, in which she inserted a page of black lines. Then she proceeded to write a letter in lead-pencil, stopping often to consult the dictionary. When she had done, she took out another sheet of a better quality, put the lines in it, and proceeded to copy the letter in ink. She blotted the first attempt, but the next she finished. She destroyed several envelopes also before she was satisfied. But at last the letter was folded and sealed, and then she carefully burnt every scrap of paper she had spoiled.

"I was educated in a convent in France," she said to Beth. "If you were older you would know that by my handwriting. It is called an Italian hand, but I learnt it in France. I was there five years."

"What else did you learn?" said Beth.

"Oh—reading. No—I could read before I went. But music, you know, and French."

"Say some French," said Beth.

"Oh, I can't," Aunt Grace Mary answered. "But I can read it a little, you know."

"I should like to hear you play," said Beth.

"But I don't play," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined.

"I thought you said you learnt music."

"Oh yes. I had to learn music; and I practised for hours every day; but I never played."

Aunt Grace Mary smiled complacently as she spoke, took off her spectacles, and locked up her writing materials—Beth, the while, thoughtfully observing her. Aunt Grace Mary's hair was a wonderful colour, neither red, yellow, brown, nor white, but a mixture of all four. It was parted straight in the middle, where it was thin, and brought down in two large rolls over her ears. She wore a black velvet band across her head like a coronet, which ended in a large black velvet bow at the back. Long heavy gold ear-rings pulled down the lobes of her ears. All her dresses were of rustling silk, and she had a variety of deep lace-collars, each one of which she fastened with a different brooch at the throat. She also wore a heavy gold watch-chain round her neck, the watch being concealed in her bosom; and jet bracelets by day, but gold ones in the evening.

Beth was deeply interested in her own family history, and intelligently pieced together such fragments of it as she could collect from the conversations of the people about her. She was sitting in one of the deep window-seats in the drawing-room looking out one day, concealed by a curtain, when her mother and Great-Aunt Victoria Bench came into the room, and settled themselves to chat and sew without observing her.

"Where is Grace Mary?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"Locked up in her own room writing a letter, I believe," Mrs. Caldwell replied, "a long and mysterious proceeding. We shall not see her again this morning, I suppose."

"Ah, well," said Aunt Victoria considerately, "she writes a very beautiful hand."

"James thought he was doing so well for himself, too!" Mrs. Caldwell interjected. "He'd better have married the mother."

"There was the making of a fine woman in Grace Mary if she had had a chance," Aunt Victoria answered, pursing up her mouth judicially. "It was the mother made the match. When he came across them in Switzerland, Lady Benyon got hold of him, and flattered him, made him believe Grace

Mary was only thirty-eight, not too old for a son-and-heir, but much too old for a large family. She was really about fifty; but he never thought of looking up her age until after they were married. However, James got one thing he likes, and more than he deserved; for Grace Mary is amiable if she's ignorant; and I should say had tact, though some people might call it cunning. But, at any rate, she's the daughter of one baronet and the sister of another."

"What's a baronet?" Beth demanded, tumbling off the window-seat on to the floor with a crash as she spoke, having lost her balance in peering round the curtain.

Both ladies jumped, quite contrary to their principles.

"You naughty child, how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell began.

Beth picked herself up. "I want to know," she interrupted.

"You've been listening."

"No, I've not. I was here first, and you came and talked. But that doesn't matter. I shan't tell. What's a baronet?"

Aunt Victoria explained, and then turned her out of the room. Uncle James was crossing the hall at the moment; he had a large bunch of keys in his hand, and went through the double-doors which led to the kitchen and offices. Beth followed him into the kitchen. The cook, an old servant, came forward curtsying. The remains of yesterday's dinner, cold roast beef, tongue, chicken, and plum-pudding, were spread out on the table. Uncle James inspected everything.

"For luncheon," he said, "the beef can remain cold on the sideboard, also the tongue. The chicken you will grill for one hot dish, and do not forget to garnish with rolls of bacon. The pudding you can cut into slices, fry, and sprinkle with a little sifted sugar. Mind, I say a little; for, as the pudding is sweet enough already, the sugar is merely an ornament to make it agreeable to the eye. For the rest, as usual."

"Yes, sir. And dinner, sir?"

"Here is the *menu*." He handed her a paper. "I will give you out what is necessary."

He led the way down a stone passage to the store-room door, which he unlocked.

"I am out of sifted sugar, sir," the cook said nervously.

"What, again?" Uncle James sternly demanded. "This is only Thursday, and I gave you some out on Saturday."

"Yes, sir, but only a quarter of a pound, sir, and I had to use it for the top of the rice-pudding, and the pancakes, and the Charlotte Russe, and the plum-pudding——"

"How?" said Uncle James—"the plum-pudding, which is not yet fried?"

"Beg pardon, sir. I'm all confused. But, however," she added desperately, "the sugar is done."

"Well, I suppose I must give you some more this time. But do not let it occur again. You may weigh out a quarter of a pound."

When that was done, Uncle James consulted a huge cookery-book which lay on a shelf in the window. "We shall require another cake for tea," he said, and then proceeded to read the recipe aloud, keeping an observant eye upon the cook as she weighed out the various ingredients.

"And the kitchen meals, sir?" she asked, as he locked up the store-room.

"Make what you have do," he said, "make what you have do."

"But there is hardly meat enough to go round once, sir."

"You must make it do. People are much healthier and happier when they do not eat too much."

This ceremony over, he went to the poultry-yard, followed by Beth (who carefully kept in the background), the yard-boy, and the poultry-maid who carried some corn in a sieve, which she handed to her master when he stopped. Uncle James scattered a little corn on the ground, calling "chuck! chuck! chuck!" at the same time, in a dignified manner. Chickens, ducks,

turkeys and guinea-fowl collected about him, and he stood gazing at them with large light prominent eyes, blandly, as if he loved them—as indeed he did when they appeared like ladies at table, dressed to perfection.

"That guinea-fowl!" he decided, after due consideration.

The yard-boy caught it and gave it to the poultry-maid, who held it while Uncle James carefully felt its breast.

"That will do," he said. "Quite a beauty."

The yard-boy took it from the poultry-maid, tied its legs together, cut its throat, and hung it on a nail.

"That drake!" Uncle James proceeded. The same ceremony followed, Uncle James bearing his part in it without any relaxation of his grand manner.

When a turkey-poult had also been executed, he requested the yard-boy to fetch him his gun from the harness-room.

"We must have a pigeon-pie," he observed as he took it.

Beth, in great excitement, stalked him to the orchard, where there was a big pigeon-house covered with ivy. In front of it the pigeons had a good run, enclosed with wire netting when they were shut in; but they were often let out to feed in the fields. The yard-boy now reached up and opened a little door in the side of the house. As he did so he glanced at Uncle James somewhat apprehensively. Uncle James, with a benign countenance, suddenly lifted his gun and fired. The yard-boy dropped.

"What is the matter?" said Uncle James.

The yard-boy gathered himself up with a very red face. "I thought you meant to shoot me, sir."

Uncle James smiled gently. "May I ask when it became customary for gentlemen to shoot yard-boys?" he said.

"Beg pardon, sir," the boy rejoined sheepishly. "There's accidents sometimes."

The pigeons were wary after the shot, and would not come out, so the yard-boy had to go into the house and drive them. There was a shelf in front of the little door, on which they generally rested a moment, bewildered, before they flew. Uncle James knew them all by sight, and let several go, as being too old for his purpose. Then, standing pretty close, he shot two, one after the other, as they stood hesitating to take flight. While loading again, he discovered Beth; but as he liked an audience when he was performing an exploit, he was quite gracious.

"Nothing distinguishes a gentleman more certainly than a love of sport," he observed blandly, as he shot another pigeon sitting.

This entertainment over, he looked at his watch. He had the whole day divided into hours and half-hours, each with its separate occupation or recreation; and nothing short of a visit from some personage of importance was ever allowed to interrupt him in any of his pursuits. For recreation he sometimes did a little knitting or a piece of Berlin woolwork, because, he said, a gentleman should learn to do everything, so as not to be at a loss if he were ever wrecked on a desert island. For the same reason, he had also trained himself to sleep at odd times, and in all sorts of odd places, choosing by preference some corner where Aunt Grace Mary and the maids would least expect to find him, the consequence being wild shrieks and shocks to their nerves, such as, to use his own bland explanation, might be expected from undisciplined females. Beth found him one day spread out on a large oak chest in the main corridor upstairs, with two great china vases, one at his head and one at his feet, filled with reeds and bulrushes, which appeared to be waving over him, and looking in his sleep, with his cadaverous countenance, like a self-satisfied corpse. She had been on her way downstairs to dispose of the core of an apple she had eaten; but, as Uncle James's mouth was open, she left it there.

Uncle James was wont to deliver little lectures to the children, for the improvement of their minds, during luncheon, which was their dinner-hour.

"With regularity and practice you may accomplish great things," he said on one occasion. "I myself always practise 'Hamilton's Exercises' on the pianoforte for one hour every day, from half-past ten till eleven, and from half-past three till four. I have done so now for many years."

Beth sat with her spoon suspended half-way up to her mouth, drinking in these words of wisdom. "And when will you be able to play?" she asked.

Uncle James fixed his large, light, ineffectual eyes upon her; but, as usual, this gaze direct only excited Beth's interest, and she returned it unabashed in simple expectation of what was to follow. So Uncle James gave in, and to cover his retreat he said: "Culture. Cultivate the mind. There is nothing that elevates the mind like general cultivation. It is cultivation that makes us great, good, and generous."

"Then, I suppose, when your mind is cultivated, Uncle James, you will give mamma more money," Beth burst out hopefully.

Uncle James blinked his eyes several times running, rapidly, as if something had gone wrong with them.

"Beth, you are talking too much; go to your room *at once*, and stay there for a punishment," her mother exclaimed nervously.

Beth, innocent of any intent to offend, looked surprised, put down her spoon deliberately, got off her chair, took up her plate of pudding, and was making off with it. As she was passing Uncle James, however, he stretched out his big hand suddenly, and snatched the plate from her; but Beth in an instant doubled her little fist, and struck the plate from underneath, the concussion scattering the pudding all over the front of Uncle James.

In the confusion which followed, Beth made her escape to the kitchen, where she was already popular.

"I say, cook," she coaxed, "give me something good to eat. My pudding's got upset all over Uncle James."

The cook sat down suddenly, and twinkled a glance of intelligence at Horner, the old coachman, who happened to be in the kitchen.

"Give me a cheesecake—I won't tell," Beth pleaded.

"That's doubtful, I should think," Horner said aside to the cook.

"Oh, bless you, she never do, not she!" cook answered, and then she fetched Beth a big cheesecake from a secret store. Beth took it smiling, and retired

to the brown bedroom, where she was left in solitary confinement until Uncle James drove out with mamma in Aunt Grace Mary's pony-carriage to pay a call in the afternoon. When they had gone, Aunt Grace Mary peeped in at Beth, and said, with an unconvincing affectation of anger: "Beth, you are a naughty little girl, and deserve to be punished. Say you're sorry. Then you shall come to my room, and see me write a letter."

"All right," Beth answered, and Aunt Grace Mary took her off without more ado.

It was a great encouragement to Beth to find that Aunt Grace Mary was obliged to take pains with her writing. All the other grown-up people Beth knew, seemed to do everything with such ease, it was quite disheartening. Beth was allowed a pencil, a sheet of paper, and some lines herself now, and Aunt Grace Mary was taking great pains to teach her to write an Italian hand. Beth was also trying to learn: "because there are such lots of things I want to write down," she explained; "and I want to do it small like you, because it won't take so much paper, you know."

"What kind of things do you want to write down, Beth?" Aunt Grace Mary asked. Beth treated her quite as an equal, so they chatted the whole time they were together, unconstrainedly.

"Oh, you know—things like—well, the day we came here there were great grey clouds with crimson caps hanging over the sea, and you could see them in the water."

"See their reflection, you mean, I suppose."

Beth looked puzzled. "When you think of things, isn't that reflection?" she asked.

"Yes; and when you see yourself in the looking-glass, that's your reflection too," Aunt Grace Mary answered.

"Oh, then I suppose it was the sea's thought of the sky I saw in the water—that makes it nicer than I had it before," Beth said, trying to turn the phrase as a young bird practises to round its notes in the spring. "The sea shows its thoughts, the thought of the sea is the sky—no, that isn't right. It never does come right all at once, you know. But that's the kind of thing."

"What kind of thing?" Aunt Grace Mary asked, bewildered.

"The kind of thing I am always wanting to write down. You generally forget what we're talking about, don't you?—I say, don't you want to drive your own ponies yourself sometimes?"

"No, not when your dear uncle wants them."

"Dear uncle wants them almost always, doesn't he? Horner ses as 'ow——"

"Beth, don't speak like that!"

"That's Horner, not me," Beth snapped, impatient of the interruption. "How am I to tell you what he said if I don't say what he said? Horner ses as 'ow, when Lady Benyon gev them there white ponies to 'er darter fur 'er own use, squire 'e sells two on 'is 'orses, an' 'as used them ponies ever since. Squire's a near un, my word!" Beth perceived that Aunt Grace Mary looked very funny in the face. "You're frightened to death of Uncle James, arn't you?" she asked, after sucking her pencil meditatively for a little.

"No, dear, of course not. I am not afraid of any one but the dear Lord."

"But Uncle James *is* the lord."

"Nonsense, child."

"Mildred says so. She says he's lord of the manor. Mildred says it's fine to be lord of the manor. But it doesn't make me care a button about Uncle James."

"Don't speak like that, Beth. It's disrespectful. It was the Lord in heaven I alluded to," said Aunt Grace Mary in her breathless way.

"Ah, that *is* different," Beth allowed. "But I'm not afraid of Him either. I don't think I'm afraid of any one really, not even of mamma, though she does beat me. I'd rather she didn't, you know. But one gets used to it. The worst of it is," Beth added, after sucking the point of her pencil a little—"The worst of it is, you never know what will make her waxy. To-day, at luncheon, you know—now, what did I say?"

"Oh," said Aunt Grace Mary vaguely; "you oughtn't to have said it, you know."

"Now, that's just like mamma! She says 'Don't!' and 'How dare you!' and 'Naughty girl!' at the top of her voice, and half the time I don't know what she's talking about. When I grow up, I shall explain to children. Do you know, sometimes I quite want to be good"—this with a sigh. "But when I'm bad without having a notion what I've done, why, it's difficult. Aunt Grace Mary, do you know what Neptune would say if the sea dried up?" Aunt Grace Mary smiled and shook her head. "I haven't an ocean," Beth proceeded. "You don't see it? Well, I didn't at first. You see *an ocean* and *a notion* sound the same if you say them sharp. Now, do you see? They call that a pun."

"Who told you that?"

"A gentleman in the train."

Beth put her pencil in her mouth, and gazed up at the sky. "I don't suppose he'd be such a black-hearted villain as to break his word," she said at last.

"Who?" Aunt Grace Mary asked, in a startled tone.

"Uncle James—about leaving Jim the place, you know. Why, don't you know? Mamma is the eldest, and ought to have had Fairholm, but she was away in Ireland, busy having me, when grandpapa died, and couldn't come; so Uncle James frightened the old man into leaving the place to him, and mamma only got fifty pounds a year, which wasn't fair."

"Who told you this, Beth?"

"Mildred. Mamma told her. And Horner said the other day to cook—I'll have to say it the way Horner says it. If I said it my way, you know, then it wouldn't be Horner—Horner said to cook as 'ow Captain Caldwell 'ud 'a' gone to law about it, but squire 'e swore if 'e'd let the matter drop, 'e'd make 'is neeve, Master Jim, as is also 'is godson, 'is heir, an' so square it; and Captain Caldwell, as was a real gen'lmon, an' fond of the ladies, tuk 'im at 'is word, an' furgiv' 'im. But, lardie! don't us know the worth o' Mr. James Patten's word!"

Aunt Grace Mary had turned very pale.

"Beth," she gasped, "promise me you will never, never, *never* say a word about this to your uncle."

"Not likely," said Beth.

"How do you remember these things you hear?"

"Oh, I just think them over again when I go to bed, and then they stay," Beth answered. "I wouldn't tell you half I hear, though—only things everybody knows. If you tell secrets, you know, you're a tell-pie. And I'm not a tell-pie. Now, Bernadine is. She's a regular tell-pie. It seems as if she couldn't help it; but then she's young," Beth added tolerantly.

"Were you ever young, I wonder?" Aunt Grace Mary muttered to herself.

CHAPTER XIII

MEANWHILE the English spring advanced in the beautiful gardens of Fairholm, and was a joy to Beth. Blossoms showered from the fruit-trees, green leaves unfurled, the birds were in full song, and the swans curved their long necks in the sunshine, and breasted the waters of the lake, as if their own grace were a pleasure to them. Beth was enchanted. Every day she discovered some new wonder—nests in the hedgerows, lambs in the fields, a foal and its mother in the paddock, a calf in the byre—more living interests in one week than she had dreamt of in the whole of her little life. For a happy interval the scenes which had oppressed her—the desolation, the sombre colours of the great melancholy mountains, the incessant sound of the turbulent sea, the shock and roar of angry breakers warring with the rocks, which had kept her little being all a-throb, braced to the expectation of calamity—lapsed now into the background of her recollection, and under the benign influence of these lovelier surroundings her mind began to expand in the most extraordinary way, while her further faculty awoke, and gave her glimpses of more delights than mortal mind could have shown her. "Such nice things," as she expressed it, "keep coming into my head, and I want to write them down." Books she flung away impatiently; but the woods and streams, and the wild flowers, the rooks returning to roost in the trees at sunset, the horses playing in the paddocks, the cows dawdling back from their pastures, all sweet country scents and cheerful country sounds she became alive to and began to love. There would be trouble enough in Beth herself at times, wherever she was; it was hard that she could not have been kept in some such paradise always, to ease the burden of her being.

One morning her mother told her that Uncle James was extremely displeased with her because he had seen her pelting the swans.

"He didn't see me pelting the swans," Beth asseverated. "I was feeding them with crusts. And how did he see me, any way? He wasn't there."

"He sees everything that's going on," Mrs. Caldwell assured her.

"He's only pretending," Beth argued, "or else he must be God."

But she kept her eyes about her the next time she was in the grounds, and at last she discovered him, sitting in the little window of his dressing-room with a book before him, and completely blocking the aperture. She had never noticed him there before, because the panes were small and bright, and the shine on them made it difficult to see through them from below. After this discovery she always felt that his eyes were upon her wherever she went within range of that window. Not that that would have deterred her had she wanted to do anything particularly; but even a child feels it intolerable to be spied upon; and as for a spy! Beth scorned the creature.

That day at luncheon Uncle James made an announcement.

"Lady Benyon is going to honour us with a visit," he began in his most impressive manner. There is no snob so inveterate as your snob of good birth; and Uncle James said "Lady" as if it were a privilege just to pronounce the word. "She will arrive this afternoon at a quarter to four."

"But you will be practising," Beth exclaimed.

"The rites of hospitality must be observed," he condescended to inform her.

"Lady Benyon is my mother, Beth," Aunt Grace Mary put in irrelevantly.

"I know," Beth answered. "Your papa was a baronet; Uncle James loves baronets; that was why he married you." Having thus disposed of Aunt Grace Mary, Beth turned to the other end of the table, and resumed: "But you went on practising when *we* arrived, Uncle James."

Uncle James gazed at her blandly, then looked at his sister with an agreeable smile. "Lady Benyon will probably like to see the children. You do not dress them in the latest fashion, I observe."

"They *are* shabby," Mrs. Caldwell acknowledged with a sigh, apologetically.

Beth shovelled some spoonfuls of pudding into her mouth very quickly. "That's the money bother again," she said, and then she sang out at the top of her voice—

"Bryan O'Lynn had no breeches to wear,

He bought a sheepskin for to make him a pair,
With the skinny side out, and the woolly side in,
'They're warm in the winter,' said Bryan O'Lynn."

"I suppose it would be quite impossible to suppress this child?" Uncle James lisped with deceptive mildness. "I observe that she joins in the conversation always, with great intelligence and her mouth full. It might be better, perhaps, if she emptied her mouth. However, I suppose it would be impossible to teach her."

"Not at all," Beth answered for herself, cheerfully. "I'm not too stupid to empty my mouth! Only just you tell me what it is you want. Don't bottle things up. I expect I've been speaking with my mouth full ever since I came, and you've been hating me for it; but you never told me."

"May I ask," said Uncle James politely, "by whom you were informed that I 'bottled things up'?"

"Ah, that would be telling," said Beth, and recommenced gobbling her pudding, to the intense relief of some of the party.

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench, sitting upright opposite, looked across the table at the child, and a faint smile flickered over her wrinkled rose-leaf cheek.

Beth finished her pudding, dropped her spoon on her plate with a clatter, leant back in her chair, and sighed with satisfaction. She possessed a horrid fascination for Uncle James. Almost everything she did was an offence to him, yet he could not keep his eyes off her or let her alone.

"Pudding seems to be a weakness of hers," he now observed. "I hope her voracity is satisfied. I should say that it resembles the voracity of the caterpillar."

"What's voracity, Aunt Victoria?" Beth asked.

"Greediness," Aunt Victoria rejoined sententiously.

"He means I'm greedy for pudding? I just *am*! I'd like to be a caterpillar for pudding. Caterpillars eat all day. But then God's good to them. He puts them on a tree with lots of leaves. I wish He'd put me in a pantry with lots

of puddings! My vorass—vor—what is it? Any way, it's satisfied now, Uncle James, and if you'll let me go, I'll wash myself, and get ready for Lady Benyon."

Rather than let her go when she wanted to, however, Uncle James sat some time longer at table than he had intended. It was he who always gave the signal to rise; before he did so on this occasion, he formally requested his sister to request Beth to be silent during Lady Benyon's visit.

Lady Benyon was a shrewd, active little old woman, with four dark curls laid horizontally on either side of her forehead. She had bright black sparkling eyes that glanced about quickly and seemed to see everything. Before she arrived, Uncle James assembled his family in the drawing-room, and set the scene, as it were, for her reception.

"Sit here, facing the window, Caroline," he said. "It will interest Lady Benyon to see how you have aged. And, Aunt Victoria, this Chippendale chair, so stiff and straight, is just like you, I think; so oblige me by sitting on it. Grace Mary, take this easy lounge; it suits your yielding nature. Elizabeth"—Beth, who was perched on the piano-stool, looked up calmly at the clouds through the window opposite. "Elizabeth," he repeated sharply. Beth made no sign.

"Beth, answer your uncle directly," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"He has not yet addressed me," Beth rejoined, in the manner of Uncle James.

"Don't call your uncle 'he,' you naughty girl. You know your name is Elizabeth."

"Yes, and I know I said I wouldn't answer to it, and I'm not going to break me oath."

"Me oath!" Uncle James ejaculated.

Beth looked disconcerted. It irked her horribly to be jeered at for making a mistake in speaking, and Uncle James, seeing she was hurt, rested satisfied for the moment, and arranged Mildred and Bernadine together in a group, leaving Beth huddled up on the piano-stool, frowning.

When Lady Benyon's carriage stopped at the door, Uncle James stood bareheaded on the steps, ready to receive her.

"So glad to see you, mamma," he lisped, as he handed her out. "*Do* take my arm."

But the little old lady waved him aside unceremoniously, and hobbled in with the brisk stiffness of age.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed when she saw the party arranged in the drawing-room. "You all look as if you were having your likeness taken—all except Puck there, on the piano-stool."

When Uncle James had manoeuvred Lady Benyon into the seat of honour he intended her to take in order to complete the picture, she frankly inspected each member of the group, ending with Beth.

"And who may you be?" she asked.

Beth smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you speak?"

Beth made another gesture.

"Goodness!" Lady Benyon cried; "is the child an idiot?"

"Beth, answer Lady Benyon directly," Mrs. Caldwell angrily commanded.

"Uncle James requested mamma to request me not to speak when you were present," Beth explained suavely.

The old lady burst out laughing. "Well, that's droll," she said—"requested mamma to request me—why, it's James Patten all over. And who may you be, you monkey?"

"I am Elizabeth Caldwell, but I only answer to Beth. Papa called me Beth."

"Good!" said the little old lady. "And what's Ireland like?"

"Great dark mountains," Beth rattled off, with big eyes dilated and fixed on space, as if she saw what she described. "Long, long, long, black bogs; all

the poor people starving; and the sea rough—just like hell, you know, but without the fire."

"Oh, now, this *is* delightful!" the old lady chuckled. "I'm to enjoy myself to-day, it seems. You didn't prepare me for this treat, James Patten!"

Uncle James simpered, as though taking to himself the credit of the whole entertainment.

"So you hate Ireland?" said Lady Benyon.

"No, I love it," said Beth. "It's me native country; and they don't give you little bits of cake there the size of sixpence. What they have you're welcome to. Long live Ireland!"

"Good!" Lady Benyon ejaculated; then turned to Mildred. "And are you another naughty little patriot?" she asked.

"No, *I'm* not naughty," Mildred answered piously.

"Beth's naughty," said Bernadine.

"I'm sure I don't know *what* Beth is not," the old lady declared, turning to Beth again.

"Riley said I was one of the little girls the devil put out when he gave up housekeeping," Beth remarked casually.

"Beth!" Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated.

"He did, mamma. He said it the day that perjured villain Pat Murphy killed my magpie. And Riley's a good man. You said so yourself."

"You can hear that the young lady has been in Ireland, I suppose, mamma," Uncle James observed.

"I hear she can imitate the Irish," Lady Benyon rejoined bluntly; "and not the Irish only," she added with a chuckle.

Beth was still sitting on the music-stool opposite the window, and presently she saw some one cross the lawn. "Oh, do look at the lovely lady," she cried enthusiastically. "She's just like the Princess Blue-eyes-and-golden-hair."

Lady Benyon glanced over her shoulder. "Why, it's my maid," she said.

Beth's countenance dropped, then cleared again. Even a maid might be a princess in disguise.

Lady Benyon was going to stay all night, and at her special request Mildred and Beth were allowed to sit up to late dinner and prayers. She expected Beth to amuse her, but Beth was busy the whole time weaving a romance about the lovely lady's-maid, and scarcely spoke a word. When the servants came in to prayers, she sat and gazed at her heroine, and forgot to stand or kneel. She noticed, however, that Uncle James read the evening prayers with peculiar fervour.

When Beth went to bed, she found Bernadine, who slept with her, fast asleep. Beth was not at all sleepy. Her intellect had been on the alert all day, and would not let her rest now; she must do something to keep up the excitement. She pulled the blind aside, and, looking out of the window, discovered an enchanted land, all soft shadow and silver sheen, and above it an exquisite moon, in an empty sky, floated serenely. "Oh, to be out in the moonlight!" she sighed to herself. "The fairy-folk—the fairy-folk." For a little her mind was a blank as she gazed; then words came tripping a measure—

"The fairy-folk are calling me,
Are calling me, are calling me;
They come across the stormy sea,
To play with me, to play with me."

Beth's vague longing crisped itself into a resolution. She looked at the big four-post bed. The curtains were drawn on one side of it. Should she draw them on the other, on the chance of her mother not looking in? No, she must wait, because of Mildred. Mildred was undressing, and would say her prayers presently. Beth waited until she knelt down, then slipped her night-dress on over her clothes, and got into bed, without disturbing Bernadine. Now she must wait for her mother; but Mrs. Caldwell came up very soon, Uncle James having hurried every one off to bed unusually early that evening. Mrs. Caldwell was a long time undressing, as it seemed to Beth;

but in the meantime Mildred had fallen asleep, and very soon after her mother got into bed she too began to breathe with reassuring regularity.

Then Beth got up, opened the door very gently, and slipped out into the dark passage.

"The fairy-folk are calling me,
Are calling me, are calling me;
They come across the stormy sea,
To play with me, to play with me."

The words set themselves to a merry tune, and carried Beth on with them.

All was dark in the hall. The front door was locked and bolted, and the shutters were up in all the rooms; how was she to get out? She felt for the green baize double-door which shut off the kitchen from the other parts of the house, opened it, and groped her way down the passage. As she did so, she saw a faint glimmer of light at the far end—not candlelight, moonlight—and at the same moment she became aware of some one else moving. At the end of the passage she was in, there was a little door leading out into a garden. If that were open all would be easy. She had stopped to listen. Certainly some one else was moving quite close to her. What was she near? Oh, the store-room. Something grated like a key in a lock—a door was opened, a match struck, a candle lighted; and there was Mrs. Cook in the store-room itself, hurriedly filling paper-bags with tea, sugar, raisins, currants, and other groceries from Uncle James's carefully guarded treasure, and packing them into a small hamper with a lid. When the hamper was full she blew out the candle, came out of the store-room, locked the door after her, and went into the kitchen, without discovering Beth. She left the kitchen door open; the blind was up; and Beth could see a man, whom she recognised as the cook's son, standing in the moonlight.

"Is there much this time, mother?" he asked.

"A goodish bit," cook replied, handing him the hamper.

"'E 'asn't 'ad 'is eyes about 'im much o' late, then?"

"Oh, 'e allus 'as 'is eyes about 'im, but 'e doan't see much. You'll get me what ye can?"

"I will so," her son replied, and kissed cook as she let him out of the back-door, which she fastened after him. Then she went off herself up the back-stairs to bed.

When all was quiet again, Beth thought of the garden-door at the end of the passage. To her relief she found it ajar; the gleam of light she had seen in that direction was the moonlight streaming through the crevice. She slipped out cautiously; but the moment she found herself in the garden she became a wild creature, revelling in her freedom. She ran, jumped, waved her arms about, threw herself down on the ground, and rolled over and over for yards, walked on all fours, turned head over heels, embraced the trunks of trees, and hailed them with the Eastern invocation, "O tree, give me of thy strength!"

For a good hour she rioted about the place in this way, working off her superfluous energy. By that time she had come to the stackyard. There, among the great stacks, she played hide-and-seek with the fairy-folk for a little. Very cautiously she would steal round in the black shadows, stalking her imaginary play-fellows, and then would go flying out into the moonlight, pursued by them in turn; and looking herself, with her white night-dress over her clothes, and her tousled hair, the weirdest little elfin figure in the world. Finally, to escape capture, she ran up a ladder that had been left against a haystack. Blocks of hay had been cut out, leaving a square shelf half way down the stack, on to which Beth scrambled from the ladder. There was room enough for her to lie at her ease up there and recover her breath. The hay and the night-air smelt deliciously sweet. The stack she was on was one of the outer row. Beneath was the road along which the waggons brought their loads in harvest time; and this was flanked by a low wall, on the other side of which was a meadow, bordered with elms. Beth pulled up the hay about her, covered herself with it, and nestled amongst it luxuriously. The moon shone full upon her, but she had quite concealed herself, and would probably have fallen asleep after her exertions had it not been that just when drowsiness was coming upon her she was startled by the sound of a hurried footstep, and a girl in a light dress, with a shawl about her shoulders, came round the stack, and stood still, looking

about her, as if she expected some one. Beth recognised her as Harriet Elvidge, the kitchen-maid; and presently Russell, one of the grooms, came hurrying to meet her from the other direction. They rushed into each other's arms.

"Thou'st laäte," the girl grumbled.

"Ah bin waatin' ower yon'er this good bit," he answered, putting his arm round her, and drawing her to the wall, on which they sat, leaning against each other, and whispering happily. The moon was low, and her great golden disk illumined the sky, against which the two dark figures stood out, silhouetted distinctly. The effect gave Beth a sensation of pleasure, and she racked her brains for words in which to express it. Presently the lovers rose and strolled away together. Then for a little it was lonely, and Beth thought of getting down; but before she had made up her mind, two other people appeared, strolling in the moonlight, whom Beth instantly recognised as Uncle James and the beautiful princess Blue-eyes-and-golden-hair. The princess had both her hands clasped round Uncle James's arm, and every now and then she nestled her face against his shoulder lovingly.

"What will Jimmie-wimmie give his Jenny-penny?" she was saying as they approached.

"First what will Jenny-penny give her Jimmie-wimmie?" Uncle James cooed.

"First, a nice—sweet—kiss!"

"Duckie-dearie!" Jimmie-wimmie gurgled ecstatically, taking the kiss with the playful grace of an elephant gambolling.

Beth on the haystack writhed with suppressed merriment until her sides ached.

But Jimmie-wimmie and Jenny-penny passed out of sight like Harriet and Russell before them. The moon was sinking rapidly. A sudden gust of air blew chill upon Beth. She was extremely sensitive to sudden changes of temperature, and as the night grew dull and heavy, so did her mood, and she began to be as anxious to be indoors again as she had been to come out. The fairy-folk had all vanished now, and ghosts and goblins would come in their

stead, and pounce upon her as she passed, if she were not quick. Beth scrambled down from the haystack, and made for the side-door in hot haste, and was half-way upstairs, when it suddenly occurred to her that if she locked the door, Jimmie-wimmie and Jenny-penny would not be able to get in. So she retraced her steps, accomplished her purpose, slipped back to bed, and slept until she was roused in the morning by a shrill cry from Bernadine—"See, mummy! see, mummy! lazy Beth is in bed with all her clothes on!"

Beth sat up, and slapped Bernadine promptly; whereupon Mrs. Caldwell slapped Beth.

"Such is life," said Beth, in imitation of Aunt Grace Mary; and Mrs. Caldwell smiled in spite of herself.

Later in the day Beth complained to Mildred of a bad cold in her head.

"Oh dear!" Mildred exclaimed, "I expect Uncle James will talk at that cold as long as it lasts."

"I know," Beth said. "Grace Mary, dear—or Aunt Victoria—have you observed that children always have colds and never have pocket-handkerchiefs?"

Uncle James, however, had a bad cold himself that morning, and described himself as very much indisposed.

"I went out of doors last night before retiring," he explained at luncheon, "tempted by the glorious moonlight and the balmy air; but before I returned the night had changed and become chilly, and unfortunately the side-door had shut itself, and every one was in bed, so I could not get in. I threw pebbles up at Grace Mary's window, but failed to rouse her, she being somewhat deaf. I also knocked and rang, but no one answered, so I was obliged to shelter in the barn. Harriet, however, appeared finally. She—er—gets the men's breakfasts, and—er—the kitchen-window—" But here Uncle James was seized with a sudden fit of sneezing, and the connection between the men's breakfasts and the kitchen-window was never explained. "She is an extremely good girl, is Harriet," he proceeded as soon as he could speak; "up at four o'clock every morning."

"I wish to goodness *my* trollop was," said Lady Benyon. "She gets later every day. Where did you go last night?"

"Oh—I had been loitering among the tombs, so to speak," he answered largely.

Beth was eating cold beef stolidly, but without much appetite because of her cold, and also because there was hot chicken, and Uncle James had not given her her choice. Uncle James kept looking at her. He found it hard to let her alone, but she gave him no cause of offence for some time. Her little nose was troublesome, however, and at last she sniffed. Uncle James looked at Lady Benyon.

"Have you observed," he said, "that when a child has a cold she never has a pocket-handkerchief?"

Beth produced a clean one with a flourish, and burst out laughing.

"What's the matter, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked, beaming already in anticipation.

"Oh, nothing. Only I said Uncle James would say that if I sniffed. Didn't I, Mildred?"

But Mildred, too wary to support her, looked down demurely.

"Puck," said Lady Benyon, "you're a character."

"There are good characters and there are bad characters," Uncle James moralised.

"Arrah, thin, it isn't a bad character you'd be afther givin' your own niece," Beth blarneyed; and then she turned up her naughty eyes to the ceiling and chanted softly: "What will Jimmie-wimmie give his duckie-dearie to be good? A nice—sweet—kiss!"

Uncle James's big white face became suddenly empurpled.

"Gracious! he's swallowed wrong," Lady Benyon exclaimed in alarm. "Drink something. You really should be careful, a great fat man like you."

Uncle James coughed hard behind his handkerchief, then began to recover himself. Beth's eyes were fixed on his face. Her chaunt had been a sudden inspiration, and its effect upon the huge man had somewhat startled her; but clearly Uncle James was afraid she was going to tell.

"How funny!" she ejaculated.

Uncle James gasped again.

"What *is* the matter, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked.

"Oh, I was just thinking—thinking I would ask Uncle James to give Mildred some chicken."

"Why, of course, my dear child!" Uncle James exclaimed, to everybody's astonishment. "And have some yourself, Beth?"

"No, thank you," Beth answered. "I'm full."

"Beth!" her mother was beginning, when she perceived that Uncle James was laughing.

"Now, that child is really amusing," he said—"really amusing."

No one else thought this last enormity a happy specimen of her wit, and they looked at Uncle James, who continued to laugh, in amazement.

"Beth," he said, "when luncheon is over I shall give you a picture-book."

Beth accordingly had to stay behind with him after the others had left the dining-room.

"Beth," he began in a terrible voice, as soon as they were alone together, trying to frighten her; "Beth, what were you doing last night?"

"I was meditating among the tombs," she answered glibly; "but I never heard them called by that name before."

"You bad child, I shall tell your mamma."

"Oh for shame!" said Beth. "Tell-tale! And if you tell I shall. I saw you kissing Jenny-penny."

Uncle James collapsed. He had been prepared to explain to Beth that he had met the poor girl with some rustic lover, and was lecturing her kindly for her good, and making her go in, which would have made a plausible story had it not been for that accursed kissing. Of course he could insist that Beth was lying; the child was known to be imaginative; but then against that was the emotion he had shown. Lady Benyon had no very high opinion of him, he knew, and once she obtained a clue she would soon unravel the truth. No, the only thing was to silence Beth.

"Beth," he said, "I quite agree with you, my dear child. I was only joking when I said I would tell your mamma. Nothing would induce me to tell tales out of school."

Beth smiled up at him frankly: "Nor me neither. I don't believe you're such a bad old boy after all."

Uncle James winced. How he would have liked to throttle her! He controlled himself, however, and even managed to make a smile as he got up to leave the room.

"I say, though," Beth exclaimed, seeing him about to depart, "where's that picture-book?"

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "I had forgotten. But no, Beth, it would never do. If I give it to you now, it would look like a bribe; and I'm sure you would never accept a bribe."

"I should think not," said Beth.

And it was long years before she understood the mean adroitness of this last evasion.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE are those who maintain that a man can do everything better than a woman can do it. This is certainly true of nagging. When a man nags, he shows his thoroughness, his continuity, and that love of sport which is the special pride and attribute of his sex. When a man nags, he puts his whole heart into the effort; a woman only nags, as a rule, because the heart has been taken out of her. The nagging woman is an over-tasked creature with jarred nerves, whose plaint is an expression of pain, a cry for help; in any interval of ease which lasts long enough to relax the tension, she feels remorse, and becomes amiably anxious to atone. With the male nag it is different. He is usually sleek and smiling, a joyous creature, fond of good living, whose self-satisfaction bubbles over in artistic attempts to make everybody else uncomfortable. This was the kind of creature Uncle James Patten was. He loved to shock and jar and startle people, especially if they were powerless to retaliate. Of two ways of saying a thing he invariably chose the more disagreeable; and when he had bad news to break, it added to his interest in it if the victim felt it deeply and showed signs of suffering.

One morning at breakfast it might have been suspected that there was something unpleasant toward. Uncle James had read prayers with such happy unction, and showed such pleased importance as he took his seat.

"Aunt Victoria," he lisped, "I have just observed in yesterday's paper that money matters are in a bad way. There has been a crisis in the city, and your investments have sunk so low that your income will be practically nil."

"What!" said Aunt Victoria incredulously, "the shares you advised me to buy?"

"Those are the ones, yes," he answered.

"But, then—I fear you have lost money too," she exclaimed.

"Oh no, thank you," he assured her, in a tone which implied reproach, "I never speculate."

"James Patten," said Aunt Victoria quietly, "am I to understand that you advised me to buy stock in which you yourself did not venture to speculate?"

"Well—er—you see," he answered with composure, "as speculation was against my principles, I could not take advantage of the opportunity myself, but that seemed to me no reason why you should not try to double your income. It may have been an error of judgment on my part; I am far from infallible—far from infallible. But I think I may claim to be disinterested. I did not hope to benefit myself——"

"During my lifetime," Aunt Victoria suggested, in the same tone of quiet self-restraint. "I see. My modest fortune would not have been much in itself to a man of your means; but it would have been a considerable sum if doubled."

"Yes, doubles or quits, doubles or quits," said Uncle James, beaming on Aunt Victoria as if he were saying something reassuring. "Alas! the family failing!"

"It is a new departure, however, for the family—to gamble at other people's expense," said Aunt Victoria.

"Alas! poor human nature," Uncle James philosophised, shaking his head. "You never know—you never know."

Aunt Victoria looked him straight in the eyes, but made no further show of emotion, except that she sat more rigidly upright than usual perhaps, and the rose-tint faded from her delicate face, leaving it waxen-white beneath her auburn front.

Uncle James ate an egg, with a pious air of thankfulness for the mercies vouchsafed him.

"And where will you live now, Aunt Victoria?" he asked at last, with an affectation of as much concern as he could get into his fat voice. For many years he had insisted that Fairholm was the proper place for his mother's sister, but then she had had money to leave. "Do not desert us altogether," he pursued. "You must come and see us as often as your altered circumstances will admit."

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench bowed expressively. Aunt Grace Mary grew very red in the face. Mrs. Caldwell seemed to be controlling herself with difficulty.

"There will be a spare room in my cottage, Aunt Victoria," she said. "I hope you will consider it your own, and make your home with me."

"Thank you kindly, Caroline," the old lady answered; "but I must consider."

"It would be a most proper arrangement," Uncle James genially decided; "and you would have our dear little Beth, of whom you approve, you know, for an interest in life."

Beth left her seat impulsively, and, going round to the old lady, nestled up to her, slipped her little hand through her arm, and glared at Uncle James defiantly.

The old lady's face quivered for a moment, and she patted the child's hand.

But no more was said on the subject in Beth's hearing; only, later, she found that Aunt Victoria was going to live with them.

Uncle James had suddenly become quite anxious that Mrs. Caldwell should be settled in her own little house; he said it would be so much more comfortable for her. The little house was Aunt Grace Mary's property, by the way—rent, ten pounds a year; but as it had not been let for a long time, and it did houses no good to stand empty, Uncle James had graciously lent it to his sister. When she was so settled in it that it would be a great inconvenience to move, he asked for the rent.

During the next week he drove every day to the station in Aunt Grace Mary's pony-carriage, to see if Mrs. Caldwell's furniture had arrived from Ireland; and when at last it came, he sent every available servant he had to set the house in order, so that it might be ready for immediate occupation. He also persuaded Harriet Elvidge, his invaluable kitchen-maid, to enter Mrs. Caldwell's service as maid-of-all-work. There is reason to believe that this arrangement was the outcome of Uncle James's peculiar sense of humour; but Mrs. Caldwell never suspected it.

"It will be nice for you to have some one I know all about," Uncle James insisted, "and with a knowledge of cooking besides. And how glad you will be to sleep under your own roof to-night!" he added in a tone of kindly congratulation.

"And how glad you will be to get rid of us," said Beth, thus early giving voice to what other people were only daring to think.

As soon as they were settled in the little bow-windowed house, it became obvious that there would be differences of opinion between mamma and Great-Aunt Victoria Bench. They differed about the cooking, about religion, and about the education of children. Aunt Victoria thought that if you cooked meat a second time it took all the goodness out of it. Mrs. Caldwell liked stews, and she said if the joints were under-done at first, as they should be, re-cooking did *not* take the goodness out of the meat; but Aunt Victoria abominated under-done joints more than anything.

The education of the children was a more serious matter, however—a matter of principle, in fact, as opposed to a matter of taste. Mrs. Caldwell had determined to give her boys a good start in life. In order to do this on her very limited income, she was obliged to exercise the utmost self-denial, and even with that, there would be little or nothing left to spend on the girls. This, however, did not seem to Mrs. Caldwell to be a matter of much importance. It is customary to sacrifice the girls of a family to the boys; to give them no educational advantages, and then to jeer at them for their ignorance and silliness. Mrs. Caldwell's own education had been of the most desultory character, but such as it was, she was content with it. "The method has answered in my case," she complacently maintained, without the slightest suspicion that the assertion proved nothing but extreme self-satisfaction. Accordingly, as she could not afford to send her daughters to school as well as the boys, she decided to educate them herself. Everybody who could read, write, and cipher was supposed to be able to teach in those days, and Mrs. Caldwell undertook the task without a doubt of her own capacity. But Aunt Victoria was not so sanguine.

"I hope religious instruction will be a part of their education," she said, when the subject was first discussed.

"They shall read the Bible from beginning to end," Mrs. Caldwell answered shortly.

"That, I should think, would be hardly desirable," Aunt Victoria deprecated gently.

"And I shall teach them their Catechism, and take them to church," Mrs. Caldwell proceeded. "That is the way in which *I* was taught."

"*We* were instructed in doctrine, and taught to order our conduct on certain fixed principles, which were explained to us," Aunt Victoria ventured.

"Indeed, yes, I dare say," Mrs. Caldwell observed politely; so there the subject had to drop.

But Aunt Victoria was far from satisfied. She shook her head sadly over her niece's spiritual state, and determined to save the souls of her great-nieces by instructing them herself as occasion should offer.

"What is education, mamma?" Beth asked.

"Why, learning things, of course," Mrs. Caldwell replied, with a smile at the child's simplicity.

"I know that," Beth snapped, irritated by her mother's manner.

"Then why did you ask?" Mrs. Caldwell wished to know.

"The child has probably heard that that is not all," said Aunt Victoria. "'Learning things' is but one item of education—if you mean by that the mere acquisition of knowledge. A well-ordered day, for instance, is an essential part of education. Education is a question of discipline, of regular hours for everything, from the getting up in the morning to the going to bed at night. No mind can be properly developed without routine. Teach a child how to order its time, and its talents will do the rest."

"Get out your books, children," said Mrs. Caldwell, and Aunt Victoria hurriedly withdrew.

Beth put a large Bible, Colenso's arithmetic, a French grammar, and Pinnock (an old-fashioned compilation of questions and answers), on the

table, and looked at them despondently. Then she took a slate, set herself the easiest addition sum she could find in Colenso, and did it wrong. Her mother told her to correct it.

"I wish you would show me how, mamma," Beth pleaded.

"You must find out for yourself," her mother answered.

This was her favourite formula. She had no idea of making the lessons either easy or interesting to the children. Teaching was a duty she detested, a time of trial both to herself and to her pupils, to be got over as soon as possible. The whole proceeding only occupied two or three dreadful hours of the morning, and then the children were free for the rest of the day, and so was she.

After lessons they all went out together to the north cliffs, where Aunt Victoria and Mrs. Caldwell walked to and fro on a sheltered terrace, while the children played on the sands below. It was a still day when Beth first saw the sands, and the lonely level and the tranquil sea delighted her. On her left, white cliffs curved round the bay like an arm; on her right was the grey and solid old stone pile, and behind her the mellow red brick houses of the little town scrambled up an incline from the shore irregularly. Silver sparkles brightened the hard smooth surface of the sand in the sunshine. The tide was coming in, and tiny waves advanced in irregular curves, and broke with a merry murmur. Joy got hold of Beth as she gazed about her, feeling the beauty of the scene. With the infinite charity of childhood, she forgave her mother her trespasses against her for that day, and her little soul was filled with the peace of the newly shriven. She flourished a little wooden spade that Aunt Victoria had given her, but did not dig. The surface of the sand was all unbroken; no disfiguring foot of man had trodden the long expanse, and Beth hesitated to be the first to spoil its exquisite serenity. Her heart expanded, however, and she shouted aloud in a great, uncontrollable burst of exultation.

A man with a brown beard and moustache, short, crisp, curly hair, and deep-set, glittering dark grey eyes, came up to her from behind. He wore a blue pilot-coat, blue trousers, and a peaked cap, the dress of a merchant-skipper.

"Don't desecrate this heavenly solitude with discordant cries," he exclaimed.

Beth had not heard him approach, and she turned round, startled, when he spoke.

"I thought I was singing!" she rejoined.

"Don't dig and disfigure the beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore," he pursued.

"I did not mean to dig," Beth said, looking up in his face; and then looking round about her in perfect comprehension of his mood—"The beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore," she slowly repeated, delighting in the phrase. "It's the kind of thing you can sing, you know."

"Yes," said the man, suddenly smiling; "it is pure poetry, and I make you a present of the copyright."

"But," Beth objected, "the shore is *not* brown. I've been thinking and thinking what to call it. It's the colour—the colour of—the colour of tarnished silver," she burst out at last triumphantly.

"Well observed," he said.

"Then I make you a present of the copyright," Beth answered readily.

"Thank you," he said; "but it will not scan."

"What is scan?"

"It won't fit into the verse, you know."

"The beautiful bare colour-of-tarnished-silver bosom of the shore," she sang out glibly; then agreed, with a wise shake of her head, that the phrase was impossible; and recurred to another point of interest, as was her wont—"What is copyright?"

Before he could answer, however, Mrs. Caldwell had swooped down upon them. She had seen him from the cliff talking to Beth, and hastened down the steps in her hot-tempered way, determined to rebuke the man for his

familiarity, and heedless of Aunt Victoria, who had made an effort to stop her.

"May I ask why you are interfering with my child, sir?" she demanded.

The man in the sailor-suit raised his hat and bowed low.

"Excuse me, madam," he said. "I could not possibly have supposed that she was your child."

Mrs. Caldwell coloured angrily as at an insult, although the words seemed innocent enough. When he had spoken, he turned to Beth, with his hat still in his hand, and added—"Good-bye, little lady. We must meet again, you and I—on the beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore."

Beth's sympathy shone out in a smile, and she waved her hand confidently to him as he turned away. Mrs. Caldwell seized her arm and hurried her up the steps to Aunt Victoria, who stood on the edge of the cliff blinking calmly.

"Imagine Beth scraping acquaintance with such a common-looking person!" Mrs. Caldwell cried. "You must never speak to him or look at him again—do you hear? I wonder what taste you will develop next!"

"It is a pity that you are so impetuous, Caroline," Aunt Victoria observed quietly. "That gentleman is the Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, who may perhaps be considered eccentric here, where noblemen of great attainments and wealth are certainly not numerous; but is hardly to be called common-looking."

Beth saw her mother's countenance drop.

"Then I *may* speak to him," she decided for herself. "What's a copyright, mamma?"

"Oh, don't bother, Beth!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed irritably.

When they went home, Bernadine clamoured for food, and her mother gave her a piece of bread. They were to have dinner at four o'clock, but no luncheon, for economy's sake. Beth was hungry too, but she would not confess it. What she had heard of their poverty had made a deep impression on her, and she was determined to eat as little as possible. Aunt Victoria glanced at Bernadine and the bread as she went up to her room, and Beth

fancied she heard her sigh. Was the old lady hungry too, she wondered, and her little heart sank.

This was Beth's first exercise in self-denial, but she had plenty of practice, for the scene was repeated day after day.

The children being free, had to amuse themselves as best they could, and went out to play in the little garden at the back of the house. Mrs. Caldwell's own freedom was merely freedom for thought. Most of the day she spent beside the dining-room table, making and mending, her only distraction being an occasional glance through the window at the boughs of the apple-trees which showed above the wall opposite, or at the people passing. Even when teaching the children she made, mended, and pursued her own thoughts, mapping out careers for her boys, making brilliant matches for Mildred and Bernadine, and even building a castle for Beth now and then. She made and mended as badly as might be expected of a woman whose proud boast it was that when she was married she could not hem a pocket-handkerchief; and she did it all herself. She had no notion of utilising the motive-power at hand in the children. As her own energy had been wasted in her childhood, so she wasted theirs, letting it expend itself to no purpose instead of teaching them to apply it. She was essentially a creature of habit. All that she had been taught in her youth, she taught them; but any accomplishment she had acquired in later life, she seemed to think that they also should wait to acquire. She had always dressed for dinner; so now, at half-past three every day, she put away her work, went into the kitchen for some hot water, which she carried upstairs herself, called the children, and proceeded to brush her own hair carefully, and change her dress. She expected the children to follow her example, but did not pay much attention to their proceedings, and they, childlike, constantly and consistently shirked as much of the ceremony as possible. If their mother caught them with unwashed hands and half-brushed hair, she thumped them on the back, and made them wash and brush; but she was generally thinking about something else, and did not catch them. The rite, however, being regularly although imperfectly performed, resulted in a good habit.

There was another thing too for which Beth had good reason to be grateful to her mother. During winter, when the days were short, or when bad weather made it impossible to go out on summer evenings, Mrs. Caldwell

always read aloud to the children after tea till bed-time. Most mothers would have made the children read; but there was a great deal of laxity mixed with Mrs. Caldwell's harshness. She found it easier to do things herself than to make the children do them for her. They objected to read, and liked to be read to, so she read to them; and as, fortunately, she had no money to buy children's books, she read what there were in the house. Beth's ear was still quicker than her eye, and she would not read to herself if she could help it; but before she was fourteen, thanks to her mother, she knew much of Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer Lytton, and even some of Shakespeare, well; besides such books as "The Woman in White," "The Dead Secret," "Loyal Heart; or, The Trappers," "The Scalp Hunters," and many more, all of which helped greatly to develop her intelligence.

CHAPTER XV

DURING the next two years, Beth continued to look on at life, with eyes wide open, deeply interested. Her mind at this time, acting without conscious effort, was a mere photographic apparatus for the registration of impressions on the brain. Every incident stored and docketed itself somewhere in her consciousness for future use, and it was upon this hoard that she drew eventually with such astonishing effect.

Rousseau in "Emile" chose a common capacity to educate, because, he said, genius will educate itself; but even genius would find its labours lightened by having been taught the use of some few tools, such as are supplied by the rudiments of a conventional education. Beth was never taught anything thoroughly; very few girls were in her day. A woman was expected at that time to earn her livelihood by marrying a man and bringing up a family; and, so long as her face was attractive, the fact that she was ignorant, foolish, and trivial did not, in the estimation of the average man, at all disqualify her for the task. Beth's education, at this most impressionable period of her life, consisted in the acquisition of a few facts which were not made to interest her, and neither influenced her conduct nor helped to form her character. She might learn in the morning, for instance, that William the Conqueror arrived 1066, but the information did not prevent her being as naughty as possible in the afternoon. One cannot help speculating on how much she lost or gained by the haphazard of her early training; but one thing is certain, had the development of her genius depended upon a careful acquisition of such knowledge as is to be had at school, it must have remained latent for ever.

As it was, however, being forced out into the life-school of the world, she there matriculated on her own account, and so, perhaps, saved her further faculty from destruction. For theoretical knowledge would have dulled the keenness of her insight probably, confused her point of view, and brought in accepted commonplaces to spoil the originality of her conclusions. It was from practical experience of life rather than from books that she learnt her work; she saw for herself before she came under the influence of other

people's observations; and this was doubtless the secret of her success; but it involved the cruel necessity of a hard and strange apprenticeship. From the time of their arrival in Rainharbour she lived three lives a day—the life of lessons and coercion which was forced upon her, an altogether artificial and unsatisfactory life; the life she took up the moment she was free to act for herself; and a life of endless dreams, which mingled with the other two unwholesomely. For the rich soil of her mind, left uncultivated, was bound to bring forth something, and because there was so little seed sown in it, the crop was mostly weeds.

When we review the march of events which come crowding into a life, seeing how few it is possible to describe, no one can wonder that there is talk of the difficulty of selection. Who, for instance, could have supposed that a good striped jacket Jim had outgrown, and Mrs. Caldwell's love of grey, would have had much effect upon Beth's career? And yet these trifles were epoch-making. Mrs. Caldwell thought grey a ladylike colour, and therefore bought Beth a carmelite dress of a delicate shade for the summer. For the first few weeks the dress was a joy to Beth, but after that it began to be stained by one thing and another, and every spot upon it was a source of misery, not only because she was punished for messing the dress, but also because she had messed it; for she was beginning to be fastidious about her clothes; and every time she went out she was conscious of those unsightly stains, and fancied everybody was looking at them. She had to wear the frock, however, for want of another; and in the autumn, when the days began to be chilly, a cast-off jacket of Jim's was added to the affliction. Mrs. Caldwell caught her trying it on one day, and after shaking her for doing so, she noticed that the jacket fitted her, and the bright idea of making Beth wear it out, so that it might not be wasted, occurred to her. To do her justice, Mrs. Caldwell had no idea of the torture she was inflicting upon Beth by forcing her to appear in her soiled frock and a boy's jacket. The poor lady was in great straits at the time, and had nothing to spend on her daughters, because her sons were growing up, and beginning to clamour for pocket-money. Their mother considered it right that they should have it too; and so the tender, delicate, sensitive little girl had to go dirty and ashamed in order that her brothers might have the wherewithal to swing a cane, smoke, drink beer, play billiards, and do all else that makes boys men in their own estimation at an early age.

Rainharbour was little more than a fishing village in those days, though it became a fashionable watering-place in a very few years. When Mrs. Caldwell first settled there, a whole codfish was sold for sixpence, fowls were one-and-ninepence a pair, eggs were almost given away, and the manners of the people were in keeping with the low prices. The natives had no idea of concealing their feelings, and were in the habit of expressing their opinions of each other and things in general at the top of their voices in the open street. They were as conservative as the Chinese too, and thought anything new and strange ridiculous. Consequently, when a little girl appeared amongst them in a boy's jacket, they let her know that they resented the innovation.

"She's gotten a lad's jacket on! oh! oh! she's gotten a lad's jacket on!" the children called aloud after her in the street, while their mothers came to the cottage-doors, wiping soap-suds from their arms, and stood staring as at a show; and even the big bland sailors lounging on the quay expanded into broad grins or solemnly winked at one another. Beth flushed with shame, but her courageous little heart was instantly full of fight. "What ignorant people these are!" she exclaimed haughtily, turning to Bernadine, who had dropped behind out of the obloquy. "What ignorant people these are! they know nothing of the fashions." The insinuation stung her persecutors, but that only made them the more offensive, and wherever she went she was jeered at—openly if there were no grown-up person with her, covertly if there were, but always so that she understood. After that first explosion she used to march along with an air of calm indifference as if she heard nothing, but she had to put great constraint upon herself in order to seem superior while feeling deeply humiliated; and all the time she suffered so acutely that at last she could hardly be induced to go out at all.

Mrs. Caldwell, who never noticed the "common people" enough to be aware of their criticism, would not listen to anything Beth had to say on the subject, and considered that her objection to go out in the jacket was merely another instance of her tiresome obstinacy. Punishments ensued, and Beth had the daily choice whether she should be scolded and beaten for refusing to go out, or be publicly jeered at for wearing a "lad's jacket."

Sometimes she preferred the chance of public derision to the certainty of private chastisement; but oftener she took the chastisement. This state of

things could not last much longer, however. Hitherto her mother had ruled her by physical force, but now their wills were coming into collision, and it was inevitable that the more determined should carry her point.

"Go and put your things on directly, you naughty, obstinate child," her mother screamed at her one day. Beth did not move.

"Do you hear me?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth made no sign. And suddenly Mrs. Caldwell realised that if Beth would not go out, she could not make her. She never thought of trying to persuade her. All that occurred to her was that Beth was too big to be carried or pulled or pushed; that she might be hurt, but could not be frightened; and that there was nothing for it, therefore, but to let her have her own way.

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Caldwell, "I shall go without you. But you'll be punished for your wickedness some day, you'll see, and then you'll be sorry."

Mildred had gone to be educated by a rich sister of her father's by this time, Aunt Victoria and Bernadine usually went out with Mrs. Caldwell, so it came to pass that Beth began to be left pretty much to her own resources, of which Harriet Elvidge in the kitchen was one, and a considerable one.

Harriet was a woman of well-marked individuality and brilliant imagination. She could never separate fact from fiction in any form of narrative, and narrative was her speciality. She was always recounting something. Beth used to follow her from room to room, as she went about her work, listening with absolute faith and the deepest interest to the stream of narrative which flowed on without interruption, no matter what Harriet was doing. Sometimes, when she was dusting the drawing-room mantelpiece, she would pause with a china cup in one hand and her duster in the other, to emphasise a thrilling incident, or make a speech impressive with suitable gesticulation; and sometimes, for the same purpose, she would stop with her hand on the yellowstone with which she was rubbing the kitchen-hearth, and her head in the grate almost. Often, too, Beth in her eager sympathy would say, "Let me do that!" and Harriet would sit in an arm-chair if they were in the drawing-room, and resign the duster—or the dishcloth, if they were in the kitchen—and continue the recital, while Beth

showed her appreciation, and encouraged her to proceed, by doing the greater part of her work for her. Mrs. Caldwell never could make out why Beth's hands were in such a state. "They are all cracked and begrimed," she would exclaim, "as if the child had to do dirty work like a servant!" And it was a good thing for Beth that she did it, for otherwise she would have had no physical training at all, and would have suffered as her sister Mildred did for want of it. Mildred, unlike Beth, held her head high, and never forgot that she was a young lady by right of descent, with an hereditary aptitude for keeping her inferiors in their proper place. She only went into the kitchen of necessity, and would never have dreamed of dusting, sweeping, bed-making, or laying the table, to help the servant, however much she might have been over-tasked; neither would Harriet have dared to approach her with the familiar pleading: "I say, miss, 'elp uz, I'm that done," to which Beth so readily responded. Mildred was studious; she had profited by the good teaching she had had while her father was alive, and was able to "make things out" for herself; but she cultivated her mind at the expense of her body. She was one of those delicate, nervous, sensitive girls, whose busy brains require the rest of regular manual exercise; and for want of it, she lived upon books, and very literally died of them eventually. She was naturally, so to speak, an artificial product of conventional ideas; Beth, on the contrary, was altogether a little human being, but one of those who answer to expectation with fatal versatility. She liked blacking grates, and did them well, because Harriet told her she could; she hated writing copies, and did them disgracefully, because her mother beat her for a blot, and said she would never improve. For the same reason, long before she could read aloud to her mother intelligibly, she had learnt all that Harriet could teach her, not only of the house-work, but of the cooking, from cleaning a fish and trussing a fowl to making barley-broth and puff-pastry. Harriet was a good cook if she had the things, as she said herself, having picked up a great deal when she was kitchen-maid in Uncle James's household.

Harriet was the daughter of a labourer. Her people lived at a village some miles away, and every Saturday morning a carrier with a covered cart brought her a letter from home, and a little parcel containing a cheesecake or some other dainty. Beth took a lively interest both in the cheesecake and the letter. "What's the news from home to-day?" she would ask. "How's Annie, and what has mother sent?" Whereupon Harriet would share the

cheesecake with her, and read the letter aloud, work being suspended as long as possible for the purpose.

Harriet was about twenty-five at this time. She had very black silky hair, straight and heavy, parted in the middle, drawn down over her ears, and gathered up in a knot behind. Her face was oval, forehead high, eyebrows arched and delicate, nose straight, and she had large expressive dark grey eyes, rather deeply set, with long black lashes, and a mouth that would have been handsome of the sensual full-lipped kind, had it not been distorted by a burn, which had disfigured her throat and chin as well. She had set her pinafore on fire when she was a child, and it had blazed up under her chin, causing irreparable injury before the flames could be extinguished. But for that accident she would have been a singularly good-looking woman of a type which was common in books of beauty at the beginning of this reign.

She could read and write after a fashion, and was intelligent, but ignorant, deceitful, superstitious, and hysterical. Mrs. Caldwell continually lectured Beth about going into the kitchen so much; but she only lectured on principle really. Young ladies could not be allowed to associate with servants as a rule, but an exception might be made in the case of a good, steady, sober sort of person, such as Mrs. Caldwell believed Harriet to be, who would keep the troublesome child out of mischief, and do her no harm. Harriet, as it happened, delighted in mischief, and was often the instigator; but Mrs. Caldwell might be excused for not suspecting this, as she only saw her on her best behaviour. When the children were safe in bed, and Miss Victoria Bench, who was an early person, had also retired, Harriet would put on a clean apron, and appear before Mrs. Caldwell in the character of a respectable, vigilant domestic, more anxious about her mistress's interests than her own; and she would then make a report in which Beth figured as a fiend of a child who could not be trusted alone for a moment, and Harriet herself as a conscientious custodian, but for whom nobody knows what might have happened.

When Harriet had no particular incident to report at these secret conferences, she would tell Mrs. Caldwell her dreams, and describe signs and portents of coming events which she had observed during the day; and Mrs. Caldwell would listen with interest. Superstition is a subject on which the most class-proud will consult with the lowest and the wickedest; it is a

mighty leveller downwards. But the poor lady had a lonely life. It was not Mrs. Caldwell's fault, but the fault of her day, that she was not a noble woman. She belonged to early Victorian times, when every effort was made to mould the characters of women as the homes of the period were built, on lines of ghastly uniformity. The education of a girl in those days was eminently calculated to cloud her intelligence and strengthen every failing developed in her sex by ages of suppression. Mrs. Caldwell was a plastic person, and her mind had been successfully compressed into the accustomed groove until her husband came and helped it to escape a little in one or two directions—with the effect, however, of spoiling its conventional symmetry without restoring its natural beauty. If the mind be tight-laced long enough, it is ruined as a model, just as the body is; and throwing off the stays which restrained it, merely exposes its deformities without remedying them; so that there is nothing for the old generation but to remain in stays. Mrs. Caldwell, with all her deformities, was just as heroic as she knew how to be. She lived for her children to the extent of denying herself the bare necessities of life for them; and bore poverty and obscurity of a galling kind without a murmur. She scarcely ever saw a soul to speak to. Uncle James Patten and the Benyon family did not associate much with the townspeople, and were not popular in the county; so that Mrs. Caldwell had very few visitors. Of course it was an advantage to be known as a relation of the great people of the place, although the great people had a bad name; but then she was evidently a poor relation, which made it almost a virtue to neglect her in a community of Christians who only professed to love the Lord Himself for what they could get. "You must worship God because He can give you everything," was what they taught their children. Even the vicar of the parish would not call on anybody with less than five hundred a year. He kept a school for boys, which paid him more than cent. per cent., but did nothing for his parishioners except preach sermons an hour long on Sundays. Self-denial and morality were his favourite subjects. He had had three wives himself, and was getting through a fourth as fast as one baby a year would do it.

Mrs. Caldwell, left to herself, found her evenings especially long and dreary. It was her habit to write her letters then, and read, particularly in French and Italian, which, she had some vague notion, helped to improve her mind. But she often wearied for a word, and began to hear voices

herself in the howling winter winds, and to brood upon the possible meaning of her own dreams, and to wonder why a solitary rook flew over her house in particular, and cawed twice as it passed. Little things naturally become of great importance in such a life, and Harriet kept up the supply; she being the connecting link between Mrs. Caldwell and the outer world. She knew all that was happening in the place, and she claimed to know all that was going to happen; and by degrees the mistress as well as the maid fell into the way of comparing events with the forebodings which had preceded them, and often established a satisfactory connection between the two.

Mrs. Caldwell always made coffee in the kitchen for breakfast in the morning, and while she was so engaged, Harriet, busy making toast, would begin—"Did you 'ear a noise last night, m'em?"

"No, Harriet—at least—was it about ten o'clock?"

"Yes, m'em, just about—a sort of scraping rattling noise, like a lot of people walking over gravel."

"I did hear something of the kind. I wonder what it was," Mrs. Caldwell would rejoin.

"Well, m'em, I think it means there are people coming to the 'ouse, for I remember it 'appened the night before your brother come, m'em, unexpected, and the lawyer."

If nobody came during the day, the token would be supposed to refer to some future period; and so, by degrees, signs and portents took the place of more substantial interests in Mrs. Caldwell's dreary life. Such things were in the air, for the little seaside place was quite out of the world at the time, and the people still had more faith in an incantation than a doctor's dose. If an accident happened, or a storm decimated the fishing-fleet, signs innumerable were always remembered which had preceded the event. If you asked why nobody had profited by the warning, people would shake their heads and tell you it was to be; and if you asked what was the use of the warning then, they would say to break the blow—in which idea there seemed to be some sense.

"When they told Tom's wife 'e was drowned, she'd 'a' dropped down dead 'erself and left the children, if she 'adn't 'a' knowed it all along," Harriet explained to Beth. "Eh! lass, you mark my words, warnin's comes for one thing, and warnin's comes for another, but they always comes for good, an' you're forced to take notice an' act on 'em or you're forced to leave 'em alone, just as is right, an' ye can't 'elp it yerself, choose 'ow. There's Mrs. Pettinger, she dreamed one night 'er husband's boat was lost, an' next mornin' 'e was to go out fishin', but she wouldn't let 'im. 'No, 'Eney John,' she ses, 'you'll not go, not if ah 'as to 'old you,' ses she, an' 'e was that mad 'e struck 'er an' knocked 'er down an' broke 'er arm, an' then, needs must, 'e 'ad to fetch the doctor to set it, an' by the time that was done, the boat 'ad gone wi'out 'im. The other men thought 'e was drunk—'e often was—an' they wouldn't wait. Well, that boat never came back."

"And did he beat his wife again?" Beth asked.

"Oh, as to that, 'ow could it make any difference?" Harriet answered.

Beth was fascinated by the folk-lore of the place, and soon surpassed Harriet herself in the interpretation of dreams and the reading of signs and tokens. She began to invent methods of divination for herself too, such as, "If the boards don't creak when I walk across the room I shall get through my lessons without trouble this morning," a trick which soon became a confirmed habit into which she was apt to lapse at any time; and so persistent are these early impressions that to the end of her days she would always rather have seen two rooks together than one alone, rooks being the birds of omen in a land where magpies were scarce. Mrs. Caldwell knew nothing of Beth's proficiency in the black arts. She would never have discussed such a subject before the children, and took it for granted that Harriet was equally discreet; while Beth on her part, with her curious quick sense of what was right and proper, believed her mother to be above such things.

Harriet was a person of varied interests, all of which she discussed with Beth impartially. She had many lovers, according to her own account, and was stern and unyielding with them all, and so particular that she would dismiss them at any moment for nothing almost. If she went out at night she had always much to tell the next morning, and Beth would hurry over her

lessons, watch her mother out of the way, and slip into the kitchen or upstairs after Harriet, and question her about what she had said, and he had said, and if she had let him kiss her even once.

"Well, last night," Harriet said on one occasion, in a tone of apology for her own weakness and good-nature. "Last night I couldn't 'elp it. 'E just put 'is arm round me, and, well, there! I was sorry for 'im."

"Why don't you say *he* and *him* and *his*, Harriet?"

"I do."

"No, you don't. You say 'e and 'im and 'is."

"Well, that's what you say."

Beth shouted the aspirates at her for answer, but in vain; with all the will in the world to "talk fine," as she called it, Harriet could never acquire the art, for want of an ear to hear. She could not perceive the slightest difference between him and 'im.

Even at this age Beth had her own point of view in social matters, and frequently disconcerted Harriet by a word or look or inflection of the voice which expressed disapproval of her conduct. Harriet had been at home on one occasion for a week's holiday, a charwoman having done her work in her absence, and on her return she had much to relate of Charles Russell, the groom at Fairholm, who continued to be an ardent admirer of hers, but not an honourable one, because he did not realise what a very superior person Harriet was. He thought she was no better than other girls, and when they were sitting up one night together in her mother's cottage, the rest of the family having gone to bed, he made her a proposal which Harriet indignantly rejected.

"And ah *ses* to 'im, 'Charles *Russell*,' ah ses to 'im, 'not was it ever so,' ah ses to 'im"—she was proceeding emphatically when Beth interrupted her.

"Did you say you sat up with him alone all night?" she asked.

"Yes, there's no 'arm, you know," Harriet answered on the defensive, without precisely knowing why.

"Well, what did he say?" Beth rejoined without comment.

But Harriet, put out of countenance, omitted the details, and brought the story to an abrupt conclusion.

Another of Harriet's interests in life was the *Family Herald*, which she took regularly, and as regularly read aloud to Beth, to the best of her ability—from the verses to "Violet," or "My own Love," on the first page, to the "Random Readings" on the last. They laughed at the jokes, tried to guess the riddles, were impressed with the historical anecdotes and words of wisdom, and became so hungry over the recipes for good dishes that they frequently fried eggs and potatoes, or a slice stolen from the joint roasting at the fire, and feasted surreptitiously.

Beth tried in after years to remember what the stories in the *Family Herald* had been about, but all she could recall was a vague incident of a falling scaffold, of a heroine called Margaret taking refuge in the dark behind a hoarding, and of a fascinating hero whom Harriet called Ug Miller. Long afterwards it dawned upon Beth that his name was Hugh.

When Mildred went to her aunt, Beth and Bernadine became of necessity constant companions, and it was a curious kind of companionship, for their natures were antagonistic. Like rival chieftains whose territories adjoin, they professed no love for each other, and were often at war, but were intimate nevertheless, and would have missed each other, because there was no one else with whom they could so conveniently quarrel. Harriet took the liveliest interest in their squabbles, which, under her able direction, rapidly developed from the usual little girls' scimmages into regular stand-up fights.

One day Beth pulled Bernadine's hair passionately, and Bernadine retaliated by clawing Beth's face, and then howled as a further relief to her feelings. Mrs. Caldwell rushed to see what accident had happened to the dear child, and Harriet came to see the sport.

"Mamma, Beth pulled my hair," Bernadine whined.

Mrs. Caldwell immediately thumped Beth, who seldom said a word in her own defence. Harriet was neutral till her mistress had disappeared, and then she supported Beth.

"Just you wait till after dinner," she said. "Come into the kitchen when your ma's asleep, and fight it out. Don't you be put upon by tell-pie-tits."

"What's the use of my going into the kitchen?" Beth rejoined; "Bernadine doesn't fight fair. She's a horrid, low little coward."

"Am I!" Bernadine howled. "Just you wait till after dinner! I'm as brave as you are, and as strong, though you *are* the biggest." Which was true. Bernadine was sallow, thin, wiry, and muscular; Beth was soft, and round, and white. She had height, age, and weight on her side; Bernadine had strength, agility, and cunning.

"Phew—w—w!" Beth jeered, mimicking her whine. "You'd 'tell mamma' if you got a scratch."

"I won't, Beth, if you'll fight," Bernadine protested.

"We'll see after dinner," Harriet put in significantly, and then returned to her work.

After the four o'clock dinner, during the dark winter months, Mrs. Caldwell dozed for half-an-hour in her chair by the fire. This was the children's opportunity. They were supposed to sit still and amuse themselves quietly while their mother slept; and, until she slept, they would sit motionless, watching her, the greater their anxiety to get away the more absolute their silence. Mrs. Caldwell looked as if she were being mesmerised to sleep by the two pairs of bright eyes so resolutely and patiently fixed upon her. The moment her breathing showed she was sound asleep, the children stole to the kitchen, shutting the doors after them softly, and instantly set to work.

It was a gruesome sight, those two children, with teeth set and clenched fists, battering each other in deadly earnest, but with no noise save the fizzle of feet on the brick floor, an occasional thump up against a piece of furniture, or the thud when they fell. They were afraid to utter a sound lest Aunt Victoria, up in her room, should hear them, and come down interfering; or their mother should wake, and come out and catch them. They bruised and blackened and scratched each other, and were seldom without what they considered the honourable scars of these battles. Sometimes, when Bernadine was badly mauled, she lost her temper, and threatened to tell mamma. But Beth could always punish her, and did so, by

refusing to fight next time, although, without that recreation, life were a blank.

Harriet always cleared away obstacles to give them room, and then sat down to eat her dinner, and watch the fight. She had the tastes, and some of the habits, of a Roman empress, and encouraged them with the keenest interest for a long time, but when she had finished her dinner she usually wearied of the entertainment, and would then stop it.

"I say, yer *ma's* comin'! I can 'ear 'er!" she would exclaim. "Elp us to wash up, or I shan't be done for the reading."

When Harriet wanted help, Bernadine usually slipped away, helping anybody not being much in her line; but Beth set to work with a will.

Beth, always sociable, had persuaded her mother to let Harriet come to the reading; and Harriet accordingly, in a clean cap and apron, with a piece of sewing, was added to the party.

So long as she sat on a high chair, at a respectful distance, and remembered that she was a servant, her being there rather gratified Mrs. Caldwell than otherwise, once she had yielded to Beth's persuasion, and saw the practical working of the experiment; it made her feel as if she were doing something to improve the lower classes. It was a pity she did not try to improve Beth and Bernadine by finding some sewing for their idle hands to do. During the reading, dear little Bernadine, "so good and affectionate always," would sit on the floor beside her mother, whose pocket she often picked of a penny or sixpence to vary the monotony when she did not understand the book. Beth also sat idle, listening intently, and watching her sister. If the reading had been harrowing or exciting, she would fight Bernadine for the sixpence when they went to bed. There were lively scenes during the readings. They all wept at the pathetic parts, laughed loudly when amused, and disputed about passages and incidents at the top of their voices. Mrs. Caldwell forgot that Harriet was a servant, Harriet forgot herself, and the children, unaccustomed to wordy warfare, forgot their fear of their mother, and flew at each other's throats.

When the story was very interesting, Mrs. Caldwell read until she was hoarse, and then went on to herself—"dipping," the children called it. It was

a point of honour with them not to dip, and they would remonstrate with their mother loudly when they caught her at it. Their feeling on the subject was so strong that she was ashamed to be seen dipping at last. She used to put the book away until they were safe in bed, and then gratify her curiosity; but they suspected her, because once or twice they noticed that she was unaffected by an exciting part; so one night they came down in their night-dresses and caught her, and after that the poor lady had to be careful. She might thump the children for coming downstairs, but she could not alter the low opinion they had of a person who dipped.

CHAPTER XVI

BETH'S brain began to be extraordinarily busy. She recorded nothing, but her daily doings were so many works of her imagination. She was generally somebody else in these days, seldom herself; and people who did not understand this might have supposed that she was an exceedingly mendacious little girl, when she was merely speaking consistently in the character which she happened to be impersonating. She would spend hours of the afternoon alone in the drawing-room, standing in the window looking out while she wove her fancies; and she soon began to go out also, by the back-door, when the mood was upon her, without asking anybody's leave. She had wandered off in this way on one occasion to the south side, whither her people rarely went. At the top of the cliff, where the winding road began which led down to the harbour, a paralysed sailor was sitting in a wickerwork wheeled chair, looking over the sea. Beth knew the man by sight. He had been a yachtsman in the service of one of her great-uncles, and she had heard hints of extraordinary adventures they had had together. It filled her with compassion to see him sitting there so lonely and helpless, and as she approached she resolved herself into a beneficent being, able and willing to help. She had a book under her arm, a costly volume which Mrs. Caldwell had borrowed to read to the children. Beth had been looking at the pictures when the desire to go out suddenly seized upon her, and had carried the book off inadvertently.

"How are you to-day, Tom?" she said, going up to the invalid confidently. "I'm glad to see you out. We shall soon have you about again as well as ever. I knew a man in Ireland much worse than you are. He couldn't move his hands and arms. Legs are bad enough, but when it's hands and arms as well, you know, it's worse. Well, now you couldn't tell there'd ever been anything the matter with him."

"And what cured 'im?" Tom asked with interest.

"Oh, he just *thought* he'd get well, you know. You've got to set yourself that way, don't you see? If mountains can be moved by faith, you can surely

move your own legs!"

"That sounds reasonable any way," Tom ejaculated.

"Do you like reading?" said Beth.

"Yes, I read a bit at times."

"Well, I've brought you a book," Beth proceeded, handing him the borrowed volume. "You'll find it interesting, I'm sure. It's a great favourite of mine."

"You're mighty good," the sailor said.

"Oh, not at all," Beth answered largely. Then she wished him good-bye. But she often visited him again in the same character, and the stories she told that unhappy invalid for his comfort and encouragement were amazing. When the book was missed, and her mother bothered about it, she listened serenely, and even helped to look for it.

Beth strolled homewards when she left her protégé, and on the way she became Norna of the Fitful Head. She tried Minna and Brenda first, but these characters were too insipid for her taste. Norna was different. She did things, you know, and made charms, and talked poetry, and people were afraid of her. Beth believed in her thoroughly. She'd be Norna, and make charms. But she had no lead. Norna looked about her. She knew by magic that Cleveland was coming to consult her, and she had no lead. There was a border of lead, however, over the attic window outside. All she had to do was to steal upstairs, climb out of the window on to the roof, and cut a piece of the lead off. It was now the mystic moment to obtain lead, but she must be wary. She strolled through the kitchen in a casual way. Harriet was busy about the grate, and paid no attention to her; so she secured the carving-knife without difficulty, went up to the attic, and opened the window. She was now on the dangerous pinnacle of a temple, risking her life in order to obtain the materials for a charm which would give her priceless power.

On the other side of the street, there lived in the Orchard House another widow-woman with three daughters. She let lodgings, and was bringing up her children to honest industry in that state of life. She and Mrs. Caldwell took a kindly interest in each other's affairs. Mrs. Davy happened to be changing the curtains in front that afternoon when Beth crept out of the attic

window on to the roof, and she was paralysed with horror for a moment, expecting to see the child roll off into the street. She was a sensible woman, however, and quickly recovering herself, she ran across the road, with her spectacles on, and rapped at Mrs. Caldwell's door. Beth, hacking away at the lead with the carving-knife, did not heed the rap. Presently, however, she heard hurried footsteps on the stairs, and climbed back into the attic incontinently, putting her spoils in her pocket. When Mrs. Davy, her mother, and Harriet, all agitated, burst open the door, she was standing at the window looking out tranquilly.

"What were you doing on the roof, Beth?" her mother demanded.

"Nothing," Beth answered.

"Mrs. Davy says she saw you get out of the window."

Beth was silent.

"You're a bad girl, giving your mother so much trouble," Mrs. Davy exclaimed, looking at her under her spectacles sternly. "If you was my child I'd whack you, I would."

Beth was instantly a lady, sneering at this common woman who was taking a liberty which she knew her mother would resent as much as she did.

"And what were you doing with the carving-knife, Miss Beth?" cried Harriet, spying it on the floor, and picking it up. Criminals are only clever up to a certain point; Beth had forgotten to conceal the carving-knife. "Oh dear! oh dear! If you 'aven't 'acked it all the way along!"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" Mrs. Caldwell echoed. It was her best carving-knife, and Beth would certainly have been beaten if Mrs. Davy had not suggested it. As it was, however, Mrs. Caldwell controlled her temper, and merely ordered her to go downstairs immediately. In the management of her children she would not be dictated to by anybody.

This was Beth's first public appearance as a disturber of the peace, and the beginning of the bad name she earned for herself in certain circles eventually. But she was let off lightly for it. Mrs. Caldwell's punishments were never retrospective. She was thunder and lightning in her wrath; a

flash and then a bang, and it was all over. If she missed the first movement, the culprit escaped. She could no more have punished one of her children in cold blood than she could have cut its throat.

Beth ran down to the acting-room, so called because the boys had brought home the idea of acting in the holidays, and they had got up charades there on a stage made of boxes, with an old counterpane for a curtain, and farthing candles for footlights. It was a long, narrow room over the kitchen, with a sloping roof. Three steps led down into it. There was a window at one end, a small lattice with an iron bar nailed to the outside vertically. Beth swung herself out round the bar, dropped on to the back-kitchen roof, crept across the tiles to the chimney at the far corner, stepped thence on to the top of the old wooden pump, and from the top to the spout, from the spout to the stone trough, and so into the garden. Then she ran round to the kitchen, and got a candle, a canister, and some water in a pail, all of which she took up to the acting-room by way of the back-kitchen roof. The canister happened to contain allspice, but this was not to be considered when she wanted the canister, so she emptied it from the roof on to Harriet's head as she happened to be passing, and so got some good out of it, for Harriet displayed strong feeling on the subject both at the moment and afterwards, when she was trying to get the stuff out of her hair; which interested Beth, who in some such way often surprised people into the natural expression of emotions which she might never otherwise have discovered. Bernadine had been playing alone peaceably in the garden, but Beth persuaded her to come upstairs. She found Beth robed in the old counterpane, with her hair dishevelled, and the room darkened. Beth was Norna now in her cell on the Fitful Head, and Bernadine was the shrinking but resolute Minna come to consult her. Beth made her sit down, drew a magic circle round her with a piece of chalk, and, in a deep tragic voice, warned her not to move if she valued her life, for there were evil spirits in the room. The pail stood on a box draped with an old black shawl, and round this she also drew a circle. Then she put some lead in the canister, melted it over the candle, dropped it into the water, and muttered—

"Like snakes the molten metal hisses,
Curses come instead of kisses."

She plunged her hand into the water—

"I search a harp for harmony,
But daggers only do I see;
I search a heart for love and hope,
But find a ghastly hangman's rope.
Woe! Woe!"

Three times round the pail she went, moaning, groaning, writhing her body,
and wringing her hands—

"Woe! Woe!
Thy courage will be sorely tried,
Thou shalt not be the pirate's bride."

At this Bernadine, whose nerves were completely shaken, set up such a howl that Harriet came running to see what was the matter. She soon let light into the acting-room. Mrs. Caldwell and Aunt Victoria had gone to see Aunt Grace Mary, so Harriet was in charge of the children, and to save herself further trouble, she took them up to a black-hole there was without a window at the top of the house, and locked them in. The place was quite empty, so that they could do no harm, and they did not seem to mind being locked up. Harriet intended to give them a little fright and then let them out; but, being busy, she forgot them, and when at last she remembered, it was so dark she had to take a candle; and great was her horror, on opening the door, to see both children stretched out on the bare boards side by side, apparently quite dead. One glance at their ghastly faces was enough for Harriet. She just looked and then fled, shrieking, with the candle alight in her hand, right out into the street. Several people who happened to be passing at the time stopped to see what was the matter. Harriet's talent for fiction furnished her with a self-saving story on the instant. She said the children had shut themselves up and got smothered.

"We'd better go and see if there's nothing can be done," a respectable workman suggested.

Harriet led the way, about a dozen people following, all awe-stricken and silent. When they came to the door, they peeped in over each other's shoulders at the two poor children, stretched out stiff and stark, the colour

of death, their jaws dropped, their glazed eyes shining between the half-closed lids, a piteous spectacle.

"Just let's see the candle a moment," the workman said. He took it from Harriet, and entered stooping—the place was a mere closet just under the roof, and he could not stand upright in it. He peered into the children's faces, then knelt down beside them, and felt their arms and chests. Suddenly he burst out laughing.

"You little devils," he said, "what 'a' ye done this for?"

Beth sat up. "Harriet locked us in to give us a fright, so we thought we'd frighten Harriet," she said.

The walls were whitewashed, and the children had made themselves ghastly by rubbing their faces all over with the whitening.

"You've gotten yer 'ands full wi' them two, I'm thinkin', missis," the workman remarked to Harriet as he went off chuckling.

"Did you hear, Beth?" Bernadine complained; "he called us little devils."

"All right," Beth answered casually. But Bernadine was disgusted. She was one of those pious children who like to stand high in the estimation of the grown-up people; and she disapproved of Beth's conduct when it got her into trouble. She was like the kind of man who enjoys being vicious so long as he is not found out by any one who will think the less of him for it; when he is found out he excuses himself, and blames his associates. Bernadine never resisted Beth's eloquent persuasions, nor the luring fascination of her schemes; but when she had had her full share of the pleasures of naughtiness, and was tired and cross, her conscience smote her, and then she told mamma. This did her good, and got Beth punished, which made Bernadine feel that she had expiated her own naughtiness and been forgiven, and also made her feel sorry for Beth—a nice kind feeling, which she always enjoyed.

Beth despised her for her conscientious treachery, and retaliated by tempting her afresh. One day she lured her out on to the tiles through an attic window in the roof, at the back of the house. It would be such fun to sit astride on the roof-ridge, and look right down into the street, she said, and

across Mrs. Davy's orchard to the fields on that side, and out to sea on the other.

"And things will come into our minds up there—such lovely things," she proceeded, beguiling Bernadine to distract her attention as she helped her up. When they were securely seated, Bernadine began to grumble.

"Things don't come into my mind," she whined.

"Don't they? Why, I was just thinking if we were to fall we should certainly be killed," Beth answered cheerfully. "We should come down thump, and that would crack our skulls, and our brains would roll out on the pavement. Ough! wouldn't they look nasty, just like a sheep's! And mamma and Aunt Victoria would rush out, and Harriet and Mrs. Davy, and they'd have to hold mamma up by the arms. Then they'd pick us up, and carry us in, and lay us out on a bed, and say they were beautiful in their lives, and in death they were not divided; and when they shut the house up at night and it was all still, mamma would cry. She'd be always crying, especially for you, Bernadine, because you're not such a trouble as I am. And when you were buried, and the worms were eating you, she would give all the world to have you here again."

This sad prospect was too much for the sensitive Bernadine. "Don't, Beth," she whimpered. "You frighten me."

"Oh, you mustn't be frightened," said Beth encouragingly. "When people up on a height like this get frightened, they always roll off. Do you feel as if the roof were moving?" she exclaimed, suddenly clutching hold.

Bernadine fell down flat on her face with a dismal howl.

"Let's be cats now," said Beth. "I'll say mew-ow-ow, and you oo-oo-owl-hiss-ss-ss."

"Don't, Beth. I want to go back."

"Come along then," said Beth.

"I can't. I daren't move."

"Oh, nonsense," said Beth; "just follow me. I shall go and leave you if you don't. You shouldn't have come up if you were afraid."

"You made me," Bernadine whimpered with her eyes shut.

"Of course it was me!" said Beth, on her way back to the skylight. "You haven't a will of your own, I suppose!"

"You aren't leaving me, Beth!" Bernadine cried in an agony. "Don't go! I'm frightened! Help me down! I'll tell mamma!"

"Then there you'll sit, tell-pie-tit," Beth chanted, as she let herself down through the skylight.

Presently she appeared on the other side of the street, and performed a war-dance of delight as she looked up at her sister, prone upon the roof-ridge.

"You do look so funny, Bernadine," she cried. "Your petticoats are nohow; and you seem to have only one leg, and it is so long and thin!"

Bernadine howled aloud. Mrs. Caldwell was not at home; but the cry brought Mrs. Davy out in her spectacles. When she saw the child's dangerous predicament, she seized Beth and shook her emphatically.

"Oh, thank you," said Beth.

"What 'a' you bin doin' now, you bad girl?" said Mrs. Davy. "Hold on, missy," she called up to Bernadine. "We'll soon 'ave ye down. You're all right! You'll not take no 'arm."

Harriet now came running out, wringing her hands, and uttering hysterical exclamations.

"Shut up, you fool," said Mrs. Davy.

Doors opened all the way down the street, and a considerable crowd had soon collected. Beth, quite detached from herself, leant against the orchard-wall and watched the people with interest.

How to get the child down was the difficulty, as there was no ladder at hand long enough to reach up to the roof.

"I'll go and fetch her down if you like," said Beth.

"I should think so! and then there'd be two of you," said Mrs. Davy.

"I don't see how you'll manage it then," said Beth. "There isn't foothold for a man to get out of the attic-window." Having spoken, she strolled off with an air of indifference, and disappeared. She was a heroine of romance now, going to do a great deed; and before she was missed, the horrified spectators saw her climbing out of the front attic-window smiling serenely. The people held their breath as they watched her go up the roof on the slippery tiles at a reckless rate to her sister.

"Come along, Bernadine," she whispered. "Such fun! There's a whole crowd down there watching us. Just let them see you're not afraid."

Bernadine peeped. It was gratifying to be an object of such interest.

"Come along, don't be an idiot," said Beth. "Just follow me, and don't look at anything but the tiles. That's the way *I* learnt to do it."

Bernadine's courage revived. Slowly she slid from the roof-ridge, Beth helping her carefully. It looked fearfully dangerous, and the people below dared not utter a sound. When they got to the attic-window, Beth, herself on the edge of the roof, guided her sister past her, and helped her in. She was following herself, when some tiles gave way beneath her, and fell with a crash into the street. Fortunately she had hold of the sill, but for a moment her legs hung over; then she pulled herself through, and, falling head first on to the floor, disappeared from sight. The people below relieved their feelings with a faint cheer.

"Eh, but she's a *bad* un," said Mrs. Davy, who was trembling all over.

"Well, she's a rare plucky un, at any rate," said a man in the crowd, admiringly.

Crowds constantly collected at the little house in Orchard Street in those days. When Mrs. Caldwell had to go out alone she was always anxious, not knowing what might be happening in her absence. Coming home from Lady Benyon's one summer evening, she found the whole street blocked with people, and the roadway in front of her own house packed so tight she

could not get past. Beth had dressed herself up in a mask and a Russian sheepskin cloak which had belonged to her father, and sat motionless in the drawing-room window on a throne made of an arm-chair set on a box; while Bernadine played Scotch airs on the piano. A couple of children passing had stopped to see what on earth the thing was, then a man and woman had come along and stopped too, then several girls, some sailors, the bellman, and many more, until the street was full. Harriet was enjoying the commotion in the background, but when Mrs. Caldwell appeared, she gave the signal, the piano stopped, and the strange beast roared loudly and fled.

But Beth had her human moments. They generally came on in wet weather, which depressed her. She would then stand in the drawing-room window by the hour together, looking out at the miserable street, thinking of the poor people, all cold and wet and hungry. She longed to do something for them, and one day she stopped a little girl who was going with a jug for some beer to the "Shining Star," a quiet little public-house on the same side of the street.

"I suppose you are a very ignorant little girl," said Beth severely.

"Aw?"

"What's your name?"

"Emily Bean."

"Do you learn lessons?"

"Naw."

"Dear me, how dreadful!" said Beth. "You ought to be taught, you know. Would you like to be taught?"

"Ah should."

"Well, you come here every afternoon at two o'clock, and I'll teach you."

"Ah mon jest ass mother first," said Emily.

"Yes—I'd forgotten that," Beth rejoined. "Well, you come if she lets you."

Emily nodded, and was going on her errand, but stopped. "Did you ass yer own mother if you might?" she wanted to know.

"No, I didn't think of that either," Beth rejoined. "But I will."

"Will she let you?"

"I don't know"—rather doubtfully.

"I expect she will if you wait until she's in a good humour," the child of the people sagely suggested.

"All right. You come at any rate," Beth answered boldly.

Mrs. Caldwell consented. She came of a long line of lady patronesses, and thought it natural and becoming that her child should wish to improve the "common people." Punctually to the moment Emily arrived next day, and Beth sat down with her in the kitchen, and taught her a, b, ab, and b, a, d, bad. Then she repeated a piece of poetry to her, and read her a little story. Harriet was busy in the back kitchen, and Bernadine was out with her mother and Aunt Victoria, so Beth and her pupil had the kitchen to themselves. The next day, however, Harriet wanted to clean the kitchen, so they had to retire to the acting-room. This was Beth's first attempt to apply such knowledge as she possessed, and in her anxiety to improve the child of the people, she improved herself in several respects. She began to read better, became less afraid of writing and spelling, mastered the multiplication table, and found she could "make out" how to do easy sums from the book. This gave her the first real interest she had ever had in school-work, and inspired her with some slight confidence in herself. She felt the dignity of the position of teacher too, and the responsibility. She never betrayed her own ignorance, nor did anything to shake Emily's touching belief in her superiority; and she never shook Emily. She knew she could have done better herself if there had been less thumping and shaking, and she had the wisdom to profit by her mother's errors of judgment already—not that Emily ever provoked her. The child was apt and docile, and the lessons were a sort of improving game.

How to impart religious instruction was the thing that troubled Beth most: she used to lie awake at night thinking out the problem. She found that Emily had learnt many texts and hymns in the Sunday-school to which she

went regularly, and Beth made her repeat them, and soon knew them all by heart herself; but she did not think that she taught Emily enough. One day in church, however, she thought of a way to extend her teaching. Bernadine had joined her class for fun, and was playing at learning too; and now Beth proposed that they should fit up a chapel in the acting-room, and resolve themselves occasionally into a clergyman and congregation. A chair with the bottom knocked out was the pulpit, and a long narrow box stood on end was the reading-desk. Beth was the parson, of course, in a white sheet filched from the soiled-clothes bag, and changed for a black shawl for the sermon. She read portions of Scripture standing, she read prayers on her knees, she led a hymn; and then she got into the black shawl and preached. What these discourses were about, she could not remember in after years; but they must have been fascinating, for the congregation listened unwearied so long as she chose to go on.

Emily was a disappointment in one way: she had no imagination. Beth pretended to take her photograph one day, after the manner of the photographers on the sands.

"Now, this is the picture," she said, showing her a piece of glass.

"But there isn't no picture on it," said Emily, staring hard at the glass.

"How stupid you are," said Beth, disgusted. "Look again."

"There isn't," Emily protested. "Just you show it to Bernadine."

"You should say *Miss* Bernadine," that young lady admonished her.

A few minutes afterwards Emily corrected Bernadine for not saying miss to Beth and herself. Beth tried to explain, but Emily could not see why she should say miss to them if they did not say miss to her and to each other.

Poor Mrs. Caldwell was in great straits for want of money at this time. She had scarcely enough to pay for their meagre fare, and her own clothes and the children's were almost beyond patching and darning. Beth surprised her several times sitting beside the dining-table with the everlasting mending on her lap, fretting silently, and the child's heart was wrung. There was some legal difficulty, and letters which added to her mother's trouble came to the house continually.

The same faculty made Beth either the naughtiest or the best of children; the difference depended on her heart: if that were touched, she was all sympathy; but if no appeal was made to her feelings, her daily doings were the outcome of so many erratic impulses acted on without consideration, merely to vary the disastrous monotony of those long idle afternoons.

The day after she had surprised her mother fretting over her letters, another packet arrived. Beth happened to be early up that morning, and opened the door to the postman. She would like to have given the packet back to him, but that being impossible, she carried it up to the acting-room and hid it in the roof. When her mother came down, however, she found to her consternation that the fact of there being no letter at all that morning was a greater trouble if anything than the arrival of the one the day before; so she boldly brought it down and delivered it, quite expecting to be whipped. But for once Mrs. Caldwell asked for an explanation, and the child's motive was so evident that even her mother was more affected by her sympathy than enraged by the inconvenient expression of it.

The next day she was playing on the pier with Bernadine. Her mother and Aunt Victoria were walking up and down, not paying much attention to the children. First they swung on a chain that was stretched from post to post down the middle of the pier to keep people from being washed off in stormy weather; but Bernadine tumbled over backwards and hurt her head, and was jeered at besides by some rude little street children, who could not understand why the little Caldwells, who were as shabby as themselves, should look down on them, and refuse to associate with them. It was not Beth's nature to be exclusive. She had no notion of differences of degree. Any pleasant person was her equal. She was as much gratified by friendly notice from the milkman, the fishwoman, and the sweep as from Lady Benyon or Count Bartahlinsky; and very early thought it contemptible to jeer at people for want of means and defects of education. She never talked of the "common people," after she found that Harriet was hurt by the phrase; and she would have been on good terms with all the street children had it not been for what Mrs. Caldwell called "Bernadine's superior self-respect." Bernadine told if Beth spoke to one of them, and as Beth had no friends amongst them as yet, she did not feel that their acquaintance was worth fighting for. But the street children resented the attitude of the two shabby little ladies, and were always watching for opportunities to annoy

them. Accordingly, when Bernadine tumbled off the chain head-over-heels backwards, there was a howl of derision. "Oh my! Ain't she gotten thin legs!" "Ah say, Julia, did you see that big 'ole i' her stockin'?" "Naw, but ah seed the patch on 'er petticoat!" "Eh—an' she's on'y gotten one on, an' it isn't flannel." "An' them's ladies!"

Bernadine's pride came to her rescue on these occasions. At home she howled when she was hurt, but now she affected to laugh, and both sisters strolled off with their little heads up, and an exasperating air of indifference to the enemy. The tide was out, and they went down into the harbour and found a large oyster among the piles of the wooden jetty. When they got home, the difficulty was how to open it; but they managed to make it open itself by holding it over the kitchen fire on the shovel. When it began to lift its lid, Beth sent Bernadine for a fork, and while she was getting it Beth ate the oyster. But Bernadine could not see the joke, and her rage was not to be appeased even by the oyster-shell, which Beth said she might have the whole of.

The battle came off after dinner that evening But it was a day of disaster. Harriet was out of temper; and Mrs. Caldwell appeared mysteriously, just as Beth knocked Bernadine down and sat on her stomach.

They were reading a story of French life at that time, and something came into it about snail-broth as a cure for consumption, and snail-oil as a remedy for rheumatism. The next day there was a most extraordinary smell all over the house. Mrs. Caldwell, Aunt Victoria, Harriet, and Bernadine went sniffing about, but could find nothing to account for it. Beth sat at the dining-table with a book before her, taking no notice. At last Harriet had occasion to open the oven door, and just as she did so there was a loud explosion, and the kitchen wall opposite was bespattered with boiling animal matter. Beth had got up early, and collected snails enough in the garden to fill a blacking-bottle, corked them up tight, and put them into the darkest corner of the oven, her idea being to render them into oil, as Harriet rendered suet into fat, and go and rub rheumatic people with it. As usual, however, her motive was ignored, while a great deal was made of the mess

on the kitchen wall—which disheartened her, especially as several other philanthropic enterprises happened to fail about the same time.

Emily appeared with a bad toothache one day, and finding a remedy for it gave Beth a momentary interest in life. She told Emily she had a cure for toothache, and Emily, never doubting, let her put some soft substance into the tooth with the end of a match.

"It won't taste very nice," said Beth; "but you mustn't mind that. You just go home, and you'll find it won't ache any more."

When Emily returned next day she gratefully proclaimed herself cured, and her mother wanted to know "whatever the stuff was."

"Soap," said Beth.

"Oh, you mucky thing!" Emily exclaimed. She resented the application of such a substance to the inside of her person. Her plebeian mind was too narrow to conceive a second legitimate use for soap, and from that day Beth's influence declined. Emily's attendance became irregular, then gradually ceased altogether; not, however, before Beth's own interest in the lessons was over, and her mind much occupied with other things.

CHAPTER XVII

THE dower-house of the Benyon family stood in a street which was merely an extension of Orchard Street, and could be seen from Mrs. Caldwell's windows. Lady Benyon, having produced a huge family, and buried her husband, had done her day's work in the world, as it were, and now had full leisure to live as she liked; so she "lived well"; and in the intervals of living, otherwise eating, she sat in the big bow-window of her sitting-room, digesting, and watching her neighbours. From her large old-fashioned house she commanded a fine view down the wide irregular front street to the sea, with a diagonal glimpse down two other streets which ran parallel with the front street; while on the left she could see up Orchard Street as far as the church; so that everybody came under her observation sooner or later, and, to Beth, it always seemed that she dominated the whole place. Most of the day her head could be seen above the wire-blind; but, as she seldom went out, her acute old face and the four dark sausage-shaped curls, laid horizontally on either side of it, were almost all of her that was known to the inhabitants.

Mrs. Caldwell went regularly to see Lady Benyon, and sometimes took the children with her. On one occasion when she had done so, Lady Benyon made her take a seat in the window where she was sitting herself, so that they could both look out. Beth and Bernadine sat in the background with a picture-book, in which they seemed so absorbed that the conversation flowed on before them with very little constraint. Beth's ears were open, however, as usual.

"After twenty-two children," Lady Benyon remarked, "one cannot expect to be as active as one was."

"No, indeed," Mrs. Caldwell answered cheerfully. "I have only had as good as fourteen, and I'm quite a wreck. I don't know what it is to pass a day free from pain. But, however, it is so ordered, and I don't complain. If only they turn out well when they do come, that's everything."

"Ah, you're right there," Lady Benyon answered.

"You know *my* trial," Mrs. Caldwell pursued—Beth's face instantly became a blank. "I am afraid she cares for no one but herself. It shows what spoiling a child does. Her father could never make enough of her."

"Well, I suppose she's naughty," Lady Benyon rejoined with a laugh; "but she's promising all the same—and not only in appearance. The things she says, you know!"

"Oh, well, yes," Mrs. Caldwell allowed. "She certainly says things sometimes, but that's not much comfort when you never know what she'll be doing. Now Mildred has never given me a moment's anxiety in her life, except on account of her delicate health, poor little body; and Bernadine is a dear, sweet little thing. *She* is the only one who is thoroughly unruly and selfish."

Beth's blood boiled at the accusation.

"How does the old aunt get on?" Lady Benyon asked presently.

"Oh, she seems to be very well."

"Don't you find it rather a trial to have her about always?"

Mrs. Caldwell shrugged her shoulders with an air of resignation. "Oh, you know, she means well," she replied, "and there really was nothing else for it. But I must say I have no patience with cant."

Beth, in opposition, still smarting from her mother's accusation of selfishness, determined at once to inquire into Aunt Victoria's religious tenets, with a view to approving of them.

"Well, James Patten played a mean part in that business," Lady Benyon observed. "But I always say, beware of a man who does his own housekeeping. When they keep the money in their own hands, and pay the bills themselves, don't trust them. That sort of man is a cur at heart, you may be sure. And as for a man who takes possession of his wife's money, and doles it out to her a little at a time—! I know one such—without a penny of his own, mind you! He gives his wife a cheque for five pounds a month; the rest goes on other women, and she never suspects it! He's one of those plausible gentlemen who's always looking for a post that will pay

him, and never gets it—you know the kind of thing." Here the old lady caught Beth's eye. "You take my advice," she said. "Don't ever marry a man who does his own housekeeping. He's a crowing hen, that sort of man, you may be sure. I warn you against the man who does a woman's work."

"And if a woman does a man's work?" said the intelligent Beth.

"It is often a very great help," Mrs. Caldwell put in, with a quick mental survey of the reams of official letters she had written for her husband.

Lady Benyon pursed up her mouth.

Aunt Victoria was one of those forlorn old ladies who have nobody actually their own to care for them, although they may have numbers of relations, and acquire odd habits from living much alone. She was a great source of interest to Beth, who would sit silently watching her by the hour together, her bright eyes steady and her countenance a blank. The intentness of her gaze fidgeted the old lady, who would look up suddenly every now and then and ask her what she was staring at. "Nothing, Aunt Victoria; I was only thinking," Beth always answered; and then she affected to occupy herself until the old lady returned to her work or her book, when Beth would resume her interrupted study. But she liked Aunt Victoria. The old lady was sharp with her sometimes, but she meant to be kind, and was always just; and Beth respected her. She had more faith in her, too, than she had in her mother, and secretly became her partisan on all occasions. She had instantly detected the tone of detraction in the allusions Lady Benyon and her mother had made to Aunt Victoria that afternoon, and stolidly resented it.

When they went home, she ran upstairs and knocked at Aunt Victoria's door. It was immediately opened, and Beth, seeing what she took for an old gentleman in a short black petticoat and loose red jacket, with short, thick, stubby white hair standing up all over his head, started back. But it was only Aunt Victoria without her cap and front. When she saw Beth's consternation, the old lady put her hand up to her head. "I had forgotten," she muttered; then she added severely, "But you should never show surprise, Beth, at anything in anybody's appearance. It is very ill-bred."

"I don't think I shall ever be surprised again," Beth answered quaintly. "But I want you to tell me, Aunt Victoria. What do you believe in?"

"What do you mean, child?"

"Oh, you know, about God, and the Bible, and cant, and that sort of thing," Beth answered evenly.

"Come in and sit down," said Aunt Victoria.

Beth sat on a classical piece of furniture that stood in the window, a sort of stool or throne, with ends like a sofa and no back. It had belonged to Aunt Victoria's father, and she valued it very much. Beth's feet, as she sat on it, did not touch the ground. Aunt Victoria stood for a moment in the middle of the room reflecting, and, as she did so, she looked, with her short, thick, stubbly white hair, more like a thin old gentleman in a black petticoat and loose red jacket than ever.

"I believe, Beth," she said solemnly, "I believe in God the Father Almighty. I believe that if we do His holy will here on earth, we shall, when we die, be received by Him into bliss everlasting; but if we do not do His holy will, then He will condemn us to the bad place, where we shall burn for ever."

"But what *is* His holy will?" Beth asked.

"It is His holy will that we should do right, and that we should not do wrong. But this is a big subject, Beth, and I can only unfold it to you bit by bit."

"But will you unfold it?"

"I will, as best I can, if you will listen earnestly."

"I am always in earnest," Beth answered sincerely.

"No one can teach you God," Aunt Victoria pursued. "He must come to you. *'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright of heart. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors;*

and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty."

Beth, in a burst of enthusiasm, jumped down from her perch, clasped her hands to her chest, and cried—"O Aunt Victoria! that is—that is"—she tore at her hair—"I want a word—I want a word!"

"It is *grand*, Beth!"

"Grand! grand!" Beth shouted. "Yes, it is grand."

"Beth," said Aunt Victoria emphatically, "remember that you are a Christian child, and not a dancing-dervish. If you do not instantly calm yourself, I shall shake you. And if I ever see you give way to such wild excitement again, I *shall* shake you, for your own good. Calm is one of the first attributes of a gentlewoman."

Teachers of religion do not always practise what they preach. Up to this moment, although Beth had done her best to teach Emily, she had had no idea of being religious herself; but now, on a sudden, there came upon her that great yearning tenderness towards God, and desire for goodness, which some sects call conversion, and hold to be the essential beginning of a religious life. This was the opportunity Aunt Victoria had prayed for, and from that time forward she began to instruct Beth systematically in religious matters. The subject fascinated Beth, and she would make opportunities to be alone with her aunt, and go to her room willingly whenever she asked her, for the pleasure of hearing her. Aunt Victoria often moved about the room, and dressed as she talked, and Beth, while listening, did not fail to observe the difficulty of keeping stockings up on skinny legs when you wore woollen garters below the knee; and also that it looked funny to have to tuck up your dress to get your purse out of a pocket in your petticoat at the back. But when Aunt Victoria sat down and read the Bible aloud, Beth became absorbed, and would even read whole chapters again to herself in order to remember how to declaim the more poetical passages as Aunt Victoria did—all of which she relished with the keenest enthusiasm. Unfortunately for Beth, however, Aunt Victoria was strongly Calvinistic, and dwelt too much on death and the judgment for her mental health. The old lady, deeply as she sympathised with Beth, and loved her, did not realise how morbidly sensitive she was; and accordingly worked on her feelings

until the fear of God got hold of her. Just at this time, too, Mrs. Caldwell chose "The Pilgrim's Progress" for a "Sunday book," and read it aloud to the children; and this, together with Aunt Victoria's views, operated only too actively on the child's vivid imagination. A great dread seized upon her—not on her own account, strange to say; she never thought of herself, but of her friends, and of the world at large. She was in mortal dread lest they should be called to judgment and consigned to the flames. While the sun was out such thoughts did not trouble her; but as the day declined, and twilight sombrely succeeded the sunset, her heart sank, and her little being was racked with one great petition, offered up to the Lord in anguish, that He would spare them all.

The season was beginning, the little place was already full of visitors, and Beth used to stand at the dining-room window while Mrs. Caldwell was reading aloud on Sunday evenings, and watch the congregation stream out of the church at the end of the road, and suffer agonies because of the torments that awaited them all, including her mother, brothers and sisters, Harriet in the kitchen, and Mrs. Davy at Orchard House opposite—everybody, indeed, except Aunt Victoria—in a future state. Out on the cliffs in the summer evenings, when great dark masses of cloud tinged with crimson were piled to the zenith at sundown, and coldly reflected in the dark waters of the bay, she saw the destination of the world; she heard cries of torment, too, in the plash of breaking waves and the unceasing roar of the sea; and as she watched the visitors lounging about in bright dresses, laughing and talking, careless of their doom, she could hardly restrain her tears. Night after night when she went to bed, she put her head under the clothes that Bernadine might not hear, and her chest was torn with sobs until she fell asleep.

At that time she devised no more tricks, she took no interest in games, and would not fight even. Bernadine did not know what to make of her. All day she was recovering from the lassitude caused by the mental anguish of the previous evening, but regularly at sunset it began again; and the more she suffered, the less able was she to speak on the subject. At first she had tried to discuss eternal punishment with Harriet, Bernadine, and Aunt Victoria, and each had responded characteristically. Harriet's imagination dwelt on the particular torments reserved for certain people she knew, which she described graphically. Bernadine listened to Beth's remarks with interest,

then accused Beth of trying to frighten her, and said she would tell mamma. Aunt Victoria discoursed earnestly on the wages of sin, the sufferings of sinners, the glories of salvation, the peace on earth from knowing you are saved, and the pleasures of the world to come; but the more Beth heard of the joys of heaven, the more she dreaded the horrors of hell. Still, however, she was too shy to say anything about her own acute mental misery, and no one suspected that anything was wrong, until one day something dejected in the child's attitude happened to catch Aunt Victoria's attention.

Beth was sitting on an African stool, her elbow on her knee, her chin resting on her little hand, her grey eyes looking up through the window at the summer sky. What could the child be thinking of, Aunt Victoria wondered, and surely she was looking thin and pale—quite haggard.

"Why don't you get something to do, Beth?" the old lady asked. "It's bad for little girls to idle about all day."

"I wish I had something to do," Beth answered. "I'm so tired."

"Does your head ache, child?" Aunt Victoria asked, speaking sharply because her mind was disturbed.

"No."

"You should answer politely, and say 'No, thank you.'"

"No, thank you, Aunt Victoria," was the docile rejoinder.

Aunt Victoria resolved to speak to Mrs. Caldwell, and resumed her knitting. She was one of those people who can keep what they have to say till a suitable occasion offers. Her mind was never so full of any one subject as to overflow and make a mess of it. She would wait a week watching her opportunity if necessary; and she did not, therefore, although she saw Mrs. Caldwell frequently during the day, speak to her about Beth until the children had gone to bed in the evening, when she was sure of her effect.

Then she began abruptly.

"Caroline, that child Beth is ill."

Mrs. Caldwell was startled. It was very inconsiderate of Aunt Victoria. She knew she was nervous about her children; how could she be so unfeeling? What made her think Beth ill?

"Look at her!" said Aunt Victoria. "She eats nothing. She has wasted to a skeleton, she has no blood in her face at all, and her eyes look as if she never slept."

"I am sure she sleeps well enough," Mrs. Caldwell answered, inclined to bridle.

"I feel quite sure, Caroline," Aunt Victoria said solemnly, "that if you take a candle, and go upstairs this minute, you will find that child wide awake."

Mrs. Caldwell felt that she was being found fault with, and was indignant. She went upstairs at once, with her head held high, expecting to find Beth in a healthy sleep. The relief, however, of finding that the child was well, would not have been so great at the moment as the satisfaction of proving Aunt Victoria in the wrong.

But Beth was wide awake, petitioning God in an agony to spare her friends. When Mrs. Caldwell entered she started up.

"O mamma!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you've come; I've been so frightened about you."

"What is the matter with you, Beth?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, not over-gently. "What are you frightened about?"

"Nothing," Beth faltered, shrinking back into herself.

"Oh, that's nonsense," her mother answered. "It's silly to be frightened at nothing, and cowardly to be frightened at all. Lie down and go to sleep, like a good child. Come, turn your face to the wall, and I'll tuck you in."

Beth obeyed, and her mother left her to her fears, and returned to Aunt Victoria in the drawing-room.

"Well?" Aunt Victoria asked anxiously.

"She was awake," Mrs. Caldwell acknowledged. "She said she was frightened, but didn't know what of. I expect she'd been dreaming. And I'm sure there is nothing the matter with her. She's been subject to queer fits of alarm at night ever since she was a baby. It's the dark, I think. It makes her nervous. At one time the doctor made us have a night-light for her, which was great nonsense, *I* always said; but her father insisted. When it suits her to play in the dark, she's never afraid."

It was at this time that Rainharbour set up a band of its own. Beth was always peculiarly susceptible to music. Her ear was defective; she rarely knew if any one sang flat; but the poorest instrument would lay hold of her, and set high chords of emotion vibrating, beyond the reach of words. The first time she heard the band, she was completely carried away. It was on the pier, and she happened to be close beside it when it began to play, and stood still in astonishment at the crash of the opening bars. Her mother, after vainly calling to her to come on, snatched impatiently at her arm to drag her away; and Beth, in her excitement, set her teeth and slapped at her mother's hand—or rather at what seemed to her the importunate thing that was trying to end her ecstasy.

Of course Mrs. Caldwell would not stand that, so Beth, victim of brute force, was hustled off to the end of the pier, and then slapped, shaken, and reviled, for the enormity of her offence, until, in an acute nervous crisis, she wrenched herself out of her mother's clutches, and sprang over into the harbour. It was high-water happily, and Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, who was just going out in his yacht, saw her drop, and fished her out with a boat-hook.

"Look here, young woman," he said, "what do you mean by tumbling about like this? I shall have the trouble of turning back and putting you on shore."

"No, don't; no, don't," Beth pleaded. "Take me along with you."

He looked at her an instant, considering, then went to the side of the yacht, and called up to her frantic mother: "She's all right. I'll have her dried, and bring her back this afternoon,"—with which assurance Mrs. Caldwell was obliged to content herself, for the yacht sailed on; not that she would have objected. Beth and Count Gustav were sworn allies by this time, and Mrs. Caldwell knew that Beth could not be in better hands. Beth had seen Count

Gustav passing their window a few days after their first meeting, and had completed her conquest of him by tearing out, and running down Orchard Street after him with nothing on her head, to ask what copyright was; and since then they had often met, and sometimes spent delightful hours together, sitting on the cliffs or strolling along by the sea. He had discovered her talent for verse-making, and given her a book on the subject, full of examples, which was a great joy to her. When the yacht was clear of the harbour, he took her down to the saloon, and got out a silk shirt. "I'm going to leave you," he said, "and when I'm gone, you must take off all your things, and put this shirt on. Then tumble into that berth between the blankets, and I'll come back and talk to you." Beth promptly obeyed. She was an ill-used heroine now, in the hands of her knightly deliverer, and thoroughly happy.

When Count Gustav returned, he was followed by Gard, a tall, dark, handsome sailor, a descendant of black Dane settlers on the coast, and for that reason commonly called Black Gard. He brought sandwiches, cakes, and hot tea on a tray for Beth. She had propped herself up with pillows in the berth, and was looking out of an open port-hole opposite, listening enraptured to the strains of the band, which, mellowed by distance, floated out over the water.

"What a radiant little face!" the Count thought, as he handed her the tea and sandwiches.

Beth took them voraciously.

"Did you have any breakfast?" the Count asked, smiling.

"Yes," Beth answered.

"What did you have?"

"Milk and hot water and dry toast. I made the toast myself."

"No butter?"

"No. The butter's running short, so I wouldn't take any."

"When do you lunch?"

"Oh, we don't lunch. Can't afford it, you know. The boys have got to be educated, and Uncle James Patten won't help, though Jim's his heir."

Count Gustav looked at her little delicate hand lying on the coverlet, and then at the worn little face.

"You've been crying," he said.

"Ah, that was only last night after I went to bed," Beth answered. "It makes you cry when people aren't saved, doesn't it? Are you saved? If you're not it will be awful for me."

"Why?"

"'Cos it would hurt so here to think of you burning in hell"—Beth clasped her chest. "It always begins to ache here—in the evening—for the people who aren't saved, and when I go to bed it makes me cry."

"Who told you about being saved, and that?"

"Aunt Victoria. She lives with us, you know. She's going away now to pay a visit, because the boys are coming home, and Mildred, for the holidays, and there wouldn't be room for her. I'm dreadfully sorry; but I shall go to church, and read the Bible just the same when she's away."

Count Gustav sat down on the end of the saloon-table and reflected a little; then he said—"I wouldn't read anything, if I were you, while Aunt Victoria's away. Just play about with Mildred and the boys, and come out fishing with me sometimes. God doesn't want *you* to save people. He does that Himself. I expect He's very angry because you cry at night. He thinks you don't trust Him. All He wants you to do is to love Him, and trust Him, and be happy. That's the creed for a little girl."

"Do you think so?" Beth gasped. Then she began to reflect, and her big grey eyes slowly dilated, while at the same time a look of intense relief relaxed the muscles of her pinched little face. "Do you think so?" she repeated. Then suddenly she burst into tears.

Count Gustav, somewhat disconcerted, hurriedly handed her a handkerchief.

Another gentleman came into the saloon at the moment, and raised inquiring eyebrows.

"Only a little martyr, momentarily released from suffering, enjoying the reaction," Count Gustav observed. "Come on deck, and let her sleep. Do you hear, little lady, go to sleep."

Beth, docile to a fault when gently handled, nestled down among the blankets, shut her eyes, and prepared to obey. The sound of the water rippling off the sides of the yacht as it glided on smoothly over the summer-sea both soothed and cheered her. Heavenly thoughts came crowding into her mind; then sleep surprised her, with the tears she had been shedding for the sufferings of others still wet upon her cheek. When she awoke, her clothes were beside her, ready to put on. She jumped up instantly, dressed, and went on deck. The yacht was almost stationary, and the two gentlemen, attended by the black Dane, Gard, were fishing. Away to starboard, the land lay like a silver mist in the heat of the afternoon. Beth turned her sorrowful little face towards it.

"Are you homesick, Beth?" Count Gustav asked.

"No, sick of home," Beth answered; "but I suppose I shall have to go back."

"And what then?"

"Mamma will punish me for jumping into the harbour, I expect."

"*Jumping in!*" he ejaculated, and then a great gravity settled upon him, and he cogitated for some time. "Why did you jump in?" he said at last.

"Because mamma—because mamma—" her chest heaved. She was ashamed to say.

Count Gustav exchanged glances with the other gentleman, and said no more. But he took her home himself in the evening, and had a long talk with mamma and Aunt Victoria; and after he had gone they were both particularly nice to Beth, but very solemn. That night, too, Aunt Victoria did not mention death and the judgment, but talked of heaven and the mercy of God until Beth's brow cleared, and she was filled with hope.

It was the next day that Aunt Victoria left them to make room for Mildred and the boys. Beth went with her mother to see the old lady off at the station. On account of their connections the little party attracted attention, and Mrs. Caldwell, feeling her importance, expected the officials to be obsequious, which they were; and, in return, she also expected Aunt Victoria to make proper acknowledgment of their attentions. She considered that sixpence at least was necessary to uphold the dignity of the family on such occasions; but, to her horror, when the moment came, Aunt Victoria, after an exciting fumble, drew from her reticule a tract entitled "The Man on the Slant," and, in the face of everybody, handed it to the expectant porter.

Mrs. Caldwell assured Lady Benyon afterwards that she should never forget that moment. Beth used to wonder why.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE end of the holidays found Beth in a very different mood. Jim had come with the ideas of his adolescence, and Mildred had brought new music, and these together had helped to take her completely out of herself. The rest from lessons, too—from her mother's method of making education a martyrdom, and many more hours of each day than usual spent in the open air, had also helped greatly to ease her mind and strengthen her body, so that, even in the time, which was only a few weeks, she had recovered her colour, shot up, and expanded.

Most of the time she had spent with Jim, whom she had studied with absorbing interest, his point of view was so wholly unexpected. And even in these early days she showed a trait of character for which she afterwards became remarkable; that is to say, she learned the whole of the facts of a case before she formed an opinion on its merits—listened and observed uncritically, without prejudice and without personal feeling, until she was fully informed. Life unfolded itself to her like the rules of arithmetic. She could not conjecture what the answer would be in any single example from a figure or two, but had to take them all down in order to work the sum. And her object was always, not to prove herself right in any guess she might have made, but to arrive at the truth. She was eleven years old at this time, but looked fourteen.

It was when she went out shooting with Jim that they used to have their most interesting discussions. Jim used to take her to carry things, but never offered her a shot, because she was a girl. She did not care about that, however, because she had made up her mind to take the gun when he was gone, and go out shooting on her own account; and she abstracted a certain amount of powder and shot from his flasks each day to pay herself for her present trouble, and also to be ready for the future. Uncle James had given Jim leave to shoot, provided he sent the game he killed to Fairholm; and sometimes they spent the day wandering through the woods after birds, and sometimes they sat on the cliffs, which skirted the property, potting rabbits. Jim expected Beth to act as a keeper for him, and also to retrieve like a

well-trained dog; and when on one occasion she disappointed him, he had a good deal to say about the uselessness of sisters and the inferiority of the sex generally. Women, he always maintained, were only fit to sew on buttons and mend socks.

"But is it contemptible to sew on buttons and mend socks?" Beth asked, one day when they were sitting in a sandy hollow waiting for rabbits.

"It's not a man's work," said Jim, a trifle disconcerted.

Beth looked about her. The great sea, the vast tract of sand, and the blue sky so high above them, made her suffer for her own insignificance, and feel for the moment that nothing was worth while; but in the hollow where they sat it was cosy and the grass was green. Miniature cliffs overhung the rabbit-holes, and the dry soil was silvered by sun and wind and rain. There was a stiff breeze blowing, but it did not touch them in their sheltered nook. They could hear it making its moan, however, as if it were vainly trying to get at them; and there also ascended from below the ceaseless sound of the sea. Beth turned her back on the wild prospect, and watched the rabbit-holes.

"There's one on the right," she said at last, softly.

Jim raised his gun, aimed, and fired. The rabbit rolled over on its back, and Beth rose in a leisurely way, fetched it, carrying it by its legs, and threw it down on the bag.

"And when all the buttons are sewed on and all the socks mended, what is a girl to do with her time?" she asked dispassionately, when she had reseated herself. "The things only come home from the wash once a week, you see."

"Oh, there's lots to be done," Jim answered vaguely. "There's the cooking. A man's life isn't worth having if the cooking's bad."

"But a gentleman keeps a cook," Beth observed.

"Oh yes, of course," Jim answered irritably. "You would see what I mean if you weren't a girl. Girls have no brains. They scream at a mouse."

"*We* never scream at mice," Beth protested in surprise. "Bernadine catches them in her hands."

"Ah, but then you've had brothers, you see," said Jim. "It makes all the difference if you're taught not to be silly."

"Then why aren't all girls taught, and why aren't we taught more things?"

"Because you've got no brains, I tell you."

"But if we can be taught one thing, why can't we be taught another? How can you tell we've no brains if you never try to teach us?"

"Now look here, Miss Beth," said brother Jim in a tone of exasperation, "I know what you'll be when you grow up, if you don't mind. You'll be just the sort of long-tongued shrew, always arguing, that men hate."

"Do you say 'that men hate' or 'whom men hate'?" Beth interrupted.

"There you are!" said Jim; "devilish sharp at a nag. That's just what I'm telling you. Now, you take my advice, and hold your tongue. Then perhaps you'll get a husband; and if you do, make things comfortable for him. Men can't abide women who don't make things comfortable."

"Well," said Beth temperately, "I don't think I could 'abide' a man who didn't make things comfortable."

Jim grunted, as though that point of view were a different thing altogether.

By degrees Beth discovered that sisters did not hold at all the same sort of place in Jim's estimation as "the girls." The girls were other people's sisters, to whom Jim was polite, and whom he even fawned on and flattered while they were present, but made most disparaging remarks about and ridiculed behind their backs; to his own sisters, on the contrary, he was habitually rude, but he always spoke of them nicely in their absence, and even boasted about their accomplishments.

"Your brother Jim says you can act anything," Charlotte Hardy, the doctor's daughter, told Beth. "And you recite wonderfully, although you've never heard any one recite; and you talk like a grown-up person."

Beth flushed with surprise and pleasure at this; but her heart had hardly time to expand before she observed the puzzling discrepancy between what Jim said to her and what he had been saying to other people, and found it

impossible to reconcile the two, so as to have any confidence in Jim's sincerity.

Before the end of the holidays she had learned to enjoy Jim's companionship, but she had no respect for his opinions at all. He had taught her a good deal, however. He had taught her, for one thing, the futility of discussion with people of his capacity. The small intellect should be treated like the small child—with tenderest consideration. It must not hear too much of anything at a time, and there are certain things that it must never be told at all. Simple familiar facts, with obvious little morals, are the right food for it, and constant repetition of what it knows is safe; but such heavy things as theories, opinions, and arguments must be kept carefully concealed from it, for fear of causing congestion or paralysis, or, worse still, that parlous condition which betrays itself in distressing symptoms such as one sees daily in society, or sits and shudders at in one's own friends, when the victim, swelling with importance, makes confident mis-statements, draws erroneous conclusions, sums up and gives advice so fatuous that you blush to be a biped of the same species.

There was an hotel in Rainharbour called the "United Kingdom," where Jim spent much of his time playing billiards, drinking beer, and smoking pipes. He had to coax money out of his mother continually for these pursuits.

"It's the kind of thing a fellow must do, you know, mamma," he said. "You can't expect him to stick at home like a girl. He must see life, or he'll be a muff instead of a man of the world. How shall I get on at Fairholm, when I come in for the property, if I'm not up to things?"

This was said at breakfast one morning, and Mrs. Caldwell, sitting opposite the window, raised her worn face and looked up at the sky, considering what else there was that she could do without.

"Do you learn how to manage estates at the 'United Kingdom'?" Beth put in innocently.

"Now, look here, Beth, just you shut up," said Jim. "You're always putting your oar in, and it's deuced impertinent of a child like you, when I'm talking to my mother. *She* knows what I'm talking about, and you don't; but you'll be teaching her next, I expect. You're far too cheeky."

"I only wanted to know," Beth protested.

"That will do," said Mrs. Caldwell impatiently. She was put out by Jim's demand for money, which she had not got to spare, and found it a relief to expend some of her irritation on Beth. "Jim is quite right, and I won't have you hanging about always, listening to things you don't understand, and rudely interrupting."

"I thought we were at breakfast," Beth exclaimed, furious at being unjustly accused of hanging about.

"Be good enough to leave the table," said Mrs. Caldwell; "and you shall have nothing but bread and water for the rest of the day."

"It will be a dinner of herbs with contentment, then, if I have it alone," said Beth; for which impertinence she was condemned to be present at every meal.

Having extracted the money from his mother, Jim went off to the "United Kingdom," and came back in the afternoon, somewhat the worse for beer; but Mrs. Caldwell did not perceive it. He complained of the poor dinner, the cooking, and Beth's shabby appearance.

"How can you go out with me like that?" he said. "Why can't you dress properly? Look at my things! I'm decent."

"So should I be," said Beth, without malice, her eyes shining with mortification. "So should I be if anybody bought me decent clothes."

She did not think it unfair, however, that she should go shabby so that Jim might be well dressed. Nor did she feel it wrong, when the holidays were over, and the boys had gone, that she should be left idly drumming on the window-pane; that they should have every advantage while she had none, and no prospect but the uncertain chance of securing a husband if she held herself well and did as she was told—a husband whom she would be expected to obey whatever he might lack in the way of capacity to order. It is suffering which makes these things plain to a generous woman; but usually by the time she has suffered enough to be able to blame those whom it has been her habit to love and respect, and to judge of the wrong they have done her, it is too late to remedy it. Even if her faculties have not

atrophied for want of use, all that should have been cultivated lies latent in her; she has nothing to fall back upon, and her life is spoilt.

Beth stood idly drumming on the window-pane for long hours after the boys had gone. Then she got her battered old hat, walked out to Fairholm, and wandered over the ground where she had been wont to retrieve for Jim. When she came to the warren, the rabbits were out feeding, and she amused herself by throwing stones at them with her left hand. She had the use of both hands, and would not have noticed if her knife had been put where her fork should have been at table; but she threw stones, bowled, batted, played croquet, and also tennis in after years, with her left hand by preference, and she always held out her left hand to be handed from a carriage.

She succeeded in killing a rabbit with a stone, to her own surprise and delight, and carried it off home, where it formed a welcome addition to the meagre fare. She skinned and cleaned it herself, boiled it, carved it carefully so that it might not look like a cat on the dish, covered it with good onion-sauce, and garnished it with little rolls of fried bacon, and sent it to table, where the only other dish was cold beef-bones with very little meat on them.

"Where did it come from?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, looking pleased.

"From Fairholm," Beth answered.

"I must thank your uncle," said Mrs. Caldwell.

"It was not my uncle," Beth answered, laughing; "and you're not to send any thanks."

"Oh, very well," said Mrs. Caldwell, still more pleased, for she supposed it was a surreptitious kindness of Aunt Grace Mary's. She ate the rabbit with appetite, and Beth, as she watched her, determined to go hunting again, and see what she could get for her. Beth would not have touched a penny of Uncle James's, but from that time forward she did not scruple to poach on his estate, and bring home anything she could catch. She had often prayed to the Lord to show her how to do something to help her mother in her dire poverty, and when this idea occurred to her, she accepted it as a direct answer to her prayer.

Mrs. Caldwell and the three girls slept in the largest bedroom in the house. It was at the back, looking into the little garden, and out to the east. The early morning sun, making black bars of the window-frame on the white blind, often awoke Beth, and she would lie and count the white spaces between the bars, where the window-panes were,—three, six, nine, twelve; or two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve. One morning after Jim left she was lying awake counting the window-panes when Harriet knocked at the door with the hot water. Mildred had not yet gone back to her aunt, and was sleeping with Beth, Bernadine being with her mother.

"Come, get up, children," said Mrs. Caldwell, as she got out of bed herself.

"Mamma, mayn't I have breakfast in bed?" said Bernadine in a wheedling tone.

"No, no, my little body," Mrs. Caldwell answered.

"But, mamma," whined the little body, "I've got such a headache!" She very often had when she ought to have been getting up.

"Cry, baby, cry," sang out Beth. "Mamma, give me my stockings."

Mrs. Caldwell picked them up off the floor, and gave them to her. Beth began to put them on in bed, and diverted herself as she did so by making diabolical grimaces at the malingering imp opposite.

"Mamma," Bernadine whined again, "Beth's teasing me."

"Beth, how often am I to tell you that I will not allow you to tease the child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth solemnly gartered her stockings. Then she gave Mildred a dig in the ribs with her heel, and growled, "Get up!"

"Mamma, Beth is teasing *me*, now," said Mildred promptly.

"Well, I don't see why I should be obliged to do all the getting up for the family," said Beth.

Her mother turned from the looking-glass with her hair-brush in her hand, and gazed at her sternly. Beth hummed a tune, but kept at a safe distance

until she was dressed, then made her escape, going straight to the kitchen, where Harriet was cutting bread to toast. "That's all the bread there is," she said, "and it won't be enough for breakfast if you eat any."

"All right, then; I haven't any appetite," Beth answered casually. "What did you dream last night?"

"I dreamt about crocodiles," Harriet averred.

"A crocodile's a reptile," said Beth, "and a reptile is trouble and an enemy. You always dream nasty things; I expect it's your inside."

"What's that to do wi' it?" said Harriet.

"Everything," said Beth. "Don't you know the stuff that dreams are made of? Pickles, pork, and plum-cake."

"Dreams is sent for our guidance," Harriet answered portentously, shaking her head at Beth's flippancy.

"Well, I'm glad of it," said Beth, "for I dreamt I was catching Uncle James's trout in a most unsportsmanlike way, and I guess the dream was sent to show me how to do it. When I have that kind of dream, I notice it nearly always comes true. But where's the 'Dream Book'?"

"'Ook it," said Harriet. "'Ere's your ma."

As the other little bodies had their breakfasts in bed, Beth had to face her lessons alone that morning, and Mrs. Caldwell was not in an amiable mood; but she was absent as well as irritable, so Beth did some old work over again, and as she knew it thoroughly, she got on well until the music began.

Beth had a great talent as well as a great love for music. When they were at Fairholm, Aunt Grace Mary gave her Uncle James's "Instruction Book for Beginners" one wet day to keep her quiet, and she learnt her notes in the afternoon, and began at once to apply them practically on the piano. She soon knew all the early exercises and little tunes, and was only too eager to do more; but her mother hated the music-lesson more than any of the others, and was so harsh that Beth became nervous, and only ventured on the simplest things for fear of the consequences. When her mother went out, however, she tried what she liked, and, if she had heard the piece before,

she could generally make something satisfactory to herself out of it. One day Aunt Victoria found her sitting on the music-stool, solemnly pulling at her fingers, one after the other, as though to stretch them.

"What *are* you doing, child?" she said.

"O Aunt Victoria," Beth answered in a despairing way, "here's such a *lovely* thing, and my head will play it, only my fingers are not long enough."

Mildred had brought a quantity of new music home with her these holidays. She promised to play well also, and her aunt was having her properly taught. Beth listened to her enraptured when she first arrived, and then, to Mildred's surprise and admiration, tried the pieces herself, and in a few weeks knew all that it had taken Mildred six months to learn.

That morning, as ill-luck would have it, when she was waiting at the piano for her mother to come and give her her lesson, Beth began to try a piece with a passage in it that she could not play.

"Do show me how to do this," she said when Mrs. Caldwell came.

"Oh, you can't do that," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "It is far too difficult for you."

"But I do so want to learn it," Beth ventured.

"Oh, very well," her mother answered. "But I warn you!"

Beth began, and got on pretty well till she came to the passage she did not understand, and there she stumbled.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth tried again nervously.

"That's not right," her mother cried. "What does that sign mean? Now, what is it? Just think!"

Beth, with a flushed face, was thinking hard, but nothing came of it.

"Will you speak?" her mother said angrily. "You are the most obstinate child that ever lived. Now, say something."

"It's not a shake," Beth ventured.

"A shake!" her mother exclaimed, giving her a hard thump on the back with her clenched fist. "Now, no more obstinacy. Tell me what it is at once."

"I don't know that sign," Beth faltered in desperation.

"Oh, you don't know it!" her mother said, now fairly fuming, and accompanying every word by a hard thump of her clenched fist. "Then I'll teach you. I've a great mind to beat you as long as I can stand over you."

Beth was a piteous little figure, crouched on the piano-stool, her back bent beneath her mother's blows, and every fibre of her sensitive frame shrinking from her violence; but she made no resistance, and Mrs. Caldwell carried out her threat. When she could beat Beth no longer, she told her to sit there until she knew that sign, and then she left her. Beth clenched her teeth, and an ugly look came into her face. There had been dignity in her endurance—the dignity of self-control; for there was the force in her to resist, had she thought it right to resist. What she was thinking while her mother beat her was: "I hope I shall not strike you back."

Harriet had heard the scolding, and when Mrs. Caldwell had gone she came and peeped in at the door.

"She's bin' thumpin' you again, 'as she?" she said with a grin. "Wot 'a ye bin' doin' now?"

"What business is that of yours?" said Beth defiantly. It was bad enough to be beaten, but it was much worse to have Harriet peeping in to gloat over her humiliation. Harriet was not to be snubbed, however. She went up to the piano and looked at the music.

"It's precious hard, I should think," she remarked.

"It's *not* hard," Beth answered positively, "if anybody tells you what you don't know and can't make out for yourself. I always remember when I'm told or shown how to do it; but what's the use of staring at a sign you've never seen before? Just you look at that! Can you make anything out of it?" Harriet approached, and, after staring at the sign curiously for some time,

shook her head. "Of course not," said Beth, snatching up her music, and throwing it on the floor; "and neither can anybody else. It isn't fair."

Bernadine had begun her lessons by this time in the next room, and Mrs. Caldwell suddenly began to scold again. "Oh, that awful voice!" Beth groaned aloud, her racked nerves betraying her.

"She's catchin' it now!" said Harriet, after listening with interest. She seemed to derive some sort of gratification from the children's troubles. "But don't you bother any more, Miss Beth.—Your ma'll 'ave forgotten all about it by goin'-out time—or she'll pretend she 'as to save 'erself trouble. Come and 'elp us wi' the beds."

Beth rose slowly from the piano-stool, and followed Harriet upstairs to the bedroom at the back of the house. She was at once attracted to the open window by an uproar of voices—"the voices of children in happy play." There was a girls' day-school next door kept by the Misses Granger. Miss Granger had called on Mrs. Caldwell as soon as she was settled in her house, to beg for the honour of being allowed to educate her three little girls, and Beth had assisted at the interview with serious attention. It would have been the best thing in the world for her had she been allowed to romp and learn with that careless, happy, healthy-minded crew of respectable little plebeians; but Mrs. Caldwell would never have dreamt of sending any of her own superior brood to associate with such people, even if she could have afforded it. She politely explained to Miss Granger that she was educating her children herself for the present; and it was then, with a sickening sense of disappointment, that Beth rejected her mother's social standard, with its "vulgar exclusiveness," once for all.

She hung out of the window now, heedless of Harriet's appeals to be "'elped wi' the beds," and watched the games going on in the next garden with pathetic gravity. The girls were playing rounders among the old fruit-trees on the grass-plot, with a loud accompaniment of shrieks and shouts of laughter. They tumbled up against the trees continually, and shook showers of autumn leaves down upon themselves; and then, tiring of the game, they began to pelt each other with the leaves, and laughed and shrieked still louder. Some of them looked up and made faces at Beth, but she did not acknowledge the discourtesy. She knew that they were not ladies, but did not feel, as her mother did, that this was a fault for which they should be punished, but a misfortune, rather, for which she pitied them, and she would

have liked to have made it up to them by knowing them. Suddenly she remembered that Aunt Victoria was coming back that day, which was something to look forward to. She took Harriet's duster, and went to see if the old lady's room was all in order for her, and arranged as she liked it. Then she returned to the drawing-room, and sat down on the piano-stool, and rage and rebellion uprose in her heart. The piece of music still lay on the floor, and she stamped her foot on it. As she did so, her mother came into the room.

"Do you know your lesson?" she demanded.

"No, I do not," said Beth, and then she doubled her fist, and brought it down bang on the keyboard.

"How dare you!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, startled by the vehemence of the blow, and jarred by the discordant cry of the poor piano.

"I felt I *must*—I felt I must make something suffer," said Beth, in a deep chest-voice and with knitted brows, twisting her fingers and rising to face her mother as she spoke; "and if I had not struck the piano, I should have struck *you*."

Mrs. Caldwell could not have been more taken aback if Beth had struck her. The colour left her face, a chill succeeded the heat of temper, and her right mind returned as to a drunken man suddenly sobered. She noticed that Beth's eyes were almost on a level with her own, and once again she realised that if Beth chose to rebel, she would be powerless to control her. For some seconds they looked at each other without a word. Then Beth stooped, picked up the piece of music, smoothed it out, and put it on the stand; and then she shut up the piano deliberately, but remained standing in front of it with her back to her mother. Mrs. Caldwell watched her for a little in silence.

"It's your own fault, Beth," she said at last. "You are so conceited; you try to play things that are too difficult for you, and then you get into trouble. It is no pleasure to me to punish you."

Beth remained with her back turned, immovable, and her mother looked at her helplessly a little longer, and then left the room. When she had gone, Beth sat down on the piano-stool. Her shabby shoes had holes in them, her

dress was worn thread-bare, and her sleeves were too short for her. She had no collar or cuffs, and her thin hands and long wrists looked hideous to her as they lay in her lap. Great tears gathered in her eyes. So conceited indeed! What had she to be conceited about? Every one despised her, and she despised herself. Here the tears overflowed, and Beth began to cry at last, and cried and cried for a long time very bitterly.

That afternoon, after Aunt Victoria had arrived, Lady Benyon and Aunt Grace Mary called. Mrs. Caldwell had recovered her good-humour by that time, and was all smiles to everybody, including Beth, when she came sauntering in, languid and heavy-eyed, with half a sheet of notepaper in her hand.

"What have you there, Puck?" said Lady Benyon, catching sight of some hieroglyph drawn on the paper. Beth gave it to her, and she turned it this way and that, but could make nothing of it.

"Mamma will tell us what it is," said Beth, taking it to her mother.

Mrs. Caldwell, still smiling, looked at the drawing. "It's an astronomical sign, surely," she ventured.

"No, it is not," Beth said.

"Then I don't know what it is," her mother rejoined.

"Oh, but you must know, mamma," said Beth. "Look again."

"But I don't know, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell insisted.

"Couldn't you make it out if Aunt Victoria beat you?" Beth suggested.

Mrs. Caldwell changed countenance.

"That is what you expect me to do, at all events," Beth pursued. "Now, you see, you can't do it yourself; and I ask you, was it fair to expect me to make out a strange sign by staring at it?" She set her mouth hard when she had spoken, and looked her mother straight in the face. Mrs. Caldwell winced.

"What's the difficulty, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked.

"The difficulty is between me and mamma," Beth answered with dignity, and then she left the room, sauntering out as she had come in, with an utterly dispirited air.

The next morning she went to practice as usual, but Mrs. Caldwell did not come to give her her music-lesson. Beth thought she had forgotten it, and went to remind her.

"No, Beth, I have not forgotten," said Mrs. Caldwell; "but after your conduct yesterday, I do not know how you can expect me to give you another music-lesson."

"Are you not going to give me any more?" Beth exclaimed.

"No, certainly not," her mother answered.

Beth's heart sank. She stood for some little time in the doorway looking at her mother, who sat beside the table sewing, and pointedly ignored her; then Beth turned, and went back to the drawing-room slowly, and carefully practised the usual time, with great tears trickling down her cheeks. It did not seem to make much difference what happened, whether she was on her best behaviour or her worst, the tears were bound to come. But Beth had a will of her own, and she determined to learn music. She said no more on the subject to her mother, however, but from that day forward she practised regularly and hard, and studied her instruction books, and listened to other people playing when she had a chance, and asked to have passages explained to her, until at last she knew more than her mother could have taught her.

CHAPTER XIX

BUT well-springs, mortal and immortal, were beginning to bubble up brightly in Beth, despite the hard conditions of her life. She sharpened her wits involuntarily on the people about her, she gathered knowledge where she listed; her further faculty flashed forth fine rays at unexpected intervals to cheer her, and her hungry heart also began to seek satisfaction. For Beth was by nature well-balanced; there was to be no atrophy of one side of her being in order that the other might be abnormally developed. Her chest was not to be flattened because her skull bulged with the big brain beneath. Rather the contrary. For mind and body acted and reacted on each other favourably, in so far as the conditions of her life were favourable. Such congenial intellectual pursuits as she was able to follow, by tranquillising her, helped the development of her physique, while the healthy condition of her body stimulated her to renewed intellectual effort—and it was all a pleasure to her.

At this time she had a new experience, an experience for which she was totally unprepared, but one which helped her a great deal, and delighted as much as it surprised her.

There were high oak pews in the little church at the end of the road which the Caldwells attended on Sunday; in the rows on either side of the main aisle the pews came together in twos, so that when Beth sat at the end of theirs, as she always did, the person in the next pew sat beside her with only the wooden partition between. One Sunday, when she was on her knees, drowsing through the Litany with her cheek on her prayer-book, she became aware of a boy in the next pew with his face turned to her in exactly the same attitude. He had bright fair hair curling crisply, a ruddy fair fat face, and round blue eyes, clear as glass marbles. Beth was pleased with him, and smiled involuntarily. He instantly responded to the smile; and then they both got very red; and, in their delicious shyness, they turned their heads on their prayer-books, and looked in opposite directions. This did not last long, however. The desire for another look seized them simultaneously, and they turned their faces to each other, and smiled again the moment their

eyes met. All through the service they kept looking at each other, and looking away again; and Beth felt a strange glad glow begin in her chest and spread gradually all over her. It continued with her the whole day; she was conscious of it throughout the night; and directly she awoke next morning there it was again; and she could think of nothing but the apple-cheeked boy, with bright blue eyes and curly fair hair; and as she dwelt upon his image she smiled to herself, and kept on smiling. There came upon her also a great desire to please, with sudden energy which made all effort easy to her, so that, instead of being tiresome at her lessons, she did them in a way that astonished her mother—such a wonderful incentive is a little joy in life. She would not go out when lessons were over, however, but stood in the drawing-room window watching the people pass. Harriet came and worried her to help with the dusting.

"Go away, you chattering idiot," said Beth. She had found Harriet out in many meannesses by this time, and had lost all respect for her. "Don't you see I'm thinking? If you don't bother me now I'll help you by-and-by, perhaps."

On the other side of the road, in the same row as the Benyon dower-house, but well within sight of the window, was the Mansion-House Collegiate Day and Boarding School for the Sons of Gentlemen. Beth kept looking in that direction, and presently the boys came pouring out in their mortar-boards, and, among them, she soon discovered the one she was thinking of. She discovered him less by sight than by a strange sensation in herself, a pleasure which shot through her from top to toe. For no reason, she stepped back from the window, and looked in the opposite direction towards the church; but she could see him when he came bounding past with his satchel of books under his arm, and she also knew that he saw her. He ran on, however, and going round the corner, where Orchard Row turned off at an angle out of Orchard Street, was out of sight in a moment.

But Beth was satisfied. Indeed she was more than satisfied. She ran into the kitchen, and astonished Harriet by a burst of hilarious spirits, and a wild demand for food, for a duster, for a scrubbing-brush. She wanted to do a lot, and she was hungry.

"You're fond, ah think," said Harriet dryly.

"You're fond, too," Beth cried. "We're all fond! The fonder the better! And I must have something to eat."

"Well, there's nothing for you but bread."

"I must have meat," said Beth. "Rob the joint, and I'll not take any at dinner."

"Ah'd tak' it w'eniver ah could get it, if ah was you," Harriet advised.

"If you was or were me, you'd do as I do," said Beth; "and *I* won't cheat. If I say I won't take it, I won't. I'm entitled to meat once a day, and I'll take my share now, please; but I won't take more than my share."

"You'll be 'ungry again by dinner-time."

"I know," said Beth. "But that won't make any difference."

She got out the sirloin of beef which was to be roasted for dinner, deftly cut some slices off it, fried them with some cold potatoes, and ate them ravenously, helped by Harriet. When dinner-time came Beth was ravenous again, but she was faithful to her vow, and ate no meat. Harriet scoffed at her for her scrupulousness.

The next day, at the same time, Beth was again in the window, waiting for her boy to come out of the Mansion-House School. When he appeared, the most delightful thrill shot through her. Her first impulse was to fly, but she conquered that and waited, watching him. He made straight for the window, and stopped in a business-like way; and then they laughed and looked into each other's faces.

"What are you doing there?" he asked, as if he were accustomed to see her somewhere else.

"I live here," she said.

"I live in Orchard Row, last house," he rejoined.

"Old Lee's?" Beth inquired.

"Yes, he's my grandfather. I'm Sammy Lee."

"He's a licensed victualler, retired," Beth repeated, drawing upon her excellent verbal memory.

"Yes," said Sammy. "What's yours?"

"I haven't one."

"What's your father?"

"He's dead too."

"What was he?"

"He was a gentleman."

"A retired gentleman?"

"No," said Beth, "an officer and a gentleman."

"Oh," said Sammy. "My father's dead too. He was a retired gentleman."

"What's a retired gentleman?" Beth asked.

"Don't you know?" Sammy exclaimed. "I thought everybody knew that! When you make a fortune you retire from business. Then you're a retired gentleman."

"But gentlemen don't go into business," Beth objected.

"What do they do then?" Sammy retorted.

"They have professions or property."

"It's all the same," said Sammy.

"It isn't," Beth contradicted.

"Yah! *you* don't know," said Sammy, laughing; and then he ran on, being late for his dinner.

The discussion had been carried on with broad smiles, and when he left her, Beth hugged herself, and glowed again, and was glad in the thought of him. But it was not his conversation so much as his appearance that she dwelt

upon—his round blue eyes, his bright fair curly hair, his rosy cheeks. "He is beautiful! he is beautiful!" she exclaimed; then added upon reflection, "*And I never thought a boy beautiful before.*"

The next day she was making rhymes about him in the acting-room, and forgot the time, so that she missed him in the morning; but when he left school in the afternoon she was at the window, and she saw him trotting up the street as hard as his little legs could carry him.

"Where were you at dinner-time?" he said.

"How funny!" she exclaimed in surprise and delight.

"What's funny?" he demanded, looking about him vaguely.

"You were wanting to see me."

"Who told you so?" Sammy asked suspiciously.

"You did yourself just now," Beth answered, her eyes dancing.

"I didn't."

"You *did*, Sammy."

"You're a liar!" said Sammy Lee.

"Sammy, that's rude," she exclaimed. "And it's not the way to speak to a young lady, and I won't have it."

"Well, but I did *not* tell you I wanted to see you at dinner-time," Sammy retorted positively.

"Yes, you did, stupid," said Beth. "You asked where I was at dinner-time, and then I knew you had missed me, and you wouldn't have missed me if you hadn't wanted to see me."

"But," Sammy repeated with sulky obstinacy, unable to comprehend the delicate subtilty of Beth's perception,—"*But I did not tell you.*"

"Didn't you want to see me, then?" Beth said coaxingly, waiving the other point with tact.

But Sammy, feeling shy at the question and vaguely aggrieved, looked up and down the street and kicked the pavement with his heel instead of answering.

"I shall go, then," said Beth, after waiting for a little.

"No, don't," he exclaimed, his countenance clearing. "I want to ask you—only you put it out of my head—gels do talk so."

"Gels!" Beth exclaimed derisively. "I happen to be a girl."

Sammy looked at her with a puzzled expression, and forgot what he was going to say. She diverted his attention, however, by asking him how old he was.

"Eleven," Sammy answered promptly.

"So am I. When were you eleven?"

"The twentieth of February."

"Oh, then you're older than me—March, April, May, June—four months. My birthday's in June. What do you do at school? Let's see your books. I wish *I* went to school!"

"Shu!" said Sammy. "What's the use of sending a gel to school? Gels can't learn."

"So Jim says," Beth rejoined with an absence of conviction that roused Sammy.

"All boys say so," he declared.

"All boys are silly," said Beth. "What's the use of saying things? That doesn't make them true. You're as bad as Jim."

"Who's Jim?" Sammy interrupted jealously.

"Jim's my brother."

Sammy, relieved, kicked his heel on the pavement.

"Which is tallest?" he asked presently, "you or me?"

"I'm tallest, I think," Beth answered; "but never mind. You're the fattest. I've grown long, and you've grown broad."

"You're mighty sharp," said Sammy.

"You're mighty blunt," said Beth. "And you'll be mighty late for tea, too. Look at the church-clock!"

Sammy glanced up, then fled precipitately; and Beth, turning to leave the window, discovered Harriet standing in the background, grinning.

"So you've gotten a sweetheart!" she exclaimed. "There's nothing like beginning early."

"So you've been listening again," Beth answered hotly. "Bad luck to you!"

A few days later Mrs. Caldwell was sitting with Lady Benyon, who was in the bow-window as usual, looking out.

"If I am not mistaken," said Lady Benyon suddenly, "there is a crowd collecting at your house."

"What! again?" Mrs. Caldwell groaned, jumping up.

"If I'm not mistaken," Lady Benyon repeated.

Mrs. Caldwell hurried off without even waiting to shake hands. On getting into the street, however, she was relieved to find that Lady Benyon had been mistaken. There was no crowd collecting in Orchard Street, but, as she approached her own house, she became aware of a small boy at the drawing-room window talking to some one within, whom she presently discovered to be Beth.

"What are you doing there, Beth?" she demanded severely. "Who is this boy?"

Beth started. "Sammy Lee," she gasped. "Mr. Lee's grandson at the end of Orchard Row."

"Why are you talking to him?" her mother asked harshly. "I won't have you talking to him. Who will you scrape acquaintance with next?" Then she turned to Sammy, who stood shaking in his shoes, with all the rosy colour

faded from his fair fat cheeks, too frightened to stir. "Go away," said Mrs. Caldwell, "you've no business here talking to my daughter, and I won't allow it."

Sammy sidled off, not daring to turn his back full till he was at a safe distance, lest he should be seized from behind and shaken. He was not a heroic figure in retreat, but Beth, in her indignation, noted nothing but the insult that had been offered him. For several days, when her mother was out, she watched and waited for him, anxious to atone; but Sammy kept to the other side of the road, and only cast furtive smiles at her as he ran by. It never occurred to Beth that he was less valiant than she was, or less willing to brave danger for her sake than she was for his. She thought he was keeping away for fear of getting her into trouble; and she beckoned to him again and again in order to explain that she did not care; but he only fled the faster. Then Beth wrote him a note. It was the first she had ever written voluntarily, and she shut herself up in the acting-room to compose it, in imitation of Aunt Grace Mary, whose beautiful delicate handwriting she always did her best to copy—with very indifferent success, however, for the connection between her hand and her head was imperfect. She could compose verses and phrases long before she could commit them to paper intelligibly; and it was not the composition of her note to Sammy that troubled her, but her bad writing. She made a religious ceremony of the effort, praying fervently, "Lord, let me write it well." Every day she presented a miscellaneous collection of petitions to the Lord, offering them up as the necessity arose, being in constant communication with Him. When she wanted to go out, she asked for fine weather; when she did not want to go out, she prayed that it might rain. She begged that she might not be found out when she went poaching on Uncle James's fields; that she might be allowed to catch something; that new clothes might be sent her from somewhere, she felt so ashamed in her dirty old shabby ones. She asked for boots and shoes and gloves, and for help with her lessons; and, when she had no special petition to offer, she would ejaculate at intervals, "Lord, send me good luck!" But, however great the variety of her daily wants, one prayer went up with the others always, "Lord, let me write well!" meaning, let me write a good hand; yet her writing did not improve, and she was much disheartened about it. She took the Lord into her confidence on the subject very frankly. When she had been naughty, and

was not found out and punished, she thanked Him for His goodness; but why would He not let her write well? She asked Him the question again and again, lifting her grey eyes to the grey sky pathetically; and all the time, though she never suspected it, she was learning to write more than well, but in a very different sense of the word.

Her note to Sammy was as follows:—

DEAR SAMMY ,—Come and talk to me. Do not be afrade. I do not mind rows, being always in them. And she can't do anything to you. I miss you. I want to tell you things. Such nice things keep coming to me. They make me feel all comfortable inside. I looked out of the window in the dark last night. There was a frost. The sky was dark dark blue like sailor's suits only bright and the stars looked like holes bored in the floor of heaven to let the light through. It was so white and bright it must have been the light of heaven. I never saw such light on earth. Sunshine is more buffy. Do come Sammy I want you so Beth. P.S. I can't stop right yet; but I'm trying. It seems rather difficult to stop: but nobody can write without stops. I always look at stops in books when I read but sometimes you put a coma and sometimes a semicollon. I expect you know but I don't so you must teach me. Its so nice writing things down. Come to the back gait tonight.

When the letter was written in queer, crabbed characters, on one side of a half-sheet of paper, then folded so that she could write the address on the other side, because she had no envelope—she wondered how she should get it delivered. There was a coolness between her and Harriet. Beth resented the coarse insinuation about having a sweetheart, and shrank from hearing any more remarks of a like nature on the subject. And she couldn't send the letter by post because she had no stamp. Should she lay it on his doorstep. No, somebody else might get it. How then? She was standing on her own doorstep with the letter in her pocket when she asked herself the question, and just at the moment Sammy himself appeared, coming back from school. Quick as thought, Beth ran across the road, whipped out the letter and gave it to him. Sammy stood still in astonishment with his mouth open, gazing at it when he found it in his hand, as if he could not imagine how it got there.

As soon as it was dark, Beth stationed herself at the back gate, which looked out into Orchard Street, and waited and waited, but Sammy did not come. He had not been able to get out; that was it—she was sure of it; yet still she waited, although the evening was very cold. Her mother and Aunt Victoria had gone to dine with Lady Benyon. She did not know what Harriet was doing, but she had disposed of Bernadine for some time to come by lending her her best picture-book to daub with paint; so it was pretty safe to wait; and at first the hope of seeing Sammy come running round the corner was pleasure enough. As the time went on, however, she became impatient, and at last she ventured a little way up the street, then a little farther, and then she ran on boldly into Orchard Row. As she approached the Lees' back-gate, she became aware of a round thing that looked like a cannon-ball glued to the top, and her fond heart swelled, for she knew it must be Sammy's head.

"O Sammy! why didn't you come?" she cried.

"I didn't like," said Sammy.

"I've been waiting for hours," Beth expostulated with gentle reproach.

"So have I, and it's cold," said Sammy disconsolately.

"Come now. She's out," Beth coaxed.

"So she was the other day," Sammy reminded her.

"But we'll go into the garden. She can't catch us there. It's too dark."

Sammy, half persuaded, ventured out from the gateway, then hesitated.

"But is it *very* dark?" he said.

"Not so very, when you're used to it," Beth answered. "But it's nice when it's dark. You can fancy you see things. Come! run!" She seized his hand as she spoke, and set off, and Sammy, overborne by the stronger will, kept pace with her.

"But I don't want to see things," he protested, trying to hold back when they came to the dark passage which led into the garden.

"Don't be a fool, Sammy," said Beth, dragging him on. "I believe you're a girl."

"I'm not," said Sammy indignantly.

"Then come and sit on the see-saw."

"Oh, have you a see-saw?" he asked, immediately diverted.

"Yes—this way—under the pear-tree. It's a swing, you know, tied to the branch, and I put this board across it. I pulled the board up out of the floor of the wood-house. Do you like see-sawing?"

"Yes," said Sammy with animation.

"Catch hold, then," said Beth, tipping up the board at her end. "What are you doing, butter-fingers?" she cried, as Sammy failed to catch hold. "I'm sorry I said you were a girl. You're much too clumsy."

She held the board until Sammy got astride of it at one end, then she bestrode it herself at the other, and started it with a vigorous kick on the ground. Up and down they went, shaking showers of leaves from the old tree, and an occasional winter pear, which fell with a thud, being hard and heavy.

"Golly! this is fine!" Sammy burst out. "I say, Beth, what a jolly sort of a girl you are!"

"Do you think so?" said Beth, amply rewarded for all her trouble.

"Yes. And you *can* write a letter! My! What a time it must 'a' took you! But, I say, it's all rot about stops, you know. Stops is things in books. *You'd* never learn stops."

"How do you know?" Beth demanded, bristling.

"Men write books," said Sammy, proud of his sex, "not women, let alone gels!"

"That's all you know about it, then!" cried Beth, better informed. "Women *do* write books, and girls too. Jane Austen wrote books, and Maria

Edgeworth wrote books, and Fanny Burney wrote a book when she was only seventeen, called 'Evelina' and all the great men read it."

"Oh!" said Sammy, jeering, "so you're as clever as they are, I suppose!"

Sammy was up in the air as he spoke; the next moment he came down bump on the ground.

"There," said Beth, "that'll teach you. You be rude again if you dare."

"I'll not come near you again, spit-cat," cried Sammy, picking himself up.

"I know you won't," Beth rejoined. "You daren't. You're afraid."

"Who's afraid?" said Sammy, blustering.

"Sammy Lee," said Beth. "Oh, Sammy Lee's afraid of me, riding the see-saw under the tree."

"I say, Beth," said Sammy, much impressed, "did you make that yourself?"

"Make what myself? Make you afraid? Yes, I did."

"No, you didn't," said Sammy, plucking up spirit. "I'm not afraid."

"Then don't be a fool," said Beth.

"Fool yourself," Sammy muttered, but not very valiantly.

The church-clock struck nine. They were standing about, Beth not knowing what to do next, and Sammy waiting for her to suggest something; and in the meantime the night became colder and the darkness more intense.

"I think I'd better take you home," Beth said at last. "Here, give me your hand."

She dragged him out of the garden in her impetuous way, and they scampered off together to Orchard Row, and when they reached the Lees' house they were so warmed and cheered by the exercise that they parted from each other in high good-humour.

"I'll come again," said Sammy.

"Do!" said Beth, giving him a great push that sent him sprawling up the passage. This was the kind of attention he understood, so he went to bed satisfied.

There was only one great interest in life for the people at Rainharbour. Their religion gave them but cold comfort; their labour was arduous and paid them poorly; they had no books, no intellectual pursuits, no games to take them out of themselves, nothing to expand their hearts as a community. There were the races, the fair, and the hirings for excitement, but of pleasure such as satisfies because it is soul-sustaining and continuous enough to be part of their lives, they knew nothing. The upper classes were idle, self-satisfied, selfish, and sensual; the lower were industrious enough, but ignorant, superstitious, and depressed. The gentry gave themselves airs of superiority, really as if their characters were as good as their manners; but they did not impose upon the people, who despised them for their veneer. Each class displayed its contempt for the other openly when it could safely do so, but was ready to cringe when it suited its own convenience, the workers for employment, and the gentry for political purposes. But human beings are too dependent on each other for such differences to exist without detriment to the whole community. Society must cohere if it is to prosper; individuals help themselves most, in the long run, when they consider each other's interests. At Rainharbour nothing was done to promote general good fellowship; the kind of Christianity that was preached there made no mention of the matter, and society was disintegrated, and would have gone to pieces altogether but for the one great interest in life—the great primitive interest which consists in the attraction of sex to sex. The subject of sweethearts was always in the air. The minds of boys and girls, youths and maidens, men and women were all full of it; but it was not often openly discussed as a pleasant topic—in fact, not much mentioned at all except for fault-finding purposes; for it was the custom to be censorious on the subject, and naturally those were most so who knew most about it, like the vicar, who had married four times. He was so rabid that he almost went the length of denouncing men and maidens by name from the pulpit if he caught them strolling about together in pairs. His mind was so constituted that he could not believe their dalliance to be innocent, and yet he did not try to introduce any other interest or pleasure into their lives to divert them from the incessant pursuit of each other.

It was the grown-up people who were so nasty on the subject of sweethearts; the boys and girls never could understand why. Their own inclination was to go about together openly in the most public places; that was how they understood sweethearting; part of the pleasure of it consisted in other people seeing them, and knowing that they were sweethearts, and smiling upon them sympathetically. This, however, the grown-up people never did; on the contrary, they frowned and jeered; and so the boys and girls kept out of their way, and sought secret sympathy from each other.

Any little boy at the Mansion-House School who secured a sweetheart enjoyed a proud distinction, and Sammy soon found that his acquaintance with Beth placed him in quite an enviable position. He therefore let his fear of Mrs. Caldwell lapse, and did his best to be seen with Beth as much as possible. And to her it was a surprise as well as a joy to find him hanging about, waiting to have a word with her. Her mother's treatment of her had so damaged her self-respect that she had never expected anybody to care for her particularly, and Sammy's attentions, therefore, were peculiarly sweet. She did not consider the position at all, however. There are subjects about which we think, and subjects upon which we feel, and the two are quite distinct and different. Beth felt on the subject of Sammy. The fact of his having a cherubic face made her feel nice inside her chest—set up a glow there which warmed and brightened her whole existence—a glow which never flickered day or night, except in Sammy's presence, when it went out altogether more often than not; only to revive, however, when the real Sammy had gone and the ideal Sammy returned to his place in her bosom. For Sammy adored at a distance and Sammy within range of criticism were two very different people. Sammy adored at a distance was all-ready response to Beth's fine flights of imagination; but Sammy on the spot was dull. He was seldom on the spot, however, so that Beth had ample leisure to live on her love undisturbed, and her mind became extraordinarily active. Verse came to her like a recollection. On half-holidays they sometimes went for a walk together over the wild wide waste of sand when the tide was out, and she would rhyme to herself the whole time; but she seldom said anything to Sammy. So long as he was silent he was a source of inspiration—that is to say, her feeling for him was inspiring; but when she tried to get anything out of him, they generally squabbled.

Beth lived her own life at this time almost entirely. Since that startling threat of rebellion, her mother had been afraid to beat her lest she should strike back; scolding only made her voluble, and Mrs. Caldwell never thought of trying to manage her in the only way possible, by reasoning with her and appealing to her better nature. There was, therefore, but one thing for her mother to do in order to preserve her own dignity, and that was to ignore Beth. Accordingly, when the perfunctory lessons were over in the morning, Beth had her day to herself. She began it generally by practising for at least an hour by the church-clock, and after that she had a variety of pursuits which she preferred to follow alone if Sammy were at school, because then there was no one to interrupt her thoughts. When the larder was empty, she became Loyal Heart the Trapper, and would wander off to Fairholm to set snares or catapult anything she could get near. The gun she had found impracticable, because she was certain to have been seen out with it; her snares, if they were found, were supposed to have been set by poachers. She herself was known to every one on the estate, and was therefore sure of respect, no matter who saw her; even Uncle James himself would have let her alone had they met, as he was of her mother's opinion, that it was safer to ignore her than to attempt to control her. The snares, although of the most primitive kind, answered the purpose. The great difficulty was how to get the game home; but that she also managed successfully, generally by returning after dark. Her mother, concluding that she owed whatever came to Aunt Grace Mary's surreptitious kindness, said nothing on the subject except to Beth, whom she supposed to be Aunt Grace Mary's agent; but she very much enjoyed every addition to her monotonous diet, especially when Beth did the cooking. In fact, had it not been for Loyal Heart, the family would have pretty nearly starved that winter, because of Jim, who had contracted debts like a man, which his mother had to pay.

With regard to Beth's cooking, it is remarkable that, although Mrs. Caldwell herself had suffered all through her married life for want of proper training in household matters, she never attempted to have her own daughters better taught. On the contrary, she had forbidden Beth to do servant's work, and objected most strongly to her cooking, until she found how good it was, and even then she thought it due to her position only to countenance it under protest. The extraordinary inefficiency of the good-old-fashioned-womanly

woman as a wife on a small income, the silly pretences which showed her want of proper self-respect, and the ill-adjusted balance of her undeveloped mind which betrayed itself in petty inconsistencies, fill us with pity and surprise us, yet encourage us too by proving how right and wise we were to try our own experiments. If we had listened to advice and done as we were told, the woman's-sphere-is-home would have been as ugly and comfortless a place for us to-day as it used to be when Beth was forced by the needs of her nature to poach for diversion, cook for kindness, and clean, and fight, and pray, and lie, and love, in her brave struggle against the hard and stupid conditions of her life—conditions which were not only retarding the development, but threatening utterly to distort, if not actually to destroy, all that was best, most beautiful, and most wonderful in her character.

Beth rather expected to get into difficulties eventually about the game, but she calculated that she would have a certain time to run before her head was snapped off, and during that time her mother would enjoy her good dinners and be the better for them, and she herself would enjoy the sport—facts which no amount of anger afterwards could alter. Since Mrs. Caldwell had washed her hands of Beth, they were beginning to be quite good friends. Sometimes her mother talked to her just as she would to anybody else; that is to say, with civility. She would say, "And what are you going to do to-day, Beth?" quite pleasantly, as though speaking to another grown-up person; and Beth would answer politely, and tell the truth if possible, instead of making some sulky evasion, as she had begun to do when there was no other way of keeping the peace. She was fearlessly honest by nature, but as she approached maturity, she lost her nerve for a time, and during that time she lied, on occasion, to escape a harrowing scene. She always despised herself for it, however, and therefore, as she grew stronger, she became her natural straightforward self again, only, if anything, all the more scrupulously accurate for the degrading experience. For she soon perceived that there is nothing that damages the character like the habit of untruth; the man or woman who makes a false excuse has already begun to deteriorate. If a census could be taken to establish the grounds upon which people are considered noble or ignoble, we should find it was in exact proportion to the amount of confidence that can be placed first of all in their sincerity, and then in their accuracy. Sincerity claims respect for character, accuracy

estimation for ability; no high-minded person was ever insincere, and no fool was ever accurate.

When the close season began, Beth left the plantations, and took to fishing in the sea. She would sit at the end of the pier in fine weather, baiting her hooks with great fat lob-worms she had dug up out of the sands at low tide, and watching her lines all by herself; or, if it were rough, she would fish in the harbour from the steps up against the wooden jetty, where the sailors hung about all day long with their hands in their pockets when the boats were in. Some of them would sit with her, all in a row, fishing too, and they would exchange bait with her, and give her good advice, while others stood behind looking on and listening. And as of old in Ireland she had fascinated the folk, so here again these great simple bearded men listened with wondering interest to her talk, and never answered at all as if they were speaking to a child. Beth heard some queer things, sitting down there by the old wooden jetty, fishing for anything she could catch, and she said some queer things too when the mood was upon her.

Sometimes, when she wanted to be alone and think, she would go off to the rocks that appeared at low-water down behind the south pier, and fish there. She loved this spot; it was near to nature, yet not remote from the haunts of man. She sat there one afternoon, holding her line, and dreamily watching the fishing boats streaming across the bay, with their brown sails set to catch the fitful breeze which she could see making cat's-paws on the water far out, but could not feel, being sheltered from it by the old stone pier. The sea was glassy smooth, and lapped up the rocks, heaving regularly like the breast of a tranquil sleeper. Beth gazed at it until she was seized with a great yearning to lie back on its shining surface and be gently borne away to some bright eternity, where Sammy would be, and all her other friends. The longing became imperative. She rose from the rock she was sitting on, she raised her arms, her eyes were fixed. Then it was as if she had suddenly awakened. The impulse had passed, but she was all shaken by it, and shivered as if she were cold.

Fortunately the fish were biting well that day. She caught two big dabs, four whittings, a small plaice, and a fine fat sole. The sole was a prize, indeed, and mamma and Aunt Victoria should have it for dinner. As she walked home, carrying the fish on a string, she met Sammy.

"Where did you get those fish?" he asked.

"Caught them," she answered laconically.

"What! all by yourself? No! I don't believe it."

"I did, all the same," she answered; "and now I'm going to cook them—some of them at least."

"Yourself? Cook them yourself? No!" he cried in admiration. Cooking was an accomplishment he honoured.

"If you'll come out after your tea, I'll leave the back-gate ajar, and you can slip into the wood-house; and I'll bring you a whiting on toast, all hot and brown."

With such an inducement, Sammy was in good time. Beth found him sitting contentedly on a heap of sticks, waiting for the feast. She had brought the whiting out with a cover over it, hot and brown, as she had promised; and Sammy's mouth watered when he saw it.

"What a jolly girl you are, Beth!" he exclaimed.

But Beth was not so much gratified by the praise as she might have been. The vision and the dream were upon her that evening, her nerves were overwrought, and she was yearning for an outlet for ideas that oppressed her. She stood leaning against the door-post, biting a twig; restless, dissatisfied; but not knowing what she wanted.

When Sammy had finished the whiting, he remembered Beth, and asked what she was thinking about.

"I'm not thinking exactly," she answered, frowning intently in the effort to find expression for what she had in her consciousness. "Things come into my mind, but I don't think them, and I can't say them. They don't come in words. It's more like seeing them, you know, only you don't see them with your eyes, but with something inside yourself. Do you know what it is when you are fishing off the rocks, and there is no breaking of waves, only a rising and falling of the water; and it comes swelling up about you with a sort of sob that brings with it a whiff of fresh air every time, and makes you take in your breath with a sort of sob too, every time—and at last you seem

to be the sea, or the sea seems to be you—it's all one; but you don't think it."

Sammy looked at her in a blank, bewildered way. "I like it best when you tell stories, Beth," he said, under the impression that all this incomprehensible stuff was merely a display for his entertainment. "Come and sit down beside me and tell stories."

"Stories don't come to me to-night," said Beth, with a tragic face. "Do you remember the last time we were on the sands—oh! I keep feeling—it was all so—*peaceful*, that was it. I've been wondering ever since what it was, and that was it—*peaceful*;

The quiet people,
The old church steeple;
The sandy reaches
Of wreck-strewn beaches—"

"Who made that up?" said Sammy suspiciously.

"I did," Beth answered offhand. "At least I didn't make it up, it just came to me. When I make it up it'll most likely be quite different. It's like the stuff for a dress, you know, when you buy it. You get it made up, and it's the same stuff, and it's quite different, too, in a way. You've got it put into shape, and it's good for something."

"I don't believe you made it up," said Sammy doggedly. "You're stuffing me, Beth. You're always trying to stuff me."

Beth, still leaning against the door-post, clasped her hands behind her head and looked up at the sky. "Things keep coming to me faster than I can say them to-night," she proceeded, paying no heed to his remark; "not things about you, though, because nothing goes with Sammy but jammy, clammy, mammy, and those aren't nice. I want things to come about you, but they won't. I tried last night in bed, and what do you think came again and again?"

Yes, yes, that was his cry,
While the great clouds went sailing by;
Flashes of crimson on colder sky;
Like the thoughts of a summer's day,
Colour'd by love in a life which else were grey.

But that isn't you, you know, Sammy. Then when I stopped trying for something about you, there came such a singing! What was it? It seems to have gone—and yet it's here, you know, it's all here," she insisted, with one hand on the top of her head, and the other on her chest, and her eyes straining; "and yet I can't get it."

"Beth, don't get on like that," Sammy remonstrated. "You make me feel all horrid."

"Make you feel," Beth cried in a deep voice, clenching her fists and shaking them at him, exasperated because the verses continued to elude her. "Don't you know what I'm here for? I'm here to make you feel. If you don't feel what I feel, then you *shall* feel horrid, if I have to kill you."

"Shut up!" said Sammy, beginning to be frightened. "I shall go away if you don't."

"Go away, then," said Beth. "You're just an idiot boy, and I'm tired of you."

Sammy's blue eyes filled with tears. He got down from the heap of sticks, intent on making his escape; but Beth changed her mind when she felt her audience melting away.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"I'm going home," he said deprecatingly. "I can't stay if you go on in that fool-fashion."

"It isn't a fool-fashion," Beth rejoined vehemently. "It's you that's a fool. I told you so before."

"If you wasn't a girl, I'd punch your 'ead," said Sammy, half afraid.

"I believe you!" Beth jeered. "But you're not a girl, anyway." She flew at him as she spoke, caught him by the collar, kicked his shins, slapped his face, and drubbed him on the back.

Sammy, overwhelmed by the sudden onslaught, made no effort to defend himself, but just wriggled out of her grasp, and ran home, with great tears streaming down his round red cheeks, and sobs convulsing him.

Beth's exasperation subsided the moment she was left alone in the wood-house. She sat down on the sticks, and looked straight before her, filled with remorse.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she kept saying to herself. "Oh dear! oh dear! Sammy! Sammy! He's gone. I've lost him. *This is the most dreadful grief I have ever had in my life.*"

The moment she had articulated this full-blown phrase, she became aware of its importance. She repeated it to herself, reflected upon it, and was so impressed by it, that she got up, and went indoors to write it down. By the time she had found pencil and paper, she was the sad central figure of a great romance, full of the most melancholy incidents; in which troubled atmosphere she sat and suffered for the rest of the evening; but she did not think of Sammy again till she went to bed. Then, however, she was seized anew with the dread of losing him for ever, and cried helplessly until she fell asleep.

For days she mourned for him without daring to go to the window, lest she should see him pass by on the other side of the road with scorn and contempt flashing forth from his innocent blue eyes. In the evening, however, she opened the back-gate, as usual, and waited in the wood-house; but he never came. And at first she was in despair. Then she became defiant—she didn't care, not she! Then she grew determined. He'd have to come back if she chose, she'd make him. But how? Oh, she knew! She'd just sit still till something came.

She was sitting on a heap of beech branches opposite the doorway, picking off the bronze buds and biting them. The blanched skeleton of Sammy's whiting, sad relic of happier moments, grinned up at her from the earthen floor. Outside, the old pear-tree on the left, leafless now and motionless, showed distinctly in silhouette against the night-sky. Its bare branches made black bars on the face of the bright white moon which was rising behind it. What a strange thing time is! day and night, day and night, week and month, spring, summer, autumn, winter, always coming and going again, while we only come once, go, and return no more. It was getting on for Christmas now. Another year had nearly gone. The years slip away steadily—day by day—winter, spring. Winter so cold and wet; March all clouds and dust—comes in like a lion, goes out like a lamb; then April is bright.

The year slips away steadily; slips round the steady year; days come and go—no, no! Days dawn and disappear, winters and springs—springs, rings, sings? No, leave that. Winter with cold and rain—pain? March storms and clouds and pain, till April once again light with it brings.

Beth jumped down from the beech boughs, ran round to the old wooden pump, clambered up by it on to the back-kitchen roof, and made for the acting-room window. It was open, and she screwed herself in round the bar and fastened the door. It was quite dark under the sloping roof, but she found the end of a tallow candle, smuggled up there for the purpose, lighted it, and stuck it on to the top of the rough deal box which formed her writing-table. She had a pencil, sundry old envelopes carefully cut open so as to save as much of the clean space inside as possible, margins of newspapers, precious but rare half-sheets, and any other scrap of paper on which she could write, all carefully concealed in a hole in the roof, from which she tore the whole treasure now in her haste.

"Winter, summer, Sammy," she kept saying to herself. "Autumn, autumn-tinted woods—my king—*Ministering Children*—ministering—king. Moon, noon. Story, glory. Ever, never, endeavour. Oh, I can do it! I can! I can! Slips round the steady year—"

It took her some days to do it to her satisfaction, but they were days of delight, for the whole time she felt exactly as she had done when first she found Sammy. She had the same warm glow in her chest, the same sort of yearning, half anxious, half pleasant, wholly desirable.

It was late in the evening when she finished, and she had to put her work away in a hurry, because her mother sent Harriet to tell her she must go to bed; but all night long she lay only half asleep, and all the time conscious of joy to come in the morning.

She was up early, but had too much self-restraint to go to the acting-room till lessons were over. She was afraid of being disturbed and so having her pleasure spoilt. As soon as she could safely lock herself up, however, she took her treasure out. It was written on the precious half-sheets in queer little crabbed characters, very distinctly:—

Slips round the steady year,
Days dawn and disappear,
 Winters and springs;
March storms and clouds and rain,
Till April once again
 Light with it brings.

Then comes the summer song,
Birds in the woods prolong
 Day into night.
Hot after tepid showers
Beats down this sun of ours,
Upward the radiant flowers
 Look their delight.

O summer scents at noon!
O summer nights and moon!
 Season of story.
Labour and love for ever
Strengthen each hard endeavour,
Now climb we up or never,
 Upward to glory!

Winter and summer past,
Autumn has come at last,
 Hope in its keeping.
Beauty of tinted wood,
Beauty of tranquil mood,
Harvest of earned good
 Ripe for the reaping.

Thus on a torrid day
Slipped my fond thoughts away,
 Book from thy pages.
Seasons of which I sing,
Are they not like, my king,
Thine own life's minist'ring
 In all its stages?

First in the spring, I ween,
Were all thy powers foreseen—
 Storms sowed renown.
Then came thy summer climb,
Then came thy golden-prime,
Then came thy harvest-time,

Bringing thy crown.

When Beth had read these lines, she doubled the half sheets on which they were written, and put them in her pocket deliberately. She was sitting on the acting-room floor at the moment, near the window.

"Now," she exclaimed, folding her delicate nervous hands on her lap, and looking up at the strip of sky above her, "now I shall be forgiven!"

It was dark at this time when the boys left school in the evening, and Beth stood at the back-gate waiting to waylay Sammy. He came trotting along by himself, and saw her as he approached, but did not attempt to escape. On the contrary, he stopped, but he had nothing to say; the relief of finding her friendly again was too great for words. Had she looked out, she might have seen him any day since the event, bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked as usual, prowling about, anxious to obtain a reassuring smile from her on his way to and from school. It was not likely that he would lose the credit of being Beth Caldwell's sweetheart if he could help it, just because she beat him. Already he had suffered somewhat in prestige because he had not been seen with her so often lately; and he had been quite as miserable in his own way, under the impression that she meant to cast him off, as she had in hers.

"Come in, Sammy," she cried, catching hold of his hand. "Come in, I've something to show you; but it's too cold to sit in the wood-house, and we can't have a light there either. Come up by the pump to the acting-room. I've fastened the door inside, and nobody can get in. Come! I'll show you the way."

Sammy followed her obediently and in silence, although somewhat suspiciously as usual; but she piloted him safely, and, once in the acting-room, with the candle lighted, he owned that it was jolly.

"Sammy, I *have* been sorry," Beth began. "I've been quite miserable about—you know what. It was horrid of me."

"I told you scratch-cats were horrid," said Sammy solemnly.

"But I've done something to atone," Beth proceeded. "Something came to me all about you. You shall have it, Sammy, to keep. Just listen, and I'll read it."

Sammy listened with his mouth and eyes open, but when she had done he shook his head. "You didn't make that up yourself," he said decidedly.

"O Sammy! yes, I did," Beth protested, taken aback and much pained.

"No, I don't believe you," said Sammy. "You got it out of a book. You're always trying to stuff me up."

"I'm not stuffing you, Sammy," said Beth, suddenly flaming. "I made it myself, every word of it. I tell you it came to me. It's my own. *You've got to believe it.*"

Sammy looked about him. There was no escape by the door, because that led into the house, and Beth was between him and the window, with her brown hair dishevelled, and her big eyes burning.

"Well," he said, a politic desire to conciliate struggling with an imperative objection to be stuffed, "of course you made it yourself if you say so. But it's all rot anyway."

The words slipped out unawares, and the moment he uttered them he ducked his head: but nothing happened. Then he looked up at Beth, and found her gazing hard at him, and as she did so the colour gradually left her cheeks and the light went out of her eyes. Slowly she gathered up her papers and put them into the hole in the roof. Then she sat on one of the steps which led down into the room, but she said nothing.

Sammy sat still in a tremor until the silence became too oppressive to be borne; then he fidgeted, then he got up, and looked longingly towards the window.

"I shall be late," he ventured.

Beth made no sign.

"When shall I see you again?" he recommenced, deprecatingly. "Will you be at the back-gate to-morrow?"

"No," she said shortly. "It's too cold to wait for you."

"Then how shall I see you?" he asked, with a blank expression.

Beth reflected. "Oh, just whistle as you pass," she said at last, in an offhand way, "and I'll come out if I feel inclined."

The next evening Mrs. Caldwell was taking her accustomed nap after dinner in her arm-chair by the fire in the dining-room, and Beth was sitting at the table dreaming, when she was suddenly startled by a long, loud, shrill whistle. Another and another of the most piercing quality followed in quick succession. Swiftly but cautiously she jumped up, and slipped into the drawing-room, which was all in darkness. There were outside shutters to the lower windows, but the drawing-room ones were not closed, so she looked out, and there was Sammy, standing with his innocent fat face as close to the dining-room shutters as he could hold it, with his fingers in his mouth, uttering shrill whistles loud and long and hard and fast enough to rouse the whole neighbourhood. Beth, impatient of such stupidity, returned to the dining-room and sat down again, leaving Sammy to his fate.

Presently Mrs. Caldwell started wide awake.

"What *is* that noise, Beth?" she exclaimed.

"It seems to be somebody whistling outside," Beth answered in deep disgust. Then her exasperation got the better of her self-control, and she jumped up, and ran out to the kitchen.

"Harriet," she said between her clenched teeth, "go out and send that silly fool away."

Harriet hastened to obey; but at the opening of the front door, Sammy bolted.

The next evening he began again, however, as emphatically as before; but Beth could not stand such imbecility a second time, so she ran out of the back-gate, and seized Sammy.

"What are you doing there?" she cried, shaking him.

"Why, you told me to whistle," Sammy remonstrated, much aggrieved.

"Did I tell you to whistle like a railway engine?" Beth demanded scornfully. "You've no sense at all, Sammy. Go away!"

"Oh, do let's come in, Beth," Sammy pleaded. "I've something to tell you."

"What is it?" said Beth ungraciously.

"I'll tell you if you'll let me come in."

"Well, come then," Beth answered impatiently, and led the way up over the roof to the acting-room. "What is it?" she again demanded, when she had lighted a scrap of candle and seated herself on the steps. "I don't believe it's anything."

"Yes, it is, so there!" said Sammy triumphantly. "But I'll lay you won't guess what it is. Mrs. Barnes has got a baby."

Mrs. Barnes was the wife of the head-master of the Mansion-House School, and all the little boys, feeling that there was more in the event than had been explained to them, were vaguely disgusted.

"I don't call that anything," Beth answered contemptuously. "Lots of people have babies."

"Well," said Sammy, "I wouldn't have thought it of him."

"Thought what of whom?" Beth snapped in a tone which silenced Sammy. He ventured to laugh, however.

"Don't laugh in that gigantic way, Sammy," she exclaimed, still more irritated. "When you throw back your head and open your mouth so wide, I can see you have no wisdom-teeth."

"You're always nasty now, Beth," Sammy complained.

Which was true. Love waning becomes critical. Beth's own feeling for Sammy had been a strong mental stimulant at first, and, in her enjoyment of it, she had overlooked all his shortcomings. There was nothing in him, however, to keep that feeling alive, and it had gradually died of inanition. His slowness and want of imagination first puzzled and then provoked her; and, little-boy-like, he had not even been able to respond to such tenderness

as she showed him—not that she had ever showed him much tenderness, for they were just like boys together. She had kissed him, however, once or twice, after a quarrel, to make it up; but she did not like kissing him: little boys are rank. His pretty colouring was all that he had had to attract her, and that, alas! had lost its charm by this time. For a little longer she looked out for him and troubled about him, then let him go gradually—so gradually, that she never knew when exactly he lapsed from her life altogether.

CHAPTER XX

FOR two years after Beth was outlawed by her mother, Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was her one link with the civilised world. The intimacy had lapsed a little while Sammy was the prevailing human interest in Beth's life, but gradually as he ceased to be satisfactory, she returned to the old lady, and hovered about her, seeking the sustenance for which her poor little heart ached on always, and for want of which her busy brain ran riot; and the old lady, who had not complained of Beth's desertion, welcomed her back in a way which showed that she had felt it.

For Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was lonely in the days of her poverty and obscurity. Since the loss of her money, there had been a great change in the attitude of most of her friends towards her, and such attentions as she received were of a very different kind from those to which she had been accustomed. Mrs. Caldwell had been the most generous to her, for at the time that she had offered Aunt Victoria a home in her house, she had not known that the old lady would be able to pay her way at all. Fortunately Aunt Victoria had enough left for that, but still her position in Mrs. Caldwell's house was not what it would have been had she not lost most of her means. Mrs. Caldwell was not aware of the fact, but her manner had insensibly adjusted itself to Aunt Victoria's altered circumstances, her care and consideration for her being as much reduced in amount as her income; and Aunt Victoria felt the difference, but said nothing. Slowly and painfully she learnt to realise that it was for what she had had to bestow, and not for what she was, that people used to care; they had served her as they served their God, in the hope of reaping a rich reward. Like many other people with certain fine qualities of their own, Aunt Victoria knew that there was wickedness in the outside world, but never suspected that her own immediate circle, the nice people with whom she talked pleasantly every day, could be tainted; and the awakening to find that her friends cared less disinterestedly for her than she did for them was a cruel disillusion. Her first inclination was to fly far from them all, and spend the rest of her days amongst strangers who could not disappoint her because she would have nothing to expect of them, and who might perhaps come to care for her

really. Long hours she sat and suffered, shut up in her room, considering the matter, yearning to go, but restrained by the fear that, as an old woman, she would be unwelcome everywhere. In Aunt Victoria's day old people were only too apt to be selfish, tyrannical, narrow, and ignorant, a terror to their friends; and they were nearly always ill, the old men from lives of self-indulgence, and the old women from unwholesome restraint of every kind. Now we are beginning to ask what becomes of the decrepit old women, there are so few to be seen. This is the age of youthful grandmothers, capable of enjoying a week of their lives more than their own grandmothers were able to enjoy the whole of their declining years; their vitality is so much greater, their appearance so much better preserved; their knowledge so much more extensive, their interests so much more varied, and their hearts so much larger. Aunt Victoria nowadays would have struck out for herself in a new direction. She would have gone to London, joined a progressive women's club, made acquaintance with work of some kind or another, and never known a dull moment; for she would have been a capable woman had any one of her faculties been cultivated to some useful purpose; but as it was, she had nothing to fall back upon. She was just like a domestic animal, like a dog that has become a member of the family, and is tolerated from habit even after it grows old, and because remarks would be made if it were put out of the way before its time; and she had been content with the position so long as much was made of her. Now, however, all too late, a great yearning had seized upon her for an object in life, for some pursuit, some interest that would remain to her when everything else was lost; and she prayed to God earnestly that He would show her where to go and what to do, or give her something—something which at last resolved itself into something to live for.

Then one day there came a little resolute tap at the door, and Beth walked in without waiting to be asked, and seeing in a moment with that further faculty of hers into the old lady's heart that it was sad, she went to her impulsively, and laid her unkempt brown head against her arm in an awkward caress, which touched the old lady to tears. Beth was lonely too, thought Aunt Victoria, a strange, lonely little being, neglected, ill-used, and misunderstood, and the question flashed through the old lady's mind, if she left the child, what would become of her? The tangled brown head, warm against her arm, nestled nearer, and Aunt Victoria patted it protectingly.

"Do you want anything, Beth?" she asked.

"No, Aunt Victoria. I just wanted to see you. I was lying on the see-saw board, looking up through the leaves, and I suddenly got a fancy that you were here all by yourself, and that you didn't like being all by yourself. *I* feel like that sometimes. So I came to see you."

"Thank you, Beth," said Aunt Victoria, with her hand still on Beth's head as if she were blessing her; and when she had spoken she looked up through the window, and silently thanked the Lord. This was the sign. He had committed Beth to her care and affection, and she was not to think of herself, but of the child, whose need was certainly the greater of the two.

"Have you nothing to do, Beth?" she said after a pause.

"No, Aunt Victoria," Beth answered drearily—"at least there are plenty of things I could do, but everything I think of makes me shudder. I feel so sometimes. Do you? There isn't a single thing I want to do to-day. I've tried one thing after the other, but I can't think about what I'm doing. Sometimes I like to sit still and do nothing; but to-day I don't even like that. I think I should like to be asked to do something. If I could do something for you now—something to help you——"

"Well, you can, Beth," Aunt Victoria answered, after sitting rigidly upright for a moment, blinking rapidly. "Help me to unpick an old gown. I am going to make another like it, and want it unpicked for a pattern."

"Can you make a gown?" Beth asked in surprise.

Aunt Victoria smiled. Then she took down an old black gown that was hanging behind the door, and handed it to Beth with a pair of sharp scissors.

"I'll undo the body part," Beth said, "and that will save your eyes. I don't think this gown owes you much."

"I do not understand that expression, Beth," said Aunt Victoria.

"Don't you," said Beth, working away with the scissors cheerfully. "Harriet always says that, when she's got all the good there is to be got out of anything—the dusters, you know, or the dishcloth. I once did a piece of

unpicking like this for mamma, and she didn't explain properly, or something—at all events, I took out a great deal too much, so she——"

"Don't call your mamma 'she.' 'She' is the cat."

"Mamma, then. Mamma beat me."

"Don't say she beat you."

"I said mamma."

"Well, don't talk about your mamma beating you. That is not a nice thing to talk about."

"It's not a nice thing to do either," said Beth judicially. "And I never used to talk about it; didn't like to, you know. But now she—mamma—doesn't beat me any more—at least only sometimes when she forgets."

"Ah, then, you have been a better girl."

"No, not better—bigger. You see if I struck her back again she wouldn't like it."

"Beth! Beth! strike your mother!"

"That was the danger," said Beth, in her slow, distinct, imperturbable way. "One day she made me so angry I very nearly struck her, and I told her so. That made her look queer, I can tell you. And she's never struck me since—except in a half-hearted sort of way, or when she forgot, and that didn't count, of course. But I think I know now how it was she used to beat me. I did just the same thing myself one day. I beat Sammy——"

"Who is Sammy?" said Aunt Victoria, looking over her spectacles.

"Sammy Lee, you know."

Aunt Victoria recollected, and felt she should improve the occasion, but was at a loss for a moment what to say. She was anxious above everything that Beth should talk to her freely, for how could she help the child if she did not know all she had in her mind? It is upon the things they are never allowed to mention that children brood unwholesomely.

"I thought that you were not allowed to know Sammy Lee," she finally observed.

"No more I was," Beth answered casually.

"Yet you knew him all the same?" Aunt Victoria ventured reproachfully.

"Aunt Victoria," said Beth, "did the Lord die for Sammy?"

"Ye—yes," said Aunt Victoria, hesitating, not because she doubted the fact, but because she did not know what use Beth would make of it.

"Then why can't *I* know him?" Beth asked.

"Oh, be—because Sammy does not live as if he were grateful to the Lord."

"If he did, would he be a gentleman?" Beth asked.

"Yes," Aunt Victoria answered decidedly.

Beth stopped snipping, and looked at her as if she were looking right through her, and out into the world beyond. Then she pursed up her mouth and shook her head.

"That won't hold water," she said. "If a man must live like the Lord to be a gentleman, what is Uncle James? And if living like the Lord makes a man a gentleman, why don't we call on old Job Fisher?"

Aunt Victoria began to fear that the task she had undertaken would prove too much for her. "It is hard, very hard," she muttered.

"Well, never mind," said Beth, resuming her work. "When I grow up I mean to write about things like that. But what were we talking about? Oh, beating Sammy. I did feel bad after I beat him, and I vowed I'd never do it again however tiresome he was, and I never did. It makes it easier if you vow. It's just as if your hands were tied then. I'd like to tell mamma to try it, only she'd be sure to get waxy. You tell her, Aunt Victoria."

Aunt Victoria made some reply which was lost in the noise of vehicles passing in the street, followed by the tramp of many feet and a great chattering. An excursion train had just arrived, and the people were pouring into the place. Beth ran to the window and watched them.

"More confounded trippers," she ejaculated. "They spoil the summer, swarming everywhere."

"Beth, I wish, to please me, you would make another vow. Don't say 'confounded trippers.'"

"All right, Aunt Victoria. Jim says it. But I know all the bad words in the language were made for the men. I suppose because they have all the bad thoughts, and do all the bad things. I shall say 'objectionable excursionists' in future." She went to the door. "I'm just going to get something," she said. "You won't go away now, will you? I shall be a minute or two, but I want you to be here when I come back. I shall be wild if you're not."

She banged the door after her and ran downstairs.

Aunt Victoria looked round the room; it no longer seemed the same place to her. Beth's cheerful chatter had already driven away the evil spirit of dejection, and taken the old lady out of herself. Untidy child! She had left her work on the floor, her scissors on the bed, disarranged the window-curtain, and upset a chair. If she would not do any more unpicking when she returned, she must be made to put things straight. There was one little easy-chair in the room. Aunt Victoria sat down in it, a great piece of self-indulgence for her at that time of day, folded her hands, and closed her weary old eyes just to give them a rest, while a nice little look of content came into her face, which it was good to see there.

When she opened her eyes again, Beth was setting a tray on a tiny table beside her.

"I think you've been having a nap, Miss Great-Aunt Victoria Bench," she said. "Now, have some tea! and buttered toast!!"

"O Beth!" cried the old lady, beaming. "How could you—at this time of day? Well, to please you. It is quite delicious. So refreshing. What, another piece of toast! Must I take another?"

"You must take it all," said Beth. "I made it for you. I do like doing things for you, Aunt Victoria. It makes me feel nice all over. I'll just unpick a little more. Then I'll tidy up."

"You're a good child to think of that," said Aunt Victoria. "I did not think you would."

"Didn't you?" said Beth. "How funny! But I like things tidy. I often tidy up."

"I—I suppose Harriet says tidy up," the old lady observed gently, not liking to be censorious at this happy moment of relaxation, but still anxious to do her duty. Beth understood her perfectly and smiled.

"I like you to tell me when I say things wrong," she said; "and I like to know how Harriet talks too. You can't write if you don't know how every one talks."

"What are you going to write?" Aunt Victoria asked, taking up another piece of buttered toast.

"Oh, books," Beth answered casually.

"Write something soul-sustaining then, Beth," said Aunt Victoria. "Try to make all you say soul-sustaining. And never use a word you would be ashamed to hear read aloud."

"You mean like those things they read in church?" said Beth. "I don't think I ever could use such words. When Mr. Richardson comes close to them, I get hot all over and hate him. But I promise you, Aunt Victoria, I will never write anything worse than there is in the Bible. There's a man called Ruskin who writes very well, they say, and he learnt how to do it from reading the Bible. His mother taught him when he was a little boy, just as you taught me. I always read the Bible—search the Scriptures—every day. You say it's a sacred book, don't you, Aunt Victoria? Harriet says it's smutty."

"Says *what*?" Aunt Victoria exclaimed, sitting bolt upright in her horror. "What does she mean by such an expression?"

"Oh, she just means stories like Joseph and Potiphar's wife, David and Bathsheba, Susanna and the elders."

"My *dear* child!" Aunt Victoria gasped.

"Well, Aunt Victoria, they're all in the Bible, at least Susanna and the elders isn't. That's in the Apocrypha."

Aunt Victoria sat silent a considerable time. At last she said solemnly: "Beth, I want you to promise me one thing solemnly, and that is that all your life long, whatever may be before you, whatever it may be your lot to learn, you will pray to God to preserve your purity."

"What is purity?" said Beth.

Aunt Victoria hesitated: "It's a condition of the mind which keeps us from ever doing or saying anything we should be ashamed of," she finally decided.

"But what kind of things?" Beth asked.

Unfortunately Aunt Victoria was not equal to the occasion. She blinked her eyes very hard, sipped some tea, and left Beth to find out for herself, according to custom.

"We must only talk about nice things," she said.

"Well, I shouldn't care to talk nastily about people as Lady Benyon does sometimes," Beth rejoined.

"But, my dear child, that is not a nice thing to say about Lady Benyon."

"Isn't it?" said Beth, then added: "Oh dear, how funny things are!" meaning how complicated.

"Where did you get this tea, Beth?" said Aunt Victoria. "It is very good, and I feel so much the better for it."

"I thought you wanted something," said Beth. "Your face went all queer. That means people want something. I got the tea out of the store-cupboard. It has a rotten lock. If you shake it, it comes open."

"But what does your mamma say?"

"Oh, she never notices. Or, if she does, she thinks she left it open herself. Harriet has a little sometimes. She takes it because she says mamma should allow her a quarter of a pound of dry tea a week, so it isn't stealing. And I

took it for you because you pay to live here, so you're entitled to the tea. I don't take it for myself, of course. But I'm afraid I oughtn't to have told you about Harriet. I'm so sorry. It slipped out. It wasn't sneaking. But I trust to your honour, Aunt Victoria. If you sneaked on Harriet, I could never trust you again, now could I?" She got up as she spoke, folded her work, picked up the chair, arranged the window-curtain, moved the tray, and put the table back in its place, at the same time remarking: "I shall take these things downstairs now, and go for a run."

She left Aunt Victoria with much to reflect upon. The glimpse she had accidentally given the old lady of Harriet's turpitude had startled her considerably. Mrs. Caldwell had always congratulated herself on having such a quiet respectable person in the house as Harriet to look after Beth, and now it appeared that the woman was disreputable both in her habits and her conversation, the very last person whom a girl, even of such strongly marked individuality as Beth, should have been allowed to associate with intimately. But what ought Miss Victoria to do? If she spoke to Mrs. Caldwell, Beth would never forgive her, and the important thing was not to lose Beth's confidence; but if she did not speak to Mrs. Caldwell, would she be doing right? Of course, if Mrs. Caldwell had been a different sort of person, her duty would have been clear and easy; but as it was, Aunt Victoria decided to wait.

The next day Beth returned of her own accord to finish the unpicking. She wanted to know what "soul-sustaining" meant; and in ten minutes she had cross-questioned Aunt Victoria into such a state of confusion that the old lady could only sit silently praying to Heaven for guidance. At last she got up, and took a little packet out of one of her trunks. She had to live in her boxes because there was no closet or wardrobe or chest of drawers in the room.

"See, Beth," she said, "here is some tea and sugar. I don't think it nice of you to go to your mother's cupboard without her leave. That's rather a servant's trick, you know, and not honest; so give it up, like a dear child, and let us have tea together, you and I, up here, when we want it. I very much enjoy a good cup of tea, it is so refreshing, and you make it beautifully."

Beth changed colour and countenance while Aunt Victoria was speaking, and she sat for some time afterwards looking fixedly at the empty grate; then she said, "You always tell me things nicely, Aunt Victoria; that's what I like about you. I'll not touch the cupboard again, I vow; and if you catch me at any other 'servant's tricks' just you let me know."

The old lady's heart glowed. The Lord was showing her how to help the child.

But the holidays were coming on; she would have to go away to make room for the boys; and she dreaded to leave Beth at this critical time, lest she should relapse, just as she was beginning to form nice feminine habits. For Beth had taken kindly to the sewing and tea-drinking and long quiet chats; it was a delight to her to have some one to wait on, and help, and talk to. "I'm so fond of you, Aunt Victoria," she said one day; "I even like you to snap at me; and if we lived quite alone together, you and I, I should do everything for you."

"Would you like to come away with me these holidays?" said Aunt Victoria, seized suddenly with a bright idea.

"Oh, wouldn't I!" said Beth. "But then, the expense!"

"I think I can manage it, if your mamma has no objection," said Aunt Victoria, nodding and blinking, and nodding again, as she calculated.

"I should think mamma would be only too glad to get rid of me," said Beth hopefully.

And she was not mistaken.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next few weeks, in their effect upon Beth's character, were among the most important of her life. She did not know until the day before where she was to go with Aunt Victoria. It was the habit of the family to conceal all such arrangements from the children, and indeed from each other as much as possible. Aunt Victoria observed that Caroline was singularly reticent, and Mrs. Caldwell complained that Aunt Victoria made a mystery of everything. It was a hard habit, which robbed Beth of what would have been so much to her, something to look forward to. Since she knew that she was to go somewhere, however, she had lived upon the idea; her imagination had been busy trying to picture the unknown place, and her mind full of plans for the comfort of Aunt Victoria.

It was after breakfast one day, while her mother and Aunt Victoria were still at table, that the announcement was made. "You need not do any lessons this morning, children," Mrs. Caldwell said. "Beth is going to Harrowgate with Aunt Victoria to-morrow, and I must see to her things and get them packed."

Aunt Victoria looked round at Beth with a carefully restrained smile, expecting some demonstration of joy. Beth was standing in the window looking out, and turned with a frown of intentness on her face when her mother mentioned Harrowgate, as if she were trying to recall something.

"Harrowgate!" she said slowly. "*Harrowgate!*"

"Beth, do not frown so," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed irritably. "You'll be all wrinkled before you're twenty."

Beth gazed at her solemnly without seeing her, then fixed her eyes upon the ground as if she were perusing it, and began to walk slowly up and down with her head bent, her hands clasped behind her, her curly brown hair falling forward over her cheeks, and her lips moving.

"What is it you're muttering, child?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"I'm trying to think," Beth rejoined.

""Twas in the prime of summer time,
An evening calm and cool....

""Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
And one with a heavy stone....

""And yet I feared him all the more,
For lying there so still....

""I took the dreary body up.'...

"Ah, I know—I have it!" she exclaimed joyfully, and with a look of relief;
"Harrowgate—Knaresboro'—the cave there——

""Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist;
And Eugene Aram walked between,
With gyves upon his wrist.""

"My dear child," said Aunt Victoria sternly, "what is it you are trying to say? and how often are you to be told not to work yourself up into such a state of excitement about nothing?"

"Don't you know about Eugene Aram, Aunt Victoria?" Beth rejoined with concern, as if not to know about Eugene Aram were indeed to have missed one of the great interests of life. Then she sat down at the table with her elbows resting on it, and her delicate oval face framed in her slender hands, and gave Aunt Victoria a graphic sketch of the story from Bulwer Lytton.

"Dear me, Caroline," said Aunt Victoria, greatly horrified, "is it possible that you allow your children to read such books?"

"I read such books to my children myself when I see fit," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "I may be allowed to judge what is good for them, I suppose?"

"Good for them!" Aunt Victoria ejaculated. "Accounts of murder, theft, and executions!"

"But why not, Aunt Victoria?" Beth put in. "Why not read about Eugene Aram as well as about Barabbas?"

Aunt Victoria looked so shocked, however, at the mention of Barabbas in this connection, that Beth broke off and hastened to add for the relief of the old lady's feelings—"Only of course Barabbas was a sacred sort of thief, and that is different."

On the journey next day a casual remark let fall by a stranger made a curious impression upon Beth. They were travelling second-class, and Aunt Victoria, talking to another lady in the carriage, happened to mention that Beth was twelve years old. A gentleman, the only other passenger, who was sitting opposite to Beth, looked up at her over his newspaper when her age was mentioned, and remarked—"Are you only twelve? I should have thought you were older. Rather nice-looking too, only freckled."

Beth felt her face flush hotly, and then she laughed. "Nice-looking! Nice-looking!" She repeated the words to herself again and again, and every time they recurred to her, she lost countenance in spite of herself, and laughed and flushed, being strangely surprised and pleased.

It was that remark that first brought home to Beth the fact that she had a personal appearance at all. Hitherto she had thought very little of herself. The world without had been, and always would be, much more to her than the world within. She was not to be one of those narrow, self-centred, morbid beings whose days are spent in introspection, and whose powers are wasted in futile efforts to set their own little peculiarities forth in such a way as to make them seem of consequence. She never at any time studied her own nature, except as a part of human nature, and in the hope of finding in herself some clue which would help her to a sympathetic understanding of other people.

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench, in these days of her poverty, lodged with an old servant of the family, who gave her for ten shillings a week a bedroom at the top of the house, and a little sunny sitting-room on the ground-floor at the back, looking out into an old-fashioned garden, full of flowers such as

knights in olden times culled for their ladies. The little sitting-room was furnished with Chippendale chairs, and a little Chippendale sideboard with drawers, and a bookcase with glass doors above and a cupboard below, in which Aunt Victoria used to keep her stores of tea, coffee, sugar, and currants in mustard-tins. Beth heard with surprise that the hearthrug was one which Aunt Victoria had worked herself as a present for Prentice when she married. Prentice was now Mrs. Pearce, but Aunt Victoria always called her Prentice. The hearthrug was like a Turkey carpet, only softer, deeper, and richer. Aunt Victoria had sat on Chippendale chairs in her youth, and she was happy amongst them. When she sat down on one she drew herself up, disdaining the stiff back and smiled and felt young again, while her memory slipped away to pleasant days gone by; and Mrs. Pearce would come and talk to her, standing respectfully, and reminding her of little things which Aunt Victoria had forgotten, or alluding with mysterious nods and shakings of the head to other things which Beth was not to hear about. When this happened Beth always withdrew. She was becoming shy of intruding now, and delicate about overhearing anything that was not intended for her; and when she had gone on these occasions, the two old ladies would nod and smile to each other, Prentice in respectful approval, and Aunt Victoria in kindly acknowledgment. Prentice wore a cap and front like Aunt Victoria, but of a subdued brown colour, as became her humble station.

Beth took charge of the housekeeping as soon as they arrived, made tea, arranged the groceries in the cupboard, and put the key in her pocket; and Aunt Victoria, who was sitting upright on a high Chippendale chair, knitting, and enjoying the dignity of the old attitude after her journey, looked on over her spectacles in pleased approval. Before they went to bed, they read the evening psalms and lessons together in the sitting-room, and Aunt Victoria read prayers. When they went upstairs they said their private prayers, kneeling beside the bed, and Aunt Victoria made Beth wash herself in hot water, and brush her hair for half-an-hour. Aunt Victoria attributed her own slender, youthful figure and the delicate texture of her skin to this discipline. She said she had preserved her figure by never relaxing into languid attitudes, and her complexion by washing her face in hot water with fine white soap every night, and in cold water without soap every morning. She did not take her fastidious appetite into consideration, nor her simple,

regular life, nor the fact that she never touched alcohol in any shape or form, nor wore a tight or heavy garment, nor lost her self-control for more than a moment whatever happened, but Beth discovered for herself, as she grew older, that these and that elevated attitude of mind which is religion, whatever the form preferred to express it, are essential parts of the discipline necessary for the preservation of beauty.

In the morning Beth made breakfast, and when it was over, if crusts had accumulated in the cupboard, she steeped them in hot milk in a pie-dish, beat them up with an egg, a little butter, sugar, currants, and candied peel, and some nutmeg grated, for a bread-pudding, which Prentice took out to bake for dinner, remarking regularly that little miss promised to be helpful, to which Aunt Victoria as regularly responded Yes, she hoped Miss Beth would become a capable woman some day.

After breakfast they read the psalms and lessons together, verse by verse, and had some "good talk," as Beth called it. Then Aunt Victoria got out an old French grammar and phrase-book, a copy of "Télémaque," and a pocket-dictionary, treasured possessions which she always carried about with her, and had a kind of pride in. French had been her speciality, but these were the only French books she had, and she certainly never spoke the language. She would have shrunk modestly from any attempt to do so, thinking such a display almost as objectionable as singing in a loud professional way instead of quietly, like a well-bred amateur, and showing a lack of that dignified reserve and general self-effacement which she considered essential in a gentlewoman.

But she was anxious that Beth should be educated, and therefore the books were produced every morning. Mrs. Caldwell had tried in vain to teach Beth anything by rule, such as grammar. Beth's memory was always tricky. Anything she cared about she recollected accurately; but grammar, which had been presented to her not as a means to an end but as an end in itself, failed to interest her, and if she remembered a rule she forgot to apply it, until Aunt Victoria set her down to the old French books, when, simply because the old lady looked pleased if she knew her lesson and disturbed if she did not, she began at the beginning of her own accord, and worked with a will—toilsomely at first, but by degrees with pleasure as she proceeded, and felt for the first time the joy of mastering a strange tongue.

"You learnt out of this book when you were a little girl, Aunt Victoria, didn't you?" she said, looking up on the day of the first lesson. She was sitting on a high-backed chair at one end of the table, trying to hold herself as upright as Aunt Victoria, who sat at the other and opposite end to her, pondering over her knitting. "I suppose you hated it."

"No, I did not, Beth," Aunt Victoria answered severely. "I esteemed it a privilege to be well educated. Our mother could not afford to have us all instructed in the same accomplishments, and so she allowed us to choose French, or music, or drawing and painting. *I* chose French."

"Then how was it grandmamma learned drawing and painting, and playing, and everything?" Beth asked. "Mamma knows tunes she composed."

"Your dear grandmamma was an exceedingly clever girl," Aunt Victoria answered stiffly, as if Beth had taken a liberty when she asked the question; "and she was the youngest, and desired to learn all we knew, so we each did our best to impart our special knowledge to her. *I* taught her French."

"How strange," said Beth; "and out of this very book? And she is dead. And now you are teaching *me*."

The feeling in the child's voice, and the humble emphasis on the pronoun *me*, touched the old lady; something familiar too in the tone caused her to look up quickly and kindly over her spectacles, and it seemed to her for a moment as if the little, long-lost sister sat opposite to her—great grey eyes, delicate skin, bright brown hair, expression of vivid interest, and all.

"Strange! strange!" she muttered to herself several times.

"I am supposed to be like grandmamma, am I not?" said Beth, as if she read her thoughts.

"You *are* like her," Aunt Victoria rejoined.

"But you can be a plain likeness of a good-looking person, I suppose?" Beth said tentatively.

"Certainly you can," Miss Victoria answered with decision; and the spark of pleasure in her own personal appearance, which had recently been kindled in Beth, instantly flickered and went out.

Their little sitting-room had a bow-window down to the ground, the front part of which formed two doors with glass in the upper part and wood below, leading out into the garden. On fine days they always stood wide open, and the warm summer air scented with roses streamed in. Both Beth and Aunt Victoria loved to look out into the garden. From where Beth sat to do her French at the end of the table, she could see the soft green turf, a bright flower-border, and an old brick wall, mellowed in tone by age, behind it; and a little to the left, a high, thick screen of tall shrubs of many varieties, set so close that all the different shades of green melted into each other. The irregular roof of a large house, standing on lower ground than the garden, with quaint gables and old chimneys, rose above the belt of shrubs; the tiles on it lay in layers that made Beth think of a wasp's nest, only that they were dark-red instead of grey; but she loved the colour as it appeared all amongst the green trees and up against the blue sky. She often wondered what was going on under that roof, and used to invent stories about it. She did not write anything in these days, however, but stored up impressions which were afterwards of inestimable value to her. The smooth grey boles of the beeches, the green down on the larches, the dark, blue-green crown which the Scotch fir held up, as if to accentuate the light blue of the sky, and the wonderful ruddy-gold tones that shone on its trunk as the day declined; these things she felt and absorbed rather than saw and noted, but because she felt them they fired her soul, and resolved themselves into poetic expression eventually.

They dined early, and on the hot afternoons they sat and worked together after dinner, Beth sewing and Aunt Victoria knitting, until it was cool enough to go out. Aunt Victoria was teaching Beth how to make some new underclothing for herself, to Beth's great delight. All of her old things that were not rags were patches, and the shame of having them so was a continual source of discomfort to her; but Aunt Victoria, when she discovered the state of Beth's wardrobe, bought some calico out of her own scanty means, and set her to work. During these long afternoons, they had many a conversation that Beth recollected with pleasure and profit. She often amused and interested the old lady; and sometimes she drew from her a serious reprimand or a solemn lecture, for both of which she was much the better. Aunt Victoria was severe, but she was sympathetic, and she was just; she seldom praised, but she showed that she was satisfied, and that was

enough for Beth; and she never scolded or punished, only spoke seriously when she was displeased, and then Beth was overwhelmed.

One very hot day when they were working together, Aunt Victoria sitting on a high-backed chair with her back to the open doors because the light was too much for her eyes, and Beth sitting beside her on a lower seat, but so that she could look up at her, and also out into the garden, it occurred to her that once on a time, long ago, Aunt Victoria must have been young, and she tried artfully to find out first, if Aunt Victoria remembered the fact, and secondly, what little girls were like at that remote period.

"Was your mamma like mine, Aunt Victoria?" she asked.

Aunt Victoria had just made a mistake in her knitting, and answered shortly: "No, child."

"When you were all children," Beth pursued, "did you play together?"

"Not much," Aunt Victoria answered grimly.

"Did you quarrel?"

"My dear child! what could put such a notion into your head?"

"What did you do then?" said Beth. "You couldn't have been all the time learning to sit upright on a high-backed chair; and I am trying so hard to think what your home was like. I wish you would tell me."

"It was not at all like yours," Aunt Victoria replied with emphasis. "We were most carefully brought up children. Our mother was an admirable person. She lived by rule. If one of her children was born at night, it was kept in the house until the morning, and then sent out to nurse until it was two years old. If it was born by day, it was sent away at once."

"And didn't great-grandmamma ever go to see it?"

"Yes, of course; twice a year."

"I think," said Beth, reflecting, "I should like to keep my babies at home. I should want to put their little soft faces against mine, and kiss them, you know."

"Your great-grandmamma did her duty," said Aunt Victoria with grim approval. "She never let any of us loll as you are doing now, Beth. She made us all sit up, as *I* always do, and as I am always telling you to do; and the consequence was our backs grew strong and never ached."

"And were you happy?" Beth said solemnly.

Aunt Victoria gazed at her vaguely. She had never asked herself the question. Then Beth sat with her work on her lap for a little, looking up at the summer sky. It was an exquisite deep blue just then, with filmy white clouds drawn up over it like gauze to veil its brightness. The red roofs and gables and chimneys of the old house below, the shrubs, the dark Scotch fir, the copper-beech, the limes and the chestnut stood out clearly silhouetted against it; and Beth felt the forms and tints and tones of them all, although she was thinking of something else.

"Mamma's back is always aching," she observed at last, returning to her work.

"Yes, that is because she was not so well brought up as we were," Aunt Victoria rejoined.

"*She* says it is because she had such a lot of children," said Beth. "Did you ever have any children, Aunt Victoria?"

Miss Victoria Bench let her knitting fall on her lap—"My—dear—child!" she gasped, holding up both her hands in horror.

"Oh, I forgot," said Beth. "Only married ladies have children. Servants have them, though, sometimes before they are married, Harriet says, and then they call them bad girls. Grandmamma wasn't as wise as great-grandmamma, I suppose, but perhaps great-grandmamma had a good husband. Grandpapa was an awful old rip, you know."

Aunt Victoria stared at her aghast.

"He used to drink," Beth proceeded, lowering her voice, and glancing round mysteriously as the old servants at Fairholm did when they discussed these things; "and grandmamma couldn't bear his ways or his language, and used to shut herself up in her own room more and more, and they never agreed,

and at last she went quite mad, so the saying came true. Did you never hear the saying? Why, you know her father's crest was a raven, and grandpapa's crest was a bee, and for generations the families had lived near each other and never been friends; and it was said, if the blood of the bees and the ravens were ever put in the same bowl it wouldn't mingle. Do you say 'if it were,' or 'if it was,' Aunt Victoria? Mamma says 'if it were.'"

"*We* were taught to say 'if it was,'" Aunt Victoria answered stiffly; "but your mamma may know better."

Beth thought about this for a minute, then set it aside for further inquiry, and dispassionately resumed. "That was a mean trick of Uncle James's, but it was rather clever too; I should never have thought of it. I mean with the fly, you know. When grandpapa died, Uncle James got his will and altered it, so that mamma mightn't have any money; and he put a fly in grandpapa's mouth, and swore that the will was signed by his hand while there was life in him."

"My dear child," said Aunt Victoria sharply, "who told you such a preposterous story?"

"Oh, I heard it about the place," Beth answered casually; "everybody knows it." She took another needleful of thread, and sewed on steadily for a little, and Aunt Victoria kept glancing at her meanwhile, with a very puzzled expression.

"But what I want to know is *why* did grandmamma stay with grandpapa if he were, or was, such a very bad man?" Beth said suddenly.

"Because it was her duty," said Aunt Victoria.

"And what was his duty?"

"I think, Beth," said the old lady, "you have done sewing enough for this afternoon. Run out into the garden."

Beth knew that this was only an excuse not to answer her, but she folded her work up obediently, observing as she did so, however, with decision, "If I ever have a bad husband, I shall *not* stay with him, for I can't see what good comes of it."

"Your grandmamma had her children to think of," said Aunt Victoria.

"But what good did she do them?" Beth wanted to know. "She devoted herself to Uncle James, but she didn't make much of a man of him! And she had no influence whatever with mamma. Mamma was her father's favourite, and he taught her to despise grandmamma because she couldn't hunt, and shrieked if she saw things killed. I think that's silly myself, but it's better than being hard. Of course mamma is worth a dozen of Uncle James, but —" Beth shrugged her shoulders, then added temperately, "You know mamma has her faults, Aunt Victoria, it's no use denying it. So what good did grandmamma do by staying? She just went mad and died! If she'd gone away, and lived as you do, she might have been alive and well now."

"Ah, my dear child," said the old lady sorrowfully, "that never could have been; for I have observed that no woman who marries and becomes a mother can ever again live happily like a single woman. She has entered upon a different phase of being, and there is no return for her. There is a weight of meaning in that expression: 'the ties of home.' It is 'the ties of home' that restrain a loving woman, however much she suffers; there are the little daily duties that no one but herself can see to; and there is always some one who would be worse off if she went. There is habit too; and there are those small possessions, each one with an association of its own perhaps, that makes it almost a sacred thing; but above all, there is hope—the hope that matters may mend; and fear—the fear that once she deserts her post things will go from bad to worse, and she be to blame. In your grandmamma's day such a thing would never have been thought of by a good woman; and even now, when there are women who actually go away and work for themselves, if their homes are unhappy—" Aunt Victoria pursed up her lips, and shook her head. "It may be respectable, of course," she concluded magnanimously; "but I cannot believe it is either right or wise, and certainly it is not loyal."

"Loyal!" Beth echoed; "that was my father's word to me: 'Be loyal.' We've got to be loyal to others; but he also said that we must be loyal to ourselves."

Aunt Victoria had folded up her knitting, and now rose stiffly, and went out into the garden with an old parasol, and sat meditating in the sun on the

trunk of a tree that had been cut down. She often sat so under her parasol, and Beth used to watch her, and wonder what it felt like to be able to look such a long, long way back, and have so many things to remember.

CHAPTER XXII

AUNT VICTORIA was surprised herself to find how kindly Beth took to a regular life, how exact she was in the performance of her little housekeeping duties, and how punctual in everything; she had never suspected that Beth's whole leaning was towards law and order, nor observed that even in her most lawless ways there was a certain system; that she fished, and poached, and prowled, fought Bernadine, and helped Harriet, as regularly as she dined, and went to bed. Habits, good or bad, may be formed in an incredibly short time if they are congenial; the saints by nature will pray, and the sinners sin, as soon as the example is set them; and Beth, accordingly, fell into Aunt Victoria's dainty fastidious ways, which were the ways of a gentlewoman, at once and without effort; and ever afterwards was only happy in her domestic life when she could live by the same rule in an atmosphere of equal refinement—an honest atmosphere where everything was done thoroughly, and every word spoken was perfectly sincere. Of course she relapsed many times—it was her nature to experiment, to wander before she settled, to see for herself; but it was by intimacy with lower natures that she learned fully to appreciate the higher; by the effect of bad books upon her that she learned the value of good ones; by the lowering of her whole tone which came of countenancing laxity in others, and by the discomfort and degradation which follow on disorder, that she was eventually confirmed in her principles. The taste for the higher life, once implanted, is not to be eradicated; and those who have been uplifted by the glory of it once will strive to attain to it again, inevitably.

It was through the influence of this time that the most charming traits in Beth's character were finally developed—traits which, but for the tender discipline of the dear old aunt, might have remained latent for ever.

It would be misleading, however, to let it be supposed that Beth's conduct was altogether satisfactory during this visit. On the contrary, she gave Miss Victoria many an anxious moment; for although she did all that the old lady required of her, she did many other things besides, things required of her by her own temperament only. She had to climb the great tree at the end of the

lawn, for instance, in order to peep into the nest near the top, and also to see into the demesne beyond the belt of shrubs, where the red-roofed house stood, peopled now by friends of her fancy. This would not have been so bad if she had come down safely; but a branch broke, and she fell and hurt herself, which alarmed Miss Victoria very much. Then Miss Victoria used to send her on errands to develop her intelligence; but Beth invariably lost herself at first; if she only had to turn the corner, she could not find her way back. Aunt Victoria tried to teach her to note little landmarks in her own mind as she went along, such as the red pillar-box at the corner of the street where she was to turn, and the green shutters on the house where she was to cross; and Beth noticed these and many more things carefully as she went, and could describe their position accurately afterwards; but, by the time she turned, the vision and the dream would be upon her as a rule, and she would walk in a world of fancy, utterly oblivious of red pillar-boxes, green shutters, or anything else on earth, until she was brought up wondering by a lamp-post, tree, or some unoffending person with whom she had collided in her abstraction; then she would have to ask her way; but she was slow to find it by direction; and all the time she was wandering about, Aunt Victoria would be worrying herself with fears for her safety until she was quite upset.

Beth was rebellious, too, about some things. There was a grocery shop at one end of the street, kept by a respectable woman, but Beth refused to go to it because the respectable woman had a fussy little Pomeranian dog, and allowed it to lick her hands and face all over, which so disgusted Beth that she could not eat anything the woman touched. It was in this shop that Beth picked up the moribund black beetle that kicked out suddenly, and set up the horror of crawling things from which she ever afterwards suffered. This was another reason for not going back to the shop, but Aunt Victoria could not understand it, and insisted on sending her. Beth was firmly naughty in the matter, however, and would not go, greatly to the old lady's discomposure.

One means of torture, unconsciously devised by Aunt Victoria, tried Beth extremely. Aunt Victoria used to send her to church alone on Sunday afternoons to hear a certain eloquent preacher, and required her to repeat the text, and tell her what the whole sermon was about on her return. Beth did her best, but if she managed to remember the text by repeating it all the

time, she could not attend to the sermon, and if she attended to the sermon, she invariably forgot the text. It was another instance of the trickishness of her memory; she could have remembered both the text and sermon without an effort had she not been afraid of forgetting them.

But the thing that gave her aunt most trouble of mind was Beth's habit of making acquaintance with all kinds of people. It was vain to warn her, and worse than vain, for the reasons Aunt Victoria gave her for not knowing people only excited her interest in them, and she would wait about, watching, to see for herself, studying their habits with the patient pertinacity of a naturalist. The drawing-room floor was let to a lady whose husband was at sea, a Mrs. Crome. She was very intimate with a gentleman who also lodged in the house, a friend of her husband's, she said, who had promised to look after her during his absence. Their bedrooms adjoined, and Beth used to see their boots outside their doors every morning when she went down to breakfast, and wonder why they got up so late.

"Out again together nearly all last night," Prentice remarked to Aunt Victoria one morning; and then they shook their heads, but agreed that there was nothing to be done. From this and other remarks, however, Beth gathered that Mrs. Crome was going to perdition; and from that time she had a horrid fascination for Beth, who would gaze at her whenever she had an opportunity, with great solemn eyes dilated, as if she were learning her by heart—as, indeed, she was—involuntarily, for future reference; for Mrs. Crome was one of a pronounced type, as Beth learnt eventually, when she knew the world better, an example which helped her to recognise other specimens of the kind whenever she met them.

She scraped acquaintance with Mrs. Crome on the stairs, at last, and was surprised to find her as kind as could be, and was inclined to argue from this that Prentice and Aunt Victoria must be mistaken about her. But one evening Mrs. Crome tempted her into the drawing-room. The gentleman was there, smoking a cigar and drinking whisky-and-water; and there was something in the whole aspect and atmosphere of the room that made Beth feel exceedingly uncomfortable, and wish she was out of it immediately.

"Aren't you very dull with that old lady?" said Mrs. Crome. "I suppose she never takes you to the theatre or anything."

"No," said Beth; "she does not approve of theatres."

"Then I suppose she doesn't approve of me?" Mrs. Crome observed good-naturedly.

"No," said Beth solemnly; "she does not."

Mrs. Crome burst out laughing, and so did the gentleman.

"This is rich, really," he said. "What a quaint little person!"

"Oh, but she's sweet!" said Mrs. Crome; and then she kissed Beth, and Beth noticed that she had been eating onions, and for long afterwards she associated the smell with theatres, frivolous talk, and a fair-haired woman smiling fatuously on the brink of perdition.

Aunt Victoria retired early to perform her evening ablutions, and on this occasion she had gone up just as usual, with a little bell, which she rang when she was ready for Beth to come. In the midst of the talk and laughter in the drawing-room the little bell suddenly sounded emphatically, and Beth fled. She found Aunt Victoria out on the landing in her petticoat and dressing-jacket, and without her auburn front, a sign of great perturbation. She had heard Beth's voice in the drawing-room, and proceeded to admonish her severely. But Beth heard not a word; for the sight of the old lady's stubbly white hair had plunged her into a reverie, and already, when the vision and the dream were upon her, no Indian devotee, absorbed in contemplation, could be less sensitive to outward impressions than Beth was. Aunt Victoria had to shake her to rouse her.

"What are you thinking of, child?" she demanded.

"Riding to the rescue," Beth answered dreamily.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Aunt Victoria. Beth gazed at her with a blank look. She was saving souls just then, and could attend to nothing else.

Beth's terror of the Judgment never returned; but after she had been away from home a few weeks she began to have another serious trouble which disturbed her towards evening in the same way. The first symptom was a curious lapse of memory which worried her a good deal. She could not remember how much of the garden was to be seen from her mother's

bedroom window at home, and she longed to fly back and settle the question. Then she became conscious of being surrounded by the country on every side, and it oppressed her to think of it. She was a sea-child, living inland for the first time, and there came upon her a great yearning for the sight and sound of moving waters. She sniffed the land-breeze, and found it sweet but insipid in her nostrils after the tonic freshness of the sea-air. She heard the voice of her beloved in the sough of the wind among the trees, and it made her inexpressibly melancholy. Her energy began to ebb. She did not care to move about much, but would sit silently sewing by the hour together, outwardly calm, inwardly all an ache to go back to the sea. She used to wonder whether the tide was coming in or going out; wonder if the fish were biting, how the sands looked, and who was on the pier. She devoured every scrap of news that came from home in the hope of finding something to satisfy her longing. Bernadine wrote her an elaborate letter in large hand, which Beth thought very wonderful; Harriet sent her a letter also, chiefly composed of moral sentiments copied from the *Family Herald*, with a view to producing a favourable impression on Miss Victoria; and Mrs. Caldwell wrote regularly once a week, a formal duty-letter, but a joy to Beth, to whom letters of any kind were a new and surprising experience. She had never expected that any one would write to her; and in the first flush of her gratitude she responded with enthusiasm, sending her mother, in particular, long descriptions of her life and surroundings, which Mrs. Caldwell thought so good she showed them to everybody. In replying to Beth, however, she expressed no approval or pleasure; on the contrary, she put Beth to shame by the way she dwelt on her mistakes in spelling, which effectually checked the outpourings, and shut Beth up in herself again, so that she mourned the more. During the day she kept up pretty well, but towards twilight, always her time of trial, the yearning for home, for mamma, for Harriet, for Bernadine, began again; the most gloomy fears of what might be happening to them in her absence possessed her, and she had great difficulty in keeping back her tears. Aunt Victoria noticed her depression, but mistook it for fatigue, and sent her to bed early, which Beth was glad of, because she wanted to be alone and cry. But one evening, when she was looking particularly sad, the old lady asked if she did not feel well.

"Yes, I feel quite well, thank you, Aunt Victoria," Beth answered with a great sigh; "but I know now what you meant about home-ties. They do pull

strong."

"Ah!" said Aunt Victoria, enlightened; "you are homesick, are you?"

And from that day forward, when she saw Beth moping, she took her out of herself by making her discuss the subject, and so relieved her; but Beth continued to suffer, although less acutely, until her return.

CHAPTER XXIII

RAINHARBOUR was not yet deserted by summer visitors, although it was late in the autumn when Beth and Aunt Victoria returned. It had been such a lovely season that the holiday people lingered, loath to leave the freshness of the sea and the freedom of the shore for the stuffy indoor duties and the conventional restrictions of their town lives.

On the day of their arrival, Beth looked about her in amaze. She had experienced such a world of change in herself since she went away, that she was surprised to find the streets unaltered; and yet, although they were unaltered, they did not look the same. It was as if the focus of her eyes had been readjusted so as to make familiar objects seem strange, and change the perspective of everything; which gave the place a different air, a look of having been swept and garnished and set in order like a toy-town. But the people they passed were altogether unchanged, and this seemed stranger still to Beth. There they had been all the time, walking about as usual, wearing the same clothes, thinking the same thoughts; they had had no new experiences, and, what was worse, they were not only unconscious of any that she might have had, but were profoundly indifferent; and to Beth, on the threshold of life, all eager interest in everything, caring greatly to know, and ready to sympathise, this vision of the self-centred with shrivelled hearts was terrible; it gave her the sensation of being the one living thing that could feel in a world of automata moved by machinery.

Bernadine and her mother had met them at the station, but Beth was so busy looking about her, collecting impressions, she had hardly a word to say to either of them. Mrs. Caldwell set this down as another sign of want of proper affection, but Aunt Victoria grumped that it was nothing but natural excitement.

The first thing Beth did after greeting Harriet, who stood smiling at the door, was to run upstairs to her mother's bedroom to settle the question of how much of the garden was visible from the window; and then she rushed on up to the attic, dragged a big box under the skylight in hot haste, and

climbed up on it to look at the sea. It was the one glimpse of it to be had from the house, just a corner, where the water washed up against the white cliffs that curved round an angle of the bay. Beth flung the skylight open, and gazed, then drew in her breath with a great sigh of satisfaction. The sea! The sea! Even that glimpse of it was refreshing as a long cool drink to one exhausted by heat and cruelly athirst.

While she was away, Beth had made many good resolutions about behaving herself on her return. Aunt Victoria had talked to her seriously on the subject. Beth could be good enough when she liked: she did all that her aunt expected of her; why could she not do all that her mother expected? Beth promised she would; and was beginning already to keep her promise faithfully by being as troublesome as possible, which was all that her mother ever expected of her. Whether or not thoughts are things which have power to produce effects, there are certainly people who answer to expectation with fatal facility, and Beth was one of them. Eventually she resisted with all her own individuality, but at this time she acted like an instrument played upon by other people's minds. This peculiar sensitiveness she turned to account in after life, using it as a key to character; she had merely to make herself passive, when she found herself reflecting the people with whom she conversed involuntarily; and not as they appeared on the surface, but as they actually were in their inmost selves. In her childhood she unconsciously illustrated the thoughts people had in their minds about her. Aunt Victoria believed in her and trusted her, and when they were alone together, Beth responded to her good opinion; Mrs. Caldwell expected her to be nothing but a worry, and was not disappointed. When Beth was in the same house with both aunt and mother, she varied, answering to the expectation that happened to be strongest at the moment. That afternoon Aunt Victoria was tired after her journey, and did not think of Beth at all; but Mrs. Caldwell was busy in her own mind anticipating all the trouble she would have now Beth was back; and Beth, standing on the box under the attic skylight, with her head out, straining her eyes to seaward, was seized with a sudden impulse which answered to her mother's expectation. That first day she ought to have stayed in, unpacked her box, exhibited her beautiful needlework, got ready for dinner in good time, and proved her affection for her mother and sister by making herself agreeable

to them; but instead of that, she stole downstairs, slipped out by the back-gate, and did not return until long after dinner was over.

She did not enjoy the scamper, however. Her home-sickness was gone, but her depression returned nevertheless, as the day declined, only in another form. She had still that curious sensation of being the only living thing in a world of figures moved by mechanism. She stood at the top of the steps which led down on to the pier, where the sailors loitered at idle times, and was greeted by those she knew with slow smiles of recognition; but she had nothing to say to any of them.

The tide was going out, and had left some of the ships in the harbour all canted to one side; cobbles and pleasure-boats rested in the mud; a cockle-gatherer was wading about in it with his trousers turned up over his knees, and his bare legs so thickly coated, it looked as if he had black leggings on. Beth went to the edge of the pier, and stood for a few minutes looking down at him. She was facing west, but the sun was already too low to hurt her eyes. On her right the red-roofed houses crowded down to the quay irregularly. Fishing-nets were hanging out of some of the windows. Here and there, down in the harbour, the rich brown sails had been hoisted on some of the cobbles to dry. There were some yachts at anchor, and Beth looked at them eagerly, hoping to find Count Bartahlinsky's *Seagull* amongst them. It was not there; but presently she became conscious of some one standing beside her, and on looking up she recognised Black Gard, the Count's confidential man. He was dressed like the fishermen in drab trousers and a dark blue jersey, but wore a blue cloth cap, with the name of the yacht on it, instead of a sou'wester.

"Has your master returned?" she said.

"No, miss," he answered. "He's still abroad. He'll be back for the hunting, though."

"I doubt it," said Beth, resentful of that vague "abroad," which absorbed him into itself the greater part of the year. When she had spoken, she turned her back on Gard and the sunset, and wandered off up the cliffs. She had noticed a sickly smell coming up from the mud in the harbour, and wanted to escape from it, but somehow it seemed to accompany her. It reminded her of something—no, that was not it. What she was searching about in her

mind for was some way, not to name it, but to express it. She felt there was a formula for it within reach, but for some time she could not recover it. Then she gave up the attempt, and immediately afterwards she suddenly said to herself—

"... the smell of death
Came reeking from those spicy bowers,
And man, the sacrifice of man,
Mingled his taint with every breath
Upwafted from the innocent flowers."

She did not search for any occult meaning in the lines, nor did they convey anything special to her; but they remained with her for the rest of the day, haunting her, in among her other thoughts, and forcing themselves upon her attention with the irritating persistency of a catchy tune.

On the cliffs she paused to look about her. It was a desolate scene. The tide was so far out by this time it looked as if there were more sand than sea in the bay. The water was the cloudy grey colour of flint, with white rims where the waves broke on the shore. The sky was low, level, and dark; where it met the water there was a heavy bank of cloud, from which an occasional flash of summer lightning, dimmed by daylight, shot along the horizon. The air was peculiarly clear, so that distant objects seemed nearer than was natural. The sheltering headland on the left, which formed the bay, stood out bright white with a crown of vivid green against the sombre sea and sky; while, on the right, the old grey pier, which shut in the view in that direction, and the red-roofed houses of the town crowding down to it, showed details of design and masonry not generally visible to the naked eye from where Beth stood. There were neither ships nor boats in the bay; but a few cobsles, with their red-brown sails flapping limp against their masts, rocked lazily at the harbour-mouth waiting for the tide to rise and float them in. Beth heard the men on them shouting an occasional remark to one another, and now and then one of them would sing an uncouth snatch of song, but the effort was spiritless, and did not last.

Leaving the harbour behind, Beth walked on towards the headland. Presently she noticed in front of her the dignified and pathetic figure of an old man, a Roman Catholic priest, Canon Hunter, who, sacrificing all

worldly ease or chance of advancement, had come to minister to the neglected fisherfolk on the coast, most of whom were Roman Catholics. He led the life of a saint amongst them, living in dire poverty, his congregation being all of the poorest, with the exception of one lady in the neighbourhood, married to a man whose vices were too expensive to leave him much to spare for his wife's charities. She managed, however, to raise enough money for the rent of the top room in the public hall, which they used as a chapel, and so kept the flickering flame of the old religion alight in the place; but it was a severe struggle. It was whispered, indeed, that more of the gentry in the neighbourhood sympathised with the Catholics than was supposed, and would have helped them but for the discredit—did help them, in fact, when they dared; but no one outside the communion knew how true this report might be, and the fisherfolk loyally held their peace.

It was natural that Beth as she grew up should be attracted by the mystery that surrounded the Roman Catholics, and anxious to comprehend the horror that Protestants had of them. She knew more of them herself than any of the people whom she heard pass uncharitable strictures upon them, and knew nothing for which they could justly be blamed. For the old priest himself she had a great reverence. She had never spoken to him, but had always felt strongly drawn towards him; and now, when she overtook him, her impulse was to slip her hand into his, less on her own account, however, than to show sympathy with him, he seemed so solitary and so suffering, with his slow step and bent back; and so good, with his beautiful calm face.

As she approached, lost in her own thoughts, she gazed up at him intently.

"What is it, my child?" he asked, with a kindly smile. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I was thinking of the beauty of holiness," Beth answered, and passed on.

The old man looked after her, too surprised for the moment to speak, and by the time he had recovered himself, she had turned a corner and was out of sight.

After Beth went home that evening, and had been duly reproached by her mother for her selfish conduct, she stole upstairs to Aunt Victoria's room,

and found the old lady sitting with her big Bible on her knee, looking very sad and serious.

"Beth," she said severely, "have you had any food? It is long past your dinner-time, and it does not do for young girls to fast too long."

"I'll go and get something to eat, Aunt Victoria," Beth answered meekly, overcome by her kindness. "I forgot."

She went down to the pantry, and found some cold pie, which she took into the kitchen and ate without appetite.

The heat was oppressive. All the doors and windows stood wide open, but there was no air, and wherever Beth went she was haunted by the sickly smell which she had first perceived coming up from the mud in the harbour, and by the lines which seemed somehow to account for it:—

"... the smell of death
Came reeking from those spicy bowers,
And man, the sacrifice of man,
Mingled his taint with every breath
Upwafted from the innocent flowers."

When she had eaten all she could, she went back to Aunt Victoria.

"Shall we read the psalms?" she said.

"Yes, dear," the old lady answered. "I have been waiting for you a long time, Beth."

"Aunt Victoria, I am very sorry," Beth protested. "I didn't think."

"Ah, Beth," the old lady said sorrowfully, "how often is that to be your excuse? You are always thinking, but it is only your own wild fancies that occupy you. When will you learn to think of others?"

"I try always," Beth answered sincerely; "but what am I to do when 'wild fancies' come crowding in spite of me, and all I ought to remember slips away?"

"Pray," Aunt Victoria answered austerely. "Prayer shapes a life; and those lives are the most beautiful which have been shaped by prayer. Prayer is creative; it transposes intention into action, and makes it inevitable for us to be and to do more than would be possible by any other means."

There was a short silence, and then Miss Victoria began the psalm. It was a joy to Beth to hear her read, she read so beautifully; and it was from her that Beth herself acquired the accomplishment, for which she was afterwards noted. Verse by verse they read the psalms together as a rule, and Beth was usually attentive; but that evening, before the end, her attention became distracted by a loud ticking; and the last word was scarcely pronounced before she exclaimed, looking about her—"Aunt Victoria, what is that ticking? I see no clock."

The old lady looked up calmly, but she was very pale. "You do hear it then?" she replied. "It has been going on all day."

Beth's heart stood still an instant, and, in spite of the heat, her skin crisped as if the surface of her body had been suddenly sprayed with cold water. "The Death Watch!" she ejaculated.

The ticking stopped a moment as if in answer to the words, and then began again. A horrible foreboding seized upon Beth.

"Oh, no—no, not that!" she exclaimed, shuddering; and then, all at once, she threw herself upon her knees beside Aunt Victoria, clasped her arms round her, and burst into a tempest of tears and sobs.

"Beth, Beth, my dear child," the old lady cried in dismay, "control yourself. It is only a little insect in the wood. It may mean nothing."

"It does mean something," Beth interrupted vehemently; "I know—I always know. The smell of death has been about me all the afternoon, but I did not understand, although the words were in my mouth. When things mean nothing, they don't make you feel queer—they don't impress you. Nine times running you may see a solitary crow, or spill the salt, or sit down thirteen to table, and laugh at all superstitious nonsense; then the sign was not for you; but the tenth time, something will come over you, and you won't laugh; then be warned and beware! I sometimes feel as if I were listening, but not with my ears, and waiting for things to happen that I know

about, but not with my head; and I try always to understand when I find myself listening, but not with my ears, and something surely comes; and so also when I am waiting for things to happen that I know about, but not with my head; they do happen. Only most of the time I know that something is coming, but I cannot tell what it is. In order to be able to tell exactly, I have to hold myself in a certain attitude—not my body, you know, *myself*—hold myself in suspense, as it were, or suspend something in myself, stop something, push something aside—I can't get it into words; I can't always do it; but when I can, then I know."

"Who taught you this?" Aunt Victoria asked, as if she were startled.

"Oh, no one taught me," Beth answered. "I just found myself doing it. Then I tried to notice how it was done. I wanted to be able to do it myself when I liked. And it was just as if there were two doors, and one had to be shut before I could look out of the other—the one that is my nose and eyes and ears; when that is shut, then I know; I look out of the other. Do things come to you so, Aunt Victoria?"

The old lady had taken Beth's hand, and was stroking it and looking at her very seriously. "No," she said, shaking her head, "no, things do not come to me like that. But although I have only one set of faculties myself, my outlook is not so limited by them that I cannot comprehend the possibility of something beyond. There are written records of people in olden times who must have possessed some such power—some further faculty such as you describe. It may be that it lies latent in the whole race, awaiting favourable conditions to develop itself, and some few rare beings have come into possession of it already. We are complex creatures—body, soul, and spirit, says the saint; and there is spiritual power. Beth, lay hold of that which you perceive in yourself, cherish it, cultivate it, live the life necessary to develop it; for be sure it is a great gift—it may be a divine one."

When the old lady stopped, Beth raised her head and looked about her, as if she had just awakened from sleep. "What were we talking about before that?" she said. "Oh, I know—the Death Watch. It has stopped."

The equinoctial gales set in early that year, and severely. Great seas washed away the silver sands which had been the delight of the summer visitors, leaving miles of clay exposed at low water to add to the desolation of the

scene. The bay was full of storm-stayed vessels, all headed to the wind, close reefed, and straining at their anchors. There were days when the steamers had to steam full speed ahead in order to keep at their berths; and then the big sailing ships would drag their anchors and come drifting, drifting helplessly towards the shore, and have to fly before the gale if they could, or take their chance of stranding if the water were low, or being battered to bits against the cliffs if the tide were in. Many a time Beth stood among the fishermen watching, waiting, praying; her whole being centred on some hapless crew, making for the harbour, but almost certain to be carried past. There was a chain down the middle of the pier in the winter to prevent people from being washed off, and she had stood clinging to this, and seen a great ship, with one ragged sail fluttering from a broken mast, carried before the wind right on to the pier-head, which it struck with a crash that displaced great blocks of granite as if they had been sponge-cakes; and when it struck, the doomed sailors on its decks sent up an awful shriek, to which those on the pier responded. Then there was a pause. Beth held her breath and heard nothing; but she saw the ship slip back, back—down amongst the mountainous waves, which sported with it once or twice, tossed it up, and sucked it down, tossed it again, then suddenly engulfed it. On the water afterwards there were ropes and spars, and dark things bobbing like corks, but she knew they were men in mortal agony; and she found herself shouting encouragement, telling them to hold on bravely, help was coming—the lifeboat! the lifeboat! She joined in the sob of excitement too, and the cheers of relief when it returned with its crew complete, and five poor wretches rescued—only five out of fifteen, but still——

"Blessed be God," said the old priest, "for those whom He has received into glory; and blessed be His holy name for those whom He deigns to let live."

Beth, standing beside him, heard the words, and wonderingly contrasted him with Parson Richardson, who remained shut up with his fourth wife in his fat living, making cent. per cent. out of his school, and heedless of the parish, while one so old and feeble as Canon Hunter stood by his people at all times, careless of himself, enduring hardship, braving danger, a man among men in spite of age and weakness, by reason of great love.

The pinch of poverty was severely felt again that winter in the Caldwell household. Beth, who was growing rapidly, became torpid from excessive

self-denial; she tried to do without enough, to make it as if there were one mouth less to feed, and the privation told upon her; her energy flagged; when she went out, she found it difficult to drag herself home, and the exuberant spirit of daring, which found expression in naughty enterprises, suddenly subsided. She poached on principle still for the benefit of the family; but the cool confidence born of a sort of inward certainty, which is a premonition of success, if it is not the power that compels it, was wanting; and it was as if her own doubts when she set the snares released the creatures from the fascination that should have lured them, so that she caught but little. The weather, too, was very severe; every one in the house, including Beth, was more or less ill from colds and coughs, and Aunt Victoria suffered especially; but none of them complained, not even to themselves; they just endured. They felt for each other, however.

"Mamma, don't you think Aunt Victoria should have a fire in her room?" Beth said one day.

"I do, my dear child," Mrs. Caldwell answered tartly; "but *I* can't afford the fuel, and she can't afford it either."

"I wish I had known that," said Beth. "I wouldn't have let her afford to take me away in the summer, spending all her money for nothing."

"What a grateful and gracious child you are!" her mother exclaimed.

Beth went frowning from the room.

The snow was several feet deep on the ground already, and was still falling heavily. Beth put on her things and stole out, her idea being to gather sticks to make a fire for the old lady; but after a weary trudge she was obliged to return empty-handed, wet, weary, and disheartened. The sticks were deep down under the snow; there were none to be seen.

"O God!" Beth prayed as she stumbled home, raising her pinched face to the sombre sky, "O God, save Aunt Victoria all suffering. Don't let her feel the cold, dear Lord, don't let her feel it."

Aunt Victoria herself was stoical. She came down to breakfast every morning, and sat up stiffly at the end of the table away from the fire, her usual seat, eating little, and saying little, but listening with interest when the

others spoke. Beth watched her, waited on her, and lay awake at night fretting because there was nothing more to be done for her.

One stormy night in particular, Beth could not sleep. There was a great gale blowing. It came in terrific gusts that shook the house, rattled the windows, and made the woodwork creak; then died away, and was followed by an interval of comparative quiet, broken by strange, mysterious sounds, to which Beth listened with strained attention, unable to account for them. One moment it was as if trailing garments swept down the narrow stairs, heavy woollen garments that made a soft sort of muffled sound, but there was no footfall, as of some one walking. Then there came stifled voices, whisperings, as of people talking eagerly yet cautiously. Then there were heavy steps, distinct yet slow, followed, after an interval, by the tramp of shuffling feet, like those of people carrying an awkward burden, and stumbling under it. But always, before Beth could think what the noise meant, the gust came again, racking her nerves, rattling the windows, making the doors creak; then dying away, to be followed by more mysterious sounds, but of another character.

"If only there were time—if only they would last long enough, I should know—I should understand," Beth thought, full of foreboding. She was not frightened, only greatly excited. Something was coming, something was going to happen, and these were the warnings, of that she was certain. It was as if she were sensitive to some atmosphere that surrounds an event and becomes perceptible to those whom it concerns if they are of the right temperament to receive the impression.

When the blast struck the house, blotting out the strange sounds which puzzled Beth, it released her strained attention, and had the effect of silence upon her after noise. In one of these pauses, she wondered if her mother and Bernadine, in the next bed, were asleep.

"Mamma," she said softly, "mamma!" There was no response. The gale dropped. Then Beth heard some one coughing hard.

"Mamma," she said again, "mamma!"

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Caldwell answered, awaking with a start.

"Aunt Victoria is coughing."

"Well, my dear child, I'm very sorry, but I can't help it; and it is hardly enough to wake me for," Mrs. Caldwell answered. She settled herself to sleep again, and the gale raged without; but Beth remained, resting on her elbow, not listening so much as straining her attention out into the darkness in an effort to perceive with her further faculty what was beyond the range of her limited senses.

"Mamma!" she exclaimed once more, "Aunt Victoria is moaning."

"Nonsense, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "You couldn't possibly hear her if she were."

There was another little interval, then Beth jumped out of bed, crying as she did so, "Mamma, Aunt Victoria is calling me."

"Beth," Mrs. Caldwell said, rousing herself, and speaking sternly, "get into bed again directly, and lie down and go to sleep. It is the gale that is making you so nervous. Put the bed-clothes over your head, and then you won't hear it."

Beth had been huddling on the first thing she laid hold of in the dark, a thick woollen dressing-gown of her mother's, while she was speaking. "I shall go and see for myself," she replied.

"Oh, very well," said Mrs. Caldwell. "It wouldn't be you if you didn't upset the whole house for your fancies. When you have awakened your aunt, and spoilt her night for nothing, as you have spoilt mine, you'll be satisfied."

Beth opened the door, and stepped down into darkness, unrelieved by the slightest glimmer of light. She had to descend some steps and go up some others to get to Aunt Victoria's room; and, after the first step, she felt as if she were floating in some new element, not moving of her own accord, but borne along confidently, without seeing and without feeling her way; and, as she went, she found that the long thick garment she wore was making the same soft muffled sound she had already heard, and also that there was no footstep audible.

She went into Aunt Victoria's room without knocking. It struck Beth as being intensely cold. A candle was burning on the little table beside the bed. The old lady was sitting, propped up uncomfortably with two thin pillows

and a hassock. She was breathing with difficulty, and showed no surprise when she saw Beth enter. Her lips were moving, and Beth could see she was mumbling something, but she could distinguish no word until she went quite close, when she heard her say, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people," several times.

"Aunt Victoria, are you ill?" Beth said. The old lady looked at her with dim eyes, then stretched out her hand to her. Beth clasped it. It was deadly cold.

"I shall light the fire," Beth said with determination, "and I shall make you some tea to ease your cough. You won't mind if I take the candle a moment to go downstairs and get the things?"

Beth was practical enough now. The vision and the dream had passed, and she was wide awake again, using her eyes, and requiring a candle. Before she went downstairs she fetched extra pillows from the spare room, and propped Aunt Victoria up more comfortably. Then she set to work to light the fire, and soon had the kettle boiling. As the room began to warm, Aunt Victoria revived a little, and smiled on Beth for the first time with perfect recognition. Beth had made her some tea, and was giving it to her in spoonfuls.

"Is that nice?" she said.

"Delicious," the old lady answered.

The gale was all on the other side of the house, so that here in front it was comparatively quiet; besides, the wind was dying away as the day approached. Beth put the teacup down when Aunt Victoria had taken the little she could, and sat on the side of the bed, holding the old lady's hand, and gazing at her intently; and, as she watched, she saw a strange change come over her. The darkness was fading from the sky and the light from Aunt Victoria's face. Beth had seen nothing like this before, and yet she had no doubt of what was coming. She had known it for days and days; she seemed to have known it always.

"Shall I go for mamma?" she asked at last.

The old lady shook her head.

Beth felt strangely benumbed. She thought of rousing Harriet to fetch the doctor, but she could not move. All feeling was suspended except the sensation of waiting. This lasted awhile, then a lump began to mount in her throat, and she had to gulp it down several times.

"Poor little girl," Aunt Victoria muttered, looking at her in her kindly way. Beth melted. "Oh, what shall I do?" she whimpered, "you have been so very good to me. You've taught me all the good I know, and I have done nothing for you—nothing but bother you. But I love you, Aunt Victoria; stay, do stay. I want to do everything you would like."

The old lady faintly pressed her hand, then made a last great effort to speak. "Bless you, Beth, my dear child," she managed to say with great difficulty. "Be comforted; you have helped me more than you know. In my sore need, I was not left comfortless. Neither will you be. May the Lord bless you, and keep you always. Amen."

Her head sank upon her breast. She seemed to settle down in the bed as if her weight had suddenly grown greater.

The sombre dawn had broken by this time, and by its light Beth saw the shadow of death come creeping over the delicate patient face.

"Aunt Victoria," she gasped breathlessly, like one in haste to deliver a message before it is too late, "shall I say '*Lift up your heads, O ye gates?*' That was the first thing you taught me."

The old lady spoke no more, but Beth saw that she understood. The faint flicker of a smile, a pleased expression, came into her face and settled there. Beth, feeling the full solemnity of the moment, got down from the bed, and stood beside it, holding fast still to the kind old hand that would nevermore caress or help her, as if she could keep the dear one near her by clinging to her.

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?" she began, with a strange vibration in her voice. *"He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity; nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come*

in." Beth's voice broke here, but with a great effort she began again fervently: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors——*"

There she stopped, for at the words the dear good kind old lady, with a gentle sigh, as of relief, passed from the scene of her sufferings, out of this interval of time, into the measureless eternity.

CHAPTER XXIV

AUNT VICTORIA BENCH died of failure of the heart, the medical man decided; and, he might have added, if the feelings of the family had not had to be considered, that the disease was accelerated by privation and cold.

For days after the event, Beth was not to be roused. She would sit in the tenantless room by the hour together, with the dear old aunt's great Bible on her knee open at some favourite passage, thinking of all that ought to have been done to save her, and suffering the ache and rage of the helpless who would certainly have done all that could have been done had they had their way. Again and again her mother fetched her down to the dining-room where there was a fire, and tried to reason with her, or scolded her for her persistent grief when reasoning produced no effect.

"You must begin your lessons again, Beth," she said to her at last one morning in despair. "Giving you a holiday is doing you no good at all."

Beth went upstairs without a word, and brought down the old aunt's French books, and sat at the dining-table with one of them open before her; but the sight of it recalled the happy summer days in the bright little parlour looking out on the trees and flowers, and the dear old lady with her delicate face sitting at the end of the table placidly knitting while Beth prepared her lesson, and the tears welled up in her eyes once more, and fell on the yellow pages.

"Beth," said her mother emphatically, "you must not go on like this. Why are you so selfish? Don't *I* feel it too? Yet I control myself."

"You don't feel it as I do," Beth answered doggedly. "She was not so much to you when she was here, how can you miss her so much now she has gone?"

"But you have others to love," Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated. "She was not your nearest relation."

"No, but she was the dearest," Beth replied. "I may have others to love, but she was the one who loved me. She never said I had no affection for any one; she never said I was selfish and thought of nothing but my own interests. If she had to find fault with me, she did it so that she made me want to be better. She was never unkind, she was never unjust, and now I've lost her, I have no one."

"It is your own fault then," said Mrs. Caldwell, apt as usual to say the kind of thing with which fatuous parents torment the genius-child. "You are so determined not to be like other people that nobody can stand you."

"I am not determined to be unlike other people," Beth exclaimed, turning crimson with rage and pain. "I want to be like everybody else, and I *am* like everybody else. And I am always ready to care for people too, if they will let me. It isn't my fault if they don't like me."

"It *is* your fault," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "You have an unhappy knack of separating yourself from every one. Look at your Uncle James. He can hardly tolerate you."

"He's a fool, so that doesn't matter," said Beth, who always dealt summarily with Uncle James. "I can't tolerate him. But you can't say I separate myself from Aunt Grace Mary. She likes me, and she's kind; but she's silly, and when I'm with her any time it makes me yawn. Is *that* my fault? And did I separate myself from Kitty? Did I separate myself from papa? Do I separate myself from Count Bartahlinsky? Have I separated myself from Aunt Victoria?—and who else is there?"

"You gave Aunt Victoria plenty of trouble while she was here," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined drily.

"Well, that is true, at all events," Beth answered in a broken voice; and then she bowed her head on the old French grammar, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Mrs. Caldwell looked up from her work at her from time to time frowning, but she was too much ruffled by some of Beth's remarks to say anything consoling; and Beth, absorbed in her grief, lost all consciousness of everything outside herself.

At last, however, a kindly hand was laid on her head, and some one stroked her hair.

"That is the way she goes on, and I don't know what to do with her," Mrs. Caldwell was saying. "Come, Beth, rouse yourself," she added sharply.

Beth looked up, and found that it was Aunt Grace Mary who was stroking her hair.

"Poor little body!" said Aunt Grace Mary as if she were speaking to an infant, then added in a sprightly tone: "Come, dear! Come, dear! Wipe your eyes. Mamma will be here directly—my mamma—and Uncle James, and Mr. Watson."

"What are they coming for?" said Beth.

"Oh, *your* mamma knows," Aunt Grace Mary answered archly. "Mr. Watson was poor dear Aunt Victoria's lawyer, and he has brought her will, and is going to read it to us."

"Am I to be sent out of the room?" Beth asked.

"Of course," said Mrs. Caldwell. "It isn't a matter for you at all."

"Everything is a matter for me that concerned Aunt Victoria," Beth rejoined, "and if Lady Benyon is to be here, *I* shall stay."

Before Mrs. Caldwell could reply, Lady Benyon herself was ushered into the little room with great deference by Uncle James. They were followed by a little old gentleman dressed in black, with spectacles, and a pair of badly-fitting black kid gloves. He shook hands with Mrs. Caldwell, and then with Beth, whom he looked at over his spectacles shrewdly. Uncle James also shook hands, and kissed his sister. "This is a solemn occasion," he said, with emotion in his voice. Then he looked at Beth, and added, "Had she not better go?"

Beth sat down beside Aunt Grace Mary, with her mouth obstinately set; and Mrs. Caldwell, afraid of a scene, merely shrugged her shoulders helplessly. Meanwhile the lawyer was blowing his nose, wiping his spectacles, taking papers out of a pocket at the back of his frock-coat, and settling himself at the table.

"You would like this young lady to retire, I suppose," said Uncle James blandly.

"By no means," the little old gentleman answered, looking up at him over his spectacles, and then at Beth. "By no means; let the young lady remain."

Aunt Grace Mary put her arm round Beth. The lawyer broke the seal, unfolded the will, and remarked by way of preface: "The document is in the handwriting of the deceased. Ahem!"

Instantly into every face there came the expression that people wear in church. Mr. Watson proceeded to read; but in a dry, distinct, matter-of-fact tone, devoid of all emotion. A lawyer reading a will aloud is sure of the interest of his audience, and, on this occasion, it was evident that each member of the little group listened with strained attention, but with very different feelings. What they gathered was that Miss Victoria Bench, spinster, being of sound mind, did will and bequeath everything of which she might die possessed to her beloved great-niece, Elizabeth Caldwell, commonly called Beth. Should Beth marry, the money was to be settled upon her for her exclusive use. The present income from the property, about fifty pounds a year, was to be devoted to the education of the said Elizabeth Caldwell, commonly called Beth.

Uncle James's jaw dropped during the reading. "But," he stammered when it was over, "if the investments recover?"

"Then Miss Elizabeth Caldwell, commonly called Beth, will have an income of between six and seven hundred a year, *at least*," said the lawyer, smiling.

Aunt Grace Mary clasped Beth close in a spasm of congratulation. Mrs. Caldwell burst into tears. Beth herself, with an unmoved countenance, perceived the disgust of Uncle James, her mother's emotion, and something like amusement in Lady Benyon's face; and she also perceived, but at a great distance as it were, that there was a dim prospect of some change for the better in her life.

"Poor little body!" said Aunt Grace Mary, caressing her.

"Rich little body!" said Lady Benyon. "Come and kiss me, Puck, and let me congratulate you."

"It is very nice for you, Beth, I am sure," said Mrs. Caldwell plaintively, holding out her hand to Beth as she passed. Beth accepted this also as a congratulation, and stooped and kissed her mother. Then the lawyer got up and shook hands with her, and thereupon Uncle James, feeling forced for decency's sake to do something, observed pointedly: "I suppose Miss Victoria Bench was quite sane when she made this bequest?"

"I should say that your supposition was correct," said the lawyer. "Miss Victoria Bench always seemed to me to be an eminently sane person."

There was no allusion whatever to Uncle James in Aunt Victoria's will. She thanked her niece, Caroline Caldwell, kindly for the shelter she had given her in her misfortune, and hoped that by providing for Beth she would relieve her mother's mind of all anxiety about the child, to whom, she proceeded to state, she left all she had in proof of the tender affection she felt for the child, and in return for the disinterested love and duty she had received from Beth. Aunt Victoria wished Beth to have her room when she was gone, in order that Beth might, as she grew up, have proper privacy in her life, with undisturbed leisure for study, reflection, and prayer. She added that she considered Beth a child of exceptional temperament, that peculiar care and kindness would be necessary to develop her character; but Miss Victoria hoped, prayed, and believed that, with the help of the excellent abilities with which she had been endowed, Beth would not only work out her own salvation eventually, but do something notable to the glory of God and for the good of mankind.

Beth's heart glowed when she heard this passage, and ever afterwards, when she recalled it, she felt strangely stimulated.

After the last solemn words of the will had been read, and the little scene of congratulation had been enacted, there was a pause in the proceedings, then Uncle James remarked in his happiest manner: "The importance which old ladies attach to their little bequests is only to be equalled by the strength of their sentiments, and the grandeur of the language in which they are expressed. One would think a principality was being bequeathed to a

princess, instead of a few pounds to an obscure little girl, to judge by the tone of the whole document. Well, well!"

Beth looked at him, then drew down the corners of her mouth impertinently. "There is one thing I can console you with, Uncle James," she said. "You may be quite sure that when I do come into my kingdom, I shall carefully conceal the fact that I am any relation of yours."

Later in the day, Beth found her mother sitting in her accustomed place by the dining-table, rocking herself sideways over her work, and with a worried expression of countenance, as if she were uneasy in her mind.

"Aren't you pleased, mamma," said Beth, "that I should be left the money?"

"Why, yes, of course, my dear child," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. Her tone to Beth had altered very much since the morning. Even in a few short hours Beth had been made to feel that mere money was making her a person of more importance than she had ever before been considered.

Her mother had stopped short, but Beth waited, and Mrs. Caldwell recommenced: "I am delighted on your account. Only, I was just thinking. The money is of no use to you just now, and it would have made all the difference to Jim. He ought to be making friends now who will last him his life and help him on in his career; but he can do nothing without an allowance, and I cannot make him one. There is no hurry for your education. In fact, I think it would be better for your health if you were not taught too much at present. But you shall have your aunt's room, Beth, to study in if you like. You may even sleep there, although I shall feel it when you leave mine. It will be breaking up the family. That remark in the will about proper privacy seems to me great nonsense, and you know I am not legally bound to give you a room to yourself. However, it was the dear old lady's last request to me, and that makes it sacred, so it shall be carried out to the letter. The room is yours, and I hope you will enjoy your privacy."

"Oh, I *shall*," Beth exclaimed with uncomplimentary fervour.

Mrs. Caldwell sighed and sewed on in silence for a little.

"The dear old lady left you the money because she believed you would do some good with it," she resumed. "'For the good of mankind.' Those are her

own words. And I do think that is rather your line, Beth; and what greater good can you do to begin with than help your brother on in the world? To spend the money on him instead of on yourself would really be a fine, unselfish thing to do."

Beth's great grey eyes dilated; the prospect was alluring. "I suppose there would not be enough for both of us?" she ventured tentatively—"enough for me to be taught some *few* things properly, you know—English, music, French."

"On fifty pounds a year, my dear child!" her mother exclaimed sorrowfully. "Fifty pounds goes no way at all." Beth sighed. "Besides," Mrs. Caldwell pursued, "*I* can teach you all these things. You've got beyond your childish tiresomeness now, and have only to ask, and then I will tell you all you don't know. It would be a pleasure and an occupation for me, and indeed, Beth, I have very little pleasure in life. The days are long and lonely." Beth looked up with sudden sympathy. "But if you will let me give you the lessons, and earn the money, I could send it to Jim, and that would comfort me greatly, and add also to *your* happiness, I should think."

It was not in Beth to resist such an appeal. She always forgot herself at the first symptom of sorrow or suffering in another, and never considered her own interests if she could help somebody else by sacrificing them.

"It *would* add to my happiness," she answered brightly. "And if you will just explain to me, mamma, when I don't understand things, I shall remember all right, and not be a bother to you. Will you be kind to me, and not scold me, and jeer at me, and make my life a burden to me? When you do that, I hate you."

Mrs. Caldwell stopped short with her needle up in the air, in the act of drawing the thread through her work. She was inexpressibly shocked.

"Hate your mother, Beth!" she gasped.

"I know it's abominable," said Beth, filled with compunction; "but I can't help it. It's the devil, I suppose. He gets hold of us both, and makes you torment me, and makes me—not like you for it."

Mrs. Caldwell quietly resumed her sewing. She was too much startled by this glimpse of herself from Beth's point of view to say another word on the subject; and a long silence ensued, during which she saw herself as a sadly misunderstood mother. She determined, however, to try and manage Beth on a new principle.

"I should like to help you to make the best of yourself, Beth," she burst out again abruptly; "and I think I can. You are a tall girl for your age, and are beginning to hold yourself well already. Your poor dear aunt was very particular to teach you that. And you have the complexion of the Bench family, if you will take care of it. You should wash your face in buttermilk at night after being out in the sun. I'll get you some, and I'll get you a parasol for the summer. Your hands are not nearly so coarse as they used to be, and they would really be quite nice if you attended to them properly. All your father's people had good hands and feet. I must see to your gloves and boots. I don't know what your waist is going to be, but you shall have some good stays. A fine shape goes a long way. With your prospects you really ought to make a good match, so do not slouch about any more as if you had no self-respect at all. You can really do a great deal to make yourself attractive in appearance. Your Uncle William Caldwell had a very ugly nose, but he pinched it, and pinched it every day to get it into shape, until at last he made it quite a good one."

Bernadine came into the room in time to hear this story, and was so impressed by it that she tried the same experiment on her own nose without asking if it were ugly or not, and pinched it and rubbed it so diligently that by the time it was formed she had thickened it and changed it from a good ordinary nose into something quite original.

This was the kind of thing that happened to ladies in the days when true womanliness consisted in knowing nothing accurately, and always taking advice. Efforts to improve themselves in some such way were common enough among marriageable maidens, and their mothers helped them to the best of their ability with equally happy hints. Because small feet were a beauty, therefore feet already in perfect proportion must be squeezed to reduce their size till they were all deformed; and because slenderness was considered elegant, therefore naturally well-formed women must compress their bodies till they looked like cylinders or hour-glasses, and lace till their

noses swelled and their hair fell out. Never having heard of proportion, all their ambition was to reduce themselves to something less than they were designed to be. Those were the days when women had "no nonsense about them, sir, I tell you," none of those new-fangled ideas about education and that.

It was a new notion to Beth that she could do anything to make herself attractive, and she took a solemn interest in it. She listened with absolute faith to all that her mother said on the subject, and determined to be high-principled and make the most of herself. When her mother talked to her in this genial friendly way, instead of carping at her or ignoring her, Beth's heart expanded and she was ready to do anything to please her. Lessons on the new method went on without friction. Beth never suspected that her mother was unequal to the task of educating her in any true sense of the word; her mother never suspected it, neither did anybody else; and Beth had it all her own way. If she were idle, her mother excused her; if she brought a lesson only half-learnt, her mother prompted her all through; if she asked questions, her mother answered them pleasantly; so that they got on very well together, and everybody was satisfied—especially Jim, who was benefiting by Aunt Victoria's bequest to the extent of being able to keep up with the best of his bar-loafing acquaintances.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN she did what Aunt Victoria approved, Beth felt that she was making Aunt Victoria happy. Her dead were never far from her, never beyond recall. She conquered her pride for Aunt Victoria's sake, and began to go out again with her mother for the morning walk that winter unasked; but Mrs. Caldwell seemed indifferent to the attention. She let Beth walk beside her day after day, but remained absorbed in her own reflections, and made no effort to talk to Beth and take her out of herself; so that Beth very soon found the duty intolerably irksome. It irritated her, too, when she caught her mother smiling to herself, and on asking what was amusing her, Mrs. Caldwell replied, still smiling, "Never *you* mind." With Beth's temperament it was not possible that the sense of duty would long survive such snubs. Gradually she began to wander off by herself again, leaving her mother pacing up and down the particular sheltered terrace overlooking the sea on which she always walked at that hour, and Bernadine playing about the cliffs or the desolate shore.

The whole place was desolate and melancholy at that time of the year. The wind-swept streets were generally deserted, and the few people who ventured out looked cold and miserable in their winter wraps. When a gleam of sunshine enlivened the sky, the sailors would stand at the top of the steps that led down on to the pier, with their hands in their trousers-pockets, chewing tobacco, and straining their eyes out seaward as if they were watching for something special; and Beth would stand there among them, and look out too—out, far beyond the range of their mental vision, eastwards, to summer lands whence the swallows came, where the soft air was perfumed with flowers, and there was brightness and warmth and ease, and the sea itself, so full of complaint down below there, raged no more, neither lamented, but sang. And there Aunt Victoria would be, sitting somewhere out of doors under the trees, with good things, books and work and fruit and flowers, piled up on a little table beside her, and every wish of her heart gratified, looking serenely happy, and smiling and nodding and beckoning to Beth. But following fast upon the vision, Aunt Victoria would be beside her in the bitter wind, wearing her old brown dress with white

spots that was far too thin, and making believe that she did not shiver; then they had returned from the morning walk, and Aunt Victoria was pausing a moment at the bottom of the stairs to look up, as if measuring her strength and the distance, before she took hold of the bannister and began to mount wearily, but never once trusting herself to glance towards Bernadine and the bread, lest something should be seen in her face which she chose to conceal. From that vision Beth would fly down the steps to the sands, and escape it in a healthy race with the turgid waves that came cresting in and broke on the barren shore.

Then one day, suddenly, as it seemed, a bird sang. The winter was over, spring was upon the land again, and Beth looked up and smiled. The old pear-tree in the little garden at the back was a white wonder of blossom, and, in front, in the orchard opposite, the apple-trees blushed with a tinge of pink. Beth, seeing them one morning very early from her bed in Aunt Victoria's room, arose at once, rejoicing, and threw the window wide open. Beth might have used the same word to express the good and the beautiful, as the Greeks did, so inseparably were the two associated in her mind. At this stage of her development she felt very literally—

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,
The wonder of His works displays the firmament."

"O Lord, how wondrous are Thy works," she chanted to herself softly, as she gazed, awe-stricken, at the loveliness of the rose-tinged foam on the fruit-trees, and her whole being was thrilled with gratitude for the beauty of earth. She took deep draughts of the sweet morning air, and, like the Indian devotee, she breathed a sacred word with every breath. But passive ecstasy was not enough for Beth. Her fine feelings strove for expression always in some fine act, and as she stood at the window she made good resolutions. Her life should be ordered to worthy purposes from morning till night. She would in future begin the day by getting up to greet the dawn in an ecstasy of devotion. Not a minute later than daybreak would do for her. All Beth's efforts aimed at an extreme.

She idled most of that day away in contemplation of her project, and she was as dilatory and troublesome as she could be, doing nothing she ought to have done, because her mind was so full of all the things she was going to

do. What she feared was that she would never be able to wake herself in time, and she went to bed at a preposterously early hour, and sat long in her night-dress, thinking how to manage it. At last it occurred to her that if she tied her great toe to the bed-post with a piece of string, it would give her a jerk when she moved, and so awake her.

The contrivance answered only too well. She could not sleep for a long time, and when at last she dropped off, she was almost immediately awakened by a pitiless jerk from the string. She had Aunt Victoria's old watch under her pillow, and lighted a match to see the time. It was only twelve. When would the day break? She turned, and tossed, and fidgeted. The string on her toe was very uncomfortable, but nothing would have induced her to be so weak as to take it off. One, two, three, she heard the church-clock strike, but it was still pitch dark. Then she dozed off again, but in a minute, as it seemed to her, she was re-aroused by the string. She gave a great weary sigh and opened her eyes. It was all grey daylight in the room.

Beth was out of bed as soon as she could get the string off her toe. The water was very cold, and she shivered and yawned and stretched over it, but washed herself with exaggerated conscientiousness all the same, then huddled on her clothes, and stood awhile, not knowing quite what to do next. She had slept with the window open, and now she drew up the blind. Under the leaden sky the apple-trees showed no tinge of colour, and it was as if white sheets had been spread out over them for the night. Beth thought of curl-papers and rooms all covered up from the dust when Harriet was sweeping, and felt no enthusiasm. She was on the west side of the house, and could not therefore see the sun rise; but she must see the sunrise—sunrise—sunrise. She had never seen the sunrise. The sea was east. It would rise over the sea. The sea at sunrise! The very thought of it took her breath away. She put on her things and slipped into the acting-room. Her mother took the front-door key up to her room with her when she went to bed at night, so that the only way out was by the acting-room window. Beth swung herself round the bar, crept cautiously down the tiles to the pump, jumped to the ground, then ran up the entry, and let herself out by the back-gate into the street. There she was seized upon by a great feeling of freedom. She threw up her arms, filled her lungs with a deep breath, and ran. There was not a soul to be seen. The town was hers!

She made for a lonely spot on the cliff, where a stream fell in a cataract on to the sand, and there was a rustic seat with a lovely view of the bay. Beth dropped on to the seat out of breath and looked curiously about her. The tide was high. The water, smooth, sullen, swollen and weary, broke on the shore in waves so small that it seemed as if the sea, tired of its endless task, were doing dispiritedly as little as it dared, and murmuring at that. The curving cliffs on the left looked like white curtains, closely drawn. The low grey sky was unbroken by cloud or rift except low down on the horizon, where it had risen like a blind drawn up a little to admit the light. It was a melancholy prospect, and Beth shivered and sighed in sympathy. Then a sparrow cheeped somewhere behind her, and another bird in the hedge softly fluted a little roulade. Beth looked round to see what it was, and at that moment the light brightened as if it had been suddenly turned up. She looked at the sea again. The rift in the leaden sky had lengthened and widened, and the first pale primrose of the dawn showed beyond. A faint flush followed, and then it seemed as if the night sky slowly rolled itself up and was put away, leaving a floor of silver, deepening to lilac, for the first bright beam to disport itself upon. Then the sea smiled, and the weariness of it, back and forth, back and forth, passed into animation. Its smooth surface became diapered with light airs, and moved with a gentle roll. The sullen murmur rose to a morning song, and a boat with bare mast at anchor in the bay, the only one in sight, rocked to the tune. A great sea-bird sailed by, gazing down into the depths with piercing eyes, and a grey gull flew so close to the water, it seemed as if his wings must dip at every flap. The sky by this time was all a riot of colour, at which Beth gazed in admiration, but without rapture. Her intellect acknowledged its loveliness, but did not delight in it—heart and soul were untouched. The spirit of the dawn refused to speak to her. She had exhausted herself in her effort to induce the intoxication of devotion which had come to her spontaneously the day before. The great spirit does not want martyrs. Joy in beauty and goodness comes of a pure and tranquil mind, not of a tortured body. The faces of the holy ones are calm and their souls serene.

A little farm-house stood back from the road just behind the seat where Beth was sitting, and a tall gaunt elderly man, with a beard on his chin, came out presently and stood staring grimly at the sunrise. Then he crossed

the road deliberately, sat down at the other end of the seat, and stared at Beth.

"You're early out," he said at last.

Beth detected something hostile in the tone, and fixed her big fearless grey eyes upon him defiantly. "It's a free country," she said.

"Free or not," he answered drily, "it isn't fit fur no young gell to be out alone at sechun a time. Ye should be indoors gettin' the breakfast."

"Thank you," said Beth, "I've no need to get the breakfast."

"Well, it makes it all the worse," he rejoined; "fur if ye're by way o' bein' a lady, it not on'y means that ye're out wi' no one to tak' care of ye, but that ye've niver been taught to tak' care o' yerself. Lady!" he ejaculated. "Pride and patches! Tak' my advice, *lady*, go back to yer bed, get yer meed o' sleep, wak' up refreshed, and set to work."

He spat on the grass in a self-satisfied way when he had spoken, and contemplated the sunrise like a man who has done his duty and earned the right to repose.

Beth got up and walked home despondently. She climbed in at the acting-room window, and went to her own room. The sun was shining on the apple-blossom in the orchard opposite, and she looked for the charm of yesterday, but finding only the garish commonplace of fruit-trees in flower with the sun on them, she drew down the blind. Then she took off her hat and jacket, threw herself on her bed, and fell into a heavy sleep, with her brow puckered and the corners of her mouth drooping discontentedly.

The next night she determined to take her meed of sleep, and did not tie the string to her toe. It had been a long lonely day, filled with great dissatisfaction and vague yearnings for companionship; but when she fell asleep she had a happy dream, so vivid that it seemed more real than anything she had seen in her morning ramble. It was eight o'clock in the evening, she dreamt, and there was some one waiting for her under the pear-tree in the garden. The night air was fresh and fragrant. The moonlight shone on the white blossoms overhead, which clustered so close that no ray penetrated to the ground beneath, so that there all was shadowy, but still she

could see that there was some one standing in the shade, and she knew that he was waiting for her. She had never seen him before, yet she knew him well and hurried to meet him; and he took her in his arms and kissed her, and his kisses thrilled her with a thrill that remained with her for many a day.

She got up the moment she awoke, and looked about her in a kind of amaze, for everything she saw was transfigured. It was in herself, however, that the light burned which made the world so radiant. As the old apple-trees, warmed by the sun, suddenly blossomed into bridal beauty in the spring, so, in the silent night, between sundown and day-dawn, while she slept, yet another petal of her own manifold nature had unfolded, and in the glow of its loveliness there was nothing of commonplace aspect; for a new joy in life was hers which helped her to discover in all things a hitherto unsuspected charm.

Beth's little life had been full of childish irregularities, the little duties being continually slurred and neglected that the little pleasures might be indulged in the sooner. She was apt to regard bathing, hair-brushing, dressing, and lessons as mere hindrances to some of the particular great businesses of life which specially occupied her—verse-making, for instance, piano-playing, poaching, or praying, whichever happened to be the predominant interest of the moment. But now, on a sudden, the care of her person became of extraordinary importance. All the hints, good and bad, she had had on the subject recurred to her, and she began to put them into practice systematically. She threw the clothes back from her bed to air it the moment she got up, that it might be fresh and sweet to sleep in. Her little bath had hitherto been used somewhat irregularly, but now she fetched hot and cold water for herself, and bathed every day. She brushed her hair glossy, and tightened her stays to make her waist small, and she was sorely dissatisfied because her boots did not pinch her feet. She began to take great care of her hands too, and would do no dusting without gloves on, or dirty work of any kind that was calculated to injure them. She used a parasol when she could, and if she got sunburnt bathing or boating, she washed her face in buttermilk at night, fetched from Fairholm regularly for the purpose. The minds and habits of the young are apt to form themselves in this way out of suggestions let fall by all kinds of people, the worst and most foolish as well as the wisest and best.

Beth longed that morning for something new and smart to wear. Her old black things looked so rusty in the spring sunshine, she could not satisfy herself with anything she had. All Aunt Victoria's possessions were hers, and she examined her boxes, looking for something to enliven her own sombre dress, and found some lace which she turned into a collar and cuffs and sewed on. When she saw herself in the glass with this becoming addition to her dress, her face brightened at the effect. She knew that Aunt Victoria would have been pleased to see her look like that—she was always pleased when Beth looked well; and now, when Beth recollected her sympathy, all the great fountain of love in her brimmed over, and streamed away in happy little waves, to break about the dear old aunt somewhere on the foreshore of eternity, and to add, perhaps, who knows how or what to her bliss.

When Beth went down to breakfast, she was very hungry, but there was only one little bloater, which must be left for mamma to divide with Bernadine. There was not much butter either, so Beth took her toast nearly dry, and her thin coffee with very little milk and no sugar in it, also for economical reasons; but the coffee was hot, and she was happy. Her happiness bubbled up in bright little remarks, which brightened her mother too.

"Mamma," said Beth, taking advantage of her mood, "it's a poor heart that never rejoices. Let's have a holiday, you and I, to celebrate the summer."

"But the summer hasn't come," Mrs. Caldwell objected, smiling.

"But summer is coming, is coming," Beth chanted, "and I want to make a song about it."

"*You* make a song!" Bernadine exclaimed. "Why, you can't spell summer."

Beth made a face at her. "I know you want a holiday, mamma," she resumed. "Come, confess! I work you to death. And there's church to-day at eleven, and I want to go."

"Well, if you want to go to church," said Mrs. Caldwell, relieved.

Beth did not wait to hear the end of the sentence.

She went to the drawing-room first, and sat down at the little rosewood piano with a volume of Moore's "Lalla Rookh" open before her.

"From the mountain's warbling fount I come,"

she chanted, with her eyes fixed on the words, but she played as if she were reading notes. She wove all the poems she loved to music in this way, and played and sang them softly to herself by the hour together.

The Lenten service in the church at the end of the road was but poorly attended. There were not more than a dozen people present; but Beth, seated beside the door, enjoyed it. She was all fervour now, and every emotional exercise was a pleasure.

After the service she strolled down the quaintly irregular front street, which was all red brick houses with small window-panes, three to the width of the window, except where an aspiring tradesman had introduced plate-glass and a vulgar disguise of stucco, which converted the warm-toned bricks into commonplace colourless greyness. It was on one side of this street that the principal shops were, and Beth stood for some time gazing at a print in a stationer's window—a lovely little composition of waves lapping in gently towards a sheltered nook on a sandy beach. Beth, wafted there instantly, heard the dreamy murmur and felt the delicious freshness of the sea, yet the picture did not satisfy her.

"I should want somebody," she broke out in herself. "I should want somebody—somebody to lay my head against. Ah, dear Lord, how I hate to be alone!"

Old Lady Benyon, at her post of observation in the big bow-window at the top of the street, saw Beth standing there, and speculated. "Gracious, how that child grows!" she exclaimed. "She'll be a woman directly."

As Beth went on down the street, she began to suffer from that dull irresolute feeling which comes of a want of purpose. She wanted a companion and she wanted an object. Presently she met a young man who looked at her intently as they approached each other, and as he looked his face brightened. Beth's pulse quickened pleasurably and her colour rose. Her steps became buoyant. She held up her head and glowed with

animation, but was unaware of the source of this sudden happy stimulant, nor did she try to discover it. She was living her experiences then, by-and-by she would reflect upon them, then inevitably she would reproduce them, and all without intention. As the sun rises, as the birds build, so would she work when the right time came. Talent may manufacture to order, but works of genius are the outcome of an irresistible impulse, a craving to express something for its own sake and the pleasure of expressing it, with no thought of anything beyond. It is talent that thinks first of all of applause and profits, and only works to secure them—works for the result, for the end in view—never for love of the work.

Beth's heart had no satisfaction at home; she had no friend of her own sex to fill it as most girls have, and a nature like hers, rich in every healthy possibility, was bound to crave for love early. It was all very well for her mother and society as it is constituted to ignore the needs of nature; by Beth herself they would not be ignored. In most people, whether the senses or the intellect will have the upper-hand is very much a matter of early training.

Because she was a girl, Beth's intellect had been left to stagnate for want of proper occupation or to run riot in any vain pursuit she might happen upon by accident, while her senses were allowed to have their way, unrestrained by any but the vaguest principles. Thanks to her free roving outdoor habits, her life was healthy if it were not happy, and she promised to mature early. Youth and sex already began to hang out their signals—clear skin, slim figure, light step, white teeth, thick hair, bright eyes. She was approaching her blossoming time, the end of her wintry childhood, the beginning of a promising spring. It was natural and right that her pulses should quicken and her spirits rise when a young man met her with a friendly glance. Her whole being was suffused with the glory of love, and her mind held the vision; but it was of an abstract kind as yet, not inspired by man. It was in herself that the emotion arose, in happy exuberance, and bubbled over, expending itself in various forms of energy until it should find one object to concentrate itself upon. There comes a time to all healthy young people when Nature says: "Mate, my children, and be happy." If the impulse come prematurely, it is not the young people, but the old ones that are to blame; they should have seen to it that the intellect, which acts as a curb on the senses when properly trained and occupied, developed first. Beth was just at the age when the half-educated girl has nothing to distract her but her own

emotions. Her religion, and the young men who are beginning to make eyes at her, interest her then about equally, and in much the same way; she owes to each a pleasurable sensation. If she can combine the two under one roof, as in church, they suffice and her happiness is complete. It cannot be said, however, that the senses awoke before the intellect in Beth; but because of the irregularities of her training, the want of discipline and order, they took possession of her first.

Passing a shop-window, Beth caught a reflection of herself in the polished pane, and saw that her skirt hung badly: it dipped too much behind. She stopped to gauge the length, that she might alter it when she went in, and then she noticed the pretty light summer things displayed in the window, and ached to possess some. She was miserably conscious of her old ill-cut skirt, more especially of the invisible dirt on it, and she did so yearn for something new and sweet and clean. Her mother had a bill at that shop—should she—should she just go in and ask about prices? No, she could not in that horrid old frock; the shopman would not respect her. She had intended to go down to the sands and sit by the sea, and wait for things to come to her, by which she meant ideas; but the discomfort of mind set up by that glimpse of her uncouth clothes, and the horrible sense of their want of freshness, gained upon her, and drove her in hurriedly. Beth would have expressed the dainty refinement of her mind in her dress had she had the means; but it is difficult to be dainty on nothing a year.

The rest of the day she spent in her room sewing. She found that one of Aunt Victoria's summer silks would fit her with very little alteration, and set to work to make a Sunday frock of it. As she worked she thought of the dear old lady, and of the hours they had sat there together sewing, and of their teas and talks. She would not have known how to alter that dress but for Aunt Victoria; it made her both sad and glad to remember how much she owed her.

Later in the day, after dinner, when the sun had set and the darkness was beginning to gather, Beth became aware of a curious sensation. It was as if she were expecting something delightful to happen, and yet, at the same time, was all aching with anxiety. Then suddenly she remembered her dream. The old pear-tree was a pyramid of blossom. Should she go and see the white foam-flowers by moonlight? The moon had risen.

She stole out into the garden, anxious above everything to go alone. Her heart throbbed curiously; what did she expect? The young moon hung in an indigo sky, and there were some white stars. The air was fresh and fragrant as it had been in her dream, but there was less light. She had to peer into the shade beneath the pear-tree to see—to see what? If there were any one there? Of course there was no one there! How could there be? She did not trust herself closer, however, until she was quite sure that there was nothing to encounter but the trunk of the tree. Then she went bravely, and reclined on the see-saw board, looking up through the black branches to the clustering blossoms that shone so white on the topmost twigs in the moonlight. And presently she began to glow with a great feeling of exultation. It began in her chest, and spread, as from a centre, all over her. The details of her dream recurred to her, the close clasp, the tender kiss, and she thrilled again at the recollection.

But, for the present, the recollection was enough.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON Sunday morning Beth went down to breakfast dressed in Aunt Victoria's light lavender silk, remodelled to suit her; and very becoming she had made it. But Mrs. Caldwell called it an absurd costume for a girl of her age, and said she looked ridiculously over-dressed; so Beth went back to her room disheartened, and reappeared at church-time, with drooping mouth, in the old black frock she usually wore on Sundays.

Vainly she tried to rouse herself to any fervour of worship during the first part of the service. She felt ill-dressed, uncomfortable, dissatisfied, and would have been glad to quarrel with anybody. Then suddenly, during the singing of a hymn, she ceased to be self-conscious. All the trouble left her, and was succeeded by that curious thrill of happy expectation which came to her continually at this time. She looked about her and saw friendly faces where before she had seen nothing but criticism and disdain of her shabby clothes.

Those were the days of pew-letting. The nearer you sat to the pulpit, the higher the price of the pew, and the better your social position. Mrs. Caldwell was obliged to content herself with a cheap seat in one of the side aisles near the door, so the vicar had never called on her. He only called on a few front rows. His own pew was high in the chancel, where all the parish could gaze at his exhausted wife and her increasing family. His pupils used to sit in the pew opposite; but the bishop, having received complaints from the neglected parish, had lately interfered and stopped the school; and henceforth Mr. Richardson was only to be allowed to have one pupil. Mr. Richardson determined to make him profitable.

From where she sat Beth could see the vicar's pew in the chancel, and she had noticed a tall slender youth sitting at the far end, near the vestry door, but he did not interest her at first; now, however, she looked at him again, and wondered who he was, and presently she found that he was gazing at her intently. Then their eyes met, and it was as if a spark of fire had kindled a glow in her chest, high up near the throat, where the breath catches. She

looked down at her book, but had no thought on the subject at all—she was all one sensation. Light had come to her, a wondrous flood of amber light, that blotted out the common congregation and all besides, but him and her. Yet she could hardly sit through the service, and the moment it was over she fled. Her great desire was to be alone, if that could be called solitude which contained all the satisfaction of the closest companionship. All the time that she was flying, however, she felt that she was being pursued, and there was the strangest excitement and delight in the sensation. But she never looked behind. She did not dare to.

She made for the cliffs on the Fairholm estate, and when she came to them her intention was to hide herself. There was a nook she knew, some distance on, a grassy space on the cliff side, not visible either from above or below. She climbed down to it, and there ensconced herself. Beneath was a little cove sheltered from the north and south by the jutting cliffs, and floored with the firmest sand just then, for the tide was out. Beth was lying in the shadow of the cliff, but, beyond, the sun shone, the water sparkled, the sonorous sea-voice sounded from afar, while little laughing waves broke out into merry music all along the shore. Beth, lying on her face with her arms folded in front of her and her cheek resting on them, looked out, lithe, young, strong, bursting with exultation, but motionless as a manifestation of inanimate nature. That was a beautiful pause in her troublous day. Never mind if it only endured for an hour, there was certainty in it, a happy certainty. From the moment their eyes had met she was sure, she knew he would come.

The little waves rang out their laughing carillons, light grace notes to the deep solemn melody of earth and air and sea; and Beth, watching with dilated pupils and set countenance, listened intently. And presently, below, on her left, round the headland some one came striding. Beth's bright eyes flashed with a vivid interest, but she shrank back, flattening herself down on the rank grass, as though thereby she made herself the more invisible.

The young man stopped, took off his hat and wiped his forehead, glanced this way and that round the cove and out to sea, like one bewildered, who has expected to find something which is not there, and begins to look for it in the most unlikely places. Hesitating, disappointed, uncertain, he moved a little on in one direction, a little back in the other, then, drawn by a sudden

impulse, that most familiar manifestation of the ruling force which disposes of us all, we know not how, he walked up the cove with swift, strong, buoyant steps, as if with a purpose, swinging his hat in his hand as he came, and threw himself full length on the smooth, hard, shining sand, and sighed a deep sigh of satisfaction, as though he knew himself within reach of what he sought. In certain states of ecstatic feeling a faculty is released which takes cognisance of things beyond the ken of our beclouded intellects, and although in the language of mind he did not know, it may be that from the region of pure spirit there had come to him a subtle perception, not to be defined, which made it more desirable to be there on that spot alone than anywhere else in the world with no matter whom.

He was a young man of seventeen or eighteen, slenderly built, with well-shaped feet, and long, delicate, nervous hands. His face was shaved clean of the down of his adolescence, so that his somewhat sallow complexion looked smooth to effeminacy. His features were regular and refined, and his fine brown curly hair was a shade lighter in colour than his skin—which produced a noticeable effect. His pale china-blue eyes, too, showed the same peculiarity, which Beth, looking down on him through the fringe of long rank grass in front of her, remarked, but uncritically, for every inch of him was a joy to her.

She was passive. But the young man soon grew restless on his sandy couch. He changed his position a dozen times, then suddenly got on his knees, and heaped up a mound of sand, which, having patted it and pressed it down as hard as it would set, he began to model. Beth held her breath and became rigid with interest as she saw the shapeless mass gradually transformed into some semblance of a human figure, conventional as an Egyptian statue. When the young man had finished, he sat beside the figure for some time, looking fixedly out to sea. Then he turned to his work once more, and, after surveying it critically, he began to make alterations, trying to improve upon what he had done; but the result did not please him, and in a fit of exasperation he fell upon the figure and demolished it. This seemed such a wanton outrage to Beth that she uttered a low cry of remonstrance involuntarily, but the exclamation mingled with the murmur of wind and wave, and was lost in it. The young man looked disconcerted himself and ashamed, too, as a child does when it has broken something in a rage and repents; and presently he began to heap the mound once more. When it was

done, he stretched himself on the sand and shut his eyes, and for a long time Beth lay still, looking down upon him.

All at once, however, the noise of the water became importunate. She had not been aware of it at all since the young man appeared, but now it came into her consciousness with the distinctness of a sudden and unexpected sound, and she looked in that direction. The last time she had noticed the tide it was far out; but now, where all had been sand beyond the sheltered cove, all was water. The silver line stretched from headland to headland, and was still advancing. Already there was no way of escape by the sands, and the cove itself would be a bay in a little while—a bay without a boat! If he did not wake and bestir himself, the callous waves would come and cover him. Should she call? She was shy of taking the initiative even to save his life, and hesitated a moment, and in that moment there came a crash. The treacherous clay cliff crumbled, and the great mass of it on which she was lying slid down bodily on to the shining sand. The young man started up, roused by the rumbling. Had he been a few feet nearer to the cliff he must have been buried alive. He and Beth stared at each other stupidly, neither realising what had happened for the first few minutes. He was the first to recover himself.

"Are you hurt?" he asked with concern, going forward to help her.

"I don't know," she answered, staggering to her feet. "No, I think not," she added. "I'm a little shaken. I'll sit down."

The sitting would have been a tumble had he not caught her in his arms and held her up. Beth felt deadly sick for an instant, then she found herself reclining on the sand, with the young man bending over her, looking anxiously into her face.

"You're faint," he said.

"Is that faint?" she answered. "What a ghastly sensation! But there is something I want to remember." She shut her eyes, then opened them, and looked up at him with a puzzled expression. "It's very odd, I can't remember," she complained.

The young man could not help her. He looked up at the cliff. "What were you doing up there?" he asked.

"What were you doing down there?" she rejoined.

"I followed you," he answered simply. "I saw you come this way, then I lost sight of you; but I thought you would be somewhere on the sands, because the cliffs are private property."

"The owner is an uncle of mine," said Beth. "I come when I like."

Then they looked into each other's faces shyly, and looked away again, smiling but confused.

"Why did you follow me?" said Beth. "You did not know me."

"No, but I wanted to," he answered readily. "Where were you?"

"Lying on a shelf where that scar is now, looking down on you."

"Then you saw me model that figure?"

"And the cliff fell," Beth put in irrelevantly to cover a blush. "It often falls. We're always having landslips here. And I think we'd better move away from it now," she added, rising. "People are killed sometimes."

"But tell me," he said, detaining her. "Didn't you know I was following you?"

Beth became embarrassed.

"You did," he persisted, "and you ran away. Why did you run away?"

"I couldn't help it," Beth confessed; then she uttered an exclamation. "Look! look! the tide! What shall we do?"

He turned and saw their danger for the first time.

"Our only way of escape is by the cliffs," Beth said, "unless a boat comes by."

"And the cliffs are perpendicular just here," he rejoined, after carefully surveying them.

They looked into each other's faces blankly.

"I can't swim—can you?" he asked.

Beth shook her head.

"What is to be done?" he exclaimed.

"There is nothing to be done, I think," she answered quietly. "We may see a boat, but hardly anybody ever comes along the cliffs. We might shout, though."

They did so until they were hoarse, but there was no response, and the tide came creeping up over the sand.

"How calm it is!" Beth observed.

He looked at her curiously. "I don't believe you're a bit afraid," he said. "I'm in a desperate funk."

"I don't believe we're going to be drowned, and I always know what's coming," she answered. Then after a little she asked him his name.

"Alfred," he answered; "and yours?"

"Beth—Beth Caldwell. Alfred!—I like Alfred."

"I like Beth. It's queer, but I like it all the better for that. It's like you."

"Do you think me queer?" Beth asked, prepared to resent the imputation.

"I think you uncommon," he replied.

Beth reflected for a little. "What is your full name?" she asked finally.

"Alfred Cayley Pounce," he replied. "My father gave me the name of Alfred that I might always remember I was *A* Cayley Pounce. But my ambition is to be *The* Cayley Pounce," he added with a nervous little laugh.

Beth compressed her lips, and looked at the rising tide. The next wave broke at their feet, and both involuntarily stepped back. Behind them was the mass of earth that had fallen from the cliff. It had descended in a solid wedge without scattering. Alfred climbed on to it, and helped Beth up. "We shall be a little higher here, at all events," he said.

Beth looked along the cliff; the high-water mark was still above their heads. "It's getting exciting, isn't it?" she observed. "But I don't feel nasty. Having you here makes—makes a difference, you know."

"If you have to die with me, how shall you feel?" he asked.

"I shall feel till my last gasp that I would much rather have lived with you," she answered emphatically.

A wavelet splashed up against the clay on which they were standing. He turned to the cliff and tore at it in a sort of exasperation, trying to scoop out footholes with his hands by which they might climb up; but the effort was futile, the soft shale crumbled as he scooped, and there was no hold to be had on it. His face had grown grey in the last few minutes, and his eyes were strained and anxious.

"I wonder how you feel," Beth said. "I think I resent the fate that threatens us more than I fear it. If my life must end now, it will be so unfinished."

He made no reply, and she stood looking out to sea thoughtfully. "It's Sunday," she observed at last. "There won't be many boats about to-day."

The water had begun to creep up on to their last refuge; it washed over her feet as she spoke, and she shrank back. Alfred put his arm round her protectingly.

"Do you still believe we shall not be drowned?" he said.

"Yes," she answered. "But, even if we were, it wouldn't be the end of us. We have been here in this world before, you and I, and we shall come again."

"What makes you think such queer things?" he asked.

"I don't think them," she answered. "I know them. The things I think are generally all wrong; but the things I know about—that come to me like this—are right. Only I can't command them. One comes to me now and again like a flash, as that one did down there just now when I said we should not be drowned; but if I put a question to myself, I can get no answer."

The water had crept up over their feet while they were speaking. It was coming in at a great rate, but there were no waves to splash them, only a

sort of gentle heave and ripple that brought it on insensibly, so that it had lapped up to the cliff behind them before they suspected it. Beth shivered as it rose around her.

"It's a good thing I changed my dress," she said suddenly. "That summer silk would certainly have been spoilt."

Alfred held her tight, and looked down into her face, but said nothing.

"I'm thinking so many things," Beth broke out again. "I'm glad it's a still day for one thing, and not freezing cold. The cold would have numbed us, and we should have been swept off our feet if there had been any waves. I want to ask you so many things. Why did you make that figure on the sand?"

"I want to be a sculptor," he said; "but my people object, and they won't let me have the proper materials to model in, so I model in anything."

The water was almost up to Beth's waist. She had to turn and cling to him to keep her footing. She hid her face on his shoulder, and they stood so some time. The water rose above her waist. Alfred was head and shoulders taller than she was. He realised that she would be covered first.

"I must hold her up somehow," he muttered.

Beth raised her head. "Alfred," she began, "we're neither of us cowards, are we? You are hating to die, I can see, but you're not going to make an exhibition of yourself to the elements; and I'm hating it, too—I'm horribly anxious—and the cold makes me sob in my breath as the water comes up. It is like dying by inches from the feet up; but while my head is alive, I defy death to make me whimper."

"Do you despair, then?" he exclaimed, as if there had been some safeguard in her certainty.

"I have no knowledge at this moment," she answered. "I am in suspense. But that is nothing. The things that have come to me like that on a sudden positively have always been true, however much I might doubt and question beforehand. I did know at that moment that we should not be drowned; but I don't know it now. My spirit can't grasp the idea, though, of being here in

this comfortable body talking to you one moment, and the next being turned out of house and home into eternity alone."

"Not alone," he interrupted, clasping her closer. "I'll hold you tight through all eternity."

Beth looked up at him, and then they kissed each other frankly, and forgot their danger for a blissful interval.

They were keeping their foothold with difficulty now. The last heave of the tide came up to Beth's shoulder, and took her breath away. Had it not been for the support of the cliff behind them, they could not have kept their position many minutes. But the cliff itself was a danger, for the sea was eating into it, and might bring down another mass of it at any moment. The agony of death, the last struggle with the water, had begun.

"I hate it," Beth gasped, "but I'm not afraid."

The steady gentle heave of the sea was like the breathing of a placid sleeper. It rose round them once more, up, up, over Beth's head. They clung closer to each other and to the cliff, staggering and fighting for their foothold. Then it sank back from them, then slowly came again, rising in an irregular wavy line all along the face of the cliffs with a sobbing sound as if in its great heart it shrank from the cruel deed it was doing—rose and fell, rose and fell again.

Alfred's face was grey and distorted. He groaned aloud.

"Are you suffering?" Beth exclaimed. "Oh, I wish it was over."

She had really the more to suffer of the two, for every wave nearly covered her; but her nerve and physique were better than his, and her will was of iron. The only thing that disturbed her fortitude were the signs of distress from him.

Gently, gently the water came creeping up and up again. It had swelled so high the last time that Beth was all but gone; and now she held her breath, expecting for certain to be overwhelmed. But, after a pause, it went down once more, then rose again, and again subsided.

Alfred stood with shut eyes and clenched teeth, blindly resisting. Beth kept her wits about her.

"Alfred!" she cried on a sudden, "I was right! I was not deceived! Stand fast! The tide is on the turn."

He opened his eyes and stared about him in a bewildered way. His face was haggard and drawn from the strain, his strength all but exhausted; he did not seem to understand.

"Hold on!" Beth cried again. "You'll be a big sculptor yet. The tide has turned. It's going out, Alfred, it's going out. It washed an inch lower last time. Keep up! Keep up! O Lord, help me to hold him! help me to hold him! It's funny," she went on, changing with one of her sudden strange transitions from the part of actor to that of spectator, as it were. "It's funny we neither of us prayed. People in danger do, as a rule, they say in the books; but I never even thought of it."

The tide had seemed to come in galloping like a racehorse, but now it crawled out like a snail; and they were both so utterly worn, that when at last the water was shallow enough, they just sank down and sat in it, leaning against each other, and yearning for what seemed to them the most desirable thing on earth at that moment—a dry spot on which to stretch themselves out and go to sleep.

"I know now what exhaustion is," said Beth, with her head on Alfred's shoulder.

"Do you know, Beth," he rejoined with a wan smile, "you've been picking up information ever since you fell acquainted with me here. I can count a dozen new experiences you've mentioned already. If you go on like this always, you'll know everything in time."

"I hope so!" Beth muttered. "Fell acquainted with you, isn't bad; but I wonder if *tumbled* wouldn't have been better——"

She dozed off uncomfortably before she could finish the sentence. He had settled himself with his head against the uncertain cliff, which beetled above them ominously; but they were both beyond thinking or caring about it. Vaguely conscious of each other, and of the sea-voice that gradually grew

distant and more distant as the water went out beyond the headland, leaving them stranded in the empty cove, they rested and slept uneasily, yet heavily enough to know little of the weary while they had to wait before they could make their escape.

For it was not until the sun had set and the moon hung high above the sea in a sombre sky, that at last they were able to go.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was dark night when Beth got back to the little house in Orchard Street. She had hoped to slip in unobserved, but her mother was looking out for her.

"Where have you been?" she demanded angrily.

Beth had come in prepared to tell the whole exciting story, but this reception irritated her, and she answered her mother in exactly the same tone: "I've been at Fairholm."

"What have you been doing there?" Mrs. Caldwell snapped.

"Getting myself into a mess, as any one might see who looked at me," Beth rejoined. "I must go and change."

"You can go to bed," said her mother.

"Thank you," said Beth, and went off straight away.

Mrs. Caldwell would have liked to have followed her, and given her a good beating, as in the old days, had she dared. Her harshness, however, had much the same effect upon Beth that a beating used to have; it shut her up in herself, and deprived her of the power to take her mother into her confidence.

Harriet followed her to her room. "Whatever 'ave you been doin'?" she exclaimed. "You're draggled from top to toe, and your Sunday dress too!"

"I got caught by the tide," said Beth; "and I'm done."

"Just you get into bed, then," said Harriet; "and I'll fetch you up some tea when she goes out. She's off in a moment to Lady Benyon's."

"Bless you, Harriet!" Beth exclaimed. "I read in a book once that there is no crime but has some time been a virtue, and I am sure it will be a virtue to steal me some tea on this occasion, if it ever is."

"Oh, all's fair in love and war," Harriet answered cheerfully, as she helped Beth off with her boots; "and you and yer ma's at war again, I guess."

"Seems like it," Beth sighed. "But stay, though. No, you mustn't steal the tea. I promised Aunt Victoria. And that reminds me. There's some still left in her little canister. Here, take it and make it, and have some yourself as a reward for the trouble. Hot tea and toast, an you love me, Harriet, and to save my life. I've had nothing but salt water since breakfast."

When Beth went downstairs next morning, her mother scowled at her. "What did you mean by telling me you had been at Fairholm yesterday?" she asked.

"I meant to tell you where I had been," Beth answered impertinently.

"I saw your Aunt Grace Mary last night, and she told me she had not seen you."

"Well, Aunt Grace Mary is a good size," Beth rejoined, "but she doesn't cover the whole estate."

Mrs. Caldwell flushed angrily. "You're an ill-conditioned girl, and will come to a bad end, or I'm much mistaken," she exclaimed.

"With the help of my relations, it's likely," Beth retorted.

Her mother said no more until breakfast was over, and then she ordered her peremptorily to get out her lessons.

"Oh, lessons!" Beth grumbled. "What's the use of the kind of lessons *I* do? I'm none the better for knowing that Henry VIII. had six wives, nor the happier, nor the richer; and my wit and wisdom certainly don't increase, nor my manners improve, if you speak the truth."

Mrs. Caldwell changed countenance. If Beth rebelled against the home-teaching, what would happen about the money that Jim was enjoying? Upon reflection, her mother saw she was making a mistake.

"I think," she began in a conciliatory tone, "you are right perhaps. You had better not do any lessons this morning, for I am sure you cannot be well, Beth, or you would never speak to your mother in such a way."

"Well, I'm sorry, mamma," Beth rejoined in a mollified tone. "But you know I cannot stand these everlasting naggings and scoldings. They make me horrid. I'm pugnacious when I'm rubbed the wrong way; I can't help it."

"There, there, then; that will do," Mrs. Caldwell replied. "Run out and amuse yourself, or have a rest. You take too much exercise, and tire yourself to death; and then you are *so* cross there is no speaking to you. Go away, like a good child, and amuse yourself until you feel better."

Beth went back to her own room at once, only too glad to escape and be alone. She was not well. Every bone in her body ached, and her head was thumping so she had to lie down on her bed at last, and keep still for the rest of the day. But her mind was active the whole time, and it was a happy day. She expected nothing, yet she was pleurably satisfied, perfectly content.

The next morning at eleven there was service in the church at the end of the road. Beth and her mother had been having the usual morning misery at lessons, and both were exhausted when the bell began to ring. Beth's countenance was set sullen, and Mrs. Caldwell's showed suppressed irritation. The bell was a relief to them.

"Can I go to church?" Beth asked.

Her mother's first impulse was to say no, out of pure contrariness; but the chance of getting rid of Beth on any honourable pretext was too much of a temptation even for her to withstand. "Yes, if you like," she answered ungraciously, after a moment's hesitation; "and get some good out of it if you can," she added sarcastically.

Beth went with honest intention. There was a glow in her chest which added fervency to her devotions, and when Alfred entered from the vestry and took his seat in the chancel pew, happiness, tingling in every nerve, suffused her. His first glance was for her, and Beth knew it, but bent her head. Her soul did magnify the Lord, however, and her spirit did rejoice in God her Saviour, with unlimited love and trust. He had saved them, He would hear them. He would help them, He would make them both—*both* good and great—great after a pause, as being perhaps not a worthy aspiration.

She did not look at Alfred a second time, but she sat and stood and knelt, all conscious of him, and it seemed as if the service lasted but a moment.

Directly it was over, she fled, taking the narrow path by the side of the church to the fields; but before she was half way across the first field, she heard a quick step following her. Beth felt she must stop short—or run; she began to run.

"Beth! Beth! wait for me," he called.

Beth stopped, then turned to greet him shyly; but when he came close, and put his arm round her, she looked up smiling. They gazed into each other's eyes a moment, and then kissed awkwardly, like children.

"Were you any the worse for our adventure?" he asked. "I've been longing to know."

"I had a headache yesterday," said Beth. "How were you?"

"All stiff and aching," he replied, "or I should have been to ask after you."

"I'm glad you didn't come," Beth ejaculated.

"Why? I ought to know your people, you know. Why don't the Richardsons know them?"

"Because we're poor," Beth answered bluntly; "and Mr. Richardson neglects his poor parishioners."

"All the more reason that I should call," Alfred Cayley Pounce persisted. "You are people of good family like ourselves, and old Rich is a nobody."

"Yes," said Beth; "but my mother would not let me know you. She and I are always—always—we never agree, you know. I don't think we can help it; we certainly don't do it on purpose—at least *I* don't; but there's something in us that makes us jar about everything. I was going to tell her all about you on Sunday night; but when I got in I couldn't. She began by being angry because I was late, without waiting to know if I were to blame, and that—that shut me up, and I never told her; and now I don't think I could."

"But what objection can she have to me?" he asked loftily. "I really must make her acquaintance."

"Not through me, then," said Beth. "Do you know the Benyons?"

"No, I don't know anybody in the neighbourhood as yet. I'm here with old Rich to be crammed. My people are trying to force me into the bar or the church or something, because I want to be a sculptor."

"Don't be forced," said Beth with spirit. "Follow your own bent. I mean to follow mine."

"I didn't know girls had any bent," he answered dubiously.

There was a recoil in Beth. "How is it people never expect a girl to do anything?" she exclaimed, firing up.

"I don't see what a girl can do," he rejoined, "except marry and look after her husband and children."

"That's all right at the proper time," Beth said. "But meanwhile, and if she doesn't marry, is she to do nothing?"

"Oh, there are always lots of little things a woman can do," he answered airily.

"But supposing little things don't satisfy her, and she has power to follow some big pursuit?"

"Oh, well, in that case," he began, somewhat superciliously. "But it's too rare to be taken into account—talent in women."

"How do you know?" Beth said. "Robbing women of the means to develop their talents doesn't prove they haven't any. The best horseman in the world could never have ridden if he hadn't had a horse. I certainly think a woman should see to the ordering of her household; but if she has it in her to do more why shouldn't she? *I* shall want to do more, I know. I shall want to be something; and I shall never believe that I cannot be that something until I have tried the experiment. If you have it in you to be a sculptor, be a sculptor. *I* certainly should, girl and all as I am. I couldn't help it."

"You're very valiant!" he said drily; "but you don't know what it is to have your whole family against you."

"Don't I?" said Beth, laughing. "I've known that all my life; but I've known something besides. I've known what it is to be myself. If you know yourself, and yourself is a sculptor, you're bound to be a sculptor in spite of your family."

He looked at her admiringly. "When you talk like that, I feel I could be anything or do anything that you like, I love you so," he ventured, flipping the grass with his stick to cover his boyish embarrassment. "I am thinking of you always, all day long."

"Isn't it strange!" Beth answered softly. "And only two days ago we had never met!"

"But now we shall never part," he said. "Only I don't want you to be anything, or to care to be anything, but just my wife."

The word wife came upon Beth with the shock of a sweet surprise. She had not realised that she would ever be asked to be any one's wife; that seemed something reserved for the honour of beings above her, beautiful beings in books; and the hot flush of joy that suffused her at the word rendered her oblivious to the condition attached. She looked up in the young man's face with eyes full of love and gratitude, her transparent skin bright with a delicate blush, and her lips just parted in a smile.

"You *are* sweet, Beth!" he exclaimed. "How sweet you are!"

For the next few weeks they saw each other every day, if it were only for a few minutes; but even when they contrived to spend long hours together it was not enough. Beth scarcely ate or slept at that time; the glow and spring and flood of feeling that coursed through her whole being sustained her.

"When we are married we shall always be together," Alfred would whisper when they had to separate; and then their eyes would dilate with joy at the heavenly prospect; each was covered the while with smiles and confusion neither of which they could control. They made each other no formal vows. It was all taken for granted between them. Now they were engaged; but when they were old enough, and had an income, they were to be married.

Alfred had given up the idea of making Mrs. Caldwell's acquaintance before it was absolutely necessary. For the present, it delighted them to think that their secret was all their own, and no one suspected it, except Dicksie, the vicar's hunchback son, whom Alfred had taken into his confidence. Dicksie was as old as Alfred, but his deformity had stunted his growth, and the young lovers, looking down into his pathetic face, were filled with compassion, and eagerly anxious to make atonement to him for his misfortune by sharing as much of their happiness with him as might be. They encouraged him to accompany them in their walks when he could, which was a joy to him, for he was content to live upon the fringe of their romance unselfishly. When they separated, Beth and Alfred kissed each other frankly, and then Beth would stoop and kiss Dicksie also, in pure affection.

Neither of the three troubled themselves about other people in those days, and they never suspected that their own doings could be of consequence to anybody. They therefore remained serenely unaware of the fact that the whole place was talking about them, their own relations being the only people who did not know of the intimacy; and, worse still, everybody objected to it. All the forces of Nature combined, and the vast scheme of the universe itself had been ordered so as to unite those two young things; but, on the other hand, the whole machinery of civilisation was set in readiness to keep them apart. And the first intimation they had of this fact took them by surprise.

The whole happy summer had passed, and autumn was with them, mellow, warm, and still. The days were shorter then, and the young people delighted to slip out at dusk, and wander about the fields, all three together. A gate opened from the vicarage grounds into the field-path beside the church, and there Alfred and Dicksie waited till Beth appeared, and often waited in vain, for Beth could not always get out. Her mother told Lady Benyon that Beth was tiresome rather than naughty in those days. She seemed to have no idea of time. She would stay out so late that her mother became quite fidgety about her, not knowing what had become of her; and when Beth came in at last in a casual way, beaming blandly at every one, it was certainly provoking. Beth thought her mother unreasonable to object to her late rambles. She was not giving her any trouble; and she could not

understand why her mother was not content to let her be happy in her own way.

Beth's lessons became more perfunctory than ever that summer. Mrs. Caldwell salved her own conscience on the subject by arguing that it is not wise to teach a girl too much when she is growing so fast, and Lady Benyon agreed. Lady Benyon had no patience with people who over-educate girls—with boys it was different; but let a girl grow up strong and healthy, and get her married as soon as possible, was what she advised. Had any one asked what was to become of a girl brought up for that purpose solely, if no one were found to marry her, Lady Benyon would have disposed of the question with a shrug of the shoulders. She laid down the principle, and if it did not act, somebody must be to blame. The principle itself was good, she was sure of that. So Beth was kept without intellectual discipline to curb her senses at this critical period, and the consequence was that her energy took the form of sensuous rather than intellectual pursuits. Her time was devoted not to practising, but to playing; to poetry, and to dreamy musings. She wove words to music at the piano by the hour together, lolled about in languorous attitudes, was more painfully concerned than ever about her personal adornment, delighted in scents and in luxurious imaginings, and altogether fed her feelings to such excess, that if her moral nature were not actually weakened, it was certainly endangered.

Fortunately she had an admirable companion in Alfred. The boy is not naturally like a beast, unable to restrain his passions, a bit more than the girl. To men as to women the power to control themselves comes of the determination. There are cases of natural depravity, of course, but they are not peculiar to either sex; and as the girl may inherit the father's vices, so may the boy have his mother to thank for his virtues. Depravity is oftener acquired than inherited. As a rule, the girl's surroundings safeguard her from the acquisition; but when they do not, she becomes as bad as the boy. The boy, on the contrary, especially if he is sent to a public school, is systematically trained to be vicious. He learns the Latin grammar from his masters, and from the habitual conversation of the other boys, the books secretly circulated by them, and their traditional code of vice, he becomes familiarised with the most hoggish habits. He may escape the practical initiation by a miracle at the time; but it is from the mind familiar with ideas

of vice that the vicious impulse eventually springs; and the seed of corruption once sown in it, bears fruit almost inevitably.

Alfred had escaped this contamination by being kept at home at a day-school, and when Beth knew him he was as refined and high-minded as he was virile for his age, and as self-restrained as she was impetuous. She wanted to hurry on, and shape their lives; but he was content to let things come about. She lived in the future, he in the present; and he was teaching her to do the same, which was an excellent thing for her. Often when she was making plans he would check her by saying, "Aren't you satisfied? I can't imagine myself happier than I am at this moment."

One thing neither of them ever anticipated, and that was interference. They expected those happy days to last without interruption until the happier ones came, when they should be independent, and could do as they liked.

"When I am king, diddle, diddle, you shall be queen," Alfred used to sing to Beth; "and Dicksie shall be prime minister."

One night they were out in the fields together. Beth was sitting on a rail, with her arm round Dicksie's neck, as he stood on one side of her; Alfred being on the other, with his arm round her, supporting her. They were talking about flowers. Alfred was great on growing flowers. The vicar had given him a piece of the vicarage garden for his own, and he was going to build a little green-house to keep Beth well supplied with bouquets. They were deeply engrossed in the subject, and the night was exceedingly dark, so that they did not notice a sailor creep stealthily up the field behind them on the other side of the hedge, and crouch down near enough to hear all that they said. Certainly that sailor was never more at sea in his life than he was while he listened to their innocent prattle.

When at last Beth said it was time to go home, and they strolled away arm in arm, Alfred and Dicksie discovered that they were late, and Beth insisted on parting from them at the field-gate into the vicarage grounds instead of letting them see her safe into the street. When they left her, she hurried on down the path beside the church alone, and she had not taken many steps before she was suddenly confronted by a tall dark man, who made as if he would not let her pass. She stopped startled, and then went straight up to him boldly and peered into his face.

"Is that you, Gard?" she exclaimed. "How dare you!"

"How dare you!" he rejoined impudently. "I've had my eye on you for some time. I saw you out there just now in the field. I was determined to know what you were up to. There's mighty little happens here that I don't know."

"Oh," said Beth, "so you're the town spy, are you? Well, you're not going to spy upon me, so I warn you, Mr. Gard. The next time I come here, I'll come armed, and if I catch you dogging me about again, I'll shoot you as dead as my father's pistols can do it. And as it is, you shall pay for this, I promise you. Just step aside now, you cowardly black devil, and let me pass. Do you think that it's milk I've got in my veins that you come out on a fool's errand to frighten me?"

Without a word the man stepped aside, and Beth walked on down the path with her head in the air, and deliberately, to let him see how little she feared him.

The next morning, directly after breakfast, she went down to the pier. Count Bartahlinsky's yacht was alongside, and Gard was on deck. He changed countenance when Beth appeared. She ran down the ladder.

"I want to see your master," she said.

"He can't see you, miss. He's given orders that he's not to be disturbed for no one whatsoever," Gard answered with excess of deference; "and it's as much as my billet is worth to go near him; he's very much occupied this morning."

"Don't tell lies," said Beth. "I'm going to see him."

She went forward to the skylight as she spoke, and called down, "Below there, Count Gustav!"

"Hello!" a voice replied. "Is that you, Beth? You know you're too big to be on the yacht now without a chaperon."

"Rot!" said Beth.

"Don't be coarse, Beth," Count Gustav remonstrated from below in rather a precious tone. "You know how I dislike hoyden English."

"Well, then, *nonsense!* if that's any better," Beth rejoined. "You've got to see me—this once at all events, or there'll be a tragedy."

"Oh, in that case," was the resigned reply, "I'll come on deck."

Beth walked aft and waited for him, enthroned on the bulwark, with a coil of rope for her footstool.

When Count Gustav appeared, he looked at her quizzically. "What is the matter, Beth?" he asked. "What are you boiling with indignation about now?"

"About that man Gard," Beth replied. "What do you think he was doing last night? and not for the first time, by his own account. Spying!"

"Spying!" said Bartahlinsky. "Gard, come here."

Gard, who had been anxiously watching them from amidships, approached.

"Now, Beth, what do you mean?" said the Count.

"I mean that I was out sitting on a rail in the church-fields last night with Alfred Cayley Pounce and Dicksie Richardson talking, and this man came and listened; and then when I left them, he met me on the path beside the church, and spoke impudently to me, and would not let me pass. I know what you thought," she broke out, turning upon Gard. "You thought I was doing something that I was ashamed of, and you'd find it out, and have me in your power. But I'll have you know that I do nothing I'm ashamed of—nothing I should be ashamed to tell your master about, so you may save yourself the trouble of spying upon me, Black Gard, as they well call you."

Gard was about to say something, but Count Gustav stopped him peremptorily. "You can go," he said. "I'll hear what you have to say later."

Then he sat down beside Beth, and talked to her long and earnestly. He advised her to give up her rambles with Alfred and Dicksie; but she assured him that that was impossible.

"Who else have I?" she asked pathetically. "And what am I to do with my days if they never come into them again?"

"You ought to have been sent to school, Beth, long ago, and I told your mother so," Count Gustav answered, frowning. "And, by Jove, I'll tell her again," he thought, "before it's too late."

The encounter with Gard added excitement to the charm of Beth's next meeting with the boys. It made them all feel rather important. They discussed it incessantly, speculating as to what the man's object could have been. Alfred said vulgar curiosity; but Beth suspected that there was more than that in the manœuvre; and when Dicksie suggested acutely that Gard had intended to blackmail them, she and Alfred both exclaimed that that was it!

They had gone about together all this time in the most open way; now they began to talk about caution and concealment, like the persecuted lovers of old romance, who had powerful enemies, and were obliged to manage their meetings so that they should not be suspected. They decided not to speak to each other in public, and, consequently, when they met in the street, they passed with such an elaborate parade of ignoring each other, and yet with such evident enjoyment of the position, that people began to wonder what on earth they were up to. Disguises would have delighted them; but the fashions of the day did not lend themselves much to disguise, unfortunately. There were no masks, no sombreros, no cloaks; and all they could think of was false whiskers for Alfred; but when he tried them, they altered him so effectually that Dicksie said he could not bear him, and Beth would not kiss him.

One evening after dinner, when Mrs. Caldwell was reading aloud to Beth and Bernadine, there came a thundering knock at the front door, which startled them all. The weather had been bad all day, and now the shutters were closed, the rain beat against them with a chilly, depressing effect, inexpressibly dreary. Instead of attending to the reading, Beth had been listening to the footsteps of people passing in the street, in the forlorn hope that among them she might distinguish Alfred's. When the knock came they thought it was a runaway, but Harriet opened the door all the same, and presently returned, smiling archly, and holding aloft a beautiful bouquet.

"What's that?" said Mrs. Caldwell. "Give it to me."

Beth's heart stood still.

There was a card attached to the flowers, and Mrs. Caldwell read aloud, "*Miss Caldwell, with respectful compliments.*"

"Who brought this, Harriet?" she asked.

"No one, ma'am," Harriet replied. "It was 'itched on till the knocker."

"Very strange," Mrs. Caldwell muttered suspiciously. "Beth, do you know anything about it?"

"Is there no name on the card?" Beth asked diplomatically; and Mrs. Caldwell looked at the card instead of into Beth's face, and discovered nothing.

Raindrops sparkled on the flowers, their fragrance filled the room, and their colours and forms and freshness were a joy to behold. "How beautiful they are!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"May I have them, mamma?" Beth put in quickly.

"Well, yes, I suppose you may," Mrs. Caldwell decided; "although I must say I do not understand their being left in this way at all. Who could have sent you flowers?"

"There's the gardener at Fairholm," Beth ventured to suggest.

"Oh, ah, yes," said Mrs. Caldwell, handing the flowers to Beth without further demur. The gift appeared less lovely, somehow, when she began to associate it with the gardener's respectful compliments.

Beth took the flowers, and hid her burning face with them. This was her first bouquet, the most exquisite thing that had ever happened to her. She carried it off to her room, and put it in water; and when she went to bed she kept the candle burning that she might lie and look at it.

The following week a menagerie came to the place. Alfred and Dicksie went to it, and their description filled Beth with a wild desire to see the creatures, especially the chimpanzee. The boys were quite ready to take her, but how was it to be managed? The menagerie was only to be there that one night more, but it would be open late, and they would be allowed to go because animals are improving. Could she get out too? Beth considered intently.

"I can go to bed early," she said at last, "and get out by the acting-room window."

"But suppose you were missed?" Alfred deprecated.

"Then I should be found out," said Beth; "but you would not."

"How about being recognised in the menagerie, though?" said Dicksie. "You see there'll be lots of people, and it's all lighted up."

"I can disguise myself to look like an old woman," Beth rejoined, thinking of Aunt Victoria's auburn front and some of her old things.

"Oh no, Beth!" Alfred protested. "That would be worse than the whiskers."

"Can't you come as a boy?" said Dicksie.

"I believe I can," Beth exclaimed. "There's an old suit of Jim's somewhere that would be the very thing—one he grew out of. I believe it's about my size, and I think I know where it is. What a splendid idea, Dicksie! I can cut my hair off."

"Oh no! Your pretty hair!" Alfred exclaimed.

"Is it pretty?" said Beth, surprised and pleased.

"*Is it pretty!*" he ejaculated, lifting it with both hands, and bathing his face in it; "the brightest, brownest, curliest, softest, sweetest hair on earth! Turn it up under your cap. These little curls on your neck will look like short hair."

They were all so delighted with this romantic plan, that they danced about, and hugged each other promiscuously. But this last piece of cleverness was their undoing, for Beth was promptly recognised at the menagerie by some one with a sense of humour, who told Lady Benyon, who told Mrs. Caldwell.

Mrs. Caldwell came hurrying home from Lady Benyon's a few nights later with the queerest expression of countenance Beth had ever seen; it was something between laughing and crying.

"Beth," she began in an agitated manner, "I am told that you went with two of Mr. Richardson's sons to the menagerie on Tuesday night, dressed as a boy."

"*One* of his sons," said Beth, correcting her; "the other boy was his pupil."

"And you were walking about looking at the animals in that public place with your arm round the girl from the shoe-shop?"

Beth burst out laughing. "All the boys had their arms round girls," she explained. "I couldn't be singular."

Mrs. Caldwell dropped into a chair, and sat gazing at Beth as if she had never seen anything like her before, as indeed she never had.

"Who is this pupil of Mr. Richardson's?" she asked at last, "and how did you make his acquaintance?"

"His name is Alfred Cayley Pounce," Beth answered. "We were caught by the tide and nearly drowned together on the sands, and I've known him ever since."

"And do you mean to say that you have been meeting this young man in a clandestine manner—that you hadn't the proper pride to refuse to associate

with him unless he were known to your family and you could meet him as an equal?"

"He did wish to make your acquaintance, but I wouldn't let him," Beth said.

"Why?" Mrs. Caldwell asked in amazement.

"Oh, because I was afraid you would be horrid to him," Beth answered.

Mrs. Caldwell was thunderstruck. The whole affair had overwhelmed her as a calamity which could not be met by any ordinary means. Scolding was out of the question, for she was not able to utter another word, but just sat there with such a miserable face, she might have been the culprit herself, especially as she ended by bursting into tears.

Beth's heart smote her, and she watched her mother for some time, yearning to say something to comfort her.

"I don't think you need be so distressed, mamma," she ventured at last "What have I done, after all? I've committed no crime."

"You've done just about as bad a thing as you could do," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "You've made the whole place talk about you. You must have known you were doing wrong. But I think you can have no conscience at all."

"I think I have a conscience, only it doesn't always act," Beth answered disconsolately. "Very often, when I am doing a wrong thing, it doesn't accuse me; when it does, I stop and repent."

She was sitting beside the dining-table, balancing a pencil on her finger as she spoke.

"Look at you now, Beth," her mother ejaculated, "utterly callous!"

Beth sighed, and put the pencil down. She despaired of ever making her mother understand anything, and determined not to try again.

"Beth, I don't know what to do with you," Mrs. Caldwell recommenced after a long silence. "I've been warned again and again that I should have trouble with you, and Heaven knows I have. You've done a monstrous

thing, and, instead of being terrified when you're found out, you sit there coolly discussing it, as if you were a grown-up person. And then you're so queer. You ought to be a child, but you're not. Lady Benyon likes you; but even she says you're not a child, and never were. You say things no sane child would ever think of, and very few grown-up people. You are *not* like other people, there's no denying it."

Beth's eyes filled with tears. To be thought unlike other people was the one thing that made her quail.

"Well, mamma, what am I to do?" she said. "I hate to vex you, goodness knows; but I must be doing something. The days are long and dreary." She wiped her eyes. "When people warned you that you would have trouble with me, they always said unless you sent me to school."

Mrs. Caldwell rocked herself on her chair forlornly. "School would do you no good," she declared at last. "No, Beth, you are my cross, and I must bear it. If I forgive you again this time, will you be a better girl in future?"

"I don't believe it's my fault that I ever annoy you," Beth answered drily.

"Whose fault is it, then?" her mother demanded.

Beth shrugged her shoulders and began to balance the pencil on her fingers once more.

Mrs. Caldwell got up and stood looking at her for a little with a gathering expression of dislike on her face which it was not good to see; then she went towards the door.

"You are incorrigible," she ejaculated as she opened it, making the remark to cover her retreat.

Beth sighed heavily, then resolved herself into a Christian martyr, cruelly misjudged—an idea which she pursued with much satisfaction to herself for the rest of the day.

In consequence of that conversation with her mother, when the evening came her conscience accused her, and she made no attempt to go out. She was to meet Alfred and Dicksie on Saturday, their next half-holiday, and she would wait till then. That was Wednesday.

During the interval, however, a strange chill came over her feelings. The thought of Alfred was as incessant as ever, but it came without the glow of delight; something was wrong.

They were to meet on the rocks behind the far pier at low water on Saturday. Few people came to the far pier, and, when they did, it was seldom that they looked over; and they could not have seen much if they had, for the rocks were brown with seaweed, and dark figures wandering about on them became indistinguishable. Beth went long before the time. It was a beautiful still grey day, such as she loved, and she longed to be alone with the sea. The tide was going out, and she had a fancy for following it from rock to rock as it went. Some of the bigger rocks were flat-topped islands, separated from the last halting-place of the tide by narrow straits, across which she sprang; and on these she would lie her length, peering down into the clear depths on the farther side, where the healthy happy sea-creatures disported themselves, and seaweeds of wondrous colours waved in fantastic forms. The water lapped up and up and up the rocks, rising with a sobbing sound, and bringing fresh airs with it that fanned her face, and caused her to draw in her breath involuntarily, and inhale long deep draughts with delight. As the water went out, bright runnels were left where rivers had been, and miniature bays became sheltered coves, paved with polished pebbles or purple mussels, and every little sandy space was ribbed with solid waves where the busy lob-worms soon began to send up their ropy castings. Beyond the break of the water the silver sea sloped up to the horizon, and on it, rocking gently, far out, a few cobbles were scattered, with rich red sails all set ready, waiting for a breeze. It was an exquisite scene, remote from all wail of human feeling, and strangely tranquillising. Gradually it gained upon Beth. Her bosom heaved with the heaving water rhythmically, and she lost herself in contemplation of sea and sky scape. Before she had been many minutes prone upon the farthest rock, the vision and the dream were upon her. That other self of hers unfurled its wings, and she floated off, revelling in an ecstasy of gentle motion. Beyond the sea-line were palaces with terraced gardens, white palaces against which grass and trees showed glossy green; and there she wandered among the flowers, and waited. She was waiting for something that did not happen, for some one who did not come.

Suddenly she sat up on her rock. The sun was sinking behind her, the silver sea shone iridescent, the tide had turned. But where were the boys? She looked about her. Out on the sands beyond the rocks on her right, a man was wading in the water with a net, shrimping. Close at hand another was gathering mussels for bait, and a gentleman was walking towards her over the slippery rocks, balancing himself as though he found it difficult to keep his feet; but these were the only people in sight. The gentleman was a stranger. He wore a dark-blue suit, with a shirt of wonderful whiteness, and Beth could not help noticing how altogether well-dressed he was—too well-dressed for climbing on the rocks. She noticed his dress particularly, because well-dressed men were rare in Rainharbour. He was tall, with glossy black hair inclining to curl, slight whiskers and moustache, blue eyes, and a bright complexion. A woman with as much colour would have been accused of painting; in him it gave to some people the idea of superabundant health, to others it suggested a phthisical tendency. Beth looked at him as he approached as she looked at everybody and everything with interest—nothing escaped her; but he made no great impression upon her. She thought of him principally as a man with a watch; and when he was near enough she asked him what time it was. He told her, looking hard at her, and smiling pleasantly as he returned his watch to his pocket. She noticed that his teeth were good, but too far apart, a defect which struck her as unpleasant.

"Why, it is quite late!" she exclaimed, forgetting to thank him in her surprise.

"Are you all alone here?" he asked.

"I was waiting for some friends," she answered, "but they have not come. They must have been detained."

She began to walk back as she spoke, and the gentleman turned too perforce, for the tide was close upon them.

"Let me help you," he said, holding out his hand, which was noticeably white and well-shaped; "the rocks are rough and slippery."

"I can manage, thank you," Beth answered. "I am accustomed to them."

Beth involuntarily resolved herself into a young lady the moment she addressed this man, and spoke now with the self-possession of one accustomed to courtesies. Even at that age her soft cultivated voice and easy assurance of manner, and above all her laugh, which was not the silvery laugh of fiction, but the soundless laugh of good society, marked the class to which she belonged; and as he stumbled along beside her, her new acquaintance wondered how it happened that she was at once so well-bred and so shabbily dressed. He began to question her guardedly.

"Do you know Rainharbour well?" he asked.

"I live here," Beth answered.

"Then I suppose you know every one in the place," he pursued.

"Oh, no," she rejoined. "I know very few people, except my own, of course."

"Which is considered the principal family here?" he asked.

"The Benyon family is the biggest and the wickedest, I should think," she answered casually.

"But I meant the most important," he explained, smiling.

"I don't know," she said. "Uncle James Patten thinks that next to himself the Benyons are. He married one of them. He's an awful snob."

"And what is his position?"

"I don't know—he's a landowner; that's his estate over there," and she nodded towards Fairholm.

"Indeed! How far does it extend?"

"From the sea right up to the hills there, and a little way beyond."

They had left the rocks by this time, and were toiling up the steep road into the town. When they reached the top, Beth exclaimed abruptly, "I am late! I must fly!" and leaving her companion without further ceremony, turned down a side street and ran home.

When she got in, she wondered what had become of Alfred and Dicksie, and she was conscious of a curious sort of suspense, which, however, did not amount to anxiety. It was as if she were waiting and listening for something she expected to hear, which would explain in words what she held already inarticulate in some secret recess of her being—held in suspense and felt, but had not yet apprehended in the region of thought. There are people who collect and hold in themselves some knowledge of contemporary events as the air collects and holds moisture; it may be that we all do, but only one here and there becomes aware of the fact. As the impalpable moisture in the air changes to palpable rain so does this vague cognisance become a comprehensible revelation by being resolved into a shower of words on occasion by some process psychically analogous to the condensation of moisture in the air. It is a natural phenomenon known to babes like Beth, but ill-observed, and not at all explained, because man has gone such a little way beyond the bogey of the supernatural in psychical matters that he is still befogged, and makes up opinions on the subject like a divine when miracles are in question, instead of searching for information like an honest philosopher, whose glory it is, not to prove himself right, but to discover the truth.

Beth did not sleep much that night. She recalled the sigh and sob and freshness of the sea, and caught her breath again as if the cool water were still washing up and up and up towards her. She saw the silver surface, too, stretching on to those shining palaces, where grass and tree showed vivid green against white walls, and flowers stood still on airless terraces, shedding strange perfumes. And she also saw her new acquaintance coming towards her, balancing himself on the slippery, wrack-grown rocks, in boots and things that were much too good for the purpose; but Alfred and Dicksie never appeared, and were not to be found of her imagination. They were nowhere.

She expected to see them in church next day—at least, so she assured herself, and then was surprised to find that there was no sort of certainty in herself behind the assurance, although they had always hitherto been in church. "Something is different, somehow," she thought, and the phrase became a kind of accompaniment to all her thoughts.

Dicksie was the first person she saw when she entered the church, but Alfred was not there, and he did not come. She went up the field-path after the service, and waited about for Dicksie. When Alfred was detained himself, Dicksie usually came to explain; but that day he did not appear, and they were neither of them at the evening service. Beth could not understand it, but she was more puzzled than perturbed.

She was reading French to her mother next morning by way of a lesson, when they both happened to look up and see Mrs. Richardson, the vicar's worn-out wife, passing the window. The next moment there was a knock at the door.

"Can she be coming here?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"What should she come here for?" Beth rejoined, her heart palpitating.

"Oh dear, oh dear! this is just what I expected!" Mrs. Caldwell declared. "And if only she had come last week, I should have known nothing about it."

"You don't know much as it is," Beth observed, without, however, seeing why that should make any difference.

The next moment the vicar's wife was ushered in with a wink by Harriet. Mrs. Caldwell and Beth both rose to receive her haughtily. She had entered with assurance, but that left her the moment she faced them, and she became exceedingly nervous. She was surprised at the ease and grace of these shabbily-dressed ladies, and the refinement of their surroundings—the design of the furniture, the colour of curtains and carpet, the china, the books, the pictures, all of which bespoke tastes and habits not common in the parish.

"I must apologise for this intrusion," she began nervously. "I have a most unpleasant task to perform. My husband requested me to come——"

"Why didn't he come himself?" Beth asked blandly. "Why does he make you do the disagreeable part of his duties?"

The vicar's wife raised her meek eyes and gazed at Beth. She had not anticipated this sort of reception from poor parishioners, and was

completely nonplussed. She was startled, too, by Beth's last question, for she belonged to the days of brave unhonoured endurance, when women, meekly allowing themselves to be classed with children and idiots, exacted no respect, and received none—no woman, decent or otherwise, being safe from insult in the public streets; when they were expected to do difficult and dirty work for their husbands, such as canvassing at elections, without acknowledgment, their wit and capacity being traded upon without scruple to obtain from men the votes which they were not deemed wise and worthy enough to have themselves; the days when they gave all and received nothing in return, save doles of bread and contempt, varied by such caresses as a good dog gets when his master is in the mood. That was the day before woman began to question the wisdom and goodness of man, his justice and generosity, his right to make a virtue of wallowing when he chose to wallow, and his disinterestedness and discretion when he also arrogated to himself the power to order all things. Mrs. Richardson had no more thought of questioning the beauty of her husband's decisions than she had thought of questioning the logic and mercy of her God, and this first flash of the new spirit of inquiry from Beth's bright wit came upon her with a shock at first—one of those shocks to the mind which is as the strength of wine to the exhausted body, that checks the breath a moment, then rouses and stimulates.

"May I sit down?" she gasped, then dropped into a chair. "He might have come himself, to be sure," she muttered. "I have more than enough to do that is disagreeable in my own womanly sphere without being required to meddle in parish matters."

Yet when her husband had said to her: "It is a very disagreeable business indeed this. I think I'll get you to go. You'll manage it with so much more tact than a man," the poor lady, unaccustomed to compliments, was gratified. Now, however, thanks to Beth, she had been nearer to making an acute observation than she had ever been in her life before; she all but perceived that the woman's sphere is never home exclusively when man can make use of her for his own purposes elsewhere. The sphere is the stable he ties her up in when he does not want her, and takes her from again to drag him out of a difficulty, or up to some distinction, just as it suits himself.

Mrs. Caldwell and Beth waited for Mrs. Richardson to commit herself, but gave her no further help.

"The truth is," she recommenced desperately, "we have lost an excellent pupil. His people have been informed that he was carrying on an intrigue with a girl in this place, and have taken him away at a moment's notice."

"And what has that to do with us?" Mrs. Caldwell asked politely.

"The girl is said to be your daughter."

"This is my eldest daughter at home," Mrs. Caldwell answered. "She is not yet fourteen."

"But she's a very big girl," Mrs. Richardson faltered.

"Who is this person, this pupil you allude to?" Mrs. Caldwell asked superciliously.

"He is the son of wealthy Nottingham people."

"Ah! lace manufacturers, I suppose," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined.

"Yes—s," Mrs. Richardson acknowledged with reluctance. She associated, as she was expected to do, with gentlemen who debauched themselves freely, but would have scorned the acquaintance of a shopman of saintly life.

"Then certainly not a proper acquaintance for my daughter," Mrs. Caldwell decided, with the manner of a county lady speaking to a person whom she knows to be nobody by birth. "Beth, will you be good enough to tell us what you know of this youth?"

"I was caught by the tide on the sands one day, and he was there, and helped me; and I always spoke to him afterwards. I thought I ought, for politeness' sake," Beth answered easily.

"May I ask how that strikes you?" Mrs. Caldwell, turning to Mrs. Richardson, requested to know, but did not wait for a reply. "It strikes me," she proceeded, "that your husband's parish must be in an appalling state of neglect and disorder when slander is so rife that he loses a good pupil

because an act of common politeness, a service rendered by a youth on the one hand, and acknowledged by a young lady on the other, is described as an intrigue. But I still fail to see," she pursued haughtily, "why you should have come to spread this scandal here in my house."

"Oh," the little woman faltered, "I was to ask if there had been any—any presents. But," she added hastily, to save herself from the wrath which she saw gathering on Mrs. Caldwell's face, "I am sure there were not. I'm sure you would never bring a breach of promise case—I'm sure it has all been a dreadful mistake. If Mr. Richardson wants anything of this kind done in future, he must do it himself. I apologise."

She uttered the last word with a gasp.

"Let me show you out," said Beth, and the discomfited lady found herself ushered into the street without further ceremony.

When Beth returned she found her mother smiling blandly at the result of her diplomacy. It was probably the first effort of the kind the poor lady had ever made, and she was so elated by her success that she took Beth into her confidence, and forgave her outright in order to hob-nob with her on the subject.

"I think I fenced with her pretty well," she said several times. "A woman of her class, a country attorney's daughter or something of that kind, is no match for a woman of mine. I hope, Beth, this will be a lesson to you, and will teach you to appreciate the superior tact and discretion of the upper classes."

Beth could not find it in her heart to say a word to check her mother's jubilation; besides, she had played up to her, answering to expectation, as she was apt to do, with fatal versatility. But she did not feel that they had come out of the business well. It was as if their honesty had been bedraggled somehow, and she could not respect her mother for her triumph; on the contrary, she pitied her. That kind of diplomacy or tact, the means by which people who have had every advantage impose upon those who have had no advantages to speak of, did not appeal to Beth as pleasant, even at fourteen.

Mrs. Caldwell put her work away at once, and hurried off to describe the encounter to Lady Benyon.

"They had not heard of the menagerie affair, I suppose," the old lady observed, twinkling. "Thanks to yourself, I think you may consider Miss Beth is well out of *that* scrape. But take my advice. Get that girl married the first chance you have. *I* know girls, and she's one of the marrying kind. Once she's married, let her mutiny or do anything she likes. *You'll* be shut of the responsibility."

CHAPTER XXVIII

FROM that time forward it was as if Alfred had vanished into space. Whether he ever attempted to communicate with her, Beth could not tell; but she received no letter or message. She expected to hear from him through Dicksie, but it soon became apparent that Dicksie had deserted her. He came to none of their old haunts, and never looked her way in church or in the street when they met. She was ashamed to believe it of him at first, lest some defect in her own nature should have given rise to the horrid suspicion; but when she could no longer doubt it, she shrugged her shoulders as at something contemptible, and dismissed him from her mind. About Alfred she could not be sure. He might have sent letters and messages that never reached her, and therefore she would not blame him; but as the thought of him became an ache, she resolutely set it aside, so that, in a very short time, in that part of her consciousness where his image had been, there was a blank. Thus the whole incident ended like a light extinguished, as Beth acknowledged to herself at last. "It is curious, though," she thought, "but I certainly knew it in myself all along from the moment the change came, *if only I could have got at the knowledge.*"

As a direct result of her separation from Alfred, Beth entered upon a bad phase. The simple satisfaction of her heart in his company had kept her sane and healthy. With such a will as hers, it had not been hard to cast him out of her anticipations; but with him, there went from her life that wholesome companionship of boy and girl which contains all the happiness necessary for their immaturity, and also stimulates their growth in every way by holding out the alluring prospect of the fulfilment of those hopes of their being towards which their youth should aspire from the first, insensibly, but without pause. Having once known this companionship, Beth did not thrive without it. She had no other interest in its place to take her out of herself, and the time hung heavy on her hands. With her temperament, however, more than a momentary pause was impossible. Her active mind, being bare of all expectation, soon began to sate itself upon vain imaginings. For the rational plans and pursuits she had been accustomed to make and to carry out with the boys, she had nothing to substitute but dreams; and on these

she lived, finding an idle distraction in them, until the habit grew disproportionate, and began to threaten the fine balance of her other faculties: her reason, her power of accurate observation and of assimilating every scrap of knowledge that came in her way. To fill up her empty days, she surrounded herself with a story, among the crowding incidents of which she lived, whatever she might be doing. She had a lover who frequented a wonderful dwelling on the other side of the headland that bounded Rainharbour bay on the north. He was rich, dark, handsome, a mysterious man, with horses and a yacht. She was his one thought, but they did not meet often because of their enemies. He was engaged upon some difficult and dangerous work for the good of mankind, and she had many a midnight ride to warn him to beware, and many a wild adventure in an open boat, going out in the dark for news. But there were happy times too, when they lived together in that handsome house hidden among the flowers behind the headland, and at night she always slept with her head on his shoulder. He had a confidential agent, a doctor, whom he sent to her with letters and messages, because it was not safe for him to appear in the public streets himself. This man was just like the one she had met on the rocks, and his clothes were always too good for the occasion. His name was Angus Ambrose Cleveland.

Just at this time, Charlotte Hardy, the daughter of a doctor who lived next door to the Benyon Dower House, fell in love with Beth, and began to make much of her. Beth had never had a girl companion before, and although she rather looked down on Charlotte, she enjoyed the novelty. They were about the same age, but Charlotte was smaller than Beth, less precocious, and better educated. She knew things accurately that Beth had only an idea of; but Beth could make more use of a hint than Charlotte could of the fullest information. Beth respected her knowledge, however, and suffered pangs of humiliation when she compared it to her own ignorance; and it was by way of having something to show of equal importance that she gradually fell into the habit of confiding her romance to Charlotte, who listened in perfect good faith to the fascinating details which Beth poured forth from day to day. Beth did not at first intend to impose on her credulity; but when she found that Charlotte in her simplicity believed the whole story, she adapted her into it, and made her as much a part of it as Hector the hero, and Dr. Angus Ambrose Cleveland, the confidential agent on whom their safety

depended. Charlotte was Beth's confidante now, a post which had hitherto been vacant; so the whole machinery of the romance was complete, and in excellent order.

"It's queer I never see the doctor about," Charlotte said one day, when they were out on the cliffs together.

Beth happened to look up at that moment and saw her acquaintance of the rocks coming towards them.

"Your curiosity will be gratified," she said, "for there he is."

"Where?" Charlotte demanded in an excited undertone.

"Approaching," Beth answered calmly.

"Will he speak?" Charlotte asked in a breathless whisper.

"He will doubtless make me a sign," Beth replied.

When he was near enough, the gentleman recognised Beth, and smiled as they passed each other.

"Oughtn't he to have taken off his hat?" Charlotte asked.

"He means no disrespect," Beth answered with dignity. "It is safer so. In fact, if you had not been my confidante, he would not have dared to make any sign at all."

"Oh, then he knows that I am your confidante!" Charlotte exclaimed, much gratified.

"Of course," said Beth. "I have to keep them informed of all that concerns me. I brought you here to-day on purpose. I shall doubtless have to ask you to take letters, and you could not deliver them if you did not know the doctor by sight. There is the yacht," she added, as a beautiful white-winged vessel swept round the headland into the bay.

"O Beth! aren't you excited?" Charlotte cried.

"No," Beth answered quietly. "You see I am used to these things."

"Beth, what a strange creature you are," said Charlotte, with respect. "One can see that there's something extraordinary about you, but one can't tell what it is. You're not pretty—at least *I* don't think so. I asked papa what he thought, and he said you had your points, and a something beyond, which is irresistible. He couldn't explain it, though; but I know what he meant. I always feel it when you talk to me; and I believe I could die for you. There's Mrs. Warner Benyon out again," she broke off to observe. "Papa was called in to see her the other day. He isn't their doctor, but she was taken ill suddenly, so they sent for him because he was at hand; and he says her shoulders are like alabaster."

Beth pursed up her mouth at this, but made no answer. When she got home, however, she repeated the observation to her mother in order to ask her what alabaster was exactly. Mrs. Caldwell flushed indignantly at the story. "If Dr. Hardy speaks in that way of his patients to his family, he won't succeed in his profession," she declared. "A man who talks about his patients may be a clever doctor, but he's sure not to be a nice man—not high-minded, you know—and certainly not a wise one. Remember that, Beth, and take my advice: don't have anything to do with a 'talking doctor'"—a recommendation which Beth remembered afterwards, but only to note the futility of warnings.

Matters became very complicated in the story as it proceeded. It was all due to some Spanish imbroglio, Beth said. Hector ran extraordinary risks, and she was not too safe herself if things went wrong. There were implicating documents, and emissaries of the Jesuits were on the look-out.

One day, Charlotte's mother being away from home, Beth asked her mysteriously if she could conceal some one in her room at night unknown to her father.

"Easily," Charlotte answered. "He never comes up to my room."

"Then you must come and ask mamma to let me spend the day and night with you to-morrow," Beth said. "I shall have business which will keep me away all day, but I shall return at dusk, and then you must smuggle me up to your room. We shall be obliged to sit up all night. I don't know what is going to happen. Are the servants safe? If I should be betrayed——"

"Safe not to tell you are there," said Charlotte, "and that is all they will know. They won't tell on me. I never tell on them."

The next morning early, Charlotte arrived in Orchard Street with a face full of grave importance, and obtained Mrs. Caldwell's consent to take Beth back with her; but instead of having to go home to spend the day alone waiting for Beth, as she had expected, she was sent out some distance along the cliffs to a high hill, which she climbed by Beth's direction. She was to hide herself among the fir-trees at the top, and watch for a solitary rider on a big brown horse, who would pass on the road below between noon and sunset, if all went well, going towards the headland.

"*I shall be that rider,*" Beth said solemnly. "And the moment you see me, take this blue missive, and place it on the Flat Rock, with a stone on it to keep it from blowing away; then go home. If I do not appear before sunset, here is a red missive to place on the Flat Rock instead of the blue one, which must then be destroyed by fire. If I return, I return; if not, never breathe a word of these things to a living soul as you value your life."

"I would rather die than divulge anything," Charlotte protested solemnly, and her choice of the word divulge seemed to add considerably to the dignity of the proceedings.

They separated with a casual nod, that people might not suspect them of anything important, and each proceeded to act her part in a delightful state of excitement; but what was thrilling earnest to Charlotte, calling for courage and endurance, was merely an exhilarating play of the fancy put into practice to Beth.

By the time Charlotte arrived at the top of the hill, and had settled herself among the firs overlooking the road below, she was very tired. Beth had given her a bag, one of Aunt Victoria's many reticules, with orders not to open it before her watch began. The bag had been a burden to carry, but Charlotte was repaid for the trouble, for she found it full of good things to eat, and a bottle of cold coffee and cream to drink, with lumps of sugar and all complete. Beth had really displayed the most thoughtful kindness in packing that bag. The contents she had procured on a sudden impulse from a pastry-cook in the town, by promising to pay the next time she passed.

After having very much enjoyed a solid Melton Mowbray pie, a sausage in puff-pastry, a sponge-cake, a lemon cheesecake, and two crisp brandy snaps, and slowly sipped the coffee, Charlotte felt that this was the only life worth living, and formally vowed to dedicate herself for ever to the Secret Service of Humanity—Beth's name for these enterprises. She kept a careful eye on the road below all this time, and there ran through her head the while fragments of a ballad Beth had written, which added very much to the charm of the occasion.

"The fir-trees whisper overhead,
Between the living and the dead,
I watch the livelong day.
I watch upon the mountain-side
For one of courage true and tried,
Who should ride by this way,"

it began. When she first heard that Beth had written that ballad, Charlotte was astonished. It was the only assertion of Beth's she had ever doubted; but Beth assured her that any one could write verses, and convinced her by "making some up" there and then on a subject which she got Charlotte to choose for her.

Many things passed on the road below—teams of waggons, drawn by beautiful big cart-horses with glossy coats, well cared for, tossing their headland rattling the polished brasses of their harness proudly, signs of successful farming and affluence; smart carriages with what Beth called "silly-fool ladies, good for nothing," in them; a carrier's cart, pedestrians innumerable, and then—then, at last, a solitary big brown horse, ridden at a steady canter by a slender girl in a brown habit (worn by her mother in her youth, and borrowed from her wardrobe without permission for the occasion). The horse was a broken-down racer with some spirit left, which Beth had hired, as she had procured the provisions, on a promise to pay. In passing, she waved a white handkerchief carelessly, as if she were flicking flies from the horse, but *without relenting her speed*. This was the signal agreed upon. Charlotte, glowing with excitement, and greatly relieved, watched the adventurous rider out of sight; then trudged off bravely to the Flat Rock, miles away behind the far pier, where she loyally deposited the blue missive. The red one she destroyed by fire according to orders.

Beth had warned her that she would be tired to death when she got in, and had better snatch some repose in preparation for the night.

"But if I oversleep myself and am not on the look-out for you when you come, what will you do?" Charlotte objected.

"Leave that to me," said Beth.

And Charlotte did accordingly with perfect confidence.

When she awoke the room was dark, but there was a motionless figure sitting in the window, clearly silhouetted against the sky. Charlotte, who expected surprises, was pleasantly startled.

"Is all safe in the west, sister?" she said softly, raising herself on her elbow.

"Yes," was the reply, "but clouds are gathering in the north. Our hope is in the east. Let us pray for the sunrise. You left the letter?"

"Yes. As fast as I could fly I went."

"Ah! then it will be gone by this time!" Beth ejaculated with conviction. The Flat Rock was only uncovered at low water, and now the tide was high. "Can you get me some food, little one, for I am famished?" she proceeded. "I have had nothing since the morning, and have ridden far, and have done much."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" said Charlotte. "And you got me such good things!"

"Ah! that was different," Beth rejoined.

Charlotte stole downstairs. Her father had been out seeing his patients all day, and had not troubled about her.

She returned with chicken and ham, cold apple-tart and cream, and a little jug of cider.

Poor Beth, accustomed to the most uninteresting food, and not enough of that, was so exhausted by her long fast and arduous labours, that she found it difficult to restrain her tears at the sight of such good things. She ate and drank with seemly self-restraint, however; it would have lowered her much in her own estimation if she had showed any sign of the voracity she felt.

Then the watch began. Having wrapped themselves up in their walking things to be ready for any emergency, they locked the door and opened the window softly. They were in a room at the top of the house, which, being next door to the Benyons, commanded the same extensive view down the front street and a bit of Rock Street and the back street, and up Orchard Street on the left to the church. They were watching for a sailor in a smart yachting suit, a man-of-war's man with bare feet, and a priest in a heavy black cloak. Beth, greatly refreshed and stimulated by her supper and the cider, fell into her most fascinating mood; and Charlotte listened enthralled to wonderful descriptions of places she had visited with Hector, sights she had seen, and events she had taken part in.

"But how is it you are not missed from home when you go away like that?" said Charlotte.

"How is it I am not missed to-night?" Beth answered. "When you are fully initiated into the Secret Service of Humanity you will find that things happen in a way you would never suspect."

"I suppose it is all right and proper being so much alone with single gentlemen," Charlotte just ventured.

"All things are right and proper so long as you do nothing wrong," Beth answered sententiously.

Lights began to move from room to room in the houses about them, gigantic shadows of people appeared on white window blinds in fantastic poses, and there was much moving to and fro as they prepared for bed. Then one by one the lights went out, and in the little old-fashioned window-panes the dark brightness of the sky and the crystal stars alone were reflected. It was a fine clear night, the gas burnt brightly in the quiet streets, there was not a soul stirring.

"Isn't it exquisite?" said Beth, sniffing the sweet air. "I am glad I was born, if it is only for the sake of being alive at night."

After this they were silent. Then by degrees the desire for sleep became imperative, and they both suffered acutely in their efforts to resist it. Finally Charlotte was vanquished, and Beth made her lie down on the bed. As she dropped off she saw Beth sitting rigidly at the open window; when she

awoke it was bright daylight, and Beth was still there in exactly the same attitude.

"Beth," she exclaimed, "you are superhuman!"

"Ah!" said Beth, with a mysterious smile, "when you have learnt to listen to the whispers of the night, and know what they signify as I do, you will not wonder. Marvellous things have been happening while you slept."

"O Beth!" said Charlotte reproachfully, "why didn't you wake me?"

"I was forbidden," Beth answered sadly. "But now watch for me. It is your turn, and I must sleep. A yachtsman or a man-of-war's man with bare feet, remember."

Beth curled herself up on the bed, and Charlotte, very weary and aching all over, but sternly determined to do her duty, took her place in the window. She had her reward, however, and when Beth awoke she found her all on the alert, for she had seen the yachtsman. He came up the street and hung about a little, pretending to look at the shops, then walked away briskly, which showed Charlotte that the plot was thickening, and greatly excited her. Beth smiled and nodded as though well satisfied when she heard the news, but preserved an enigmatical silence.

Then Charlotte went downstairs and smuggled her up such a good breakfast—fried ham, boiled eggs, hot rolls with plenty of butter, and delicious coffee—that the famishing Beth was fain to exclaim with genuine enthusiasm—

"In spite of all the difficulty, danger, and privation we have to endure in the Secret Service of Humanity, Charlotte, is there anything to equal the delight of it?"

And Charlotte solemnly asseverated that there was not.

Much stimulated by her breakfast, Beth took leave of Charlotte. She must be alone, she said, she had much to think about. She went to the farther shore to be away from everybody. She wanted to hear what the little waves were saying to the sand as they rippled over it. It was another grey day, close and still, and the murmur of the calm sea threw her at once into a

dreamy state, full of pleasurable excitement. She hid herself in a spot most soothing from its apparent remoteness, a sandy cove from which, because of the projecting cliffs on either hand, neither town nor coast could be seen, but only the sea and sky. Although the grey was uniform enough to make it impossible to tell where cloud met water on the horizon, it was not dull, but luminous with the sunshine it enfolded, and full of colour in fine gradations as Beth beheld it. She sat a long time on the warm dry sand, with her chin resting on her knees, and her hands clasped round them, not gazing with seeing eyes nor listening with open ears, but apprehending through her further faculty the great harmony of Nature of which she herself was one of the triumphant notes. At that moment she tasted life at its best and fullest—life all ease and grace and beauty, without regret or longing—perfect life in that she wanted nothing more. But she rose at last, and, still gazing at the sea, slowly unclasped her waistbelt, and let it fall on the sand at her feet; then she took her hat off, her dress, her boots and stockings, everything, and stood, ivory-white, with bright brown wavy hair, against the lilac greyness under the tall dark cliffs. The little waves had called her, coming up closer and closer, and fascinating her, until, yielding to their allurements, she went in amongst them, and floated on them, or lay her length in the shallows, letting them ripple over her, and make merry about her, the gladdest girl alive, yet with the wrapt impassive face of a devotee whose ecstasy is apart from all that acts on mere flesh and makes expression. All through life Beth had her moments, and they were generally such as this, when her higher self was near upon release from its fetters, and she arose an interval towards oneness with the Eternal.

But on this occasion she was surprised in her happy solitude. A troop of what Mrs. Caldwell called "common girls" came suddenly round the cliff into her sheltered nook, with shouts of laughter, also bent on bathing. Beth plunged in deeper to cover herself the moment they appeared; but they did not expect her to have anything on, and her modesty was lost upon them.

"How's the water?" they shouted.

"Delicious," she answered, glad to find them friendly.

They undressed as they came along, and were very soon, all of them, playing about her, ducking and splashing each other, and Beth also,

including her sociably in their game. And Beth, as was her wont, responded so cordially that she was very soon heading the manœuvres.

"We shall all be ill if we stay in any longer," she said at last. "I shall take one more dip and go and dress. Let's all take hands and dip in a row."

They did so, and then, still hand in hand, scampered up on to the beach.

"My!" one of them exclaimed, when they came to their clothes and had broken the line,— "My! ain't *she* nice!"

Then all the other girls stood and stared at Beth, whose fine limbs and satin-smooth white skin, so different in colour and texture from their own, drew from them the most candid expressions of admiration.

Beth, covered with confusion, hurried on a garment all wet as she was, for she had no towel; and then, in order to distract their attention from her body, she began to display her mind.

"Eh, I have had a good time!" one of the girls exclaimed. "Let's come again often."

"Let us form a secret society," said Beth, "and I will be your leader, and we'll have a watchword and a sign; and when the water is right, I'll send the word round, and then we'll start out unobserved, and meet here, and bathe in secret."

"My! that would be fine!" the girls agreed.

"But that's not all," said Beth, standing with her chemise only half on, oblivious of everything now but her subject. "It would be much better than that. There would be much more in it. We could meet in the fields by moonlight, and I would drill you, and show you a great many things, all for the Secret Service of Humanity. You don't know what we're doing! We're going to make the world just like heaven, and everybody will be good and beautiful, and have enough of everything, and we shall all be happy, because nobody will care to be happy unless everybody else has been made so. But it will be very hard work to bring it about. The wicked people are doing all they can to prevent us, and the devil himself is fighting against us.

We shall conquer, however; and those who are first in the fight will be first for the glory!"

The girls, some standing, some sitting, most of them with nothing on, remained motionless while she spoke, not understanding much, yet so moved by the power of her personality, that when she exclaimed, "Well, what do you say, girls? will you join?" they all exclaimed with enthusiasm, "We will! we will!"

And then they made haste to dress as if the millennium could be hurried here by the rate at which they put on their clothes. Beth then and there composed a terrible oath, binding them to secrecy and obedience, and swore them all in solemnly; then she chose one for her orderly, who was to take round the word on occasion; and they were all to meet again in the fields behind the church on Saturday at eight o'clock.

But in the meantime, not a word!

Beth made Charlotte captain of the band; and drills, bathing rites, and other mysteries were regularly conducted, the girls being bound together more securely by the fascination of Beth's discourses, and the continual interest she managed to inspire, than by any respect they had for an oath. Beth's interest in them extended to the smallest detail of their lives. She knew which would be absent from drill because it was washing-day, and which was weak for want of food; and she resumed her poaching habits—only on Uncle James Patten's estate, of course—and, having beguiled a gunsmith into letting her have an air-gun on credit, she managed to snare and shoot birds enough to relieve their necessities to an appreciable extent. She never let any one into the secret of those supplies, and the mystery added greatly to her credit with the girls.

That season some friends of the Benyons brought their boys to stay at Rainharbour for the holidays, and Beth varied her other pursuits by rambling about with them, Lady Benyon having seen to it that she made their acquaintance legitimately, for the old lady shrewdly suspected that Beth was already beginning to attract attention. From her post of observation in the window she had seen young men turn in the street and look back at the slender girl, in spite of her short petticoats, with more interest than many a maturer figure aroused; and she had heard that Beth

Caldwell was already much discussed. Beth's brother Jim, when he came home that summer, also began to introduce her to his young men friends in the neighbourhood, so that very soon Beth had quite a little court about her on the pier when the band played. She liked the boys, and the young men she found an absorbing study; but not one of them touched her heart. Her acquaintance with Alfred had made her fastidious. He had had sense enough to respect her, and his companionship had given her a fine foretaste of the love that is ennobling, the love that makes for high ideals of character and conduct, for fine purpose, spiritual power, and intellectual development, the one kind worth cultivating. In these more sophisticated youths she found nothing soul-sustaining. She philandered with some of them up to the point where comparisons become inevitable, and, so long as they met her in a spirit of frank camaraderie, it was agreeable enough; but when, with their commonplace minds, they presumed to be sentimental, they became intolerable. Still the glow was there in her breast often and often, and would be momentarily directed towards one and another; but the brightness of it only showed the defects in each; and so she remained in love with love alone, and the power of passion in her, thwarted, was transmuted into mental energy.

But Beth learnt a good deal from her young men that summer—learnt her own power, for one thing, when she found that she could twist the whole lot of them round her little finger if she chose. The thing about them that interested her most, however, was their point of view. She found one trait common to all of them when they talked to her, and that was a certain assumption of superiority which impressed her very much at first, so that she was prepared to accept their opinions as confidently as they gave them; and they always had one ready to give on no matter what subject. Beth, perceiving that this superiority was not innate, tried to discover how it was acquired that she might cultivate it. Gathering from their attitude towards her ignorance that this superiority rested somehow on a knowledge of the Latin grammar, she hunted up an old one of her brother's and opened it with awe, so much seemed to depend on it. Verbs and declensions came easily enough to her, however. The construction of the language was puzzling at the outset; but, with a little help, she soon discovered that even in that there was nothing occult. Any industrious, persevering person could learn a language, she decided; and then she made more observations. She

discovered that, in the estimation of men, feminine attributes are all inferior to masculine attributes. Any evidence of reasoning capacity in a woman they held to be abnormal, and they denied that women were ever logical. They had to allow that women's intuition was often accurate, but it was inferior, nevertheless, they maintained, to man's uncertain reason; and such qualities as were undeniable they managed to discount, as, for instance, in the matter of endurance. If women were long enduring, they said, it was not because their fortitude was greater, but because they were less sensitive to suffering, and so, in point of fact, suffered less than men would under the circumstances.

This persistent endeavour to exalt themselves by lowering women struck Beth as mean, and made her thoughtful. She began by respecting their masculine minds as much as they did themselves; but then came a doubt if they were any larger and more capable than the minds of women would be if they were properly trained and developed; and she began to dip into the books they prided themselves on having read, to see if they were past her comprehension. She studied Pope's translation of the Iliad and Odyssey indoors, and she also took the little volume out under her arm; but this was a pose, for she could not read out of doors, there were always so many other interests to occupy her attention—birds and beasts, men and women, trees and flowers, land and water; all much more entrancing than the Iliad or Odyssey. Long years afterwards she returned to these old-world works with keen appreciation, and wondered at her early self; but when she read them first, she took their meanings too literally, and soon wearied of warlike heroes, however great a number of their fellow-creatures they might slay at a time, and of chattel heroines, however beautiful, which was all that Homer conveyed to her; not did she find herself elated by her knowledge of their exploits. She noticed, however, that the acquisition of such knowledge imposed upon the boys, and gained her a reputation for cleverness which made the young university prigs think it worth their while to talk to her. They had failed to discover her natural powers because there was no one to tell them she had any, and they only thought what they were told to think about people and things, and admired what they were told to admire. In this Beth differed from them widely, for she began by having tastes of her own. She did not believe that they enjoyed Homer a bit more than she did; but the right pose was to pretend that they did; so they posed and pretended,

according to order, and Beth posed and pretended too, just to see what would come of it.

It was a young tutor in charge of a reading-party who helped Beth with the Latin grammar. He managed to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Caldwell, and came often to the house; and finally he began to teach Beth Latin at her own request, and with the consent of her mother. The lessons had not gone on very long, however, before he tried to insinuate into his teaching some of the kind of sophistries which another tutor had imposed by way of moral philosophy on Rousseau's Madame de Warens in her girlhood, to her undoing. This was all new to Beth, and she listened with great interest; but she failed utterly to see why not believing in a God should make it right and proper for her to embrace the tutor: so the lessons ended abruptly. Beth profited largely by the acquaintance, however,—not so much at the time, perhaps, as afterwards, when she was older, and had gained knowledge enough of men of various kinds to enable her to compare and reflect. It was her first introduction to the commonplace cleverness of the academic mind, the mere acquisitive faculty which lives on pillage, originates nothing itself, and, as a rule, fails to understand, let alone appreciate, originality in others. The young tutor's ambition was to be one of a shining literary clique of extraordinary cheapness which had just then begun to be formed. The taint of a flippant wit was common to all its members, and their assurance was unbounded. They undertook to extinguish anybody with a few fine phrases; and, in their conceited irreverence, they even attacked eternal principles, the sources of the best inspiration of all ages, and pronounced sentence upon them. Repute of a kind they gained, but it was by glib falsifications of all that is noble in sentiment, thought, and action, all that is good and true. It was the contraction of her own heart, the chill and dulness that settled upon her when she was with this man, as compared to the glow and expansion, the release of her finer faculties, which she had always experienced when under the influence of Aunt Victoria's simple goodness, that first put Beth in the way of observing how inferior in force and charm mere intellect is to spiritual power, and how soon it bores, even when brilliant, if unaccompanied by other endowments, qualities of heart and soul, such as constancy, loyalty, truthfulness, and that scrupulous honesty of action which answers to what is expected as well as to what is known of us.

Beth played very diligently at learning during this experiment, but only played for a time. The mind in process of forming itself involuntarily rejects all that is unnecessary, and that kind of knowledge was not for her. It opened up no prospect of pleasure in itself. All she cared to know was what it felt like to have mastered it; and that she arrived at by resolving herself into a lady of great attainments, who talked altogether about things she had learnt, but had nothing in her mind besides. A mind with nothing else in it, in Beth's sense of the word, was to Beth what plainness is to beauty; so, while many of her contemporaries were stultifying themselves with Greek and Latin ingenuities, she pursued the cultivation of that in herself which is beyond our ordinary apprehension, that which is more potent than knowledge, more fertilising to the mind—that by which knowledge is converted from a fallow field into a fruitful garden. Altogether, apart from her special subject, she learnt only enough of anything to express herself; but it was extraordinary how aptly she utilised all that was necessary for her purpose, and how invariably she found what she wanted—if found be the right word; for it was rather as if information were flashed into her mind from some outside agency at critical times when she could not possibly have done without it.

One sad consequence of her separation from Alfred, and the strange things she did and dreamed for distraction in the unrest of her mind, was a change in her constitution. Her first fine flush of health was over, the equability of her temper was disturbed, and she became subject to hysterical outbursts of garrulity, to fits of moody silence, to apparently causeless paroxysms of laughter or tears; and she was always anxious. She had real cause for anxiety, however, for, in her efforts to realise her romance to Charlotte's satisfaction, she had run up little bills all over the place. What would happen when they were presented, as they certainly would be sooner or later, she dared not think; but the dread of the moment preyed upon her mind to such an extent that, whenever she heard a knock at the door, she entreated God to grant that it might not be a bill. And even when there were no knocks, she went on entreating to be spared, and worked herself into such a chronic fever of worry that she was worn to a shadow, and developed a racking cough which gave her no peace.

Just at this time, too, the whole place began to be scandalised by her vagaries, her mysterious expeditions on the big brown horse, and her

constant appearance in public with a coterie of young men about her. At a time when anything unconventional in a girl was clear evidence of vice to all the men and most of the women who knew of it, Beth's reputation was bound to suffer, and it became so bad at last that Dr. Hardy forbade Charlotte to associate with her. Charlotte told her with tears, and begged to be allowed to meet her in the Secret Service of Humanity as usual; but Beth refused. She said it was too dangerous just then, they must wait; the truth being that she was sick of the Secret Service of Humanity, of Charlotte, of everything and everybody that prevented her hearing when there was a knock at the door, and praying to the Lord that it might not be a bill.

The secret society was practically dissolved by this time, and very soon afterwards the catastrophe Beth had been dreading occurred, and wrought a great change in her life. It happened one day when she was not at home. Aunt Grace Mary was so alarmed by her cough and the delicacy of her appearance that she had braved Uncle James and carried her off to stay with her at Fairholm for a change. Once she was away from the sound of the knocks, Beth suffered less, and began to revive and be herself again to the extent of taking Aunt Grace Mary into her confidence boldly.

"Beth, Beth, Beth!" said that poor good lady tenderly, "you naughty girl, how could you! Running in debt with nothing to pay; why, it isn't honest!"

"So *I* think," said Beth in cordial agreement, taking herself aside from her own acts, as it were, and considering them impartially. "Help me out of this scrape, Aunt Grace Mary, and I'll never get into such another."

"But how much do you owe, Beth dear?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Beth answered. "Pounds for Tom Briggs alone."

"Who's *he*?" was Aunt Grace Mary's horrified exclamation.

"Oh, only the horse—a dark bay with black points. I rode him a lot, and oh! it *was* nice! It was like poetry, like living it, you know, like being a poem one's self. And I'm glad I did it. If I should die for it, I couldn't regret it. And I shouldn't wonder if I did die, for I feel as if those knocks had fairly knocked me to bits."

"Nonsense, Beth, you silly child, don't talk like that," said Aunt Grace Mary. "What else do you owe?"

"Oh, then there's Mrs. Andrews, the confectioner's, bill."

"Confectioner's!" Aunt Grace Mary exclaimed. "O Beth! I never thought you were greedy."

"Well, I don't think I am," Beth answered temperately. "I've been very hungry, though. But I never touched any of those good things myself. I only got them for Charlotte when she had heavy work to do for the Secret Service of Humanity."

"The *what*?" Aunt Grace Mary demanded.

"The game we played. Then there's the hairdresser's bill, that must be pretty big. I had to get curls and plaits and combs and things, besides having my hair dressed for entertainments to which I was obliged to go——"

"Beth! *are* you mad?" Aunt Grace Mary interrupted. "You've never been to an entertainment in your life."

"No," Beth answered casually, "but I've played at going to no end of a lot."

"Well, this is the most extraordinary game I ever heard of!"

"But it was such an exciting game," Beth pleaded with a sigh.

"But, my dear child, such a reckless, unprincipled game!"

"But you don't think of that at the time," Beth assured her. "It's all real and right then. We——"

But here the colloquy was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Caldwell in a state of distraction with the hairdresser's bill in her hand. Aunt Grace Mary made her sit down, and patted her shoulder soothingly. Uncle James was out. Beth, greatly relieved, looked on with interest. She knew that the worst was over.

"Never mind, Caroline," Aunt Grace Mary said cheerfully. "Beth has just been telling me all about it. Confession is good for the saints, you know, or the soul, or something; so that's cheering. She has been very naughty, very

naughty indeed, but she is very sorry. She sincerely regrets. Hairdresser, did you say? Oh, give it to me! Now, do give it to me, *there's* a dear! And we won't have another word about it. Beth, you bad girl, be good, and say you repent."

"Say it!" Beth ejaculated, coughing. "Look at me, and you'll see it, Aunt Grace Mary. I've been repenting myself to pieces for months."

"Well, dear; well, dear," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined, beaming blandly, "that will do; that's enough, I'm sure. Mamma forgives you, so we'll have no more about it."

The hairdresser's bill was the only one Mrs. Caldwell ever heard of, for Aunt Grace Mary got the use of her pony carriage next day, by telling Uncle James her mamma had sent Caroline to say she particularly wished her to take Beth to see her. Uncle James, to whom any whim of Lady Benyon's was wisdom, ordered the carriage for them himself; and, as they drove off together, Aunt Grace Mary remarked to Beth, "I think I managed that very cleverly; don't you?" Naturally estimable women are forced into habits of dissimulation by the unreason of the tyrant in authority in many families; and Aunt Grace Mary was one of the victims. She had been obliged to resort to these small deceits for so many years, that all she felt about them now was a sort of mild triumph when they were successful. "I mean to go and see mamma, you know, so it won't be any story," she added.

She went with Beth first, however, to the various shops where Beth owed money, and paid her debts; and Beth was so overcome by her generosity, and so anxious to prove her repentance, that she borrowed sixpence more from her, and went straightway to the hairdresser's, and had all her pretty hair cropped off close like a boy's, by way of atonement. When she appeared, Lady Benyon burst out laughing; but her mother was even more seriously annoyed than she had been by the hairdresser's bill. Beth's hair had added considerably to her market value in Mrs. Caldwell's estimation. She would not have put it so coarsely, but that was what her feeling on the subject amounted to.

"What is to be done with such a child?" she exclaimed in despair.

"Send her to school," Aunt Grace Mary gasped.

"She would be expelled in a month," Mrs. Caldwell averred.

"Possibly; but it would be worth the trial," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined in her breathless way.

"Yes," Lady Benyon agreed. "She has been at home far too long, running wild, and it's the only thing to be done. But let it be a strict school."

"How am I to afford it?" Mrs. Caldwell wailed, rocking herself on her chair.

"Well, there's the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters; you can get her in there for next to nothing, and it's strict enough," Lady Benyon suggested.

And finally, after the loss of some more precious time, and with much reluctance, Mrs. Caldwell yielded to public opinion, and decided to deprive Jim of Beth's little income, and send Beth to school, some new enormities of Beth's having helped considerably to hasten her mother's decision.

CHAPTER XXIX

MRS. CALDWELL'S married life had been one long sacrifice of herself, her health, her comfort, her every pleasure, to what she conceived to be right and dutiful. Duty and right were the only two words approaching to a religious significance that she was not ashamed to use; to her all the other words savoured of cant, and even these two she pronounced without emphasis or solemnity, lest the sense in which she used them might be mistaken for a piece of religiosity. Of the joy and gladness of religion the poor lady had no conception.

Nevertheless, as has already been said, Mrs. Caldwell was an admirable person, according to the light of her time. To us she appears to have been a good woman marred, first of all, by the narrow outlook, the ignorance and prejudices which were the result of the mental restrictions imposed upon her sex; secondly, by having no conception of her duty to herself; and finally, by those mistaken notions of her duty to others which were so long inflicted upon women, to be their own curse and the misfortune of all whom they were designed to benefit. She had sacrificed her health in her early married life to what she believed to be her duty as a wife, and so had left herself neither nerve nor strength enough for the never-ending tasks of the mistress of a household and mother of a family on a small income, the consequence of which was that shortness of temper and querulousness which spoilt her husband's life and made her own a burden to her. She was highly intelligent, but had carefully preserved her ignorance of life, because it was not considered womanly to have any practical knowledge of the world; and she had neglected the general cultivation of her mind partly because intellectual pursuits were a pleasure, and she did not feel sufficiently self-denying if she allowed herself any but exceptional pleasures, but also because there was a good deal of her husband's work in the way of letters and official documents that she could do for him, and these left her no time for anything but the inevitable making and mending. Busy men take a sensible amount of rest and relaxation, of food and fresh air, and make good speed; but busy women look upon outdoor exercise as a luxury, talk about wasting time on meals, and toil on incessantly yet with

ever-diminishing strength, because they take no time to recoup; therefore they recede rather than advance; all the extra effort but makes for leeway.

The consequence of Mrs. Caldwell's ridiculous education was that her judgment was no more developed in most respects than it had been in her girlhood, so that when she lost her husband and had to act for her children, she had nothing better to rely on for her guidance than time-honoured conventions, which she accepted with unquestioning faith in their efficacy, even when applied to emergencies such as were never known in the earlier ages of human evolution to which they belonged. She had starved herself and her daughters in mind and body in order to scrape together the wherewithal to send her sons out into the world, but she had let them go without making any attempt to help them to form sound principles, or to teach them rules of conduct such as should keep them clean-hearted and make them worthy members of society; so that all her privation had been worse than vain, it had been mischievous; for the boys, unaided by any scheme or comprehensive view of life, any knowledge of the meaning of it to show them what was worth aiming at, and also unprotected by positive principles, had drifted along the commonest course of self-seeking and self-indulgence, and were neither a comfort nor a credit to her. However, she was satisfied that she had done her best for them, and therefore, being of the days when the woman's sphere was home exclusively, and home meant, for the most part, the nursery and the kitchen, she sat inactive and suffered, as was the wont of old-world women, while her sons were sinning all the sins which she especially should have taught them to abhor; and, with regard to her girls, she was equally satisfied that she had done the right thing by them under the circumstances. She could not have been made to comprehend that Beth, a girl, was the one member of the family who deserved a good chance, the only one for whom it would have repaid her to procure extra advantages; but having at last been convinced that there was nothing for it but to send Beth to school, she set to work to prepare her to the best of her ability. Her own clothes were in the last stage of shabbiness, but what money she had she spent on getting new ones for Beth, and that, too, in order that she might continue the allowance to Jim as long as possible. She made a mighty effort also to teach Beth all that was necessary for the entrance examination into the school, and sewed day and night to get the things ready—in all of which, be it said, Beth helped to the best of her

ability, but without pride or pleasure, because she had been made to feel that she was robbing Jim, and that her mother was treating her better than she deserved, and the feeling depressed her, so that the much-longed-for chance, when it came, found her with less spirit than she had ever had to take advantage of it.

"Ah, Beth!" her mother said to her, seeing her so subdued, "I thought you would repent when it was too late. You won't find it so easy and delightful to have your own way as you suppose. When it comes to leaving home and going away among strangers who don't care a bit about you, you will not be very jubilant, I expect. You know what it is when Mildred leaves home, how she cries!"

"Summer showers, soft, warm, and refreshing," Beth snapped, irritated by the I-told-you-so tone of superiority, which, when her mother assumed it, always broke down her best resolutions, and threw her into a state of opposition. "Mildred the Satisfactory has the right thing ready for all occasions."

The result of this encounter was an elaborate pose. In dread of her mother's comments, should she betray the feeling expected of her, she set herself to maintain an unruffled calm of demeanour, whatever happened.

Autumn was tinting the woods when Beth packed up. The day before her departure she paid a round of visits, not to people, but to places, which shows how much more real the life of her musings was to her at that time than the life of the world. She got up at daybreak and went and sat on the rustic seat at the edge of the cliff where the stream fell over on to the sand, and thought of the first sunrise she had ever seen, and of the puritan farmer who had come out and reprimanded her ruggedly for being there alone at that unseemly hour. Poor man! His little house behind her was shut up and deserted, the garden he had kept so trim was all bedraggled, neglect ruled ruin all over his small demesne, and he himself was where the worthy rest till their return. The thought, however, at that hour and in that heavenly solitude, where there was no sound but the sea-voice which filled every pause in an undertone with the great song of eternity it sings on always, did not sadden Beth, but, on the contrary, stimulated her with some singular vague perception of the meaning of it all. The dawn was breaking, and the

spirit of the dawn all about her possessed and drew her till she revelled in an ecstasy of yearning towards its crowning glory—Rise, Great Sun! When she first sat down, the hollow of the sky was one dark dome, only relieved by a star or two; but the darkness parted more rapidly than her eyes could appreciate, and was succeeded, in the hollow it had held, by rolling clouds monotonously grey, which, in turn, ranged themselves in long low downs, irregularly ribbed, and all unbroken, but gradually drawing apart until at length they were gently riven, and the first triumphant tinge of topaz colour, pale pink, warm and clear, like the faint flush that shyly betrays some delicate emotion on a young cheek, touched the soft gradations of the greyness to warmth and brightness, then mounted up and up in shafts to the zenith, while behind it was breathed in the tenderest tinge of turquoise blue, which shaded to green, which shaded to primrose low down on the horizon, where all was shining silver. Then, as the grey, so was the colour riven, and rays of light shot up, crimson flashes of flame, which, while Beth held her breath, were fast followed from the sea by the sun, that rose enwrapt in their splendour, while the water below caught the fine flush, and heaved and heaved like a breast expanding with delight into long deep sighs.

Beth cried aloud: "O Lord of Loveliness! how mighty are Thy manifestations!"

Later in the day she climbed to the top of the hill where Charlotte had kept her faithful watch for the dark-brown horse, and there, beneath the firs, she sat looking out, with large eyes straining far into the vague distance where Hector had been.

The ground was padded with pine-needles, briony berries shone in the hedgerows below, and hips and haws and rowans also rioted in red. Brambles were heavy with blue-black berries, and the bracken was battered and brown on the steep hill-side. Down in the road a team of four horses, dappled bays with black points and coats as glossy as satin, drawing a waggon of wheat, curved their necks and tossed their heads till the burnished brasses of their harness rang, and pacing with pride, as if they rejoiced to carry the harvest home. On the top of the wheat two women in coloured cotton frocks rested and sang—sang quite blithely.

Beth watched the waggon out of sight, then rose, and turning, faced the sea. As she descended the hill she left that dream behind her. Hector, like Sammy and Arthur, passed to the background of her recollections, where her lovers ceased from troubling, and the Secret Service of Humanity, superseded, was no more a living interest.

Beth went also to the farther sands to visit the spot where she had been surprised in the water by the girls, and had become the white priestess of their bathing rites, and taught that girls had a strength as great as the strength of boys, but different, if only they would do things. Mere mental and physical strength were what Beth was thinking of; she knew nothing of spiritual force, although she was using it herself at the time, and doing with it what all the boys in the diocese, taken together, could not have done. She had heard of works of the Spirit, and that she should pray to be imbued with it; but that she herself was pure spirit, only waiting to be released from her case of clay, had never been hinted to her.

The next day she travelled with her mother from the north to the south, and during the whole long journey there was no break in the unruffled calm of her demeanour. Her mother wondered at her, and was irritated, and fussed about the luggage, and fumed about trains she feared to miss; but Beth kept calm. She sat in her corner of the carriage looking out of the window, and the world was a varied landscape, to every beauty of which she was keenly alive, yet she gave no expression to her enthusiasm, nor to the discomfort she suffered from the August sun, which streamed in on her through the blindless window, burning her face for hours, nor to her hunger and fatigue; and when at last they came to the great house by the river, and her mother, having handed her over to Miss Clifford, the lady principal, said, somewhat tearfully, "Good-bye, Beth! I hope you will be happy here. But be a good girl." Beth answered, "Thank you. I shall try, mamma," and kissed her as coolly as if it were her usual good-night.

"We do not often have young ladies part from their mothers so placidly," Miss Clifford commented.

"I suppose not," Mrs. Caldwell said, sighing.

Beth felt that she was behaving horridly. There was a lump in her throat, and she would liked to have shown more feeling, but she could not. Now,

when she would have laid aside the mask of calmness which she had voluntarily assumed, she found herself forced to wear it. Falsifications of our better selves are easily entered upon, but hard to shake off. They are evil things that lurk about us, ready but powerless to come till we call them; but, having been called, they hold us in their grip, and their power upon us to compel us becomes greater than ours upon them.

Mrs. Caldwell felt sore at heart when she had gone, and Beth was not less sore. Each had been a failure in her relation to the other. Mrs. Caldwell blamed Beth, and Beth, in her own mind, did not defend herself. She forbore to judge.

CHAPTER XXX

ST. CATHERINE'S MANSION, the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters, had not been built for the purpose, but bought, otherwise it would have been as ugly to look at as it was dreary to live in. As it was, however, the house was beautiful, and so also were the grounds about it, and the views of the river, the bridge with its many arches, and the grey town climbing up from it to the height above.

Beth was still standing at the top of the steps under the great portico, where her mother had left her, contemplating the river, which was the first that had flowed into her experience.

"Come, come, my dear, come in!" some one behind her exclaimed impatiently. "You're not allowed to stand there."

Beth turned and saw a thin, dry, middle-aged woman, with keen dark eyes and a sharp manner, standing in the doorway behind her, with a gentler-looking lady, who said, "It is a new girl, Miss Bey. I expect she is all bewildered."

"No, I am not at all bewildered, thank you," Beth answered in her easy way. As she spoke she saw two grown-up girls in the hall exchange glances and smile, and wondered what unusual thing she had done.

"Then you had better come at once," Miss Bey rejoined drily, "and let me see what you can do. Please to remember in future that the girls are not allowed to come to this door."

She led the way as she spoke, and Beth followed her across the hall, up a broad flight of steps opposite the entrance, down a wide corridor to the right, and then to the right again, into a narrow class-room, and through that again into another inner room.

"These are the fifth and sixth rooms," Miss Bey remarked,— "fifth and sixth classes."

They were furnished with long bare tables, forms, hard wooden chairs, a cupboard, and a set of pigeon-holes. Miss Bey sat down at the end of the table in the "sixth," with her back to the window, and made Beth sit on her left. There were some books, a large slate, a slate pencil, and damp sponge on the table.

"What arithmetic have you done?" Miss Bey began.

"I've scrambled through the first four rules," Beth answered.

"Set yourself a sum in each, and do it," Miss Bey said sharply, taking a piece of knitting from a bag she held on her arm, and beginning to knit in a determined manner, as if she were working against time.

Beth took up the slate and pencil, and began; but the sharp click-click of the needles worried her, and her brain was so busy studying Miss Bey she could not concentrate her mind upon the sums.

Miss Bey waited without a word, but Beth was conscious of her keen eyes fixed upon her from time to time, and knew what she meant.

"I'm hurrying all I can," she said at last.

"You'll have to hurry more than you can, then, in class," Miss Bey remarked, "if this is your ordinary rate of work."

When the sums were done, she took the slate and glanced over them. "They are every one wrong," she said; "but I see you know how to work them. Now clean the slate, and do some dictation."

She took up a book when Beth was ready, and began to read aloud from it. Beth became so interested in the subject that she forgot the dictation, and burst out at last, "Well, I never knew that before."

"You are doing dictation now," Miss Bey observed severely.

"All right, go on," Beth cheerfully rejoined.

Miss Bey did not go on, however, and on looking up to see what was the matter, Beth found her gazing at her with bent brows.

"May I ask what your name is?" Miss Bey inquired.

"Beth Caldwell."

"Then allow me to inform you, Miss Beth Caldwell, that 'all right, go on,' is not the proper way to address the head-mistress of the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters."

"Thank you for telling me," Beth answered. "You see I don't know these things. I always say that to mamma."

"Have you ever been to school before?" Miss Bey asked.

"No," Beth answered.

"Oh!" Miss Bey ejaculated, with peculiar meaning. "Then you will have a great deal to learn."

"I suppose so," Beth rejoined. "But that's what I came for, you know—to learn. It's high time I began!"

She fixed her big eyes on the blank wall opposite, and there was a sorrowful expression in them. Miss Bey noted the expression, and nodded her head several times, but there was no relaxation of her peremptory manner when she spoke again.

"Go on, my dear," she said. "If I give as much time to the others as you are taking, I shall not get through the new girls to-night."

Beth finished her dictation.

"What a hand!" Miss Bey exclaimed. "Wherever did you learn to write like that?"

"I taught myself to write small on purpose," Beth replied. "You can get so much more on to the paper."

"You had better have taught yourself to spell, then," Miss Bey rejoined. "There are four mistakes in this one passage."

Beth balanced her pencil on her finger with an air of indifference. She was wondering how it was that the head-mistress of the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters used the word "wherever" as the vulgar do.

The examination concluded with some questions in history and geography, which Beth answered more or less incorrectly.

"I shall put you here in the sixth," Miss Bey informed her; "but rather for your size than for your acquirements. There is a delicate girl, much smaller than you are, in the first."

"Then I'd rather be myself, tall and strong, in the sixth," Beth rejoined. "If I don't catch her up, at all events I shall have more pleasure in life, and that's something."

Again Miss Bey gazed at her; but she was too much taken aback by Beth's readiness to correct her on the instant, although it was an unaccustomed and a monstrous thing for a girl to address a mistress in an easy conversational way, let alone differ from her.

She took Beth to the great class-room where the seventh and eighth worked, and the fifth and sixth joined them for recreation and preparation, and where also the Bible lessons were given by Miss Clifford to the whole school.

There were a good many girls of various ages in the room, who all looked up.

"This is a new girl," Miss Bey said, addressing them generally,— "Miss Beth Caldwell. Please to show her where to go and what to do."

She glanced round keenly as she spoke, then left the room; and at the same time a thin, sharp-looking little girl with short hair rose from the table at which she was sitting and went up to Beth.

"I'm head of the fifth," she said. "Has Bey been examining you? What class did she put you in?"

"The sixth," Beth said.

"I should have thought you'd have been in the third at least," the head of the fifth piped, "you're so big. Here are some sixth girls—Jessie Baker, Ina Formby, Rosa Bird."

The sixth girls were sitting at a round table, with their little desks before them, writing letters. One of them pulled out a chair for Beth. They had just returned from the holidays, and were in various stages of home-sickness—some of them crying, and the rest depressed; but they welcomed Beth kindly, as one of themselves, and inspected her with interest.

"You can write a private letter to-day, you know," Rosa Bird said to Beth.

"What is a private letter?" Beth asked.

"One to your mother, you know, that isn't read. You seal it up yourself. Public letters have to be sent in open to Miss Clifford. One week you write a public letter, and the next a private one. Hello! here's Amy Wynne!"

A dark girl of about eighteen had entered by a door at the farther end of the room, and was received with acclamation, being evidently popular. Beth, who was still in her mask of calm indifference, looked coldly on, but in herself she determined to be received like that some day.

Most of the girls in the room jumped up, and Amy Wynne kissed one after the other, and then shook hands with Beth.

"Are all my children back?" she asked.

"I don't know," Rosa Bird rejoined, glancing round. "They are not all here."

"That's one of the mothers," Rosa explained to Beth when Amy Wynne had gone again. "The first-class girls are mothers to us. You walk with your mother in the garden, and sit with her on half-holidays, and she's awfully good to you. I advise you to be one of Amy Wynne's children if you can." She was interrupted by the loud ringing of a bell in the hall. "That's for tea," Rosa added. "Come, and I'll show you the way."

The big dining-room was downstairs in the basement, next the kitchen. Miss Clifford dined in the next room attended by her maids of honour (the two girls at the top of the first class for the time being) and the rest of the class except the girls at the bottom, who were degraded to the second-class table in the big dining-room. Here each two classes had a separate table, at either end of which a teacher sat on a Windsor chair. The girls had nothing but hard benches without backs to sit on. Miss Bey, the housekeeper Miss

Winch, and the head music-mistress, irreverently called Old Tom by the girls, sat at a separate table, where, at dinner-time, they did all the carving, and snatched what little dinner they could get in the intervals, patiently and foolishly regardless of their own digestions. For tea there were great dishes of thick bread and butter on all the tables, which the girls began to hand round as soon as grace had been said. Each class had a big basin of brown sugar to put in the tea, which gave it a coarse flavour. The first cup was not so bad, but the second was nothing but hot water poured through the teapot. It was not etiquette to take more than two. When the girls were ready for a second, they put pieces of bread in their saucers that they might know their own again, and passed the cups up to the teacher who poured out tea. If any girl suspected that the cup returned to her was not her own, she would not touch the tea. When the meal was over, one of the girls took the sugar-basin, beat down the sugar in it flat and hard with the spoon, did a design on the top, and put it away.

"What's that for?" Beth asked.

"That's so that we shall know our own again," Rosa answered. "But it never lasts the proper time."

"What do you do when it's done?" said Beth.

"Do without," was the laconic rejoinder.

All the girls were talking at once.

"What a racket!" Beth exclaimed.

"It'll be quiet enough to-morrow," Rosa replied. "The first class talks at table in Miss Clifford's room, but we are not allowed to speak a word here, except to the teachers, nor in the bedrooms either, once work begins. Do you see that great fat old thing at the mistress's table? That's Old Tom, the head music-mistress. She is a greedy old cat! She likes eating! You can see it by the way she gloats over things, and she's quite put out if she doesn't get exactly what she wants. Fancy caring! It's just like a man; and that's why she's called Old Tom."

"Not that she's fastidious!" said Agnes Stewart, a tall slender girl with short crisp black hair and grey-green eyes, who was sitting opposite to Beth. "I

believe she likes mutton."

"Oh, she's horrid enough for anything!" the girl next her exclaimed with an expression of disgust.

Some of the girls ate their thick bread and butter unconcernedly, others were choked with tears, and could not touch it. Most of the tearful ones were new girls, and the old ones were kind to them; the teachers, too, were sympathetic, and did their best to cheer them.

After tea they all returned to their class-rooms. Beth went and stood in one of the great windows looking out on to the grounds, the river, the old arched bridge, and the grey houses of the town climbing up the hill among the autumn-tinted trees. All the windows were shut, and she began to feel suffocated for want of fresh air, and bewildered by the clatter of voices. If only she could get out into the garden! The door at the end of the room, which led into the first and second, was open. She went through. But before she was half across the room, one of the elder girls exclaimed roughly, "Hello! what are you doing here?"

"It's a new girl, Inkie," another put in.

"Well, the sooner she learns she has no business here the better," Inkie rejoined.

Beth thought her exceedingly rude, and passed on into the vestibule unconcernedly.

"Well, that's cool cheek!" Inkie exclaimed.

"Hie—you—new girl! come back here directly, and go round the other way, just to teach you manners."

Beth turned back with flaming cheeks, looked at her hard a moment.

"That for *your* manners!" she said, snapping her fingers at her.

Amy Wynne rose from her seat and went up to Beth. "You must learn at once, Miss Caldwell," she said, "that you will not be allowed to speak to the elder girls like that."

"Then the elder girls had better learn at once," said Beth defiantly, "that they will not be allowed to speak to me as your Inkie-person did just now. You'll not teach me manners by being rude to me; and if any girl in the school is ever rude to me again, I'll box her ears. Now, I apologise for coming through your room, but you should keep the door shut."

When she had spoken, she returned to the big class-room deliberately, and crossed it to the other door. As she did so, she noticed that a strange hush had fallen upon the girls, and they were all looking at her curiously. She went into the hall, and was passing the vestibule door, when Miss Bey, who was sitting just inside knitting, stopped her.

"Where are you going, Miss Caldwell?" she asked in her sharp way.

"Upstairs," Beth answered.

"You speak shortly, Miss Caldwell. It would have been more polite to have mentioned my name."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bey," Beth rejoined.

Miss Bey bowed with a severe smile in acknowledgment of the apology. "What do you want upstairs?" she asked.

"To be alone," Beth answered. "I can't stand the noise."

"You must stand the noise," said Miss Bey. "Girls are not allowed to go upstairs without some very good reason; and they must always ask permission—politely—from the teacher on duty. I am the teacher on duty at this moment. If you had gone upstairs without permission, I should have given you a bad mark."

Beth looked longingly at the hall door, which had glass panels in the upper part, through which she could see the river and the trees. "What a prison this is!" she exclaimed.

Miss Bey had had great experience of girls, and her sharp manner, which was mainly acquired in the effort to maintain discipline, somewhat belied her kindly nature.

"You can bring a chair from the hall, and sit here beside me, if you like," she said to Beth.

"Thank you," Beth answered. "This *is* better," she said when she was seated. "May I talk to you?"

"Yes, certainly," said Miss Bey.

There was a great conservatory behind them as they sat looking into the hall; on their left was the third and fourth class-room, on their right the first and second; the doors of both stood open.

"Did you hear the row I had in there just now?" Beth asked, nodding towards the first and second.

"I did," said Miss Bey. "But you mustn't say 'row,' it is vulgar."

"Difficulty, then," Beth rejoined. "But what did you think of it?"

Miss Bey reflected. The question as Beth put it was not easy to answer. "I thought you were both very much in the wrong," she said at last.

"Well, that is fair, at all events," Beth observed with approval. "I don't mean to break any of your rules when I know what they are, and I bet you I won't have a bad mark, if there's any way to help it, the whole time I am at school; but I'm not going to be sat upon by anybody."

Miss Bey pursed up her mouth and knitted emphatically. She was accustomed to naughty girls, but the most troublesome stood in awe of the teachers.

"My dear," she said, after a little pause, "I honour your good resolutions; but I must request you not to say 'I'll bet,' or talk about 'being sat upon.' Both expressions are distinctly unladylike. I must also tell you that at school the teachers are not on the same level as the girls; they are in authority, you see."

"I see," said Beth. "I spoke to you as one lady might speak to another. I won't again, Miss Bey."

Miss Bey paused once more, with bent brows, to reflect upon this ambiguous announcement; but not being able to make anything of it, she proceeded: "It is a matter of discipline. Without strict discipline an establishment of this size would be in a state of chaos. The girls must respect the teachers, and the younger girls must respect the elder ones. All become elder ones in turn, and are respected."

"Well, *I* mean to be respected all through," Beth declared, and set her mouth hard on the determination.

At eight o'clock Miss Bey rang a big handbell for prayers, and the whole household, including the servants, came trooping into the hall. The girls sat together in their classes, and, when all were in their places, Miss Clifford came in attended by her maids-of-honour, mounted the reading-desk, and read the little service in a beautiful voice devoutly. Beth softened as she listened, and joined in with all her heart towards the end.

When prayers were over, and the servants had gone downstairs, one of the maids-of-honour set a chair under the domed ceiling in front of the vestibule for Miss Clifford, who went to it from the reading-desk, and sat there. Then the first-class girls rose and left their seats in single file, and each as she passed walked up to Miss Clifford, took the hand which she held out, and curtsied good-night to her. The other classes followed in the same order. Miss Clifford said a word or two to some of the girls, and had a smile for all. When Beth's turn came, she made an awkward curtsy in imitation of the others. Miss Clifford held her hand a moment, and looked up into her face keenly; then smiled, and let her go. Beth felt that there was some special thought behind that smile, and wondered what it was. Miss Clifford made it her duty to know the character, temper, constitution, and capacity of every one of the eighty girls under her, and watched carefully for every change in them. This good-night, which was a dignified and impressive ceremony, gave her an opportunity of inspecting each girl separately every day, and very little escaped her. If a girl looked unhappy, run down, overworked, or otherwise out of sorts, Miss Clifford sent for her next morning to find out what was the matter; and she was scolded, comforted, put on extras, had a tonic to take, or was allowed another hour in bed in the morning, according to the necessities of her case.

The girls who were in certain bedrooms sat up an hour after prayers, and had dry bread and water for supper; they turned to the left and went back to their class-rooms when they had made their curtseys. The others turned to the right and went upstairs. Beth was one of these. She was in No. 6. There were several beds in the room, and beside each bed was a washstand, and a box for clothes. The floor was carpetless. There were white curtains hung on iron rods to be drawn round the beds and the space beside them, so that each girl had perfect privacy to dress and undress. The curtains were all drawn back for air when the girls were ready, but no girl drew her curtain without the permission of the girl next to her. When a bell rang, they all knelt down, and had ten minutes for private prayers night and morning, the bell being rung again when the time was up. The girls had to turn down their beds to air them before they left their rooms in the morning. They had an hour's lessons before breakfast, then prayers. After prayers the monitresses rose from their seats below the reading-desk, and, as they filed out, each in turn reported if any one had spoken or not spoken in the bedrooms. Breakfast consisted of thick bread and butter and tea for the girls, with the addition of an insufficient quantity of fried bacon for the teachers. After breakfast the girls went upstairs again and made their beds in a given time; then all but a few, who were kept in for music, went out into the garden for half-an-hour. Beth had to go out that first morning. The sun was shining, bright drops sparkled on grass and trees, the air was heavy with autumn odours, but fresh and sweet, and the birds chirped blithely. Beth felt like a free creature once more directly she got out, and, throwing up her arms with a great exclamation of relief after the restraint indoors, she ran out on to the wide grass-plot in front of the house at the top of her speed.

"Come back, come back, new girl!" cried the head French mistress, Mademoiselle Duval, the teacher on duty. "You are not allowed to go on the grass, nor must you run in that unseemly way."

"I'm sorry," said Beth. "I didn't know."

She moved off on to the path which overlooked the river, and began to walk soberly up and down, gazing at the water.

"Mademoiselle!" the French mistress screamed again shrilly, "come away from there! The girls are not allowed to walk on that path."

"Oh dear!" said Beth. "Where may I go?"

"Just go where you see the other girls go," Mademoiselle rejoined sharply.

Not being a favourite, the French mistress was left to wander about alone. Popular teachers always had some girls hanging on to their arms out in the garden, and sitting with them when they were on duty indoors; but Mademoiselle seldom had a satellite, and never one who was respected. The girls thought her deceitful, and deceit was one of the things not tolerated in the school. Miss Bey was believed to be above deceit of any kind, and was liked and respected accordingly in spite of her angular appearance, sharp manner, the certainty that she was not a lady by birth, and the suspicion that her father kept a shop. The girls had certain simple tests of character and station. They attend more to each other's manners in the matter of nicety at girls' schools than at boys', more's the pity for those who have to live with the boys afterwards. If a new girl drank with her mouth full, ate audibly, took things from the end instead of the side of a spoon, or bit her bread instead of breaking it at dinner, she was set down as nothing much at home, which meant that her people were socially of no importance, not to say common; and if she were not perfectly frank and honest, or if she ever said coarse or indelicate things, she was spoken of contemptuously as a dockyard girl, which meant one of low mind and objectionable manners, who was in a bad set at home and made herself cheap after the manner of a garrison hack, the terms being nearly equivalent. There was no pretence of impossible innocence among the elder girls, but neither was there any impropriety of language or immodesty of conduct. Certain subjects were avoided, and if a girl made any allusion to them by chance, she was promptly silenced; if she recurred to them persistently, she was set down at once as a dockyard girl and an outsider. The consequence of this high standard was an extremely good tone all through the school.

Beth turned into the lime-tree avenue, where she met several sets of girls all walking in rows with their arms round each other. None of them took any notice of her, until she got out on to the drive, where she met Amy Wynne

with her children. Amy let go the two she had her arms round, sent them all on, and stopped to speak to Beth.

"Have you no mother?" she asked.

"I have one at home," Beth answered coldly in spite of herself.

"But you know our custom here," Amy rejoined. "The elder girls are mothers to the young ones."

"I know," said Beth, "but I don't want a mother. I should hate to have my thoughts interrupted by a lot of little girls in a row, all cackling together."

"I was going to offer," Amy began, "but, of course, if you are so self-reliant, it would only be an impertinence."

"Oh no!" said Beth, sincerely regretting her own ungraciousness. "It is kind of you, and if it were you alone, I should be glad, but I could not stand the others."

"Well, I hope you won't be lonely," Amy answered, and hurried on after her children.

"Lonely I must be," Beth muttered to herself with sudden foreboding.

When the girls went in, Beth was summoned to the big music-room. "Old Tom" was there with Dr. Centry, who came twice a week to hear the girls play. There were twelve pianos in the room, ten upright and two grand, besides Old Tom's own private grand, all old, hard, and metallic; and twelve girls hammered away on them, all together, at the same piece; but if one made a mistake, Old Tom instantly detected it, and knew which it was.

"Do ye know any music?" she asked Beth in a gruff voice with a rough Scotch accent.

"A little," Beth answered.

"What, for instance?" Old Tom pursued, looking at Beth as if she were a culprit up for judgment.

"Some of Chopin," Beth replied. "I like him best."

Old Tom raised her eyebrows incredulously. "Sit down here and play one of his compositions, if you please—here, at my piano," she said, opening the instrument.

But Beth felt intimidated for once, partly by the offensive manners of the formidable-looking old woman, her bulk and gruffness, but also because Old Tom's doubt of her powers, which she perceived, was shaking her confidence. She sat down at the piano, however, and struck a few notes; then her nerve forsook her.

"I can't play," she said. "I'm nervous."

"Humph!" snarled Old Tom. "I thought that 'ud be your Chopin! Go and learn exercises with the children in Miss Tait's class-room."

Miss Tait, acting on Old Tom's report, put Beth into one of her lower classes, and left her to practise with the beginners. When she had gone, Beth glanced at the exercises, and then began to rattle them off at such a rate that no one in the class could keep up with her. Miss Tait came hurrying back.

"Who is that playing so fast?" she said. "Was it you, Miss Caldwell?"

"Yes," Beth answered.

"Then you must go into a higher class," said Miss Tait.

But the same thing happened in every class until at last Beth had run up through them all, as up a flight of stairs, into Old Tom's first. Her piano in the first, when the whole class was present and she had no choice, was a hard old instrument, usually avoided because it was the nearest to the table at which Old Tom sat (when she did not walk about) during a lesson. The first time Beth took her place at it, the other girls were only beginning to assemble, and Old Tom was not in the room. A great teasing of instruments, as Old Tom called it, was going on. A new piece was to be taken that morning, and each girl began to try it as soon as she sat down, so that they were all at different passages. They stopped, however, and looked up when Beth appeared.

"That's your piano," the head girl said.

"I hope you'll like it!" one of the others added sarcastically.

"Oh, but I'm glad to be here!" said Beth, striking a few firm chords. "Now I feel like Chopin," and she burst out into one of his most brilliant waltzes triumphantly.

Old Tom had come in while she was speaking, but Beth did not see her. Old Tom waited till she had done.

"Oh, so now ye feel like Chopin, Miss Caldwell," she jeered. "And it appears ye are not above shamming nervous when it suits ye to mak' yerself interesting. I shall remember that."

Old Tom taught by a series of jeers and insults. If a girl were poor, she never failed to remind her of the fact. "But, indeed, ye're beggars all," was her favourite summing up when they stumbled at troublesome passages. Most of the girls cowered under her insults, but Beth looked her straight in the face at this second encounter, and at the third her spirit rose and she argued the point. Old Tom tried to shout her down, but Beth left her seat, and suggested that they should go and get Miss Clifford to decide between them. Then Old Tom subsided, and from that time she and Beth were on amicable terms.

Beth had an excellent musical memory when she went to school, but she lost it entirely whilst she was there, and the delicacy of her touch as well; both being destroyed, as she supposed, by the system of practising with so many others at a time, which made it impossible for her to feel what she was playing or put any individuality of expression into it.

On that opening day, Beth had to go from the music-room to her first English lesson in the sixth. All the girls sat round the long narrow table, Miss Smallwood, the mistress, being at the end, with her back to the window. The lesson was "Guy," a collection of questions and answers, used also by the first-class girls, only that they were farther on in the book. Who was William the Conqueror? When did he arrive? What did he do on landing? and so on. Beth, at the bottom of the class on Miss Smallwood's right, was in a good position to ask questions herself. She could have told the whole history of William the Conqueror in her own language after once reading it over; but the answers to the questions had to be learnt by heart

and repeated in the exact language of the book, and in the struggle to be word-perfect enough to keep up with the class, the significance of what she was saying was lost upon her. It was her mother's system exactly, and Beth was disappointed, having hoped for something different. These pillules of knowledge only exasperated her; she wanted enough to enable her to grasp the whole situation.

"What is the use of learning these little bits by heart about William the Conqueror and the battle of Hastings, and all that, Miss Smallwood?" she exclaimed one day.

"It is a part of your education, Beth," Miss Smallwood answered precisely.

"I know," Beth grumbled, "but couldn't one read about it, and get on a little quicker? I want to know what he did when he got here."

"Why, my dear child, how can you be so stupid? You have just said he fought the battle of Hastings."

"Yes, but what did the battle of Hastings do?" Beth persisted, making a hard but ineffectual effort to express herself.

"Oh, now, Beth, you are silly!" Miss Smallwood rejoined impatiently, and all the girls grinned in agreement. But it was not Beth who was silly. Miss Smallwood had had nothing herself but the trumpery education provided everywhere at that time for girls by the part of humanity which laid undisputed claim to a superior sense of justice, and it had not carried her far enough to enable her to grasp any more comprehensive result of the battle of Hastings than was given in the simple philosophy of Guy. Most of the girls at the Royal Service School would have to work for themselves, and teaching was almost the only occupation open to them, yet such education as they received, consisting as it did of mere rudiments, was an insult to the high average of intelligence that obtained amongst them. They were not taught one thing thoroughly, not even their own language, and remained handicapped to the end of their lives for want of a grounding in grammar. When you find a woman's diction at fault, never gird at her for want of intelligence, but at those in authority over her in her youth, who thought anything in the way of education good enough for a girl. Even the teachers at St. Catherine's, some of them, wrote in reply to invitations, "I shall have

much pleasure in accepting." The girls might be there eight years, but were never taught French enough in the time either to read or speak it correctly. Their music was an offence to the ear, and their drawings to the eye. History was given to them in outlines only, which isolated kings and their ministers, showing little or nothing of their influence on the times they lived in, and ignoring the condition of the people, who were merely introduced as a background to some telling incident in the career of a picturesque personage; and everything else was taught in the same superficial way—except religion. But the fact that the religious education was good in Beth's time was an accident due to Miss Clifford's character and capacity, and therefore no credit to the governors of the school, who did not know that she was specially qualified in that respect when they made her Lady Principal. She was a high-minded woman, Low Church, of great force of character and exemplary piety, and her spirit pervaded the whole school. She gave the Bible lessons herself in the form of lectures which dealt largely with the conduct of life; and as she had the power to make her subject interesting, and the faith which carries conviction, both girls and mistresses profited greatly by her teaching. Many of them became deeply religious under her, and most of them had phases of piety; whilst there were very few who did not leave the school with yearnings at least towards honour and uprightness, which were formed by time and experience into steady principles.

Beth persisted in roaming the garden alone. She loved to hover about a large fountain there, with a deep wide basin round it, in which gold-fish swam and water-lilies grew. She used to go and hang over it, peering into the water, or, when the fountain played, she would loiter near, delighting in the sound of it, the splash and murmur.

One of the windows of Miss Clifford's sitting-room overlooked this part of the garden, and Beth noticed the old lady once or twice standing in the window, but it did not occur to her that she was watching her. One day, however, Miss Clifford sent a maid-of-honour to fetch her; and Beth went in, wondering what she had done, but asked no questions; calm indifference was still her pose.

Miss Clifford dismissed the maid-of-honour. She was sitting in her own special easy-chair, and Beth stood before her.

"My dear child," she said to Beth, "why are you always alone? Are the girls not kind to you?"

"Oh yes, thank you," Beth answered, "they are quite kind."

"Then why are you always alone?"

"I like it best."

"Are you sure," said Miss Clifford, "that the others do not shun you for some reason or other?"

"One of them wished to be my mother," Beth rejoined, "but I did not care about it."

"But you cannot be happy always alone like that," Miss Clifford observed.

Beth was silent.

Miss Clifford looked at her earnestly for a little, then she shook her head.

"I tell you what I will do if you like, Miss Clifford," Beth said upon reflection. "I will form a family of my own."

Miss Clifford smiled. "Ah! I see you are ambitious," she said, "but, my dear child, a sixth girl can't expect to have that kind of influence."

"It is not ambition," Beth answered, "for I shall feel it no distinction, only a great bother. Nevertheless, I will do it to show you that I am not shunned; and to please you, as you do not like me to wander alone."

A week or two later Beth appeared in the garden with six of the worst girls in the school clinging to her, fascinated by her marvellous talk.

Miss Clifford sent for her again. "I am sorry to see you in such company," she said. "Those girls are all older than you are, and they will lead you into mischief."

"On the contrary, Miss Clifford," Beth replied, "I shall keep them out of mischief. Not one of them has had a bad mark this week."

Then Miss Clifford sent for Miss Smallwood, the mistress of the sixth. "What do you make of Beth Caldwell?" she asked.

"I can't make anything of her," Miss Smallwood answered. "I think she tries, but she does not seem able to keep up with the other girls at all. She seldom knows a lesson or does a sum correctly. I sometimes think she ought to be in the eighth. But then occasionally she shows a knowledge far beyond her years; not a knowledge of school work, but of books and life."

"How about her themes?"

"I don't know what to think of them; they are too good. But she declares emphatically that she does them all out of her own head."

"What sort of temper has she?"

"Queer, like everything else about her. Not unamiable, you know, but irritable at times, and she has days of deep depression, and moments of extreme elation."

"Ah!" Miss Clifford ejaculated, and then reflected a little. "Well, be patient with her," she said at last. "If she hasn't exceptional ability of some kind, I am no judge of girls; but she is evidently unaccustomed to school work, and is suffering from the routine and restraint, after being allowed to run wild. She should have been sent here years ago."

CHAPTER XXXI

FROM the foregoing it will be seen that Beth made her mark upon the school from the day of her arrival in the way of getting herself observed and talked about. She was set down as queer to begin with, and when lessons began both girls and mistresses decided that she was stupid; and queer she remained to the end in the estimation of those who had no better word to express it, but with regard to her stupidity there soon began to be differences of opinion.

At preparation one evening she talked instead of doing her work, and gradually all the girls about her had stopped to listen.

"Gracious!" Beth exclaimed at last, "the bell will go directly, and I've not done a sum. Show me how to work them, Rosa."

"Oh, bother!" Rosa rejoined. "Find out for yourself! My theme was turned, and I've got to do it again."

"Look here," said Beth, "if you'll do my sums, I'll do your theme now, and your thorough bass on Thursday."

"I wish to goodness you wouldn't talk, Beth!" Agnes Stewart exclaimed. "We shall all get bad marks to-morrow."

"Then why do you listen?" Beth retorted.

"I can't help it," Agnes grumbled. "You fascinate me. I should have thought you were clever if I had only heard you talk, and not known what a duffer you are at your lessons."

"Well, she's not a duffer at thorough bass anyway," Rosa put in. "She only began this term, and she's a long way ahead even of some of the first. Old Tom's given her a little book to herself."

"I began thorough bass with the rest of you," Beth observed. "It's the only thing we started fair in. You are years ahead of me in all the other work."

The girls reflected upon this for a little.

"And you can write themes," Rosa finally asseverated.

"Oh, that's nothing," Beth protested. "Themes are easy enough. I could write them for the whole school."

"Well, that's no reason why you should put your nose in your cup every time you drink," Lucy Black, the sharpest shrimp of a girl in the class, said, grinning.

"I never did such a thing in my life," Beth exclaimed, turning crimson. "You'll say I eat audibly next."

"No, you don't do that," Rosa said solemnly; "but you do put your nose in your cup."

The colour flickered on Beth's sensitive cheek, and she shrank into herself.

"There, don't tease her!" Mary Wright, the eldest, stupidest, and most motherly girl in the school, exclaimed. "How can you drink without putting your nose in your cup, stupid?"

Then Beth saw it and smiled, greatly relieved. This venerable pleasantry was a sign that she had been taken once for all into the good graces of her schoolmates. The girls who were liked were usually nicknamed and always chaffed; the rest were treated with different degrees of politeness, the dockyard girls, as the lowest of all, being called miss, even by the teachers.

On Thursday evenings the girls in the fifth and sixth were allowed to do fancy work for an hour while a story-book was read aloud to them, either by Miss Smallwood or one of themselves when her voice was tired. The book was always either childish or dull, generally both, and Beth, who had been accustomed to Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, grew restive under the infliction. One evening when she had twice been reprimanded for yawning aggressively, she exclaimed, "Well, Miss Smallwood, it is such silly stuff! Why, I could tell you a better story myself, and make it up as I go on."

"Then begin at once and tell it," said Miss Smallwood, glancing round at the girls, who smiled derisively, thinking that Beth would have to excuse herself and thereby tacitly acknowledge that she had been boasting. To their

surprise, however, Beth took the request seriously, settled herself in her chair, folded her hands, and, with her eyes roaming about the room as if she were picking up the details from the walls, the floor, the ceiling, and all it contained, started without hesitation. It was the romantic story of a haunted house on a great rocky promontory, and the freshness and sound of the sea pervaded it. The girls went on with their work for a little, but by degrees first one and then another stopped, and just sat staring at Beth, while gravity settled on every face as the interest deepened.

Suddenly the bell rang, and the story was not finished.

"Oh dear!" Miss Smallwood exclaimed, "it is very fascinating, Beth; but I really am afraid I ought not to have allowed you to tell it. I had no idea—I must speak to Miss Clifford."

The fame of this wonderful story spread through the school, and the next half-holiday the first-class girls sent to ask Beth to go to their room and repeat it; but Beth was not in the mood, and answered their messenger tragically:—

"'Twas not for this I left my father's home!
Go, tell your class, that Vashti will not come."

"Vashti's a little beast, I think," the head girl observed when the message was delivered.

Miss Clifford also sent for Beth, and requested her to repeat the story, that she might judge for herself if she should be allowed to go on with it; and Beth repeated it, being constrained; but the recital was so wearisome that Miss Clifford dismissed her before she was half-way through, with leave to finish it if anybody cared to hear it. When Thursday came, the girls and Miss Smallwood cared very much to hear it, and Beth, stimulated by their clamours, went on without a break for the whole hour, and ended with a description of a shipwreck, which was so vivid that the whole class was shaken with awe, and sat silent for a perceptible time after she stopped.

Beth could rarely be persuaded to repeat this performance; but from that time her standing was unique, both with girls and mistresses, a fact, however, of which she herself was totally unaware. She felt her backwardness in school work and nothing else, and petitioned God incessantly to help her with her lessons, and get her put up; and put up she was regularly until she reached the third, when she was among the elder girls. She was never able to do the work properly of any class she was in, however, and her class mistresses were always against her being put up, but Miss Clifford insisted on it.

Beth was never anything but miserable at school. The dull routine of the place pressed heavily upon her, and everything she had to do was irksome. The other girls accommodated themselves more or less successfully to the circumstances of their lives; but Beth in herself was always at war with her surroundings, and her busy brain teemed with ingenious devices to vary the monotony. The confinement, want of relaxation, and of proper physical training, very soon told upon her health and spirits, as indeed they did upon the greater number of the girls, who suffered unnecessarily in various ways. Beth very soon had to have an extra hour in bed in the morning, a cup of soup at eleven o'clock, a tonic three times a day, and a slice of thick bread and butter with a glass of stout on going to bed; such things were not stinted

during Miss Clifford's administration; but it was a case of treating effects which all the time were being renewed by causes that might and ought to have been removed, but were let alone.

St. Catherine's Mansion was regulated on a system of exemplary dulness. There is a certain dowager still extant who considers it absurd to provide amusement for people of inferior station. All people who earn their living are people of inferior station to her; she has never heard of such a thing as the dignity of labour. Because many of the girls at St. Catherine's were orphans without means, and would therefore have to earn their own living as governesses when their education was finished, the dowager-persons who interested themselves in the management of the school had used their influence strenuously to make the life there as much of a punishment as possible. "You cannot be too strict with girls in their position," was what they continually averred, their own position by birth being in no way better, and in some instances not so good, as that of the girls whom they were depriving of every innocent pleasure natural to their age and necessary for the good of their health and spirits. They were not allowed to learn dancing; they had no outdoor games at all, not even croquet—nothing whatever to exhilarate them and develop them physically except an hour's "deportment," the very mildest kind of calisthenics, in the big class-room once a fortnight, and the daily making of their little beds. For the rest, monotonous walks up and down the garden-paths in small parties, or about the dreary roads two and two in long lines, was their only exercise, and even in this they were restricted to such a severe propriety of demeanour that it almost seemed as if the object were to teach them to move without betraying the fact that they had legs. The consequence of all this restraint was a low state of vitality among the girls, and the outbreak of morbid phases that sometimes went right through the school. Beth, as might have been expected, was one of the first to be caught by anything of this kind; and she arrived, by way of her own emotions, at the cause of a great deal that was a mystery to older people, and also thought out the cure eventually; but she suffered a great deal in the process of acquiring her special knowledge of the subject. She was especially troubled by her old malady—depression of spirits. Sometimes, on a summer evening, when all the classes were at preparation, and the whole great house was still, a mistress would begin to practise in one of the music-rooms, and Beth would be carried away by the music, so

that work was impossible. One evening, when this happened, she sat, with a very sad face, looking out on the river. Pleasure-boats were gliding up and down; a gay party went by, dancing on the deck of a luxurious barge to the music of a string-band; a young man skimmed the surface in a skiff, another punted two girls along; and people walked on the banks or sat about under the trees, and children played—and they were all free! Suddenly Beth burst into tears. Miss Smallwood questioned her. Was she ill? had she any pain? had any one been unkind to her? No? What was the matter then? Nothing; she was just miserable!

"Beth, don't be so silly," Miss Smallwood remonstrated. "A great girl like you, crying for nothing! It is positively childish."

The other girls stole glances at her and looked grave. At the beginning of the term they would not have sympathised perhaps; but this was the middle, and many of them were in much the same mood themselves.

When the bell rang, and the recreation hour began, they got out their little bits of fancy-work, and such dull childish books as they were allowed, and broke up into groups. Beth was soon surrounded by the cleverer girls in the class.

"I sympathise with you, Beth," said Janey North, a red-haired Irish girl, "for I felt like it myself, I did indeed."

"Will the holidays never be here?" sighed Rosa Bird.

"I can't think why I stay at all," said Beth. "I hate it—I hate it all the time."

"But how could one get away?" said Janey.

"Only by being ill," Agnes Stewart answered darkly. She was a delicate girl, and from that time she starved herself resolutely, until she was so wasted that Miss Clifford in despair sent her home. Another girl was seized with total deafness suddenly, and had also to go; the change brought her hearing back in a very short time; and some of the dockyard girls received urgent summonses from dying relations, and were allowed to go to them. They always returned the brighter for the experience.

One day, after the weather became cold, a girl appeared in class wrapped up in a shawl, and with her head all drawn down to one side. Her neck was stiff, and she could not straighten it. She was sent to the infirmary. The girls thought her lucky. For it was warm there, and nurse was kind, and sang delightful songs. She would be able to do fancy-work, too, and read as much as she liked, and would not have to get up till she had had her breakfast and the fire was lighted, and need not trouble about lessons at all—a stiff neck was a very small drawback to the delights of such a change.

Next day another girl's neck was stiff. Miss Smallwood searched for a draught, but did not succeed in finding one. That evening at prayers one of the girls in the first appeared in a shawl with her head on one side and a white worn face; and next day there was another case from the third and fourth. So it was evident that there was something like an epidemic going through the school; but the doctor had never seen one of the kind before, and was at a loss to account for it. The cases were all exactly alike: stiff neck, with the head drawn down to one side, accompanied by feverishness, and followed by severe prostration.

Beth sat with a stolid countenance, and stared solemnly at every girl that was attacked, as if she were studying her case. Then, one morning, she came down in a shawl herself, with her head on one side and a very white face. Nurse marched her off at once to the infirmary, and put her in a bed beside the fire, and Beth, as she coiled herself up, and realised that she need not worry about lessons, or rush off to practise when the bell rang, or go out to walk up and down in the garden till she hated every pebble on the path, heaved a great sigh of relief and fell asleep. When she awoke the doctor was feeling her pulse.

"She's very low," he said. "Is she a delicate girl naturally?"

"She looked strong enough when she came to school," nurse answered; "but she soon went off, as so many of them do."

"The loss of vitality amongst them is really extraordinary," the doctor observed. "Give her port wine and beef-tea. Don't keep her in bed too much, but don't hurry her up. Rest and relief from lessons is the great thing."

Some healthy pleasure to vary the monotonous routine, some liberty of action and something to look forward to, would have been better; but nobody thought of that.

How many of those necks were really stiff beyond the will of the sufferer to move it, no one will ever know; but when it occurred to Beth to straighten her own one day, she found no difficulty.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Beth was moved into the upper school, she came under the direct influence of Miss Crow, the English mistress of the third and fourth, who had been educated at St. Catherine's herself, and was an ardent disciple of Miss Clifford's. Beth, although predisposed to pietism, had not been sensibly influenced by Miss Clifford's teaching heretofore; now, however, she attached herself to Miss Crow, who began at once to take a special interest in her spiritual welfare. She encouraged Beth to sit and walk with her when she was on duty, and invited her to her room during recreation in order to talk to her earnestly on the subject of salvation, or to read to her and expound portions of Scripture, fine passages from religious books, and beautiful hymns. Some of the hymns she took the trouble to copy out for Beth's help and comfort when they were specially appropriate to the needs of her nature, such as "Calm me, my God, and keep me calm," or specially suited to her case, like "Call me! and I will answer, gladly singing!" Beth responded readily to her kindness, and very soon became a convert to her views; but she did not stop there, for it was not in Beth's nature to rest content with her own conversion while there were so many others still sitting in darkness who might be brought to the light. No sooner was she convinced herself than she began to proselytise among the other girls, and in a short time her eloquence and force of character attracted a following from all parts of the school. Miss Crow told Miss Clifford that she spoke like one inspired, and high hopes were entertained of the work which they somewhat prematurely concluded she was destined to do. Unfortunately Beth's fervent faith received a check at a critical time when it was highly important to have kept it well nourished—that is to say, when she was being prepared for confirmation. It happened when Miss Crow was hearing the girls their Scripture lesson one morning, the subject being the escape of the children of Israel from Egypt, and the destruction of Pharaoh's hosts in the Red Sea.

"I know a man who says the whole of that account has been garbled," Beth remarked in a dreamy way, meaning Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, but not thinking much of what she was saying.

Miss Crow nearly dropped the Bible, so greatly was she startled and shocked by the announcement.

"Beth!" she exclaimed, directly the class was over and she could speak to Beth privately, "how could you be so wicked as to say that anything in Holy Scripture is a garbled account?"

"I said I knew a man who said so," Beth answered, surprised that so simple a remark should have created such consternation.

But Miss Crow saw in her attitude a dangerous tendency to scepticism, and expressed strong condemnation of any one who presumed to do other than accept Holy Writ in blind unquestioning faith. She talked to Beth with horror about the ungodly men who cast doubt on the unity of the Bible, called its geology in question, and even ventured to correct its chronology by the light of vain modern scientific discoveries; and Beth shocked her again by the questions she asked, and the intelligent interest she showed in the subject. She told Miss Crow that Count Gustav had also said that the Old Testament was bad religion and worse history, but she did not know that other people had thought so too. Whereupon Miss Crow went to Miss Clifford and reported Beth's attitude as something too serious for her to deal with alone, and Miss Clifford sent for Beth and talked to her long and earnestly. She told her that it was absurd for a girl of her age to call in question the teaching of the best and greatest men that ever lived, which somehow reminded Beth of the many mistakes made by the best and greatest men that ever lived, of their differences of opinion and undignified squabbles, the instances of one man discovering and suffering for a truth which the rest refused to accept, and the constant modification, alteration, and rejection by one generation of teaching which had been upheld by another with brutality and bloodshed,—instances of all of which were notorious enough even to be known at a girls' school. Beth said very little, however; but she determined to read the Bible through from beginning to end, and see for herself if she could detect any grounds for the mischief-making doubts and controversies she had been hearing about. She began in full faith, but was brought up short at the very outset by the discrepancy between the first and second chapters of Genesis, which she perceived for the first time. She went steadily on, however, until she had finished the Book of Job, and then she paused in revolt. She could not reconcile the

dreadful experiment which had entailed unspeakable suffering and loss irreparable upon a good man with any attribute she had been accustomed to revere in her deity. There might be some explanation to excuse this game of god and devil, but until she knew the excuse she would vow no adhesion to a power whose conduct on that occasion seemed contrary to every canon of justice and mercy. She did not belong to the servile age when men, forgetting their manhood, fawned on patrons for what they could get, and cringingly accepted favours from the dirtiest hands. Even her God must be worthy to help her, worthy to be loved, good as well as great. The God who connived at the torment of Job could not be the God of her salvation.

Beth had spoken casually in class. She had never questioned her religion, and would not have done so now if the remark had been allowed to pass; but the fuss that was made about it, and the severity with which she was rebuked, by putting her mind into a critical attitude, had the effect of concentrating her attention on the subject; so that it was the very precautions which were taken to check her supposed scepticism that first made her sceptical. The immediate consequence was that she gave up preaching and refused to be confirmed. Miss Clifford, Miss Crow, and the chaplain argued, expostulated, and punished in vain. It was the first case of the kind that had occurred in the school, and Beth was treated as a criminal; but she felt more like a martyr, and was not to be moved. She did not try to make partisans for herself, however; on the contrary, she deserted her family as well as her congregation, and took to wandering about alone again; but she was not unhappy. Her old faith had gone, it is true, but it had left the way prepared for a new one. She did not believe in the God of Job—because she was sure that there must be a better God—that was all.

From this time, however, her imagination rode rampant once more over everything. The vision and the dream were upon her. All wholesome interest in her work was over. There was an old piano in the reception-room which the girls were allowed to use for their amusement on half-holidays, and she often went there; but even when she practised, she moved her fingers mechanically, her mind busy with vivid scenes and moving dramatic incidents; so that her beloved music was gradually converted from an object in itself into an aid to thought.

It was only six weeks to the holidays, but oh! how the days dragged! She struggled to be conscientious, to be good, to please Miss Crow, to escape bad marks; but everything was irksome. Getting up, lessons, breakfast, making her bed, practising, lessons again, dressing, going out, dinner—the whole round of regular life was an effort. Her face grew thin and pale, she began to cough, and was put upon extras again. "We can't let you go home looking like that, you know," nurse said. Beth looked up at her out of her dream absently and smiled. She was enjoying a visionary walk at the moment with a vague being who loved her. They were out on a white cliff overlooking the sea in a wild warm region. The turf they trod on was vivid green, and short and springy; the water below was green and bright and clear, sea-birds skimmed the surface, and the air was sweet. But presently the road was barred by a rail, so they had to stop, and he put his arm round her, and she laid her head on his shoulder; and the murmur of wind and water was in her ears, and she became as the lark that sang above them, the curlew that piped, the quiet cattle, and all inanimate things—untroubled, natural, complete. All intellectual interest being suspended, she had begun to yearn for a companion, a mate. Her delicate mind refused to account for the tender sensation; but it was love, or rather the mood for love she had fallen into—the passive mood, which can be converted into the active in an ordinary young girl by almost any man of average attractions, provided she is not already yearning happily for some one in particular. It is not until much later that she learns to discriminate. There were girls at the school who saw in every man they met a possible lover, and were ready to accept any man who offered himself; but they were of coarser fibre than Beth, more susceptible to the physical than to the ideal demands of love, and fickle because the man who was present had more power to please than the one who was merely a recollection. The actual presence was enough for them, they had no ideals. With Beth it was different. Her present was apt to be but a poor faded substitute for the future with the infinite range of possibilities she had the power to perceive in it, or even for the past as she glorified it.

While she was in this mood she was particularly provoking to those in authority over her.

"Beth," said Miss Crow one day severely, "you are to go to Miss Clifford directly." Beth went.

"I hear," said Miss Clifford in her severest tone, "that you have not made your bed this morning."

"I went up to make it," Beth answered, trying dreamily to recollect what had happened after that.

"I must give you a bad mark," Miss Clifford said, and then paused; and Beth, who had not been attending, becoming conscious that something had been bestowed upon her, answered politely, "Thank you."

"Beth, you are impertinent," Miss Clifford exclaimed, "and I must punish you severely. Stay in the whole of your half-holiday and do arithmetic."

Then Beth awoke with a start, and realising what she had done, struggled to explain; but the moment she became herself again, an agony of dumbness came upon her, and she left the room without a word.

She spent the long bright afternoon cowering over her arithmetic, and crying at intervals, being in the lowest spirits, so that by prayer-time she was pretty well exhausted. She tried to attend to the psalms, but in the middle of them she became a poor girl suffering from a cruel sense of injustice. All her friends misunderstood her and were unkind to her, in consequence of which she pined away, and one day, in the midst of a large party, she dropped down dead.

And at this point she actually did fall fainting with a thud on the floor. Miss Clifford, who was giving out the hymn, stopped startled, and some of the girls shrieked. Miss Crow and one of the other teachers carried Beth out by the nearest door.

"Poor little thing!" said Miss Crow, looking pityingly at her drawn white face and purple eyelids. "I'm afraid she's very delicate."

Miss Clifford came also, when prayers were over, and said kind things; and from that time forward Beth received a great deal of sympathetic attention, which did her good, but in no way reconciled her to her imprisonment.

The following term, Beth watched the spring come in at school with infinite yearning. To be out—to be free to sit under the apple-trees and look up through the boughs at the faintly flushed blossom, till the vision and the dream came upon her, and she passed from conscious thought into a higher phase of being—just to do that was her one desire till the petals fell. Then pleasure-boats began to be rowed on the river, rowed or steered by girls no older than herself, in summer dresses delicately fresh; and she, seeing them, became aware of the staleness of her own shabby clothing, and writhed under the rules which would not allow her even to walk on the path overlooking the river, and gaze her fill at it. The creamy white flowers of the great magnolia on the lawn came out, and once she slipped across the grass to peer into them and smell them. She got a bad mark for that, the second she had had.

At preparation that evening she sat so that she could see the river, and watched it idly instead of working; and presently there floated into her mind the rhyme she made when she was a little child at Fairholm—

"The fairy folk are calling me."

Suddenly she caught her breath, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, her whole aspect changed from apathy to animation, and she laughed.

"What has happened to please you, Beth; you look quite bright?" Miss Bey said, meeting her in the vestibule when preparation was over. Miss Bey was said to favour Beth by some; Beth was said to toady Bey by others; the truth being that they had taken to each other from the first, and continued friends.

"I've got a sort of singing at my heart," Beth answered, sparkling. "The fairy folk are calling me."

Beth slept in No. 5 then, and had the bed nearest to the window. There was a moon that night, and she lay long watching the light of it upon the blind—long after the gas was put out and the teachers had gone to their rooms. Wondering at last if the girls in the room were asleep, she sat up in bed, the better to be able to hear; and judged that they were. Then she got out of bed, walked quietly down the room in her night-dress and bare feet, opened the door cautiously, and found herself out in the carpetless passage. It was dark there, but she walked on confidently to the head of the grand staircase,

which the girls were only allowed to use on special occasions. "This *is* a special occasion," Beth said to herself with a grin. "The fairy folk are calling me, and I must go out and dance on the grass in that lovely moonlight."

But how to get out was the difficulty. The hall door was bolted and barred. She went into the first and second. There were two large windows in the room which looked into the great conservatory, and one of them was open a crack. She pushed it up higher, and got through into the conservatory. There she found a large side window on the left of the first and second also open a little. The shelf in front of the window had flower-pots on it, which she moved aside, then got up herself, and with a tug, managed to raise the heavy sash. Then she sat on the sill and looked down. It was too far to jump, but a sort of dado of ornamental stonework came right up to the window, and by the help of this she managed to descend to the ground, and found herself free. For a moment she stood stretching herself like one just released from a cramped position, drawing in deep draughts of the delicious night air the while; then she bounded off over the dewy grass, and ran, and jumped, and waved her arms, every muscle of her rejoicing in an ecstasy of liberty. She ran round to the front of the house, regardless of the chance of some one seeing her from one of the windows, and danced round and round the magnolia, and buried her face in the big white flowers one after the other, and bathed it in the dew on their petals. Then she went to the path by the river and hung over the railing, and after that she visited the orchard, and every other forbidden place in the grounds. In the orchard she found some half-ripe fruit under the trees, and gathered it; and finding that she could not climb into the conservatory again with the fruit in her hands, she amused herself by throwing it through the open window.

It was harder to climb up than it had been to get down, but she accomplished the feat at last with sundry abrasions, shut the window, replaced the flower pots, got into the first and second, and went back to bed. Her night-dress was wet with dew, and her feet were scratched and dirty; but she was too much exhilarated by the exercise and adventure to feel any discomfort. She was sitting up in bed, hungrily munching some of her spoils, when Janey North, the girl in the next bed, awoke.

"What are you eating, Beth?" she asked in a cautious voice, whispering, fearful of awaking a mistress and being reported for talking.

"Apples," Beth answered. "Have some?"

"All right! but where did you get them?" Janey asked.

"Never you mind!" said Beth.

Janey did not mind at the moment, and ate the greater number, but next day she went treacherously and told, in order to ingratiate herself with one of the mistresses, and the matter was reported to Miss Clifford, who sent for Beth. Janey North was also sent for.

"What is this I hear about your having apples in your bedroom last night, Beth?" Miss Clifford said.

"A story, I should think," Beth answered readily. "Who told you?"

Janey North looked disconcerted.

"What have you to say, Miss North?" Miss Clifford asked.

"You *were* eating apples," Janey said to Beth.

"How do you know?" Beth asked suavely.

"I saw you."

"What, in the middle of the night when the gas was out?"

"Ye-yes," Janey faltered.

Beth shrugged her shoulders and looked at Miss Clifford, who said severely: "I think, Miss North, you have either dreamt this story or invented it."

Janey was barred in the school after that, the girls deciding that, whether the story were true or not, she was a dockyard girl for telling it. It was Beth's sporting instinct that had made her evade the question. When she had won the game, and the excitement was over, she felt she had been guilty of duplicity, and determined to confess when Miss Clifford sent for her next

and gave her a good opportunity. She would have gone at once but for the dread of losing the precious liberty that was life to her. All through the weeks that followed she kept herself sane and healthy by midnight exercises in the moonlight. Her appetite had failed her till she took to this diversion, but after her second ramble she was so hungry that she went down to the kitchen boldly to forage in the hope of finding a crust. The fire was still burning brightly, and by its light she discovered on the table the thick bread and butter for the next morning's breakfast, all cut ready, and piled up under covers on the dishes. There was half a jug of beer besides, doubtless left from the servants' supper. It was rather flat, but she thought it and the new bread and butter delicious. She had a bad cold after the first ramble, but that was the only one, strange to relate, for she always went out in her night-dress, and bare-footed.

During this time her imagination was exceedingly active and her health improved, but her work was a greater trouble than ever. She had just been put into the third, but Miss Clifford threatened to put her down again if she did not do better, and one day she sent for Beth, who went trembling, under the impression that that was what the summons was for. She found Miss Clifford and Miss Bey discussing a letter, and both looking very serious.

"Beth," Miss Clifford began, "a gentleman whom I know well has written to tell me that he was walking home by the river-path at two o'clock on Monday morning, and saw a girl here at St. Catherine's with only her night-dress on, hanging over the railing looking into the river; and I am sure from the description it was you."

"Yes," said Beth, "I saw him."

Miss Clifford let the letter fall on her lap, and Miss Bey dropped into a chair. Beth looked on with interest, and wondered about that accurate description of herself; she would have given anything to see it.

"What were you doing there?" Miss Clifford asked; and Beth noticed that she was treating the matter just as her mother had treated the menagerie business.

"Just looking at the water," Beth said.

"At two o'clock in the morning! How did you get out?"

"By the conservatory window."

"Had you been out before?"

"Oh yes, often."

"Do any of the other girls go out?"

"Not that I know of," said Beth, then added, "No, I'm sure they don't."

"Thank Heaven for that, at all events!" Miss Clifford ejaculated. Then she made Beth sit down beside her, and took her hand, and gazed at her long and sorrowfully.

"Was it such a very dreadful thing to do?" Beth asked at last.

"You have been a great disappointment to me, Beth," Miss Clifford answered indirectly, "and to Miss Bey. We expected more of you than of any other girl now in the school—you promised so well in many ways at one time."

"*Did I?*" said Beth, looking from one to the other in consternation. "Oh, why didn't you tell me? I thought you all fancied I should never do anything well, and that disheartened me. If I had known——" She burst into tears.

Late that night Miss Clifford and Miss Bey sat together discussing Beth.

"I feel more than ever convinced there is something exceptional about the child," Miss Clifford declared. "I hope it is not insanity; but, at all events, it is not sin, and I won't have her punished. I say now what I said at first, she should have been sent here early, or not at all. And now she must go."

"What, expel her!" Miss Bey ejaculated.

"No. Didn't I say I would not have her punished? There is some explanation of her wild escapade besides mere naughtiness, I feel sure, and she shall have every chance that I can give her. There is no vice in her of any kind that I can discover, and she is fearlessly honest. If she were grown-up we should call her eccentric, and be interested and amused by her vagaries; and I do not see why she should not be allowed the same excuse as it is, only St. Catherine's is not the place for her. Here all must move in the common

orbit, to save confusion. So I shall write to her mother, and get her to take her from the school at the end of the term in the regular way."

"But in the meantime?" Miss Bey asked.

"Beth has given me her word that she will be good, and do nothing I should disapprove of, and she will keep it."

So Beth's credit was saved by the good judgment of this kind, wise woman, and her career at St Catherine's ended honourably, if somewhat abruptly.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN it was rumoured amongst the mistresses that Beth was to leave that term, Old Tom put her on to play first piano in the first-class solo, and to lead the treble in the second-class duet at the examination.

"For I rather like ye, Miss Beth Caldwell," she said. "You're not a sycophant, whatever else ye are. They've not been able to do much wi' ye in regard to yer work in the rest of the school, but ye've done well under me, and I'll let ye have yer chance to distinguish yerself before ye go."

"Oh, but do you think I can do it?" Beth exclaimed.

"Ye can do anything ye set yerself to do, Beth Caldwell," Old Tom shouted at her.

Beth set herself accordingly, and when the day came she led the solo and duet with the precision of a musical box, but with such an expenditure of nerve-power that she was prostrated by the effort. She was considered quite a musician at St. Catherine's, but by this time the dire method of teaching had had its effect. Her confidence and her memory for music were gone, the beauty of her touch spoilt, and the further development of her talent effectually checked.

She did not go home for the holidays. Miss Clifford had advised, Lady Benyon approved, and Mrs. Caldwell decided, that she should be sent direct to a finishing school in London, and when St. Catherine's broke up, Miss Bey, who happened to be going that way, good-naturedly undertook to see Beth safely to her destination.

Miss Clifford held Beth's hand long, and gazed into her face earnestly when she took leave of her. "I shall hear of you again," she said, "and I pray God it may be good news; but it depends upon yourself, Beth. We are free agents. Good-bye, my dear child, and God bless you."

Beth had been eighteen intolerable months at the school, and had been exceedingly miserable most of the time, yet she left it with tears in her eyes,

melted and surprised by the kindest farewells from every one. It had never dawned upon her until that moment that she was really very much liked.

Her new school was a large house in a long wide street of houses, all exactly alike. When she arrived with Miss Bey, they were shown into a deliciously cool shady drawing-room, charmingly furnished, and the effect upon Beth, after the graceless bareness of St. Catherine's, was altogether reassuring.

In front of the fireplace, which was hidden by ferns and flowering plants, a slender girl, with thick dark hair down her back, was lying on the white woolly hearthrug, reading. She got up to greet the visitors without embarrassment, still holding her book in her hand.

"Miss Blackburne will be here directly," she said. "Will you sit down?" Then there was a little pause, which Miss Bey broke by asking in her magisterial way, "What is that you are reading, my dear?"

"The Idylls of the King," the girl answered.

Miss Bey's nostrils flapped.

"Is it not rather advanced for you, my dear?" she said. "We do not allow it at all, even to our first-class girls."

"Oh, Miss Blackburne likes us to read it," was the easy answer. "She says that Tennyson and all the good modern writers are a part of our education."

"Thank goodness!" Beth ejaculated fervently. "At St. Catherine's our minds were starved on books suited to the capacity of infants and imbeciles."

"I should think, Beth, you are hardly old enough or educated enough to be a judge of literature as yet," Miss Bey said severely.

"Nor do I pretend to be a judge. How can I know anything of literature when literature is unknown at St. Catherine's? But I should think babes and sucklings would be wise enough to object to the silly trash we had instead of literature."

Beth spoke emphatically, shaking herself free of the restrictions of the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters once for all.

Miss Blackburne came in while she was speaking, and smiled.

"I like to hear a girl express an opinion," she said. "She may be quite wrong, but she must have some mind if she attempts to think for herself at all; and mind is material to work upon."

"I'm afraid *I* haven't much mind," Beth said, sighing, "or manner either."

Miss Blackburne smiled again, and looked at Miss Bey; but Miss Bey supported Beth in her self-depreciation by preserving an ominous silence.

"This is one of your new school-fellows," Miss Blackburne said to Beth; "let me introduce you to each other. Clara Herring, Beth Caldwell."

When Miss Bey took her leave, Miss Blackburne left the room with her, and immediately afterwards another girl came in, clapping her hands.

"Oh, I say!" she exclaimed, "Signor Caponi *is* a dear! He has the nicest chocolate eyes, and he says my Italian is wonderful! Now I've done all my work for to-day."

"Have you?" said Beth. "Why, it isn't five o'clock yet!"

"Miss Blackburne won't let us work long hours," the girl rejoined. "She says it destroys our freshness. But let us know each other's names. I am Geraldine Tressillion. Good name for a novel, isn't it?" and she clapped her little white hands and laughed again.

"That's just what you're made to be—the heroine of a novel," Clara Herring observed, looking at her admiringly. "I always think of you when I come across a gay one, with golden hair and blue eyes."

"I have my good points, I know," Geraldine rejoined. "But how about my hips? Too high, alas!"

"Oh, that won't show much while you're slight," said Clara, looking at her critically.

"Well, I'll make haste and marry me before I'm afflicted with flesh, as I'm sure to become. For I deny myself nothing—I live to eat," Geraldine rattled on cheerfully. "One can't get very fat before one comes out; and I hate a thin

dowager. I'm engaged already, you know, but I don't like the man much—don't like him at all, in fact; and my sister says I can do better. She's been married a year, and has a baby. She told me all about it. Mamma imagines we're all innocent. A lady implored her to tell my sister things before she married, but she said she really could not speak to an innocent girl on such a subject. I don't believe she was ever so innocent herself. A grown girl can't be innocent unless she's a fool; but anyway, it's the right pose to pretend. You've got to play the silly fool to please a man; then he feels superior."

"But it's hypocritical," said Beth.

"Yes, my dear. But you must be hypocritical if you want to be a man's ideal of a woman. You must know nothing, do nothing, see nothing, but just what suits his pleasure and convenience; and in order to answer to his requirements you must be either a hypocrite, or a blind worm without eyes or intelligence. Men don't like innocence because it's holy, but because it whets their appetites, my sister says, and if they're deceived it serves them right. They work the world for their own pleasure, not ours; and we must look out for ourselves. If we want money, liberty, devotion, admiration, and any other luxury, we must pretend. Don't you see?"

"I don't know," Beth rejoined. "But, personally, I shall never pretend anything."

"Then you will suffer for your sincerity," Geraldine rejoined.

Beth shrugged her shoulders. The turn the conversation had taken was distasteful to her, and she would not pursue it.

There was a pause, then Clara observed sententiously:

"Innocence is not impossible, Geraldine. Surely Adelaide is innocent enough."

"I said innocence and intelligence were incompatible," Geraldine answered. "You don't call Adelaide intelligent, do you?"

"Who is Adelaide?" Beth asked.

"The daughter of a Roman Catholic peer," Geraldine replied. "She is eighteen, and her mind is absolutely undeveloped. We think she's in training for a convent, and that's why they don't let her learn much. Miss Ella Blackburne is a Roman Catholic, and so also is Adelaide's maid; They trot her round to all the observances of her Church regularly, and in the intervals she plays with the kitten. I don't know why she should have been sent here at all, for this is a regular forcing-house for the marriage market. Miss Blackburne expects all her girls to marry well, and they generally do. I should think, Miss Beth, she will be able to make something of you with those eyes!"

"Look at its neck and shoulders, too, and the way its head is set on them!" Clara exclaimed.

"Not to mention its hands and its complexion!" Geraldine supplemented. "But its voice alone—*soft, gentle, and low*—would get it into the peerage!"

Beth, unused to be appraised in this way, blushed and smiled, rather pleased, but confused.

"How many girls are there here?" she asked, to change the subject.

"Six boarders till you came, but now we are seven," Clara answered. "There are some day-girls too, but they are children, and don't count. The greatest pickle in the school is the daughter of an Archbishop—at least, she has been the greatest pickle so far—we don't know you as yet, however. But we have heard things!"

"Come and see my room," Geraldine interrupted. "And perhaps you'd like to see your own. It's next to mine."

"Are you allowed to go up and down stairs just as you like?" Beth asked in surprise.

"Why, of course!" Geraldine cried. "You can go where you like and sit where you like when you've done your work. We're not in prison!"

Beth had a dainty little room, hung with white curtains, all to herself. Her heart expanded when she saw it. The delightful appearance of her new surroundings had already begun to have the happiest effect upon her mind.

When Geraldine took her into her own room she drew a yellow book from under a quantity of linen in a drawer. "It's a French novel," she said. "Miss Blackburne wouldn't let me read it for worlds if she knew, so you mustn't tell. I'll lend it to you if you like."

"I couldn't read it if I would; I don't know enough," Beth said.

"Oh, you'll soon learn; and I'll tell you all there is in it. I say, what size is your waist? Mine is only seventeen inches; but I laced till I got shingles to reduce it to that. I know a doctor who says small waists are neither healthy nor beautiful; but then they're the fashion, and men are such awful fools about fashion. They sneer at a healthy figure, and saddle themselves every day with ailing wives, all deformed, because they're accustomed to see women so; and then they call *us* silly! My husband won't think *me* silly once I get command of his money, whatever else he may think me. Till then—!" she made a pretty gesture with her hands and laughed—Beth observing her the while with deep attention as a new specimen.

She found eventually that Geraldine was not at all a bad girl, or in the least inclined to be vicious, her conversation notwithstanding; she was merely a shrewd one learning how to protect herself in that state of life to which she was destined. If a woman is to make her way in society and keep straight, she must have wits and knowledge of a special kind. There is probably no more delightful, high-minded, charming-mannered, honourable and trustworthy woman in the world than a well-bred Englishwoman; but, on the other hand, there can be nothing more vulgar-minded, coarse, and despicable than women of fashion tend to become. There is no meanness nor shabbiness, not to mention fraud, that they will not stoop to when it suits themselves, from tricking a tradesman and sweating a servant, to neglecting their children, deceiving their husbands, and slandering their friends. They are sheep running hither and thither in servile imitation of each other, without an original thought amongst them; the froth of society, with the natural tendency of froth to rise to the surface and thence be swept aside; mere bubbles, that shine a moment and then burst. It is fashion that unsexes women and unmakes men. To be in the world of fashion and of it, is to degenerate; but to be in it and not of it, to know it and remain untainted, despising all it has to give, makes towards solid advance. There

are some ugly stages to be gone through, however, before the advancement is pronounced.

The six girls at Miss Blackburne's were all daughters of people of position, all enjoying the same advantages and under the same influences; but three of them were already shaping themselves into women of fashion, while the other three were tending as inevitably to develop into women of fine character and cultivated mind. Beth was attracted to all such women, and recognised their worth, often long before they appreciated her at all. She was seventh among the girls, her place being in the middle, as it were, with three on either side of her, teaching her all they could, as was inevitable. In association with the budding women of fashion, she lost the first fine delicacy of maiden modesty of mind; but the example of the young gentlewomen, on the other hand, confirmed her taste and settled her convictions. The ladies who kept the school were high-minded themselves and exemplary in every possible way, and if they did not make all their pupils equally so, it was because factors go to the formation of character with which, for want of knowledge, no one can reckon at present. The influence of these ladies upon Beth was altogether benign. She was in a new world with them—a world of ease and refinement, of polished manners, of kindly consideration, where, instead of being harried by nagging rules, stultified by every kind of restraint, and lowered in her own estimation for want of proper respect and encouragement, she was allowed as much liberty as she would have had in a well-ordered home, and found herself and her abilities of special interest to each of her teachers. Instead of being an item, a part of a huge piece of machinery to be strictly kept in the particular place assigned to her, whether it were adapted to the needs of her nature or not, for fear of putting the whole mechanism out of order, her present and future being less considered than the smooth working of the machine—she was a girl again with some character of her own to be formed and developed. Here, too, she was put upon her honour to do all that was expected of her, and the immediate consequence of this in her case was the most scrupulous exactness. She attached herself to Miss Ella, attracted first of all by the fact that she was a Roman Catholic. How she could be one was a mystery Beth longed to solve; but Miss Ella did not consider it loyal to Protestant parents to influence their daughters at school, and would give her no help in this. In every other respect, however, Beth found her exceedingly

kind and sympathetic, a serene, strong woman, who began to curb the exuberance of Beth's naughtiness from the first, and to direct the energy of which it was the outcome into profitable channels.

There was no monotony in Miss Blackburne's establishment. The girls were taken in turns to operas, concerts, picture-galleries, and every kind of exhibition that might help to cultivate their minds. To be able to discuss such things was a part of their education. They were expected to describe all they saw, fluently and pleasantly, but without criticism enough to require thought and provoke argument, which is apt to be tedious; and thus was formed the habit of chatting in the genial light frothy way which does duty for conversation in society. Geraldine had not exaggerated when she called Miss Blackburne's school a forcing house for the marriage market. At that time marriage was the only career open to a gentlewoman, and the object of her education was to make her attractive. The theory then was that solid acquirements were beyond the physical strength of girls, besides being unnecessary. Showy accomplishments, therefore, were all that was aimed at; but they had to be thorough. Music, singing, drawing, dancing, French, German, Italian—whatever it might be; the girl who was learning it had the greatest attention from her master or mistress during the lesson; she was made to do it as much by the will of the teacher as by her own intelligence. This was the first experience of thorough teaching Beth had ever had, and she enjoyed it, and would have worked harder to profit by it than Miss Blackburne would allow. As it was, she made great progress with her work, while all the time the more informal but most valuable part of her education, which was directed to the strengthening of every womanly attribute, went on steadily under the influence of Miss Ella.

It would have been well for Beth if she had been left at Miss Blackburne's for the next three years; but just when the rebellious beating of her wings against the bars had ceased, and they had folded themselves contentedly behind her for awhile; just when the wild flights of her imagination were giving way to wholesome habits of thought, and her own vain dreams were being dissipated by the honest ambition to accomplish something actual—she was summoned away. Her sister Mildred had died suddenly of meningitis, and the immediate effect of the shock on Mrs. Caldwell, who had dearly loved her eldest daughter, was a kindlier feeling for Beth, and a wish to have her at home—for a time at all events. And Beth went willingly

under the circumstances. She sympathised deeply with her mother, and was full of grief herself for her sister, to whom she had been tenderly attached although they had seen so little of each other. Beth was not yet sixteen, and this was the third blow that death had dealt her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BETH had a natural love of order, and at school she had learnt the necessity for it. She did not mean to give up work when she went home; on the contrary, she determined to do more than ever. Miss Ella had taught her to be deliberate, neither to haste nor to rest, but steadily to pursue. She insisted that things to be well done must be done regularly, and Beth, in accordance with this precept, mapped out her day so as to make the most of it. She got up at seven, opened her window wider, threw the clothes back from her bed to air it, had her bath, brushed her hair; left nothing untidy lying about her room; did her good reading, the psalms and lessons; breakfasted, made her bed, studied French, went out for exercise, sewed, and read so much, all in the same order every day. She paid particular attention to her personal appearance, too, that being the one of her mother's principles which had also been most particularly enjoined by Miss Blackburne. At both of her schools marriage was the great ambition of most of the girls. At St Catherine's it meant a means of escape from many hardships; to Miss Blackburne's girls it offered the chance of a better position, and more money and luxury. There was a nicer tone among the Royal Service girls, and more reticence in their discussions of the subject than at Miss Blackburne's, where the girls were not at all high-minded, and talked of their chances with the utmost frankness, not to say coarseness; but good looks were held to be the best, if not the only means to the end in both sets. Money and accomplishments might help, but personal appearance was the great certainty; and Beth was naturally impressed with this idea like the rest. Marriage, however, was far from being the distinct object of her life; in fact, she had no distinct object at all as yet. She had always meant to do something, or rather to be something; but further than that she had not got.

Miss Blackburne had paid particular attention to the cultivation of the speaking voice, and it was from her that Beth had learnt how to round hers to richness, and modulate it so that its natural sweetness and charm were greatly enhanced. There was considerable difference of opinion about her looks. She was always striking in appearance, but dress, for one thing, altered her very much, and the state of her mind still more. People who met

her on one occasion admired her exceedingly, and on the next wondered why they had thought her good-looking at all. She had the mesmeric quality which makes it impossible to escape observation, and her personality never failed to interest the intelligent whether it pleased them or not; but she was only at her best in mind, manner, and appearance when her fitful further faculty was active; then indeed she shone with a strange loveliness, a light to be felt rather than seen, and not to be described at all. At such times the mere physical beauty of other women went out in her immediate neighbourhood, and was no more thought of. It was not until she was quite mature, however, that her manner permanently acquired that subtle indefinable quality called charm, which is the outcome of a large tolerant nature and kindness of heart. It was as if she did not come into full possession of her true self until she had experienced numberless other phases of being common to the race. Hence the apparently incongruous mixture she presented in the earlier stages of her youth, her sluggish indifference at times, her excesses of energy and zeal, her variations of taste.

At first, after she left school, as was inevitable, her self-discipline was irksome enough at times, and some of the details she shirked; but not for long, because the time which accustomed duties should have occupied hung heavy on her hands, and she felt dissatisfied with herself rather than relieved when she neglected them. So by degrees her habits were formed, and in after life she found them a very present help in time of trouble, anchors which kept her from drifting to leeward, as she must have done but for their hold upon her. Some of her erratic tricks were not to be cured, but they came to be part of the day's work rather than a hindrance to it. She saw many a sunrise, for instance, and revelled with uplifted spirit in the beauty and wonder of the hour; but the soul that sang responsive to the glories of the summer dawn, the colour, the freshness, the perfume, was steeped at noon with equal energy in the book she was studying, so that, instead of losing anything, she gained that day one sunrise more.

When she left school Beth was fastidiously refined. She hurried over all the hateful words and passages in the Bible, Shakespeare, or any other book she might be reading. The words she would not even pronounce to herself, so strongly did her delicate mind revolt from a vile idea, and sicken at the expression of it. But, nevertheless, she pored patiently over every book she

could get that had a great reputation, and in this way she read many not usually given to girls, and became familiarised with certain facts of life not generally supposed to be of soul-making material. But she took no harm. The soul that is shaping itself to noble purpose, the growing soul, tries more than is proper for its nourishment in its search for sustenance, but rejects all that is unnecessary or injurious, as water creatures without intelligence reject any unsuitable substance they collect with their food.

Before she had been many days at home, Beth found that her mother had made a new acquaintance, who came to the house often in a casual way like an intimate friend. He came in on the day of her arrival after dinner, and was introduced to Beth by her mother as "the doctor." Beth broke into smiles, for she recognised her long-ago acquaintance of the rocks, the doctor of her Hector-romance. And it seemed he really was a doctor; now that was a singular coincidence! In their little drawing-room she discovered him to be a bigger man than she had supposed, but otherwise he was like her first impression of him, striking because of his colouring; the red and white of his complexion, which was unusually clear for a man, and the lightness of his grey-green eyes being in peculiar contrast to the blackness of his hair. She noticed again, too, that the expression of his face when he smiled was not altogether agreeable, because his teeth were too far apart; and she also thought his finely-formed hands would have looked better had they not been so obtrusively white.

"But we have met before," he exclaimed when Beth acknowledged the introduction. "You are the young lady I helped on the rocks one day, quite a long time ago now, when you were a little girl."

"I remember," Beth said, noticing that he claimed to have helped her on that occasion, and remembering also that she had declined his help.

"You never told me, Beth," her mother said reproachfully.

"There was really nothing to tell," he answered, coming to the rescue.

"What a day that was!" Beth observed. "Did you notice the sea? It was the sort of sea that might make one long to be a crab to live in it. Though a crab is not the animal that I should specially choose to be. I long to be a cat sometimes. To be able to fluff out my fur and spit would be such a

satisfaction. There are feelings that can be expressed in no other way. And then to be able to purr! Purring is the one sound in nature that expresses perfect comfort and content, I think."

"Beth, don't talk nonsense," her mother said impatiently.

"Oh, it's not nonsense altogether," the doctor interposed. "It is just cheery chatter, and that is good. Miss Beth will raise your spirits in no time, or I'm much mistaken." He had watched Beth with gravity while she was speaking, as one sees people watch an actress critically, obviously marking her points, but betraying no emotion.

Mrs. Caldwell sighed heavily. "The doctor has been so good, Beth," she said. "He has come here continually, and done more to cheer me than anybody."

"Oh now, Mrs. Caldwell, you exaggerate," he remonstrated with a smile. "But it's my principle, you know, to be cheery. I always say be cheery whatever happens. It's no use crying over spilt milk!"

"A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a,"

Beth rattled off glibly, and again the doctor considered her.

"Now that's good," he said, just as if he had never heard it before; "and it's my meaning exactly. Don't let your spirits go down——"

"For there's many a girl, as I know well,
A-looking for you in the town,"

Beth concluded, her spirits rising uproariously.

"Beth!" her mother remonstrated, but with a smile.

"The worst of it is, the ones on the look-out are not the ones with the good looks," the doctor observed, also smiling.

"But they are the ones with the money," Beth rejoined. "I wonder how it is that plain girls so often have money. I suppose the money-grubbing spirit comes out in ugliness in the female branch."

Tea was brought in, but Beth refused to take any. The doctor tried to persuade her.

"You had better change your mind," he said. "Ladies are privileged to change their minds."

"I know," said Beth. "Ladies are privileged to be foolish. It is almost the only privilege men allow them. I scorn it myself. At school we were warned to be firm when once we had said 'No, thank you.' Miss Ella used to say that people who allowed themselves to be over-persuaded and changed their minds lost self-control and became self-indulgent eventually."

"Ah, that makes me think of my poor dear mother," said the doctor. "A better and more consistent woman never lived. Once she said a thing, you couldn't move her. She was a good mother to me! I was always her favourite son. But, like other young fellows, I'm afraid I didn't half appreciate her till I had lost her."

"All the same, I am sure you were all that a good son should be," Mrs. Caldwell observed sincerely.

The doctor's eyes shone with emotion.

When he had gone, Mrs. Caldwell began to discuss him.

"He really *is* cheery," she said, "he always raises my spirits; and I am sure he is good and kind. Did you see how his eyes filled with tears when he mentioned his mother? He is handsome, too, don't you think so? Such a colour! And always so well dressed. Lady Benyon admires him very much. But he gets on with every one, even Uncle James! What do you think of him, Beth?"

"I think he looks neat to the point of nattiness, which is finical in a man," Beth answered.

"Ah, that is because you are not accustomed to well-dressed men," her mother assured her. "Here in Rainharbour you don't often see one."

"I have been in London lately," Beth observed.

"Beth," her mother began emphatically, "that is so like you! Will you never get out of the habit of answering so? You are always in opposition, and it is too conceited of you at your age. I did hope they would have cured you of the trick at school; but no sooner do you get home, than you begin again as bad as ever."

"Well, rather than displease you, mamma, I'll do my best to hold my tongue for the future when I can't say what you want me to say," Beth answered cheerfully. "I came home to be a comfort to you, and if I can't be a comfort to you and express myself as well, why, I must go unexpressed."

"Now, there you are again, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell cried peevishly. "Is that a nice thing to say?"

Beth looked at her mother and smiled enigmatically. Then she reflected. Then her countenance cleared.

"Mamma," she said, "your hair is much whiter than it was; but I don't think I ever saw you look so nice. You have such a pretty complexion, and so few

wrinkles, and such even teeth! What a handsome girl you must have been!"

Mrs. Caldwell smiled complacently, and went to bed in high good humour. She told Bernadine, as they undressed, that she thought Beth greatly improved.

But Beth herself lay long awake that night; tossing and troubled, feeling far from satisfied either with herself or anybody else.

The next morning she rose early and drew up her plan of life.

CHAPTER XXXV

As that first day at home wore on, Beth was seized with an importunate yearning to go out, and it was with difficulty that she got through her self-appointed tasks. She thought of the sea, the shore, the silence and solitude, which were apt to be so soothing to her dull senses that she ceased to perceive with them, and so passed into the possession of her farther faculty for blissful moments. She fancied the sea was as she best loved to have it, her favourite sea, with tiny wavelets bringing the tide in imperceptibly over the rocks, and the long stretch of water beyond heaving gently up to the horizon, with smooth unruffled surface shining in the sun. When she had done her work she fared forth to the sea, to sit by it, and feel the healthy happy freshness of it all about her, and in herself as well. She went to the rocks. The tide was coming in. The water, however, was not molten silver-grey, as she had imagined it, but bright dark sapphire blue, with crisp white crests to the waves, which were merry and tumbled. It was the sea for an active, not for a meditative mood; its voice called to play, rather than to that prayer of the whole being which comes of the contemplation of its calmness; it exhilarated instead of soothing, and made her joyous as she had not been since she went to school. She stood long on the rocks by the water's edge, retreating as the tide advanced, watching wave after wave curve and hollow itself and break, and curve and hollow itself and break again. The sweet sea-breeze sang in her ears, and braced her with its freshness, while the continuous sound of wind and water went from her consciousness and came again with the ebb and flow of her thoughts. But the strength and swirl of the water, its tireless force, its incessant voices choring on a chorus of numberless notes, invited her, fascinated her, filled her with longing—longing to trust herself to the waves, to lie still and let them rock her, to be borne out by them a little way and brought back again, passive yet in ecstatic enjoyment of the dreamy motion. The longing became an impulse. She put her hand to her throat to undo her dress—but she did not undo it—she never knew why. Had she yielded to the attraction, she must have been drowned, for she could swim but little, and the water was deeper than she knew, and the current strong; and she might have

yielded just as she resisted, for no reason that rendered itself into intelligible thought.

She turned from the scene of her strange impulse, and began to wander back over the rocks, suffering the while from that dull drop of the spirit which sets in at the reaction after moments of special intensity; and in this mood she came upon "the doctor," also climbing the rocks.

"Now, it is a singular coincidence that I should meet you here again," he said.

Beth smiled. "I am afraid those nice boots of yours will suffer on these sharp rocks," she remarked by way of saying something. "We natives keep our old ones for the purpose."

"Ah," he said, "I don't keep old ones for any purpose. I have an objection to everything old, old people included."

Beth had a book under her arm, and he coolly took it from her as he spoke, and read the title: "Dryden's Poetical Works." "Ah! So you carry the means of improving your mind at odd moments about with you. Well, I'm not surprised, for I heard you were clever."

Beth smiled, more pleased than if he had called her beautiful; but she wondered if Dryden could properly be called improving.

"It is absurd to keep a girl at school who has got as far as this kind of thing," he added, tapping the old brown book; "but it seems to me they don't understand you much at home, little lady."

"What makes you think so?" Beth asked shrewdly.

"Oh," he answered, somewhat disconcerted, "I judge from—from things I hear and see."

This implied sympathy, and again Beth was pleased.

It was late when she got in, and she expected her mother to be annoyed; but Mrs. Caldwell was all smiles.

"I suppose the doctor found you?" she said. "He asked where you were, and I said on the rocks probably."

"That accounts for the singular coincidence," Beth observed; but, girl-like, she thought less at the moment of the little insincerity than of the compliment his following her implied.

They dined that evening with Lady Benyon. It was a quiet little family party, including Uncle James and Aunt Grace Mary. The doctor was the only stranger present. He looked very well in evening dress.

"Striking, isn't he?" Aunt Grace Mary whispered to Beth. "Such colouring!"

"And how are you, Dan?" was Uncle James's greeting, uttered with an affectation of cordiality in his unexpected little voice that interested Beth. She wondered what was toward. She noticed, too, that she herself was an object of special attention, and her heart expanded with gratification. Very little kindness went a long way with Beth.

Dr. Dan took her in to dinner.

"By the way," he said, looking across the table at Uncle James, "I went to see that old Mrs. Prince, your keeper's mother, as I promised. She's a wonderful old woman for eighty-five. I shouldn't be surprised if she lived to a hundred."

"Dear! dear!" Uncle James ejaculated with something like consternation.

"I seem to have put my foot in it somehow," Dr. Dan remarked to Beth confidentially.

"If you do anything to keep her alive you will," Beth answered. "Uncle James always speaks bitterly about elderly women;—about old ones he is perfectly rabid. He seems to think they rob worthy men of part of their time by living so long."

It was arranged before the party broke up that the doctor should drive Beth to Fairholm in the Benyon dogcart to lunch next day. Beth was surprised and delighted to find herself the object of so much consideration. Dr. Dan, as they all called him, began to be associated in her mind with happy days.

"Have you come to live here?" she asked as they drove along.

"No," he answered. "I am only putting in the time until I can settle down to a practice of my own. I have just heard of one which I shall buy if I can get an appointment I am trying for in the same place."

"What is the appointment?" Beth asked.

"It's a hospital I want to be put in charge of," he answered casually,— "a small affair, but I should get a regular income from it, and that would make my rent, and all that sort of thing, secure. A doctor has to set up with a show of affluence."

"It is a terrible profession to me, the medical profession," Beth said. "The responsibilities must be so great and so various."

"Oh, I never think of that," he answered easily.

"I should," Beth rejoined.

"Yes, *you* would, of course," he said; "and that shows what folly it is for women to go in for medicine. They worry about this and that, things that are the patient's look-out, not the doctor's, and make no end of mischief; besides always losing their heads in a difficulty."

Just then the horse, which had been very fidgety all the way, bolted. The blood rushed into the doctor's face. "Sit tight! sit tight!" he exclaimed. "Don't now,—now don't move and make a fuss. Keep cool."

"Keep cool yourself," said Beth dryly. "I'm all right."

Dr. Dan glanced at her sideways, and saw that she was laughing.

When they arrived at Fairholm, he made much of the incident. "If I hadn't had my wits about me, there would have been a smash," he vowed. "But I happened to be on the spot myself, and Miss Beth behaved admirably. Most girls would have shrieked, you know, but she behaved heroically."

This was all rather gushing, but it did not offend Beth, because she associated gush with Aunt Grace Mary, who had always been kind to her. Gushing people are usually weak and amiable, gush being the ill-judged

outcome of a desire to please; but at that happy age it was the amiable intention that Beth took into account. Her desire to be pleased, which had so seldom been gratified, had become a danger to her judgment by this time; it made her apt to respond to any attempt to please her without considering means and motives which should have discounted her appreciation. Everybody was trying to please her now, and all her being answered only too readily. She spent a delightful day at Fairholm, and went home in extravagantly high spirits.

Dr. Dan called early the next morning, and found her with her hat on, just going out.

"How are you this misty cold grey day?" he asked.

"Oh, very bright," she answered. "I feel as if I were the sun, and I'm just going to shine out on the world to enliven it."

"May I accompany you?" he asked.

"The sun, alas! is a solitary luminary," she answered, shaking her head.

"Then I shall hope for better luck next time," he said, and let her go alone.

In the evening he came in again to have a game of cribbage with Mrs. Caldwell. Beth was sleepy and had gone to bed early. In the pauses of the game they talked about her, and the responsibilities of a family.

"A girl wants some one to look after her," the doctor said, "especially if she has money."

"Yes, indeed," Mrs. Caldwell replied, "girls are a great anxiety. Now a boy you can put into a profession and have done with it. But it is not so easy to find a suitable husband for a girl."

"But, of course, if she has a little money it makes a difference," he observed. "Only she should have some one to advise her in the spending of it. Now, Miss Beth, for instance, will be as much a child at twenty-one in money matters as she is now."

"I hope we shall find the right man for her before then," Mrs. Caldwell answered archly; "not that I think her aunt's fortune will cause her much

anxiety." She alluded to the smallness of the sum.

"She gets some of the interest, I suppose, to go on with," he said.

"Just enough to dress on."

Beth saw a great deal of Dr. Dan after that. She was not in the least in love with him, but they became intimate all the sooner on that account. A girl shrinks more shyly from a man she loves than from one for whom she has only a liking; in the one case every womanly instinct is on the alert, in the other her feeling is not strong enough to seem worth curbing. Beth was fond of men's companionship, and Dr. Dan's assiduous attentions enlivened her, made her brain active, and brought the vision and the dream within reach; so that she moved in a happy light, but considered the source of it no more than she would have considered the stick that held the candle by which she read an entrancing book.

There are idyllic gleams in all interesting lives; but life as we live it from day to day is not idyllic. In Beth's case there was the inevitable friction, the shocks and jars of difficulties and disagreements with her mother. These had been suspended for a time after her return, but began to break out again, fomented very often by Bernadine, who was always her mother's favourite, but was never a pleasant child. Dr. Dan came one very wet day, and found Beth sitting in the drawing-room alone, looking miserable. She had done all her little self-imposed tasks honestly, but had reaped no reward. On the contrary, there had come upon her a dreadful vision of herself doing that sort of thing on always into old age, as Aunt Victoria did her French, with no object, and to no purpose; and for the first time she formulated a feeling that had gradually been growing up in her of late: "I must have more of a life than this." What could she do, however, tied to that stupid place, without a suspicion as yet that she had it in her to do anything special, and without friends to help her, with no one to advise. As she reflected, the hopelessness of it all wrung from her some of the bitterest tears she ever shed. If her mother would only send her back to Miss Blackburne she would be learning something, at all events; but, although Mrs. Caldwell had said nothing definite on the subject, Beth was pretty certain by this time that she did not mean to let her return to school.

Beth was in the middle of this misery when Dr. Dan arrived.

"How's this?" he said, "Down? You should have the window open. It's not cold to-day, though it's wet; and the room is quite stuffy. Never be afraid of fresh air, you know."

"I'm not," Beth said. "I didn't know the window was shut. Open it as wide as you like—the wider the better for me."

"That's better," he said, as the fresh air flowed in. "It's singular how women will shut themselves up. No wonder they get out of spirits! Now, I never let myself run down. When one thing goes wrong, I just take up another, and don't bother. You'd think I wasn't having much of a time here; but I'm as happy as the day is long, and I want to see you the same." He sat down beside her on the old-fashioned sofa, took her hand, and began to stroke it gently. "Cheer up, little girl," he added. "I believe you've been crying. Aren't they kind to you?"

"Oh yes, they're kind enough," Beth answered, soothed by the caress; "at least they mean to be. The misery is in myself. I feel all dissatisfied."

"Not when I'm with you, do you?" he asked reproachfully.

"No, I don't bother about myself when I have you to talk to," Beth answered. "You come in fresh, and give me something else to think about."

"Then, look here, Beth," he said, putting his arm round her. "I don't think I can do better than take you away with me. You've a head on your shoulders, and an original way with you that would be sure to bring people about the house, and you're well connected and look it;—all of which would be good for my practice. Besides, a young doctor must marry. I'm over thirty, though you might not think it. Come, what do you say? You'd have a very good time of it as my wife, I can tell you. All your own way, and no nagging. You know what *I* am, a cheery fellow, never put out by anything. Now, what do you say?"

"Are you asking me to marry you?" said Beth, breaking into a smile. The position struck her as comical rather than serious.

"Why, what else?" he replied, smiling also. "I see you are recovering your spirits. You'll be as happy as the day is long when we're married. You'd

never get on with anybody else as you'd do with me. I don't think anybody else would understand you."

Beth laughed. She liked him, and she liked to be caressed. Why not marry him and be independent of every one? She hadn't the slightest objection at the moment; far from it, for she saw in the offer the one means of escape she was likely to have from the long dull dreary days, and the loneliness, which was all the life she could have to look forward to when he had gone. And he was good-looking, too, and nice—everybody said so. Besides, they would all be pleased if she accepted him, her mother especially so. Now that she came to think of it, she perceived that this was what they had been suggesting to her ever since her return.

"It is settled then?" he said, stooping forward to look into her face.

She looked at him shyly and laughed again. For the life of her she could not keep her countenance, although she felt she was behaving in the silly, giggling-girl sort of way she so much despised.

"That's all right," he exclaimed, looking extremely well pleased; and at that moment Mrs. Caldwell walked into the room, just in time to witness a lover-like caress. Beth jumped up, covered with confusion. Mrs. Caldwell looked from one to the other, and waited for an explanation.

"We've just come to the conclusion that we cannot live apart," Dan said deliberately, rising at the same time and taking Beth's hand.

"My dear child!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, embracing Beth with happy tears in her eyes. "This *is* a joy! I *do* congratulate you."

Beth became suddenly serious. The aspect of the affair had changed. It was no longer a game of the moment, but a settled business, already irrevocable. She wanted to explain that she had not actually pledged herself, that she must take time to consider; but her heart failed her in view of her mother's delight. It was Beth's great weakness that, as a rule, she could neither spoil pleasure nor give pain to save herself in an emergency.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WHEN Dan came to see her the next morning, he found her in a mixed mood. Half-a-dozen times during the night she had declined to marry him in a painful scene, but just as often her imagination would run on into the unknown life she would have to lead with him. She saw herself in white satin and lace and pearls, a slender figure at the head of a long dining-table, interesting to everybody, and Dan was at the foot, looking quite distinguished in evening dress, with his glossy black hair and wonderful clear skin. She had gathered the nicest people in the neighbourhood about her, and on her right there was a shadowy person, a man of mark, and knightly, who delighted in her conversation.

When she came downstairs to receive Dan she was coughing, and he showed his devotion by being greatly concerned about her health. He said she must have port wine and a tonic, and be out in the air as much as possible, and suggested that they should go for a walk at once as it was a lovely day, though still wet under foot.

"I would not ask you to walk if I had a carriage to offer you," he said, "for I hate to see a delicate lady on foot in the mud. But you shall have your carriage yet, please God, all in good time!"

"Where shall we go?" said Beth when they left the house.

"Oh, anywhere," he answered. "Take me to one of your own favourite haunts."

She thought of the Fairholm cliffs for a moment, but felt that they were sacred to many recollections with which she would not care to associate this new experience. "I'll show you the chalybeate spring," she said.

They turned out of Orchard Street, and went down the hill to the Beck, a broad, clear, shallow rivulet, that came round a sharp green curve between high banks, well wooded with old trees, all in their heavy, dark-green, summer foliage. As they crossed the rustic wooden bridge Beth paused a

little to look up at the trees and love them, and down into the clear water at the scarlet sticklebacks heading up stream. Her companion looked at her in surprise when she stopped, and then followed the direction of her eyes. All he saw, however, was a shallow stream, a green bank, and some trees.

"This is not very interesting," he observed.

Beth made no reply, but led the way up the hill on the other side, and, to the right, passed a row of cottages with long gardens at the back running down to the brow of the bank that overhung the Beck. In most of these cottages she was an object of suspicion because of her uncanny words and ways, and she knew it, and the thought of it was a grief to her. She wanted the people to like her as she would have liked them had they let her. The wish to win them fired her imagination. She looked on ahead into futurity, and was a beautiful lady, driving a pair of ponies down a wooded lane, with a carriage full of good things for the cottagers, and they all loved her, and were very glad to see her.

"What are you thinking about?" Dan asked.

"How nice it would be to be rich," she replied.

"But you will be well off when you're twenty-one, I am told."

"I suppose there's a chance of it," she answered dreamily.

(The ponies had arrived at the village by this time, and she was looking up at an old grey church with a red roof.)

"Do you know what your aunt's income was?" he asked.

"Seven or eight hundred a year," she answered absently.

(The sexton's little house stood by the gate leading into the churchyard. His wife came out when the carriage stopped, wiping soap-suds from her bare arms with her apron. Beth leaned forward and held out her hand to her, and the woman smiled a cordial welcome. She had a round flat face and fair hair. Then Beth handed her a mysterious package from the carriage, which she received half in delight and half in inquiry.)

But Beth's imagination stopped there, for she perceived that she had passed the gate of the garden in which was the chalybeate spring. There was a cottage in the garden, and Beth turned back, and went up to the door, where a woman was standing holding a plump child, whose little fat thigh, indented by the pressure, bulged over her bare arm.

"May we have a drink, please?" Beth asked.

"Yes, and welcome," the woman answered. "I'll fetch you a glass."

"Let me hold the baby," said Beth.

The woman smiled, and handed him to her. Beth took him awkwardly, and squeezed him up in her arms as a child holds a kitten.

"Isn't he nice?" she said.

"That's a matter of taste," Dan answered. "I don't like 'em fat-bottomed myself."

Beth froze at the expression. When the woman returned, she handed the child back to her carefully, but without a smile, took the glass, and went down to the spring by a narrow winding path which took them out of sight of the cottage directly. Here it was old trees again, and green banks, with the Beck below. When they were under the trees Beth looked up at a big elm, and her companion noticed her lips move.

"What are you saying to yourself?" he asked.

"Nothing to myself," she answered. "I'm saying, 'Oh, tree, give me of thy strength!' the Eastern invocation."

He laughed, and wanted to know what rot that was; and again Beth was jarred.

"You'll have no luck if you don't respect the big trees," she said.

"Oh, by Jove, if we wait for the big trees to make our luck, we shan't have much!" he rejoined, picking up a pebble and firing it into the Beck below.

They were on a narrow path now, about half-way down the bank, and here, in a hollow, the chalybeate spring bubbled out, and was gathered by a

wooden spout into a slender stream, which fell on the ground, where, in the course of time, it had made a basin for itself that was always partly full. The water was icy cold, and somewhat the colour of light on steel. Beth held the glass to the spout, rinsed it first, then filled it, and offered it to Dan, but he dryly declined to take it "Not for me, thank you," he said; "I never touch any medicinal beastliness."

For the third time Beth was jarred. She threw the water on the ground, refilled the glass, and drank. Dan saw he had made a mistake.

"I'll change my mind and have some too," he said, anxious to mollify her.

Beth filled the glass again, and handed it to him in silence, but no after-thought could atone for the discourtesy of his first refusal, and she looked in another direction, not even troubling herself to see whether he tried the water or not.

There was a rustic seat in the hollow of the bank, and he suggested that they should sit there a while before they returned. Beth acquiesced; and soon the sputter of the little spring bubbling into its basin, the chitter of birds in the branches above, the sunbeams filtering from behind through the leaves, the glint of the Beck below slipping between its banks, soundless, to the sea, enthralled her.

"Isn't this lovely?" she ejaculated.

"Yes, it's very jolly—with you," he said.

"You wouldn't like it so well without me?" Beth asked.

"No, I should think not," he rejoined. "And you wouldn't like it as well without me, I hope."

"No," Beth responded. "It makes it nicer having some one to share it."

"Now that's not quite kind," he answered in an injured tone. "Some one is any one; and *I* shouldn't be satisfied with anybody but you."

"Well, but I am satisfied with you," Beth answered dispassionately.

He took her hand, laid it in his own palm, and looked at it. It was a child's hand as yet, delicately pink and white.

"What a pretty thing!" he said. "Oh, you smile at that." He reached up to put a lock of her brown hair back from her cheek, and then he put his arm round her.

Next day he was obliged to go away—Beth never thought of inquiring why or wherefore; but she heard her mother and Lady Benyon talking about the very eligible appointment he was hoping to get. He took an affectionate leave of her. When he had gone she went off to the sands, and was surprised to find how glad she was to be alone again. The tide was far out, and there were miles and miles of the hard buff sand, a great, open space, not empty to Beth, but teeming with thought and full of feeling. Some distance on in front of her there was a solitary figure, a man walking with bent head and hands folded behind him, holding a stick—Count Gustav Bartahlinsky's favourite attitude when deep in meditation. Beth hurried on, and soon overtook him.

"Would you rather be alone, Count Gustav?" she said.

He turned to look at her, then smiled, and they walked on together.

"So they are going to marry you off," he said abruptly.

"Yes," Beth answered laconically.

"Do you wish to be married?"

"No, I do not."

"Then why do you consent?"

"Because I'm weak; I can't help it," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"I can't," she repeated. "I'm firm enough about some things, but in this I vacillate. When I am alone I know I am making a mistake, but when I am with other people who think differently, my objection vanishes."

"What is your objection?" he asked.

"That is the difficulty," she said. "I can't define it. Do you know Dr. Dan?"

"I can't say I know him," he answered. "I have met him and talked to him. He expresses the most unexceptional opinions; but it is premature to respect a man for the opinions he expresses—wait and see what he does. Words and acts don't necessarily agree. Sometimes, however, a chance remark which has very little significance for the person who makes it, is like an aperture that lets in light on the whole character." He cogitated a little, then added, "Don't let them hurry you. Take time to know your man, and if you are not satisfied yourself, if there is anything that jars upon *you*, never mind what other people think, have nothing to do with him."

When Beth went home, she found her mother sitting by the drawing-room window placidly knitting and looking out. "I am afraid I am very late," Beth said. "I have been on the sands with Count Gustav."

"Ah, that was nice, I should think," Mrs. Caldwell observed graciously. "And what were you talking about?"

"Being married, principally," Beth answered.

Mrs. Caldwell beamed above her knitting. "And what did he say?"

"He strongly advised me not to marry if I didn't want to."

Mrs. Caldwell changed countenance. "Did he indeed?" she observed with a sniff. Then she reflected. "And what had you been saying to draw such a remark from him?"

"I said I didn't want to be married," Beth blurted out with an effort.

"How could you tell Count Gustav such a story, Beth?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, shaking her head reproachfully.

"It was no story, mamma."

"Nonsense, Beth," her mother rejoined. "It is nothing but perverseness that makes you say such things. You feel more interesting, I believe, when you are in opposition. If I had refused to allow you to be married, you would have been ready to run away. *I* know girls! They all want to be married, and

they all pretend they don't. Why, when I was a girl I thought of nothing else; but I didn't talk about it."

"Perhaps you had nothing else to think about," Beth ventured.

"And what have you to think about, pray?"

Beth clasped her hands, and her grey eyes dilated.

"Beth, don't look like that," her mother remonstrated. "You are always acting, and it *is* such a pity—as you will find when you go out into the world, I am afraid, and people avoid you."

"I didn't know I was doing anything peculiar," Beth said; "and how am I to help it if I don't know?"

"Just help it by only doing as you are told until you are able to judge for yourself. Look at the silly way you have been talking this afternoon! What must Count Gustav have thought of you? Never be so silly again. You *must* be married now, you know. When a girl lets a man kiss her, she *has* to marry him."

Beth had been watching her mother's fingers as she knitted until she was half mesmerised by the bright glint of the needles; but now she woke up and burst out laughing. "If that be the case," she said, "he is not the only one that I shall have to marry."

Mrs. Caldwell's hands dropped on her lap, and she looked up at Beth in dismay. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Just that," Beth answered.

"Do you mean to tell me you have allowed men to kiss you?" Mrs. Caldwell cried.

Beth looked up as if trying to keep her countenance.

"You wicked girl, how dare you?"

"Well, mamma, if it were wicked, why didn't you warn me?" Beth said. "How was I to know?"

"Your womanly instincts ought to have taught you better."

Unfortunately for this theory, all Beth's womanly instincts set in the opposite direction. Her father's ardent temperament warred in her with Aunt Victoria's Puritan principles, and there was no telling as yet which would prevail.

Beth made no reply to that last assertion of her mother's, but remained half sitting on the table, with her feet stretched out in front of her, and her hands supporting her on either side, which brought her shoulders up to her ears. It was a most inelegant attitude, and peculiarly exasperating to Mrs. Caldwell.

"Oh, you wicked—you bad—you *abandoned* girl!" she exclaimed, losing her temper altogether. "My heart is *broken* with you. Go to your room, and stay there. I feel as if I could never endure the sight of you again."

Beth gathered herself together slowly, and strolled away with an air of indifference; but as soon as she found herself alone in her own room with the door shut, she dropped on her knees and lifted her clasped hands to heaven in an agony of remorse for having tormented her mother, and in despair about that wretched engagement. "O Lord, what am I to do?" she said; "what am I to do?" If she could make up her mind once for all either way, she would be satisfied; it was this miserable state of indecision that was unendurable.

Presently in the room below, she thought she heard her mother sob aloud. She listened, breathless. Her mother was sobbing. Beth jumped up and opened her door. What should she do? Her unhappy mother—heart-broken, indeed. What a life hers was—a life of hard privation, of suffering most patiently borne, of the utmost self-denial for her children's sake, of loss, of loneliness, of bitter disappointment! First her husband taken, then her dearest child; her ungrateful boys not over-kind to her; and now this last blow dealt her by Beth, just when the prospect of getting her well married was bringing a gleam of happiness into her mother's life. The piteous sobs continued. Beth stole downstairs, bent on atoning in her own person by any sacrifice for all the sorrows, no matter by whom occasioned, which she felt were culminating in this final outburst of grief. She found her mother standing beside the high old-fashioned mantelpiece, leaning her poor head against it.

"Mamma," Beth cried, "do forgive me. I never meant to—I never meant to hurt you so. I will do anything to please you. I was only teasing you about kissing men. I haven't been in the habit of kissing any one. And of course I'll marry Dan as soon as you like. And we'll all be happy—there!"

Mrs. Caldwell held out her arms, and Beth sprang into them, and hugged her tight and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THAT autumn Beth was married to Daniel Maclure, M.D., &c., &c. At the time of her marriage she hardly knew what his full name was. She had always heard him called "the doctor" or "Dr. Dan," and had never thought of him as anything else, nor did she know anything else about him—his past, his family, or his prospects, which, considering her age, is not surprising; but what did surprise her in after years, when she discovered it, was to find that her friends who made the match knew no more about him than she did. He had scraped acquaintance with her brother Jim in a public billiard-room in Rainharbour, and been introduced by him to the other members of her family, who, because his address was good and his appearance attractive, had taken it for granted that everything else concerning him was equally satisfactory.

Beth decided to keep her surname for her father's sake, and also because she could not see why she should lose her identity because she had married. Everybody said it was absurd of her; but she was determined, and from the time of her marriage she signed herself Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure.

Dan confided to Mrs. Caldwell that he was troubled by some few small debts which he was most anxious to pay in order that he might start his married life clear, and the poor lady generously reduced her slender income by selling some shares to raise the money for him. When he accepted it, his eyes filled with tears, as was usual with him in moments of emotion.

"O mamma!" Beth exclaimed when she heard of the sacrifice, "how could you? I do not deserve such generosity, for I have never been any comfort to you; and I shall always be miserable about it, thinking how badly you want the money."

"There will be one mouth less to feed when you have gone, you know, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell answered bravely, "and I shall be the happier for thinking that you start clear. Debt crushed us our whole married life. I shall be the easier if I know you haven't that burden to bear. Besides, Dan will repay me as soon as he can. He is a thoroughly good fellow."

"You shall be repaid, mamma, in more ways than one, if I live," Beth vowed.

Uncle James Patten doled out a five-pound-note to Beth by way of a wedding present from the long rent-roll her mother should have inherited.

"This is to help with your trousseau, but do not be extravagant," he said in his pleasant way. "As the wife of a professional man, you will descend from my class to the class below, the middle class, and you should dress according to your station. But you are doing as well as we could expect you to do, considering your character and conduct. Some doubted if you would ever receive an offer of marriage, or have the sense to accept it if one were made you; but I always said you would have the doctor if he would have you."

Beth's impulse was to throw the note at him, but she restrained herself on her brother Jim's account. It was suspected that Uncle James was only waiting for a plausible excuse to disinherit Jim; and he found it the next time Jim stayed at Fairholm. They were in the drawing-room together one day, and a maid was mending the fire. Uncle James was sitting at a writing-table with a mirror in front of him, and he declared that in that mirror he distinctly saw his nephew chuck the maid-servant under the chin, which was conduct such as Mr. James Patten could not be expected to tolerate in his heir; so he altered his will, and after that all communication ceased between the two families, except such as Aunt Grace Mary managed to keep up surreptitiously.

Aunt Grace Mary was very generous to Beth, and so also was old Lady Benyon. Had it not been for these two, Beth would have left home ill-provided for. Thanks to them, however, she was spared that humiliation, and went with an ample outfit.

In the days preceding her marriage, Beth sometimes thought of Charlotte, and of the long fiction of that wonderful time when they were friends. Her busy brain had created many another story since then, but none that had the fascination of that first sustained effort. Hector's mysterious establishment on the other side of the headland, the troubles in Spain, the wicked machinations of their enemies, the Secret Service of Humanity, the horses, yacht, and useful doctor—who had not held a high place in their estimation,

being merely looked upon as a trustworthy tool of Hector's; yet it was he whom Beth was to marry. She wondered what Charlotte would think of her when she heard it, and of Hector and the whole story; but she never knew, for Charlotte was at school in France during this period, and never came into Beth's life again.

During the early days of her married life a sort of content settled upon Beth; a happy sense of well-being, of rest and satisfaction, came to her, and that strange vague yearning ache, the presence of which made all things incomplete, was laid. The atmosphere in which she now lived was sensuous, not spiritual, and although she was unaware of this, she felt its influence. Dan made much of her, and she liked that; but the vision and the dream had ceased. Her intellectual activity was stimulated, however, and it was not long before she began to think for herself more clearly and connectedly than she had ever done before.

They spent the first few weeks in London in a whirl of excitement, living at sumptuous restaurants, and going to places of amusement every night, where Beth would sit entranced with music, singing, dancing, and acting, never taking her eyes from the stage, and yearning in her enthusiasm to do the same things herself—not doubting but that she could either, so perfectly had she the power to identify herself with the performers, and realise, as from within, what their sensations must be.

When she had been in London as a girl at school, she had seen nothing but the bright side of life, the wholesome, happy, young side. A poor beggar to be helped, or a glimpse in the street of a sorrowful face that saddened her for a moment, was the worst she knew of the great wicked city; but now, with Dan for a companion, the realities of vice and crime were brought home to her; she learnt to read signs of depravity in the faces of men and women, and to associate certain places with evil-doers as their especial haunts. Her husband's interest in the subject was inexhaustible; he seemed to think of little else. He would point out people in places of public amusement, and describe in detail the loathsome lives they led. Every well-dressed woman he saw he suspected. He would pick out one because she had yellow hair, and another because her two little children were precocious and pretty, and declare them to be "kept women." That a handsome woman could be anything but vicious had apparently never occurred to him. He was

very high-minded on the subject of sin if the sinner were a woman, and thought no degradation sufficient for her. In speaking of such women he used epithets from which Beth recoiled. She allowed them to pass, however, in consideration of the moral exasperation that inspired them, and the personal rectitude his attitude implied. The subject had a horrible kind of fascination for her; she hated it, yet she could not help listening, although her heart ached and her soul sickened. She listened in silence, however, neither questioning nor discussing, but simply attending; collecting material for which she had no use at the moment, and storing it without design—material which she would find herself forced to turn to account eventually, but in what way and to what purpose there was no knowing as yet.

They were to live at Slane, an inland town near Morningquest, where modern manufactures had competed successfully with ancient agricultural interests, and altered the attitude of the landed gentry towards trade, and towards the townspeople, beguiling them to be less exclusive because there was money in the town, self-interest weighing with them all at once in regard to the neighbours whom Christian precept had vainly urged them to recognise.

Dr. Maclure had taken an old-fashioned house in a somewhat solitary position on the outskirts of Slane, but near enough to the town to secure paying patients, as he hoped, while far enough out of it to invite county callers. It stood just on the highroad, from which it was only divided by a few evergreen shrubs and an iron railing; but it was picturesque, nevertheless, with creepers—magnolia, wisteria, and ivy—clustering on the dark red bricks. At the back there was a good garden, and in front, across the road, were green meadows with hedgerows—a tangle of holly, hawthorn, and bramble—and old trees, surviving giants of a forest long uprooted and forgotten. It was a rich and placid scene, infinitely soothing to one fresh from the turmoil of the city, and weary of the tireless motion, the incessant sound and tumult of the sea. When Beth looked out upon the meadows first, she sighed and said to herself, "Surely, surely one should be happy here!"

The house was inconveniently arranged inside, and had less accommodation than its outside pretensions promised; but Beth was delighted with it all, and took possession of her keys with pride. She was

determined to be a good manager, and make her housekeeping money go a long way. Her dream was to save out of it, and have something over to surprise Dan with when the bills were paid. To her chagrin, however, she found that she was not to have any housekeeping money at all.

"You are too young to have the care of managing money," said Dan. "Just give the orders, and I'll see about paying the bills."

But the system did not answer. Beth had no idea what she ought to be spending, and either the bills were too high or the diet was too low, and Dan grumbled perpetually. If the housekeeping were at all frugal, he was anything but cheery during meals; but if she ordered him all he wanted, there were sure to be scenes on the day of reckoning. He blamed her bad management, and she said nothing; but she knew she could have managed on any reasonable sum to which he might have limited her. She had too much self-respect to ask for money, however, if he did not choose to give it to her.

It surprised her to find that what he had to eat was a matter of great importance to him. He fairly gloated over things he liked, and in order to indulge him, and keep the bills down besides, she went without herself; and he never noticed her self-denial. He was apt to take too much of his favourite dishes, and was constantly regretting it. "I wish I had not eaten so much of that cursed *vol au vent*; it never agrees with me," he would say; but he would eat as much as ever next time. Beth could not help observing such traits. She did not set them down to his personal discredit, however, but to the discredit of his sex at large. She had always heard that men were self-indulgent, and Dan was a man; that was the nearest she came to blaming him at first. Being her husband had made a difference in her feeling for him; before their marriage she was not so tolerant.

Her housekeeping duties by no means filled her day. An hour or so in the morning was all they occupied at most, and the time must have hung heavy on her hands had she had no other pursuit to beguile her. Fortunately she had no intention of allowing her plans for the improvement of her mind to lapse simply because she had married. On the contrary, she felt the defects of her education more keenly than ever, and expected Dan to sympathise with her in her efforts to remedy them. He came in one day soon after they

were settled, and found her sitting at the end of the dining-room table with her back to the window and a number of books spread out about her.

"This looks learned," he said. "What are you doing?"

"I am looking for something to study," she answered. "What writers have helped you most?"

"Helped me most!—how do you mean?"

"Well, helped you to be upright, you know, to make good resolutions and keep straight."

"Thank you," he said; "I have not felt the need of good resolutions, and this is the first hint I have had that I require any. If you will inquire among my friends, I fancy you will find that I have the credit of going pretty straight as it is."

"O Dan!" Beth exclaimed, "you quite misunderstand me. I never meant to insinuate that you are not straight. I was only thinking of the way in which we all fall short of our ideals."

"Ideals be hanged!" said Dan. "If a man does his duty, that's ideal enough, isn't it?"

"I should think so," Beth said pacifically.

Dan went to the mantelpiece, and stood there, studying himself with interest in the glass. "A lady told me the other day I looked like a military man," he said, smoothing his glossy black hair and twisting the ends of his long moustache.

"Well, I think you look much more military than medical," Beth replied, considering him.

"I'm glad of that," he said, smiling at himself complacently.

"Are you?" Beth exclaimed in surprise. "Why? A medical man has a finer career than a military man, and should have a finer presence if ability, purpose, and character count for anything towards appearance. Personally I think I should wish to look like what I am, if I could choose."

"So you do," he rejoined, adjusting his hat with precision as he spoke, and craning his neck to see himself sideways in the glass. "You look like a silly little idiot. But never mind. That's all a girl need be if she's pretty; and if she isn't pretty, she's of no account, so it doesn't matter what she is."

When he had gone, Beth sat for a long time thinking; but she did no more reading that day, nor did she ever again consult Dan about the choice of books, or expect him to sympathise with her in her work.

For the first few months of her married life, she had no pocket-money at all. Aunt Grace Mary slipped two sovereigns into her hand when they parted, but these Beth kept, she hardly knew why, as she had her half-year's dividend to look forward to. About the time that her money was due, Dan began to talk incessantly of money difficulties. Bills were pressing, and he did not know where on earth to look for a five-pound-note. He did not think Beth too young to be worried morning, noon, and night on the subject, although she took it very seriously. One morning after he had made her look anxious, he suddenly remembered a letter he had for her, and handed it to her. It was from her lawyer, and contained a cheque for twenty-five pounds, the long-looked-forward-to pocket money.

"Will this be of any use to you?" Beth asked, handing him the cheque.

His countenance cleared. "Of use to me? I should think it would!" he exclaimed. "It will just make all the difference. You must sign it, though."

When she had signed it, he put it in his pocket-book, and his spirits went up to the cheery point. He adjusted his hat at the glass over the dining-room mantelpiece, lit a shilling cigar, and went off to his hospital jauntily. Beth was glad to have relieved him of his anxiety. She half hoped he might give her something out of the cheque, if it were only a pound or two, she wanted some little things so badly; but he never offered her a penny. She thought of Aunt Grace Mary's two sovereigns, but the dread of having nothing in case of an emergency kept her from spending them.

There was one thing Dan did which Beth resented. He opened her letters.

"Husband and wife are one," he said. "They should have no secrets from each other. I should like you to open my letters, too, but they contain professional secrets, you see, and that wouldn't do."

He spoke in what he called his cheery way, but Beth had begun to feel that there was another word which would express his manner better, and now it occurred to her.

"You have no right to open my letters," she said; "and being facetious on the subject does not give you any."

"But if I chose to?" he asked.

"It will be a breach of good taste and good feeling," she answered.

No more was said on the subject, and Dan did not open her letters for a little, but then he began again. He had always some excuse, however—either he hadn't looked at the address, or he had been impatient to see if there were any message for himself, and so on; but Beth was not mollified although she said nothing, and her annoyance made her secretive. She would watch for the postman, and take the letters from him herself, and conceal her own, so that Dan might not even know that she had received any.

She had a difficulty with him about another matter too. His lover-like caresses while they were engaged had not been distasteful to her; but after their marriage he kept up an incessant billing and cooing, and of a coarser kind, which soon satiated her. She was a nicely balanced creature, with many interests in life, and love could be but one among the number in any case; but Dan almost seemed to expect it to be the only one.

"Oh dear! must I be embraced again?" she exclaimed one day, with quite comical dismay on being interrupted in the middle of a book that was interesting her at the moment.

Dan looked disconcerted. In his cheerful masculine egotism it had not occurred to him that Beth might find incessant demonstrations of affection monotonous. He would smile at pictures of the waning of the honeymoon, where the husband returns to his book and his dog, and the wife sits apart sad and neglected; it was inevitable that the man should tire, he had other things to think of; but that the wife should be the first to be bored was incredible, and worse: it was unwomanly.

Dan went to the mantelpiece, and stood looking down into the fire, and his grey-green eyes became suffused.

"Have I hurt you, Dan?" Beth exclaimed, jumping up and going to him.

"Hurt me!" he said, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, "that is not the word for it. You have made me very unhappy."

"Oh!" said Beth, her own inclinations disregarded at once, "I *am* sorry!"

But he had satiated her once for all, and she never recovered any zest for his caresses. She found no charm or freshness in them, especially after she perceived that they were for his own gratification, irrespective of hers. The privileges of love are not to be wrested from us with impunity. Habits of dutiful submission destroy the power to respond, and all that they leave to survive of the warm reality of love at last is a cold pretence. By degrees, as Beth felt forced to be dutiful, she ceased to be affectionate.

Although Dan dressed to go out with scrupulous care, he took no trouble to make himself nice in the house. Care in dress was not in him a necessary part and expression of a refined nature, but an attempt to win consideration. He never dressed for dinner when they were alone together. It was a trouble rather than a refreshment to him to get rid of the dust of the day and the associations of his walking-dress. This was a twofold disappointment to Beth. She had expected him to have the common politeness to dress for her benefit, and she was not pleased to find that the punctiliousness he displayed in the matter on occasion was merely veneer. It was a defect of breeding that struck her unpleasantly. They had been poor enough at home, but Beth had been accustomed all her life to have delicate china about her, and pictures and books, to walk on soft carpets and sit in easy-chairs; possessions of a superior class which, in her case, were symbols bespeaking refinement of taste and habits from which her soul had derived satisfaction even while her poor little fragile body starved. She dressed regularly and daintily herself, and Dan at the bottom of the table in his morning coat was an offence to her. She said nothing at first, however, so his manners still further deteriorated, until one night, after she had gone to her room, he walked in with his hat on, smoking a cigar. It was this last discourtesy that roused her to rebel.

"This is my bedroom," she said significantly.

"I know," he answered.

"You know—yet you keep your hat on, and you are smoking," she proceeded.

"Why," he rejoined, "and if I do, what then? I know ladies who let their husbands smoke in bed."

"Probably," she said. "I have heard of more singularly coarse things than that even. But I am accustomed to pure air in my room, and I must have it."

"And suppose I should choose to stay here and smoke?" he said.

"Of course I could not prevent you," she answered; "but I should go and sleep in another room."

"H'm," he grunted. "You're mighty particular."

But he went away all the same, and did not appear there again either with his hat on or smoking a cigar.

Beth suffered miserably from the want of proper privacy in her life. She had none whatever now. It had been her habit to read and reflect when she went to bed, to prepare for a tranquil night by setting aside the troubles of the day, and purifying her mind systematically even as she washed her body; but all that was impossible if her husband were at home. He would break in upon her reading with idle gossip, fidget about the room when she wished to meditate, and leave her no decent time of privacy for anything. He had his own dressing-room, where he was secure from interruption, but never had the delicacy to comprehend that his presence could be any inconvenience to Beth. And it was worse than an inconvenience. It was a positive hardship—never to be sure of a moment alone.

One afternoon, when she had locked herself in her bedroom, he came and turned the handle of the door noisily.

"Open the door," he said.

"Do you want anything?" she asked.

"Open the door," he repeated.

She obeyed, and he came in, and glanced round suspiciously.

"What were you doing?" he asked.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "this is intolerable!"

"What is intolerable?" he demanded.

"This intrusion," she replied. "I want to be alone for a little; can't you understand that?"

"No, I cannot understand a wife locking her husband out of her room, and what's more, you've no business to do it. I've a legal right to come here whenever I choose."

Then Beth began to realise what the law of man was with regard to her person.

"I never intrude upon you when you shut yourself up," she remonstrated.

"Oh, that is different," he answered arrogantly. "I may have brainwork to do, or something important to think about. There is no comparison."

Beth went to her dressing-table, sat down in front of it, folded her hands, and waited doggedly.

He looked at her for a little; then he said, "I don't understand your treatment of me at all, Beth. But there's no understanding women." He spoke as if it were the women's fault, and to their discredit, that he couldn't understand them.

Beth made no answer, and he finally took himself off, slamming the door after him.

"Thank goodness!" Beth exclaimed. "One would think he had bought me."

Then she sat wondering what she should do. She must have some corner where she would be safe from intrusion. He had his consulting-room, a room called his laboratory, a surgery, and a dressing-room, where no one would dream of following him if he shut the door; she had literally not a

corner. She left her bedroom, and walked through the other rooms on the same floor as she considered the matter; then she went up to the next floor, where the servants slept. Above that again there was an attic used as a box-room, and she went up there too. It was a barn of a place, supported by pillars, and extending apparently over the whole of the storey below. The roof sloped to the floor on either side, and the whole place was but ill-lighted by two small windows looking to the north. Dr. Maclure had taken over the house as it stood, furniture and all, from the last occupants, by whom this great attic had evidently been used as a lumber-room. There were various pieces of furniture in it—tables, chairs, and drawers, some broken, some in fair condition. At the farther end, opposite to the door, there was a pile of packing-cases and travelling-trunks. Beth had always thought that they stood up against the wall, but on going over to them now, she discovered that there was a space behind. The pile was too high for her to see over it, but by going down on her hands and knees where the sloping roof was too low for her to stoop, she found she could creep round it. It was the kind of thing a child would have done, but what was Beth but a child? On the other side of the pile it was almost dark. She could see something, however, when she stood up, which looked like a mark on the whitewash, and on running her hand over it she discovered it to be a narrow door flush with the wall. There was no handle or latch to it, but there was a key which had rusted in the keyhole and was not to be turned. The door was not locked, however, and Beth pushed it open, and found herself in a charming little room with a fireplace at one end of it, and opposite, at the other end, a large bow window. Beth was puzzled to understand how there came to be a room there at all. Then she recollected a sort of tower there was at the side of the house, which formed a deep embrasure in the drawing-room, a dressing-room to the visitor's room, and a bath-room on the floor above. The window looked out on the garden at the back of the house. A light iron balcony ran round it, the rail of which was so thickly covered with ivy that very little of the window was visible from below. Beth had noticed it, however, only she thought it was a dummy, and so also did Dan. The little room looked bright and cosy with the afternoon sun streaming in. It seemed to have been occupied at one time by some person of fastidious taste, judging by what furniture remained—a square Chippendale table with slender legs, two high-backed chairs covered with old-fashioned tapestry, and a huge mahogany bookcase of the same period, with glass doors above

and cupboards below. The high white mantelpiece, adorned with vases and festoons of flowers, was of Adam's design, and so also was the dado and the cornice. The walls were painted a pale warm pink. A high brass fender, pierced, surrounded the fireplace, and there were a poker, tongs, and shovel to match, and a small brass scuttle still full of coals. There were ashes in the grate, too, as if the room had only lately been occupied. The boards were bare, but white and well-fitting, and in one corner of the room there was a piece of carpet rolled up.

Beth dropped on to one of the dusty chairs, and looked round. Everything about her was curiously familiar, and her first impression was that she had been there before. On the other hand, she could hardly believe in the reality of what she saw, she thought she must be dreaming, for here was exactly what she had been pining for most in the whole wide world of late, a secret spot, sacred to herself, where she would be safe from intrusion.

She went downstairs for some oil for the lock, and patiently worked at it until at last she succeeded in turning the key. Then, as it was too late to do anything more that day, she locked the door, and carried the key off in her pocket triumphantly.

Half the night she lay awake thinking of her secret chamber; and as soon as Dan had gone out next morning, and she had done her housekeeping, she stole upstairs with duster and brush, and began to set it in order. All her treasures were contained in some old trunks of Aunt Victoria's which were in the attic, but had not been unpacked because she had no place to put the things. Dan had seen some of these treasures at Rainharbour, and considered them old rubbish, and, not thinking it likely that there would be anything else in the boxes, he had taken no further interest in them. He would have liked to have left them behind altogether, and even tried to laugh Beth out of what he called her sentimental attachment to odds and ends; but as most of the things had belonged to Aunt Victoria, she took his ridicule so ill that he wisely let the subject drop. He had been somewhat hasty in his estimation of the value of the contents of the boxes, however, for there were some handsome curios, a few miniatures and pictures of great artistic merit, some rare editions of books, besides laces, jewels, brocades, and other stuffs in them.

When Beth had swept and dusted, she put down the carpet. Then she began to unpack. Among the first things she found were the old French books, a quarto Bible with the Apocrypha in it, Shakespeare in several volumes, and her school-books and note-books; some ornaments, some beautiful old curtains, and a large deep rug, like a Turkey carpet, in crimson and green and purple and gold, worked by Aunt Victoria. This she spread before the fireplace. The doorway she covered with a curtain, and two more she hung on either side of the window, so that they could not be seen from below. Her books of reference, desk, note-books, and writing materials she put on the table, arranged the ornaments on the mantelpiece, and hung the miniatures and pictures on the walls. Then she sat down and looked about her, well pleased with the whole effect. "Now," she exclaimed, "I am at home, thank God! I shall be able to study, to read and write, think and pray at last, undisturbed."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

As Dan sympathised with none of Beth's tastes or interests, and seemed to have none of his own with which she could sympathise, their stock of conversation was soon exhausted, and there was nothing like companionship in their intercourse. If Beth had had no resources in herself, she would have had but a sorry time of it in those days, especially as she received no kindness from any one in Slane. Some of the other medical men's wives called when she first arrived, and she returned their calls punctually, but their courtesy went no farther. Mrs. Carne, the wife of the leading medical practitioner, asked her to lunch, and Mrs. Jeffreys, a surgeon's wife, asked her to afternoon tea; but as these invitations did not include her husband, she refused them. She invited these ladies and their husbands in return, however, but they both pleaded previous engagements.

After the Maclures had been some little time at Slane, Lady Benyon bethought her of an old friend of hers, one Lady Beg, who lived in the neighbourhood, and asked her to call upon Beth, which she did forthwith, for she was one of those delightful old ladies who like nothing better than to be doing a kindness. She came immediately, bringing an invitation to lunch on the following Sunday, already written in case she should find no one at home.

Dan was delighted, "We shall meet nothing but county people there," he said, "and that's the proper set for us. They always do the right thing, you see. They're the only people worth knowing."

"But Beg is miles away from here," Beth said; "how shall we go?"

"We'll go in the dogcart, of course," Dan answered.

He had set up a dogcart on their arrival, but this was the first time he had proposed to take Beth out in it.

As they drove along on Sunday morning in the bright sunshine, Dan's spirits overflowed in a characteristic way at the prospect of meeting

"somebody decent," as he expressed it, and he made remarks about the faces and figures of all the women they passed on the road, criticising them as if they were cattle to be sold at so much a point.

"That little girl there," he said of one, whom he beamed upon and ogled as they passed, "reminds me of a fair-haired little devil I picked up one night in Paris. Gad! she *was* a bad un! up to more tricks than any other I ever knew. She used to—" (here followed a description of some of her peculiar practices).

"I wish you would not tell me these things," Beth remonstrated.

But he only laughed. "You know you're amused," he said. "It's just your conventional affectation that makes you pretend to object. That's the way women drive their husbands elsewhere for amusement; they won't take a proper intelligent interest in life, so there's nothing to talk to them about. I agree with the advanced party. They're always preaching that women should know the world. Women who *do* know the world have no nonsense about them, and are a jolly sight better company than your starched Puritans who pretend to know nothing. It's the most interesting side of life after all, and the most instructive; and I wonder at your want of intelligence, Beth. You shouldn't be afraid to know the natural history of humanity."

"Nor am I," Beth answered quietly; "nor the natural—or unnatural—depravity either, which is what you really mean, I believe. But knowing it, and delighting in it as a subject of conversation, are two very different things. Jestng about that side of life affects me like mud on a clean coat. I resent being splashed with it, and try to get rid of it, but unfortunately it sticks and stains."

"Oh, you're quite right," Dan answered unctuously. "It's just shocking the stories that are told—" and for the rest of the way he discoursed about morals, illustrating his meaning as he proceeded with anecdotes of the choicest description.

When they arrived at Beg House, they found the company more mixed than Dan had anticipated. Dr. and Mrs. Carne were there, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffreys, and Mr., Mrs., and Miss Petterick. Mr. Petterick was a solicitor of bumptious manners and doubtful reputation, whom the whole county hated,

but tolerated because of his wealth and shrewdness, either of which they liked to be in a position to draw upon if necessary. But besides these townspeople, there were Sir George and Lady Galbraith, Mr. and Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, and Mrs. Orton Beg, a widowed daughter-in-law of Lady Beg's.

Dr. Maclure immediately made up to Sir George Galbraith, who was also a medical man, and of great repute in his own line. He was a county magnate besides, and a man of wealth and importance by reason of a baronetcy somewhat unexpectedly inherited, and a beautiful country-seat. He continued to practise, however, for love of his profession, but used it as a means of doing good rather than as a source of income. In appearance he was a tall, rather awkward man, with a fine head and a strong, plain face. He spoke in that deliberate Scotch way which has a ring of sincerity in it and inspires confidence, and the contrast between his manner and Dan's struck Beth unpleasantly. She wished Dan would be less effusive; it was almost as if he were cringing; and she thought he should have waited for Sir George Galbraith, who was the older man, to have made the first advance.

Beth herself was at her ease as soon as she came among these people. It was the social atmosphere to which she had been accustomed. Mrs. Carne, Mrs. Jeffreys, and Mrs. Petterick were on their best behaviour, but Beth had only to be natural. The county people were all nice to her, and the other town ladies, who had hitherto slighted her, looked on and wondered to see her so well received. At luncheon, as there were not gentlemen enough to go round, she sat between Sir George Galbraith and Mrs. Orton Beg. Mrs. Kilroy sat opposite. Sir George had known Mrs. Kilroy all her life. It was he, in fact, who nicknamed her and her brother "The Heavenly Twins" in the days when, as children, they used to be the delight of their grandfather, the old Duke of Morningquest, and the terror of their parents, Mr. and Lady Adeline Hamilton-Wells.

As soon as they were seated, Mrs. Kilroy attacked Sir George on some subject which they had previously discussed, and there ensued a little playful war of words.

"Oh, you're just a phrase-maker," Mrs. Kilroy exclaimed at last, finding herself worsted; "and phrases prove nothing."

"What is a phrase-maker?" he asked with a twinkle.

"Why, a phrase-maker is a person who recklessly launches a saying, winged by wit, and of superior brevity and distinctness, but not necessarily true—a saying which flies direct to the mind, and, being of a cutting nature, carves an indelible impression there," said Mrs. Kilroy—"an impression which numbs the intellect and prevents us reasoning for ourselves. Opinion is formed for the most part of phrases, not of knowledge and observation. The things people say smartly are quoted, not because they are true, but because they are smart. A lie well put will carry conviction to the average mind more surely than a good reason if ill-expressed, because most people have an æsthetic sense that is satisfied by a happy play upon words, but few have reason enough to discriminate when the brilliant ingenuity of the phrase-maker is pitted against a plain statement of the bald truth."

"As, for instance?" asked Sir George.

"Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence,"

Mrs. Kilroy responded glibly. "That is quoted everywhere, and I have never heard it questioned, yet it is a flagrant case of confounding smartness with accuracy. Love of the kind that Byron meant is quite as much a thing apart from woman's life as from man's; more men, in fact, make the pursuit of it their whole existence than women do."

"You are right," said Sir George thoughtfully. "Love is certainly not a modern woman's whole existence, and she never dies of it. She feels it strongly, but it does not swamp her. In a bad attack, she may go to bed young one night and rise next day with grey hairs in her head, and write a book about it; but then she recovers: and I think you are right about phrases, too. 'Syllables govern the world,' John Selden said; but 'phrases' would have been the better word. Phrases are the keynotes to life; they set the tune to which men insensibly shape their course, and so rule us for good and ill. This is a time of talk, and formidable is the force of phrases. Catch-words are creative; they do not prove that a thing is—they cause it to be."

"Then an unscrupulous phrase-maker may be a danger to the community," Beth observed.

"Yes," said Sir George; "but on the other hand, one who is scrupulous would be a philanthropist of extraordinary power."

"Now, isn't that like his craft and subtlety, Evadne?" said Mrs. Kilroy to Lady Galbraith. "He has been gradually working up to that in order to make Mrs. Maclure suppose I intended to pay him a compliment when I called him a phrase-maker."

"You are taking a mean advantage of an honest attempt on my part to arrive at the truth," said Sir George.

"I believe you blundered into that without seeing in the least where you were going," Beth observed naïvely.

Everybody smiled, except Dan, who told her on the way home she had made a great mistake to say such a thing, and she must be careful in future, or she would give offence and make enemies for him.

"No fear with people like that," said Beth. "They all understood me."

"Which is as much as to say that your husband does not," said Dan, assuming his hurt expression. "Very well. Go your own way. But you'll be sorry for it."

"What a delightful person Mrs. Orton Beg is," Beth observed, to make a diversion; "and so nice-looking too!"

"You are easily pleased! Why, she's forty if she's a day!" Dan ejaculated, speaking as if that were to her discredit, and must deprive her of any consideration from him.

The next excitement was a military ball. Dan determined to go, and Beth was ready enough; she had never been to a ball.

"But how about a dress?" she said. "There has been such a sudden change in the fashion since mine were made, I'm afraid I have nothing that will do."

"Then get a new one," Dan said.

"What! and add to the bills?" Beth objected.

"Oh, bother the bills!" he answered in the tone he called cheery. "I've had them coming in all my life and I'm still here. Get a thing when you want it, and pay for it when you can—that's my motto. Why, my tailor's bill alone is up in the hundreds.

"But that was the bill mamma gave you the money to settle," Beth exclaimed.

"I know," he answered casually. "I got the money out of her for that, but I had to spend it on your amusement in town, my dear."

"Oh!" Beth ejaculated—"how could you?"

"How could I?" he answered coolly. "Well, I couldn't of course if I hadn't been clever; but I can always get anything I like out of old ladies. They dote on me. You've only got to amuse them, you know, and pour in a little sentiment on occasion. Let them understand you've been rather a naughty man, but you know what's right—that always fetches them. Your mother would have sold out all she had to help me when she found I meant to repent and settle. But of course I wouldn't take anything that was not absolutely necessary," he added magnanimously.

Beth compressed her lips and frowned. "Do you mean to say you obtained money from a poor woman like my mother for a special purpose which she approved, and spent that money on something else?" she asked.

Dan changed countenance. "I got the money from your mother to pay my tailor's bill; but the circumstance of your spending more money in town than I could afford compelled me to use it for another purpose," he answered in rather a blustering tone.

"I spent no money in town," Beth said.

"I had to spend it on you then," he rejoined, "and a nice lament you would have made if I hadn't! But it's all the same. Husband and wife are one; and I maintain that the money was given to me to pay a just debt, and I paid a just debt with it. Now, what have you to say against that to the disparagement of your husband?"

He looked Beth straight in the face as he spoke, as if the nature of the transaction would be changed by staring her out of countenance, and she returned his gaze unflinchingly; but not another word would she say on the subject. There is a sad majority of wives whose attitude towards their husbands must be one of contemptuous toleration—toleration of their past depravity and of their present deceits, whatever form they may take. Such a wife looks upon her husband as a hopeless incurable, because she knows that he has not the sense, even if he had the strength of character, to mend his moral defects. Beth fully realised her husband's turpitude with regard to the money, and also realised the futility of trying to make him see his own conduct in the matter in any light not flattering to himself, and she was deeply pained. She had taken it for granted that Dan would pay interest on the money, but had not troubled herself to find out if he were doing so, as she now thought that she ought to have done, for clearly she should have paid it herself if he did not. True, she never had any money; but that was no excuse, for there were honest ways of making money, and make it she would. She was on her way upstairs to her secret chamber to think the matter out undisturbed when she came to this determination; and as soon as she had shut herself in, she sank upon her knees, and vowed to God solemnly to pay back every farthing, and the interest in full, if she had to work her fingers to the bone. Curiously enough, it was with her fingers she first thought of working, not with her brain. She had seen an advertisement in a daily paper of several depôts for the sale of "ladies' work" in London and other places, and she determined at once to try that method of making money. Work of all kinds came easily to her, and happily she still had her two sovereigns, which would be enough to lay in a stock of materials to begin with. Her pin-money Dan regularly appropriated as soon as it arrived, with the facetious remark that it would just pay for her keep; and so far Beth had let him have it without a murmur, yielding in that as in all else, however much against her own inclinations, for gentleness, and also with a vague notion of making up to him in some sort for his own shortcomings, which she could not help fancying must be as great a trouble to him as they were to her. She had grown to have a very real affection for Dan, as indeed she would have had for any one who was passably kind to her; but her estimate of his character, as she gradually became acquainted with it, was never influenced by her affection, except in so far as she pitied him for traits which would have made her despise another man.

Since her marriage she had given up her free, wild, wandering habits. She would go into the town to order things at the shops in the morning, and take a solitary walk out into the country in the afternoon perhaps, but without any keen enjoyment. Her natural zest for the woods and fields was suspended. She had lost touch with nature. Instead of looking about her observantly, as had been her wont, she walked now, as a rule, with her eyes fixed on the ground, thinking deeply. She was losing vitality too; her gait was less buoyant, and she was becoming subject to aches and pains she had never felt before. Dan said they were neuralgic, and showed that she wanted a tonic, but troubled himself no more about them. He always seemed to think she should be satisfied when he found a name for her complaint. She had also become much thinner, which made her figure childishly young; but in the face she looked old for her age—five-and-twenty at least—although she was not yet eighteen.

There was one particularly strong and happy point in Beth's character: she wasted little or no time in repining for the thing that was done. All her thought was how to remedy the evil and make amends; so now, when she had recovered from the first shock of her husband's revelation, she put the thought of it aside, pulled herself together quickly, and found relief in setting to work with a will. The exertion alone was inspiring, and re-aroused the faculty which had been dormant in her of late. She went at once to get materials for her work, and stepped out more briskly than she had done for many a day. She perceived that the morning air was fresh and sweet, and she inhaled deep draughts of it, and rejoiced in the sunshine. Just opposite their house, across the road, on the other side of a wooden paling, the park-like meadow was intensely green; old horse-chestnuts dotted about it made refreshing intervals of shade; in the hedgerows the tall elms stood out clear against the sky, and the gnarled oaks cast fantastic shadows on the grass; while beyond it, at the farther side of the meadow by the brook, the row of Canadian poplars which bordered it kept up a continuous whispering, as was their wont, even on the stillest days. When Beth first heard them, they spoke a language to her which she comprehended but could not translate; but the immediate effect of her life with Dan had been to deaden her perception, so that she could not comprehend. Then the whispering became a mere rustle of leaves, appealing to nothing but her

sense of hearing, and her delight in their murmur lapsed when its significance was lost to her spirit.

But that morning Nature spoke to her again and her eyes were opened. She saw the grey-green poplars, the gnarled oaks, the dark crests of the elms upraised against the radiant blue of the sky, and felt a thrill like triumph as she watched the great masses of cloud, dazzlingly white, floating in infinite space majestically. The life about her, too—the twittering of birds in the hedgerows; an Alderney cow with its calf in the fields; a young colt careering wildly, startled by a passing train; a big dog that saluted her with friendly nose as he trotted by—all these said something to her which made her feel that, let what might happen, it was good to be alive.

On her way into town she thought out a piece of work, something more original and effective than the things usually sold in fancy-work shops, which did not often please her. When she had bought all the materials that she required, there was very little of her two pounds left, but she returned in high spirits, carrying the rather large parcel herself, lest, if it were sent, it should arrive when Dan was at home and excite his curiosity. He always appeared if he heard the door-bell ring, and insisted on knowing who or what had come, an inquisitive trick that irritated Beth into baffling him whenever she could.

She carried her precious packet up to her secret chamber, and set to work at once. Dan, when he came in to lunch, was surprised to find her unusually cheerful. After the temper she had displayed at breakfast, he had expected to have anything but a pleasant time of it for a little. Seeing her in good spirits put him also into a genial mood, and he began at once to talk about himself—his favourite topic.

"Well, I've had a rattling hard day," he observed. "You'd be surprised at the amount I've done in the time. I don't believe any other man here could have done it. I was at that confounded hospital a couple of hours, and after that I had a round! People are beginning to send for me now as the last from school. They think I'm up to the latest dodges. The old men won't like it! I had to go out to the Pettericks to see that girl Bertha again. Their family doctor could make nothing of her case, but it's simple enough. The girl's hysterical, that's what she is; and I know what I'd like to prescribe for her,

and that's a husband. Hee-hee! Soon cure her hysterics! As to the old girl, her mother, she's got"—then followed a minute description of her ailments, told in the baldest language. Of two words Dan always chose the coarsest in talking to Beth, now that they were married, which had made her writhe at first; but when she had remonstrated, he assumed an injured air, after which she silently endured the infliction for fear of wounding him. And it was the same with regard to his patients. The first time he described the ailment of a lady patient, and made gross comments about her, Beth had exclaimed—

"O Dan! what would she think of you if she knew you had told me? Surely it is a breach of confidence!"

"Well," he exclaimed, trying to wither her with a look, "you *have* a nice opinion of your husband! Is it possible that I cannot speak to my own wife without bringing such an accusation upon myself! Well, well! And I'm slaving for you morning, noon, and night, to keep you in some sort of decency and comfort; and when I come home, and do my best to be cheery and amuse you, instead of being morose after the strain of the day, as most men are, all the thanks I get is a speech like that! O holy matrimony!"

"I did not mean to annoy you, Dan; I'm sorry," Beth protested.

"So you should be!" he said; "so you should be! It's mighty hard for me to feel that my own wife hasn't confidence enough in me to be sure that I should never say a word either to her or anybody else about any of my patients to which they'd object."

"People feel differently on the subject, perhaps," Beth ventured. "I only know that if I had a doctor who talked to his wife about my complaints, I should"—despise him, was what she was going to say, but she changed the phrase—"I should not like it. But you should know what your own patients feel about it better than I do."

Even as she spoke, however, her mother's remark of long ago about a "talking doctor" recurred to her, and she felt lowered in her own estimation by the kind of concession she was making to him. The tragedy of such a marriage consists in the effect of the man's mind upon the woman's, shut up with him in the closest intimacy day and night, and all the time imbibing his poisoned thoughts. Beth's womanly grace pleaded with her continually not

to hurt her husband since he meant no offence, not to damp his spirits even when they took a form so distasteful to her. To check him was to offend him and provoke a scene for nothing, since his taste was not to be improved; and she would have to have checked him perpetually, and made a mere nag of herself; for to talk in this way to her, to tell her objectionable stories, and harp on depravity of all kinds, was his one idea of pleasurable conversation. It was seldom, therefore, that she remonstrated—especially in those early days when she had not as yet perceived that by tacitly acquiescing she was lending herself to inevitable corruption.

Just at that time, too, she did not trouble herself much about anything. She was entirely absorbed in her new object in life—to get the work done, to make the money, to pay her mother with interest; there was continual exaltation of spirit in the endeavour. Every moment that she could safely secure, she spent in her secret chamber, hard at work. Her outlook was on the sky above, for ever changing; on the gay garden below, whence light airs wafted the fragrance of flowers from time to time, to her delight; and on a gentle green ascent, covered and crowned with trees, which shut out the world beyond. Here there was a colony of rooks, where the birds were busy all day long sometimes, and from which they were sometimes absent from early morning till sundown, when they came back cawing by ones and twos and threes, a long straggling procession of them, their dark iridescent forms with broad black wings outspread, distinct and decorative, against the happy blue. Beth loved the birds, and even as she worked she watched them, their housekeepings and comings and goings; and heard their talk; and often as she worked she looked out at the fair prospect and up at the sky hopefully, and vowed again to accomplish one act of justice at all events. She stopped her regular studies at this time, because she conceived them to be for her own mere personal benefit, while the task which she had set herself was for a better purpose. But, although she did not study as had been her wont, while she sewed she occupied her mind in a way that was much more beneficial to it than the purposeless acquisition of facts, the solving of mathematical problems, or conning of parts of speech. Beside her was always an open book, it might be a passage of Scripture, a scene from Shakespeare, a poem or paragraph rich in the wisdom and beauty of some great mind; and as she sewed she dwelt upon it, repeating it to herself until she was word-perfect in it, then making it even more her own by earnest

contemplation. These passages became the texts of many observations; and in them was also the light which showed her life as it is, and as it should be lived. In meditating upon them she taught herself to meditate; and in following up the clues they gave her in the endeavour to discriminate and to judge fairly, by slow degrees she acquired the precious habit of clear thought. This lifted her at once above herself as she had been; and what she had lost of insight and spiritual perception since her marriage, she began to recover in another and more perfect form. Wholesome consideration of the realities of life now took the place of fanciful dreams. Her mind, wonderfully fertilised, teemed again—not with vain imaginings, however, as heretofore, but with something more substantial. Purposeful thought was where the mere froth of sensuous seeing had been; and it was thought that now clamoured for expression instead of the verses and stories—fireworks of the brain, pleasant, transient, futile distractions with nothing more nourishing in them than the interest and entertainment of the moment—which had occupied her chiefly from of old. It was natural to Beth to be open, to discuss all that concerned herself with her friends; but having no one to talk to now, she began on a sudden to record her thoughts and impressions in writing; and having once begun, she entered upon a new phase of existence altogether. She had discovered a recreation which was more absorbing than anything she had ever tried before; for her early scribbling had been of another kind, not nearly so entrancing. Then it had been the idle gossip of life, and the mere pictorial art of word-painting, an ingenious exercise, that had occupied her; now it was the more soul-stirring themes in the region of philosophy and ethics which she pursued, and scenes and phases of life interested her only as the raw material from which a goodly moral might be extracted. Art for art's sake she despised, but in art for man's sake she already discovered noble possibilities. But her very delight in her new pursuit made her think it right to limit her indulgence in it. Duty she conceived to be a painful effort necessarily, but writing was a pleasure; she therefore attended first conscientiously to her embroidery, and any other task she thought it right to perform, although her eager impatience to get back to her desk made each in turn a toil to her. Like many another earnest person, she mistook the things of no importance for things that matter because the doing of them cost her much; and it was the intellectual exercise, the delicate fancy work of her brain, a matter of enormous consequence, that she neglected. Not knowing that "*If a man love the*

labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him," she made the fitting of herself for the work of her life her last exercise at the tired end of the day. She rose early and went to bed late in order to gain a little more time to write, but never suspected that her delight in the effort to find expression for what was in her mind of itself proclaimed her one of the elect.

When she had finished her embroidery, she despatched it secretly to the depôt in London; but then she found that she would have to pay a small subscription before she could have it sold there, and she had no money. She wrote boldly to the secretary and told her so, and asked if the subscription could not be paid out of the price she got for her work. The secretary replied that it was contrary to the rules, but the committee thought that such an artistically beautiful design as hers was sure to be snapped up directly, and they had therefore decided to make an exception in her case.

While these letters were going backwards and forwards, Beth suffered agonies of anxiety lest Dan should pounce upon them and discover her secret; but he happened to be out always at post-time just then, so she managed to secure them safely.

As she had no money, she could not buy any more materials for embroidery, so she was obliged to take a holiday, the greater part of which she spent in writing. She was deeply engrossed by thoughts on progress, which had been suggested by a passage in one of Emerson's essays: "*All conservatives are such from natural defects. They have been effeminated by position or nature, born halt and blind, through luxury of their parents, and can only, like invalids, act on the defensive.*" Even in her own little life Beth had seen so much of the ill effects of conservatism in the class to which she belonged, and had suffered so much from it herself already, that the subject appealed to her strongly, and she pursued it with enthusiasm—more from the social than the political point of view, however. But, unfortunately, in all too short a time, her holiday came to an end. Her beautiful embroidery had sold for six guineas, and she found herself with the money for more materials, and three pounds in hand besides, clear profit, towards the debt. She had also received an order from the depôt for another piece of work at the same price, which caused her considerable elation, and set her to work

again with a will; and it was only when she could no longer ply her needle that she allowed herself to take up her pen.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BETH had no more zest for the ball after that conversation with Daniel about the money her mother had given him. She felt obliged to go to it because he insisted that it was necessary for the wives of professional men to show themselves on public occasions; but she would not get a new dress. She had never worn her white silk trimmed with myrtle, and when she came to look at it again, she decided that it was not so much out of the fashion after all, and, at any rate, it must do.

When she came down to dinner dressed in it on the night of the ball, she looked very winsome, and smiled up at Dan in shy expectation of a word of approval; but none came. In the early days of their acquaintance he had remarked that she was much more easily depressed than elated about herself, and would be the better of a little more confidence—not to say conceit; but since their marriage he had never given her the slightest sympathy or encouragement to cure her of her diffidence. If anything were amiss in her dress or appearance, he told her of it in the offensive manner of an ill-conditioned under-bred man, generally speaking when they were out of doors, or in some house where she could do nothing to put herself right, as if it were some satisfaction to him to make her feel ill at ease; and if she were complimented by any one else about anything, he had usually something derogatory to say on the subject afterwards. Now, when he had inspected her, he sat down to table without a word.

"Is there anything wrong?" Beth asked anxiously.

"No," he answered. "That stuff on your sleeves might have been fresher, that's all."

"This will be my first ball," Beth ventured, breaking a long silence.

"Well, don't go and tell everybody," he rejoined. "They'll think you want to make yourself interesting, and it's nothing to boast about. Just lay yourself out to be agreeable to people who will further your husband's interests, for once."

"But am I not always agreeable?" Beth exclaimed, much mortified.

"It doesn't appear so," he answered drily. "At any rate, you don't seem to go down here."

"How do you mean?" Beth asked.

"Why, the ladies in the place all seem to shun you, for some reason or other; not one of them ever comes near you in a friendly way."

"They were all very nice to me the other day at Beg," Beth protested, her heart sinking at this recurrence of the old reproach; for to be shunned, or in any way set apart, seemed even more dreadful to her now than it had done when she was a child.

"See that they keep it up then," he answered grimly.

"If it depends upon me, they will," said Beth, setting her sensitive mouth in a hard determined line that added ten years to her age and did not improve her beauty. And it was with a sad heart, and sorely dissatisfied with herself, that she drove to her first ball.

When they entered the ball-room, however, and Dan beamed about him on every one in his "thoroughly good fellow" way, her spirits rose. The decorations, the handsome uniforms, the brilliant dresses and jewels, the flowers and foliage plants, and, above all, the bright dance-music and festive faces, delighted her, and she gazed about her with lips just parted in a little smile, wondering to find it all so gay.

A young military man was brought up to her and introduced by one of the stewards before she had been five minutes in the room. He asked for the pleasure of a dance; but, alas! thanks to the scheme of education at the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters having been designed by the authorities to fit the girls for the next world only, Beth could not dance. She had had some lessons at Miss Blackburne's, but not enough to give her confidence, so she was obliged to decline. Another and another would-be partner, and some quite important people, as Dan said, offered, but in vain; and he looked furious.

"Well," he exclaimed, "this is nice for me!"

"I am sorry," Beth answered nervously. She was beginning to have a painful conviction that a man had to depend almost entirely on his wife for his success in life, and the responsibility made her quail.

"I shall have to go and do *my* duty, at any rate," he proceeded. "I must leave you alone."

"Yes, do," said Beth. "Mrs. Kilroy and Mrs. Orton Beg have just come in; I will go and join them." She naturally expected Dan to escort her, and he probably would have done so had he waited to hear what she was saying; but his marital manners were such that he had taken himself off while she was speaking, and left her to fend for herself. She was too glad, however, to see her charming new acquaintances, who had been so kindly, to care much, and she crossed the room to them, smiling confidently. As she approached, she saw that they recognised her and said something to each other. When she came close, they both bowed coldly, and turned their heads in the opposite direction.

Beth stopped short and her heart stood still. The slight was unmistakable; but what had she done? She looked about her as if for an explanation, and saw Lady Beg close beside her, talking to Mrs. Carne.

"Ah, how do you do? Nice ball, isn't it?" Lady Beg observed, but without shaking hands.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Carne, and then they resumed their conversation, taking no further notice of Beth, who would probably have turned and fled from the dreadful place incontinently, if Mrs. Petterick had not come up at that moment and spoken to her as one human being to another, seizing upon Beth as Beth might have seized upon her, in despair; for Mrs. Petterick had also been having her share of snubs. Oh, those Christians! how they do love one another! how tender they are to one another's feelings! how careful to make the best of one another! how gentle, good, and kind, and true! How singular it is that when the wicked unbeliever comes to live amongst them, and sees them as they are, he is not immediately moved by admiration to adopt their religion in order that he also may acquire the noble attributes so conspicuously displayed by them!

"You're not dancing, my dear," Mrs. Petterick said. "Come along and sit with me on that couch against the wall yonder. We shall see all that's going on from there."

Beth was only too thankful to go. A waltz was being played, and Dan passed them, dancing with Bertha Petterick. They glided over the floor together with the gentle voluptuous swing, dreamy eyes, and smiling lips of two perfect dancers, conscious of nothing but the sensuous delight of interwoven paces and clasping arms.

"My! but they do step well together, him and Bertha!" Mrs. Petterick exclaimed. "He's a handsome man, your husband, and a gay one—flirting about with all the ladies! I wonder you're not jealous!"

"Jealous!" Beth answered, smiling. "Not I, indeed! Jealousy is a want of faith in one's self."

"Well, my dear, if you always looked as well as you do just now, you need not want confidence in yourself," Mrs. Petterick observed. "But what would you do if your husband gave you cause for jealousy?"

"Despise him," Beth answered promptly.

Mrs. Petterick looked as if she could make nothing of this answer. Then she became uneasy. The music had stopped, but Bertha had not returned to her. "I must go and look after my daughter," she said, rising from her comfortable seat with a sigh. "Gels are a nuisance. You've got to keep your eye on them all the time, or you never know what they're up to."

Beth stayed where she was, and soon began to feel uncomfortable. People stared coldly at her as they passed, and she could not help fancying herself the subject of unpleasant remark because she was alone. She prayed hard that some one would come and speak to her. Dan had disappeared. After a time she recognised Sir George Galbraith among the groups of people at the opposite side of the room. He was receiving that attention from every one which is so generously conferred on a man or woman of consequence, whose acquaintance adds to people's own importance, and to whom it is therefore well to be seen speaking; but although his manner was courteously attentive he looked round as if anxious to make his escape, and

finally, to Beth's intense relief, he recognised her, and, leaving the group about him unceremoniously, came across the room to speak to her.

"Would it be fair to ask you to sit out a dance with me?" he said. "I do not dance."

"I would rather sit out a dance with you than dance it with any one else I know here," she answered naïvely; "but, as it happens, I do not dance either."

"Indeed! How is that? I should have thought you would like dancing."

"So I should, I am sure, if I could," she replied. "But I can't dance at all. They would not let me learn dancing at one school where I was, and I was not long enough at the other to learn properly."

"Now, that is a pity," he said, considering Beth, his professional eye having been struck by her thinness and languor. "But have some lessons. Dancing in moderation is capital exercise, and it exhilarates; and anything that exhilarates increases one's vitality. Why don't you make your husband teach you? He seems to know all about it."

"Yes," Beth answered, smiling; "but I shouldn't think teaching me is at all in his line. Why don't you dance yourself?"

"Oh, I am far too clumsy," he said good-naturedly. "My wife says if I could even learn to move about a room without getting in the way and upsetting things, it would be something."

"Is she here to-night?" Beth asked.

"No, she was not feeling up to it," he answered. "She tired herself in the garden this afternoon, helping me to bud roses."

"Oh, can you bud roses?" Beth exclaimed. "I should so like to know how it is done."

"I'll show you with pleasure."

"Will you really?" said Beth. "How kind of you."

"Not at all. Let me see, when will you be at home? We mustn't lose any time, or it will be too late in the year."

"I'm pretty nearly always at home," Beth said.

"Then if I came to-morrow morning would that be convenient?"

"Quite; and I hope you will stay lunch," Beth answered.

Dan returned to the ball-room just then, and, on seeing who was with her, he immediately joined them; but Sir George only stayed long enough to exchange greetings politely.

"You seem to get on very well with Galbraith," Dan observed.

"Don't you like him?" Beth asked in surprise, detecting a note of enmity in his voice.

"I haven't had much chance," he said bitterly. "He doesn't play the agreeable to me as he does to you."

Beth missed the drift of this remark in considering the expression "play the agreeable," which was unpleasantly suggestive to her of under-bred gentility.

"You will be able to give him an opportunity to-morrow then," she said, "if you are in at lunch-time, for he is coming to show me how to bud roses, and I have asked him to stay."

"Have you, indeed?" Dan exclaimed, obviously displeased, but why or wherefore Beth could not conceive. "I hope to goodness there's something to eat in the house," he added upon reflection, fussily.

"There is as much as there always is," Beth placidly rejoined.

"Well, that's not enough then. Just think what a man like that has on his own table!"

"A man like that won't expect our table to be like his."

"You'd better make it appear so for once then, or you'll be having our hospitality criticised as I heard the Barrack fellows criticise Mrs. Jeffery's

the other day. A couple of them called about lunch-time, and she asked them to stay, and they said there was nothing but beer and sherry, and the fragments of a previous feast, and they were blessed if they'd go near the old trout again."

"An elegant expression!" said Beth. "It gives the measure of the mind it comes from. Please don't introduce the person who uses it to me. But as to Sir George Galbraith, you need not be afraid that *he* will accept hospitality and criticise it in that spirit. He will neither grumble at a cutlet, nor describe his hostess by a vulgar epithet after eating it."

She shut her mouth hard after speaking. Disillusion is a great enlightener; our insight is never so clear as when it is turned on the character of a person in whom we used to believe; and as Dan gradually revealed himself to Beth, trait by trait, a kind of distaste seized upon her, a want of respect, which found involuntary expression in trenchant comments upon his observations and in smart retorts. She did not seek sympathy from him now for the way in which she had been slighted at the ball, knowing perfectly well that he was more likely to blame her than anybody else. He had, in fact, by this time, so far as any confidence she might have reposed in him was concerned, dropped out of her life completely, and left her as friendless and as much alone as she would have been with the veriest stranger.

That night when she went home she felt world-worn and weary, but next morning, out in the garden with Sir George Galbraith budding roses, she became young again. Before they had been together half-an-hour she was chatting to him with girlish confidence, telling him about her attempts to cultivate her mind, her reading and writing, to all of which he listened without any of that condescension in his manner which Dan displayed when perchance he was in a good-humour and Beth had ventured to expand. Sir George was genuinely interested.

Dan came in punctually to lunch, for a wonder. He glanced at Beth's animated face sharply when he entered, but took no further notice of her. He was one of those husbands who have two manners, a coarse one for their families, and another, much more polished, which they assume when it is politic to be refined. But Dan's best behaviour sat ill upon him, because it was lacking in sincerity, and Beth suffered all through lunch because of the

obsequious pose he thought it proper to assume towards his distinguished guest.

After lunch, when Sir George had gone, he took up his favourite position before the mirror over the chimney-piece, and stood there for a little, looking at himself and caressing his moustache.

"You talk a great deal too much, Beth," he said at last.

"Do you think so?" she rejoined.

"Yes, I do," he assured her. "Of course Galbraith had to be polite and affect to listen, but I could see that he was bored by your chatter. He naturally wanted to talk to me about things that interest men."

"Then why on earth didn't he talk to you?" Beth asked.

"How could he when you monopolised the conversation?"

"It was he who kept me talking," she protested.

"Oh yes; I notice you are very animated when anything in the shape of a man comes in," Dan sneered.

Beth got up and left the room, less affected by the insinuation, however, than by the vulgar expression of it.

The following week Sir George came in one morning with some cuttings, and stayed a while in the garden with Beth, showing her how to set them; but he would not wait for lunch. Dan showed considerable annoyance when he heard of the visit.

"He should come when I am at home," he said. "It is damned bad taste his coming when you are alone."

The next time Sir George came Dan happened to be in, to Beth's relief. She had brought her writing down that day, and was working at it on the dining-room table, not expecting Dan till much later. He was in a genial mood, for a wonder.

"What on earth are you scribbling about there?" he asked.

"Just something I was thinking about," Beth answered evasively.

"Going in for authorship, eh?"

"Why not?" said Beth.

Dan laughed. "You are not at all ambitious," he remarked; then added patronisingly, "A little of that kind of thing will do you no harm, of course; but, my dear child, your head wouldn't contain a book, and if you were just a little cleverer you would know that yourself."

Beth bit the end of her pencil and looked at him dispassionately, and it was at this moment that Sir George Galbraith was announced.

Dan received him with effusion as usual; and also, as usual, Sir George responded with all conventional politeness, but the greeting over, he turned his attention to Beth. He had brought her a packet of books.

"This looks like work in earnest," he said, glancing at the table. "I see you have a good deal of something done. Is it nearly finished?"

"All but," Beth rejoined.

"What are you going to do with it?"

Beth looked at him, and then at her manuscript vaguely. "I don't know," she said. "What can I do with it?"

"Publish it, if it is good," he answered.

"But how am I to know?" Beth asked eagerly. "Do you think it possible I could do anything fit to publish?"

Before he could reply, Dan chimed in. "I've just been telling her," he said, "that little heads like hers can't contain books. It's all very well to scribble a little for pastime, and all that, but she mustn't seriously imagine she can do that sort of work. She'll only do herself harm. Literature is men's work."

"Yet how many women have written, and written well, too," Beth observed.

"Oh yes, of course—exceptional women."

"And why mayn't I be an exceptional woman?" Beth asked, smiling.

"Coarse and masculine!" Dan exclaimed. "No, thank you. We don't want you to be one of that kind—do we, Galbraith?"

"There is not the slightest fear," Sir George answered dryly. "Besides, I don't think any class of women workers—not even the pit-brow women—are necessarily coarse and masculine. And I differ from you, too, with regard to that head," he added, fixing his keen, kindly eyes deliberately on Beth's cranium till she laughed to cover her embarrassment, and put up both hands to feel it. "I should say there was good promise both of sense and capacity in the size and balance of it—not to mention anything else."

"Well, you ought to know if anybody does," said Dan with a facetious sort of affectation of agreement, which left no doubt of his insincerity.

"I wish," Sir George continued, addressing Beth, "you would let me show some of your work to a lady, a friend of mine, whose opinion is well worth having."

"I would rather have yours," Beth jerked out.

"Oh, mine is no good," he rejoined. "But if you will let me read what you give me to show my lady, I should be greatly interested. We were talking about style in prose the other day, and I have ventured to bring you these books—some of our own stylists, and some modern Frenchmen. You read French, I know."

"There is nothing like the French," Dan chimed in. "We have no literature at all now. Look at their work compared to ours, how short, crisp, and incisive it is! How true to life! A Frenchman will give you more real life in a hundred pages than our men do in all their interminable volumes."

"More sexuality, you mean, I suppose," said Galbraith, "Personally I find them monotonous, and barren of happy phrases to enrich the mind, of noble sentiments to expand the heart, of great thoughts to help the soul; without balance, with little of the redeeming side of life, and less aspiration towards it. If France is to be judged by the tendency of its literature and art at present, one would suppose it to be dominated and doomed to destruction by a gang of lascivious authors and artists who are sapping the manhood of

the country and degrading the womanhood by idealising self-indulgence and mean intrigue. The man or woman who lives low, or even thinks low, in that sense of the word, will tend always to descend still lower in times of trial. Moral probity is the backbone of our courage; without it we have nothing to support us when a call is made upon our strength." [1]

[1] The truth of this assertion was lately proved in a terrible manner at the burning of the Charity Bazaar in the Rue Jean Goujon, when the nerves of the luxurious gentlemen present, debilitated by close intimacy with the *haute cocotterie* in and out of society, betrayed them, and they displayed the white feather of vice by fighting their own way out, not only leaving the ladies to their fate, but actually beating them back with their sticks and trampling on them in their frantic efforts to save themselves, as many a bruised white arm or shoulder afterwards testified. There was scarcely a man burnt on the occasion, husbands, lovers, and fathers escaped, leaving all the heroic deeds to be done by some few devoted men-servants, some workmen who happened to be passing, a stray Englishman or American, and mothers who perished in attempting to rescue their children.

"I can't stand English authors myself," was Dan's reply. "They're so devilish long-winded, don't you know."

"Poverty of mind accounts for the shortness of the book as a rule," said Galbraith. "I like a long book myself when it is rich in thought. The characters become companions then, and I miss them when we are forced to part."

Beth nodded assent to this. She had been turning over the books that Galbraith had brought her, with the tender touch of a true book-lover and that evident interest and pleasure which goes far beyond thanks. Mere formal thanks she forgot to express, but she had brightened up in the most wonderful way since Galbraith appeared, and was all smiles when he took his leave.

Not so Dan, however; but Beth was too absorbed in the books to notice that.

"How kind he is!" she exclaimed. "Dan, won't it be delightful if I really can write? I might make a career for myself."

"Rot!" said Dan.

"Sir George differs from you," Beth rejoined.

"I say that's all rot. What does he know about it? I tell you you're a silly fool, and your head wouldn't contain a book. I ought to know!"

"Doctors differ again, then, it seems," Beth said. "But in this case the patient is going to decide for herself. What is the use of opinion in such

matters? One must experiment. I'm going to write, and if at first I don't succeed—I shall persevere."

"Oh, of course!" Dan sneered. "You'll take anybody's advice but your husband's. However, go your own way, as I know you will. Only, I warn you, you'll regret it."

Beth was dipping into one of the books, and took no notice of this. Dan's ill-humour augmented.

"Did you know the fellow was coming to-day?" he asked.

"No—if by fellow you mean Sir George Galbraith," she answered casually, still intent on the book.

"You know well enough who I mean, and that's just a nag," he retorted. "And it looks uncommonly as if you did expect him, and had set all that rubbish of writing out to make a display."

Beth bit the end of her pencil, and looked at Dan contemptuously.

"I dare say he'd like to get hold of you to make a tool of you," he pursued. "He's in with Lord Dawne and the whole of that advanced woman's party at Morne, who are always interfering with everything."

"How?" Beth asked.

"By poking their noses into things that don't concern them," he asseverated, "things they wouldn't know anything about if they weren't damned nasty-minded. There's that fanatical Lady Fulda Guthrie, and Mrs. Orton Beg, and Mrs. Kilroy, besides Madam Ideala—they're all busybodies, and if they succeed in what they're at just now, by Jove, they'll ruin me! I'll have my revenge, though, if they do! I'll attack your distinguished friend. He has established himself as a humanitarian, and travels on that reputation; but he has an hospital of his own, where I have no doubt some pretty games are played in the way of experiments which the public don't suspect. *I* know the kind of thing! Patients mustn't ask questions! The good doctor will do his best for them—trust him! He'll try nothing that he doesn't know to be for their good; and when they're under chloroform he'll take no unfair advantage in the way of cutting a little more for his own private information

than they've consented to. Oh, I know! Galbraith seems to be by way of slighting me, but I'll show him up if it comes to that—and, at any rate, I'm on the way to discoveries myself, and I bet I'll teach him some things in his profession yet that will make him sit up—things he doesn't suspect, clever and all as he is."

Beth knew nothing of the things to which Dan alluded, and therefore missed the drift of this tirade; but the whole tone of it was so offensive to her that she gathered up her books and papers and left the room. Silence and flight were her weapons of defence in those days.

CHAPTER XL

THERE was a gap of six months between that last visit of Sir George Galbraith's and the next, and in the interval Beth had worked hard, reading and re-reading the books he had lent her, writing, and perhaps most important of all, reflecting, as she sat in her secret chamber, busy with the beautiful embroideries which were to pay off that dreadful debt. She had made seven pounds by this time, and Aunt Grace Mary had sent her five for a present surreptitiously, advising her to keep it herself and say nothing about it—Aunt Grace Mary knew what husbands were. Beth smiled as she read the letter. She, too, was beginning to know what husbands are—husbands of the Uncle James kind. She added the five pounds to her secret hoard, and thanked goodness that the sum was mounting up, little by little.

But she wished Sir George would return. He was a busy man, and lived at the other side of the county, so that she could not expect him to come to Slane on her account; but surely something more important would bring him eventually, and then she might hope to see him. She knew he would not desert her. And she had some manuscript ready to confide to him now if he should repeat his offer; but she was too diffident to send it to him except at his special request.

She was all energy now that the possibility of making a career for herself had been presented to her, but it was the quietly restrained energy of a strong nature. She never supposed that she could practise a profession without learning it, and she was prepared to serve a long apprenticeship to letters if necessary. She meant to write and write and write until she acquired power of expression. About what she should have to express she never troubled herself. It was the need to express what was in her that had set her to work. She would never have to sit at a writing-table with a pen in her hand waiting for ideas to come. She had discovered by accident that she could have books in plenty, and of the kind she required, from the Free Library at Slane. Dan never troubled himself to consult her taste in books, but he was in the habit of bringing home three-volume novels for himself from the library, a form of literature he greatly enjoyed in spite of his

strictures. He made Beth read them aloud to him in the evening, one after the other—an endless succession—while he smoked, and drank whiskies-and-sodas. He brought them home himself at first, but soon found it a trouble to go for them, and so sent her; and then it was she discovered that there were other books in the library. The librarian, an educated and intelligent man, helped her often in the choice of books. They had long talks together, during which he made many suggestions, and gave Beth many a hint and piece of information that was of value to her. He was her only congenial friend in Slane, and her long conversations with him often took her out of herself and raised her spirits. He little suspected what a help he was to the lonely little soul. For the most part she took less interest in the books themselves than in the people who wrote them; biographies, autobiographies, and any scrap of anecdote about authors and their methods she eagerly devoured. Life as they had lived it, not as they had observed and imagined it, seemed all-important to her; and as she read and thought, sitting alone in the charmed solitude of her secret chamber, her self-respect grew. Her mind, which had run riot, fancy-fed with languorous dreams in the days when it was unoccupied and undisciplined, came steadily more and more under control, and grew gradually stronger as she exercised it. She ceased to rage and worry about her domestic difficulties, ceased to expect her husband to add to her happiness in any way, ceased to sorrow for the slights and neglects that had so wounded and perplexed her during the first year of her life in Slane; and learnt by degrees to possess her soul in dignified silence so long as silence was best, feeling in herself *that* something which should bring her up out of all this and set her apart eventually in another sphere, among the elect—feeling this through her further faculty to her comfort, although unable as yet to give it any sort of definite expression. As she read of those who had gone before, she felt a strange kindred with them; she entered into their sorrows, understood their difficulties, was uplifted by their aspirations, and gloried in their successes. Their greatness never disheartened her; on the contrary, she was at home with them in all their experiences, and at her ease as she never was with the petty people about her. It delighted her when she found in them some small trait or habit which she herself had already developed or contracted, such as she found in the early part of George Sand's *Histoire de ma Vie*, and in the lives of the Brontës. Under the influence of nourishing books, her mind, sustained and stimulated, became nervously active. It had a trick of flashing

off from the subject she was studying to something wholly irrelevant. She would begin Emerson's essay on *Fate* or *Beauty* with enthusiasm, and presently, with her eyes still following the lines, her thoughts would be busy forming a code of literary principles for herself. In those days her mind was continually under the influence of any author she cared about, particularly if his style were mannered. Involuntarily, while she was reading Macaulay, for instance, her own thoughts took a dogmatic turn, and jerked along in short, sharp sentences. She caught the peculiarities of De Quincey too, of Carlyle, and also some of the simple dignity of Ruskin, which was not so easy; and she had written things after the manner of each of these authors before she perceived the effect they were having upon her. But it was unfortunate for her that her attention had been turned from the matter which she had to express to the manner in which she should express it. From the time she began to think of the style and diction of prose as something to be separately acquired, the spontaneous flow of her thoughts was checked and hampered, and she expended herself in fashioning her tools, as it were, instead of using her tools to fashion her work. When, in her reading, she came under the influence of academic minds, she lost all natural freshness, and succeeded in being artificial. Her English became turgid with Latinities. She took phrases which had flowed from her pen, and were telling in their simple eloquence, and toiled at them, turning and twisting them until she had laboured all the life out of them; and then, mistaking effort for power, and having wearied herself, she was satisfied. Being too diffident to suspect that she had any natural faculty, she conceived that the more trouble she gave herself the better must be the result; and consequently she did nothing worth the doing except as an exercise of ingenuity. She was serving her apprenticeship, however—making her mistakes.

It was late in the autumn before she saw her good friend Sir George Galbraith again. He came on a bright, clear, frosty morning, and found her out in the garden, pacing up and down briskly, and looking greatly exhilarated by the freshness. When she saw him coming towards her, she uttered a little joyful exclamation, and hurried forward to meet him.

"I have been longing to see you," she said in her unaffected way; "but I know what the distance is, and how fully your time is occupied. It is very good of you to come at all."

"Only the time and distance have prevented me coming sooner," he rejoined. "But, tell me, how have you been getting on? And have you thought any more of making a career for yourself?"

"I have thought of nothing else," Beth answered brightly; "and I wonder I ever thought of anything else, for the idea has been in me, I believe, all my life. I must have discussed it, too, at a very early age, for I have remembered lately that I was once advised by an old aunt of mine, the best and dearest friend I ever had, to write only that which is—or aims at being—soul-sustaining."

He nodded his head approvingly. "From such seed a good crop should come," he said. "But what line shall you take?"

"I don't know."

"Not novels then, for certain?"

"Nothing for certain—whatever comes and calls for expression."

They were pacing up and down together, and there was a pause.

"Did you expect I should try to write novels, and do you think I ought?" Beth asked at last.

"I think I did expect it," he answered; "but as to whether you ought or ought not, that is for you to decide. There is much to be said against novel reading and writing. I think it was De Quincey who said that novels are the opium of the West; and I have myself observed that novel-reading is one of those bad habits that grow upon people until they are enslaved by it, demoralised by it; and if that is the case with the reader, what must the writer suffer?"

Beth bent her brows upon this. "But that is only one side of it, is it not?" she asked after a moment's reflection. "I notice in all things a curious duality, a right side and a wrong side. Confusion is the wrong side of order, misery of happiness, falsehood of truth, evil of good; and it seems to me that novel-reading, which can be a vice, I know, may also be made a virtue. It depends on the writer."

"And on the taste of the reader," he suggested. "But I believe the taste of the intelligent 'general reader' is much better than one supposes. The mind

craves for nourishment; and the extraordinary success of books in which any attempt, however imperfect, is made to provide food for thought, as distinguished from those which merely offer matter to distract the attention, bears witness, it seems to me, to the involuntary effort which is always in progress to procure it. I believe myself that good fiction may do more to improve the mind, enlarge the sympathies, and develop the judgment than any other form of literature—partly because it looks into the hidden springs of action, and makes all that is obscure in the way of impulse and motive clear to us. Biography, for instance, merely skims the surface of life, as a rule; and in history, where man is a puppet moved by events, there can be very little human nature."

"I wonder if you read many novels," said Beth. "I have to read them aloud to my husband until I am satiated. And I am determined, if I ever do try to write one, to avoid all that is conventional. I never will have a faultlessly beautiful heroine, for instance. I am sick of that creature. When I come to her, especially if she has golden hair yards long, a faultless complexion, and eyes of extraordinary dimensions, I feel inclined to groan and shut the book. I have met her so often in the weary ways of fiction! I know every variety of her so well! She consists of nothing but superlatives, and is as conventional as the torso of an Egyptian statue, with her everlasting physical perfection. I think her as repulsive as a barber's block. I confess that a woman who has golden hair and manages to look like a lady, or to be like one even in a book, is a wonder, considering all that is associated with golden hair in our day; but I should avoid the abnormal as much as the conventional. I would not write plotty-plotty books either, nor make a pivot of the everlasting love-story, which seems to me to show such a want of balance in an author, such an absence of any true sense of proportion, as if there was nothing else of interest in life but our sexual relations. But, oh!" she broke off, "how I do appreciate what the difficulty of selection must be! In writing a life, if one could present all sides of it, and not merely one phase—the good and the bad of it, the joys and the sorrows, the moments of strength and of weakness, of wisdom and of folly, of misery and of pure delight—what a picture!"

"Yes; and how utterly beyond the average reader, who never understands complexity," he answered. "But I think it a good sign for your chances of success that you should have complained of the difficulty of selection in the

matter of material rather than bemoan your want of experience of life. Most young aspirants to literary fame grumble that they are handicapped for want of experience. They are seldom content with the material they have at hand—the life they know. They want to go and live in London, where they seem to think that every one worth knowing is to be found."

"That isn't my feeling at all," said Beth. "The best people may be met in London, but I don't believe that they are at their best. The friction of the crowd rubs out their individuality. In a crowd I feel mentally as if I were in a maze of telegraph wires. The thoughts of so many people streaming out in all directions about me entangle and bewilder me."

"You do not seem to like anything exceptional."

"No, I do not," said Beth. "I like the normal—the everyday. Great events are not the most significant, nor are great people the most typical. It is the little things that make life livable. The person who comes and talks clever is not the person we love, nor the person who interests us most. Those we love sympathise with us in the ordinary everyday incidents of our lives, and discuss them with us, merely touching, if at all, on the thoughts they engender. I don't want to know what people think as a rule; I want to know what they have experienced. People who talk facts, I like; people who talk theories, I fly from. And I think upon the whole that I shall always like the kind people better than the clever ones. I believe we owe more to them, too, and learn more from them—more human nature, which after all is what we want to know."

"But the clever people are kind also sometimes," said Sir George.

"When they are, of course it is perfect," Beth answered. "But judging the clever ones of to-day by what they write, I cannot often think them so. The works of our smartest modern writers, particularly the French, satiate me with their cleverness; but they are vain, hollow, cynical, dyspeptic; they appeal to the head, but the heart goes empty away. Few of them know or show the one thing needful—that happiness is the end of life; and that by trying to live rightly we help each other to happiness. That is the one thing well worth understanding in this world; but that, with all their ingenuity, they are not intelligent enough to see."

"You are an optimist, I perceive," Sir George said, smiling, "and I entirely agree with you. So long as we understand that happiness is the end of life, and that the best way to secure it for ourselves is by helping others to attain to it, we are travelling in the right direction. By happiness I do not mean excitement, of course, nor the pleasure we owe to others altogether; but that quiet content in ourselves, that large toleration and love which should overflow from us continually, and make the fact of our existence a source of joy and strength to all who know us."

They walked up and down a little in silence, then Sir George asked her what she thought of some of the specimens of style and art in literature he had lent her to study.

"I don't know yet," Beth said. "My mind is in a state of chaos on the subject. I seem to reject 'style' and 'art.' I ask for something more or something else, and am never satisfied. But tell me what you think of the stylists."

"I think them brilliant," he rejoined, "but their work is as the photograph is to the painting, the lifeless accuracy of the machine to the nervous fascinating faultiness of the human hand. No, I don't care for the writers who are specially praised for their style. I find their productions cold and bald as a rule. I want something warmer—more full-blooded. Most of the stylists write as if they began by acquiring a style and then had to sit and wait for a subject. I believe style is the enemy of matter. You compress all the blood out of your subject when you make it conform to a studied style, instead of letting your style form itself out of the necessity for expression. This is rank heresy, I know, and I should not have ventured on it a few years ago; but now, I say, give me a style that is the natural outcome of your subject, your mind, your character, not an artificial but a natural product; and even though it be as full of faults as human nature is, faults of every kind, so long as there is no fault of the heart in it, that being the one unpardonable fault in an author—if you have put your own individuality into your work—I'll answer for it that you will arrive sooner and be read longer than the most admired stylist of the day. Be prepared to sacrifice form to accuracy, to avoid the brilliant and the marvellous for the simple and direct. What matters it how the effect is got so that it comes honestly?

But of course it will be said that this, that, and the other person did not get their effects so; they will compare you to the greatest to humiliate you."

"Oh, that would be nothing to me so that I produced my own effects," Beth broke in. "That is just where I am at present. I mean to be myself. But please do not think that I have too much assurance. If I go wrong, I hope I shall find it out in time; and I shall certainly be the first to acknowledge it. I do not want to prove myself right; I want to arrive at the truth."

"Then you will arrive," he assured her. "But above everything, mind that you are not misled by the cant of art if you have anything special to say. If a writer would be of use in his day, and not merely an amuser of the multitude, he must learn that right thinking, right feeling, and knowledge are more important than art. When you address the blockhead majority, you must not only give them your text, you must tell them also what to think of it, otherwise there will be fine misinterpretation. You may be sure of the heart of the multitude if you can touch it; but its head, in the present state of its development, is an imperfect machine, manœuvred for the most part by foolishness. People can see life for themselves, but they cannot always see the meaning of it, the why and wherefore, whence things come and whither they are tending, so that the lessons of life are lost—or would be but for the efforts of the modern novelist."

Beth reflected a little, then she said: "I am glad you think me an optimist. It seems to me that healthy human nature revolts from pessimism. The work that lasts is the work that cheers. Give us something with hope in it—something that appeals to the best part of us—something which, while we read, puts us in touch with fine ideals, and makes us feel better than we are."

"That is it precisely," said he. "The school of art-and-style books wearies us because there is no aspiration in it, nothing but a deadly dull artistic presentment of hopeless levels of life. It is all cold polish, as I said before, with never a word to warm the heart or stir the better nature."

"That is what I have felt," said Beth; "and I would rather have written a simple story, full of the faults of my youth and ignorance, but with some one passage in it that would put heart and hope into some one person, than all that brilliant barren stuff. And I'm going to write for women, not for

men. I don't care about amusing men. Let them see to their own amusements, they think of nothing else. Men entertain each other with intellectual ingenuities and Art and Style, while women are busy with the great problems of life, and are striving might and main to make it beautiful."

"Now that is young in the opprobrious sense of the word," said Sir George. "It is only when we are extremely young that we indulge in such sweeping generalisations."

Beth blushed. "I am always afraid my judgment will be warped by my own narrow personal experience,—I must guard against that!" she exclaimed, conscious that she had had her husband in her mind when she spoke.

Sir George nodded his head approvingly, and looked at his watch. "I must go," he said, "but I hope there will not be such a long interval before I come again. My wife is sorry that she has not been able to call. She is not equal to such a long drive. But she desired me to explain and apologise; and she has sent you some flowers and fruit which she begs you will accept. Have you some of your work ready for me this time? I have asked my friend Ideala to give you her opinion, which is really worth having, and she says she will with pleasure. You must know her. I am sure you would like her extremely."

"But would she like me?" slipped from Beth unawares.

"Now, that is young again," he said, with his kindly smile-indulgent.

"It is the outcome of sad experience," Beth rejoined with a sigh. "No woman I have met here so far has shown any inclination to cultivate my acquaintance. I think I am being punished for some unknown crime."

Sir George became thoughtful, but said nothing.

As they approached the house, Beth saw Dan peeping at them from behind the curtain of an upstairs window. The hall-table was covered with the fruit and flowers Sir George had brought. Beth sent a servant for Dan. The girl came back and said that the doctor was not in.

"Nonsense!" said Beth. "I saw him at one of the windows just now. If you will excuse me, Sir George, I will find him myself."

She called him as she ran upstairs, and Dan made his appearance, looking none too well pleased.

He went down to Sir George, and Beth ran on up to her secret chamber for her manuscripts and the books Sir George had lent her, which had been waiting ready packed for many a day.

When he had gone, Beth danced round the dining-room, clapping her hands.

"I can't contain myself," she exclaimed. "I do feel encouraged, strengthened, uplifted."

She caught a glimpse of Dan's face, and stopped short.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"The matter is that I'll have no more of this," he answered in a brutal tone.

"No more of what?" Beth demanded.

"No more of this man's philandering after you," he retorted.

"I don't understand you," Beth gasped.

"Oh, you're mighty innocent," he sneered. "You'll be telling me next that he comes to see *me*, lends *me* books, walks up and down by the hour together with *me*, brings *me* fruit and flowers! You think I'm blind, I suppose! *You're* a nice person! and so particular too! and so fastidious in your conversation! Oh, trust a prude! But I tell you," he bawled, coming up close to her, and shaking his fist in her face, "I tell you I won't have it. Now, do you understand that?"

Beth did not wince, but oh, what a drop it was from the heights she had just left to this low level! "Be good enough to explain your meaning precisely," she said quietly. "I understand that you are bringing some accusation against me. It is no use blustering and shaking your fist in my face. I am not to be frightened. Just explain yourself. And I advise you to weigh your

words, for you shall answer to me in public for any insult you may offer me in private."

Dr. Maclure was sobered by this unexpected flash of spirit. They had been married nearly three years by this time, and Beth's habitual docility had deceived him. Hitherto men have been able to insult their wives in private with impunity when so minded, and Dan was staggered for a moment to find himself face to face with a mere girl who boldly refused to suffer the indignity. He was not prepared for such a display of self-respect.

"You're very high and mighty!" he jeered at last.

"I am very determined," Beth rejoined, and set her lips.

He tried to subdue her by staring her out of countenance; but Beth scornfully returned his gaze. Then suddenly she stamped her foot, and brought her clenched fist down on the dining-room table, beside which she was standing. "Come, come, sir," she said, "we've had enough of this theatrical posing. You are wasting my time, explain yourself."

He took a turn up and down the room.

"Look here, Beth," he began, lowering his tone, "you cannot pretend that Galbraith comes to see me."

"Why should I?" she asked.

"Well, it isn't right that he should come to see you, and I won't have it," he reiterated.

"Do you mean that I am not to have any friends of my own?" she demanded.

"*He* is not to be one of your friends," Dan answered doggedly.

"And what explanation am I to give him, please?" she asked politely.

"I won't have you giving him any explanation."

"My dear Dan," she rejoined, "when you speak in that way, you show an utter want of knowledge of my character. If I will not allow you to insult me, and bully me, and bluster at me, it is not likely that I will allow you to

insult my friends. If Sir George Galbraith's visits are to stop, I shall tell him the reason exactly. He at least is a gentleman."

"That is as much as to say that I am not," Dan blustered.

"You certainly are not behaving like one now," Beth coolly rejoined. "But there! You have my ultimatum. I am not going to waste any more time in vulgar scenes with you."

"Ultimatum, indeed!" he jeered. "Well, you *are*, you know! You'll write and explain to him, will you, that your husband's jealous of him? That shows the terms you are on!"

"It is jealousy then, is it?" said Beth. "Thank you. Now I understand you."

Dan's evil mood took another turn. His anger changed to self-pity. "Oh dear! oh dear! what am I to do with you?" he exclaimed. "And after all I've done for you—to treat me like this." He took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped away the tears which any mention of his own goodness and the treatment he received from others always brought to his eyes.

Beth watched him contemptuously, yet her heart smote her. He was a poor creature, but for that very reason, and because she was strong, surely she should be gentle with him.

"Look here, Dan," she said. "I have never knowingly done you any wrong in thought, or word, or deed; all you have said to me to-day has been ridiculously wrong-headed; but never mind. Stop crying, do, and don't let us have any more idiotic jealousy. Why, it was Lady Galbraith who sent me the flowers and fruit, with a kind message of apology because she has not been able to call. Why should not she be jealous?"

"Oh, she's a fool!" Dan rejoined, recovering himself. "She leads him the life of a dog with her fears and fancies, and she won't take any part in his philanthropic work, though he wishes it. She's a pretty pill!"

The servant came in at this moment to lay the table for lunch, and Dan went to the looking-glass with the inconsequence of a child, and forgot his grievance in the contemplation of his own beloved image and in abusing Lady Galbraith. Abusing somebody was mental relaxation of the most

agreeable kind to him. Feeling that he had gone too far, he was gracious to Beth during lunch, and just before he went out he kissed her, and said, "We won't mention that fellow again, Beth. I don't believe you'd do anything dishonourable."

"I should think not!" said Beth.

When he had gone, she returned to her secret chamber, the one little corner sacred to herself, to her purest, noblest thoughts, her highest aspirations; and as she looked round, it seemed as if ages had passed since she last entered it, full of happiness and hope. It was as if she had been innocent then, and was now corrupted. Her self-control did not give way, but she could do nothing, and just sat there, wan with horror; and as she sat, every now and then she shivered from head to foot. She had known of course in a general way that such things did happen, that married women did give their husbands cause for jealousy; but to her mind they were a kind of married women who lived in another sphere where she was not likely to encounter them. She had never expected to be brought near such an enormity, let alone to have it brought home to herself in a horrible accusation; and the effect of it was a shock to her nervous system—one of those stunning blows which are scarcely felt at first, but are agonising in their after effects. When the reaction set in, Beth's disgust was so great it took a physical form, and ended by making her violently sick. It was days before she quite recovered, and in one sense of the word she was never the same again.

CHAPTER XLI

DAN said no more about Sir George Galbraith; and indeed he had no excuse, for Sir George did not come again. There were other men, however, who came to the house, Dan's own friends; and now that Beth's eyes were opened, she perceived that he watched them all suspiciously if they paid her any attention; and if she showed the slightest pleasure in the conversation of any of them, he would be sure to make some sneering remark about it afterwards. Dan was so radically vicious that the notion of any one being virtuous except under compulsion was incomprehensible to him.

"Your spirits seem to go up when Mr. Vanrickards is here," he observed one day.

"Thank you for warning me," Beth answered, descending to his level in spite of herself. "I will be properly depressed the next time he comes."

But although she could keep him in check so that he dared not say all that he had in his mind, she understood him; and the worst of it was that his coarse and brutal jealousy accustomed her to the suspicion, and made her contemplate the possibility of such a lapse as he had in his mind. She began to believe that he would not have tormented himself so if husbands did not ordinarily have good reason to be jealous of their wives. She concluded that such treachery of man to man as he dreaded must be normal. And then also she realised that it was thought possible for a married woman to fall in love, and even wondered at last if that would ever be her own case. Dan had, in fact, destroyed his own best safeguard. If a man would keep his wife from evil, he should not teach her to suspect herself—neither should he familiarise her with ideas of vice. Since their marriage Dan's whole conversation, and the depravity of his tastes and habits, had tended towards the brutalisation of Beth. Married life for her was one long initiation into the ways of the vicious.

Dr. Maclure's sordid jealousy made him the laughing-stock of the place, though he never suspected it. His conceit was too great to let him suppose that any sentiment of his could provoke ridicule. It became matter for

common gossip, however, and from that time forward gentlemen ceased to visit the house. Men of a certain kind came still, men who were bound to Dan by kindred tastes, but not such as he cared to introduce to Beth. These boon companions generally came in the evening, and were entertained in the dining-room, where they spent the night together, smoking, drinking, and talking after the manner of their kind. Beth could not use her secret chamber after dark for fear of the light being seen, so she stayed in the drawing-room alone till she went to bed. She found those evenings interminable, and the nights more trying still. She could not read or write because of the noise in the dining-room, and had to fall back on her sewing for occupation; but sewing left her mind open to any obsession, and only too often, with the gross laughter from the next room, scraps of the lewd topics her husband delighted in came to her recollection. When Dan discoursed about such things he was at the high-water mark of pleasure, his countenance glowed, and enjoyment of the subject was expressed in all his person. Beth's better nature revolted, but alas! she had become so familiar with such subjects by this time that, although she loathed them, she could not banish them. Life from her husband's point of view was a torment to her, yet under the pressure of his immediate influence it was forced upon her attention more and more—from his point of view.

When she went to bed on his festive nights she suffered from the dread of being disturbed. If her husband were called out at night professionally, it was a pleasure to her to lie awake so that she might be ready to rise the moment he returned, and get him anything he wanted. On those occasions she always had a tray ready for him, with soup to be heated, or coffee to be made over a spirit-lamp, and any little dainty she thought would refresh him. She was fully in sympathy with him in his work, and would have spared herself no fatigue to make it easier for him, but she despised him for his vices, and refused to sacrifice herself in order to make them pleasanter for him. When he stayed up smoking and drinking half the night she resented the loss of sleep entailed upon her, which meant less energy for her own work the next day. The dread of being disturbed made her restless, and the futility of it under the circumstances exasperated her. She suffered, too, more than can be mentioned, from the smell of alcohol and tobacco, of which he reeked, and from which he took no trouble to purify himself. Often and often, when she had tossed herself into a fever on these dreadful

nights, she craved for long hours, with infinite yearning, to be safe from disturbance, in purity and peace; and thought how happily, how serenely she would have slept until the morning, and how strong and fresh she would have arisen for another day's work had she been left alone. Only once, however, did she complain. Dan was going out in a particularly cheerful mood that night.

"Shall you be late?" she asked.

"Yes, probably. Why?"

"I was thinking, if you wouldn't mind, I would have a bed made up for you in the spare room. *I* only sleep in snatches when you are out and I am expecting you. Every sound rouses me. I think it is the door opening. And then when you do come it disturbs me, and I do not sleep again. If you don't mind I should prefer to be alone—on your late nights—your late festive nights."

Dr. Maclure stood looking gloomily into the fireplace.

"Have I annoyed you, Dan?" Beth asked at last.

He walked to the door, stood a moment with his back to her, then turned and looked at her. "Annoyed is not the word," he said. "You have wounded me deeply."

He opened the door as he spoke, and went out. When he had gone Beth sat and suffered. She could not bear to hurt him, she was not yet sufficiently brutalised for that; so she said no more on the subject, but patiently endured the long lonely night watches, and the after companionship which had in it all that is most trying and offensive to a refined and delicate woman.

After that first display of jealousy Beth discovered that her husband pried upon her continually. He was very high and mighty on the subject of women spying upon men, but there seemed no meanness he would not compass in order to spy upon a woman. He had duplicate keys to her drawers and boxes, and rummaged through all her possessions when she

went out. One day she came upon him standing before her wardrobe, feeling in the pockets of her dresses, and on another occasion she discovered him unawares in her bedroom, picking little scraps of paper out of the slop-pail and piecing them together to see what she had been writing. To Beth, accustomed to the simple, honourable principles of her parents, and to the confidence with which her mother had left her letters lying about, because she knew that not one of her children would dream of looking at them, Dan's turpitude was revolting. On those occasions when she caught him, he did not hear her enter the room, and she made her escape without disturbing him, and stole up to her secret chamber, and sat there, suffering from one of those attacks of nausea and shivering which came upon her in moments of deep disgust.

After that she had an attack of illness which kept her in bed for a week; but even then, feverish and suffering as she was, and yearning for the coolness and liberty of a room to herself, she dared not suggest such a thing for fear of a scene.

While she was still in bed Dan brought her some letters one morning. He made no remark when he gave them to her, but he had opened them as usual, and stood watching her curiously while she read them. The first she looked at was from her sister Bernadine, and had a black border round it; but she took it out of its envelope unsuspectingly, and read the words that were uppermost, "*Mamma died this morning.*" In a moment it flashed upon her that Dan had read the letter, and was waiting now to see the effect of the shock upon her. She immediately, but involuntarily, set herself to baffle his cruel curiosity. With a calm, illegible face she read the letter from beginning to end, folded it, and put it back in its envelope deliberately, then took up another which had also been opened.

But suppressed feeling finds vent in some form or other, and Beth showed temper now instead of showing grief. "I wish you would not open my letters," she said irritably. "All the freshness of them is gone for me when you open them without my permission and read them first. Besides, it is an insult to my correspondents. What they say to me is intended for me, and not for you."

"I have a perfect right to open your letters," he retorted.

"I should like to see the Scripture that gives you the right, and I should advise you to waive it if you do not wish me to assume the right to open yours. Your petty prying keeps me in a continual state of irritation. I shall be lowered to retaliate sooner or later. So stop it, please, once and for all."

"My petty prying, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Well, that is a nice thing to say to your husband! Why, even when I do open your letters, which is not often, I never read them without your permission."

"Indeed," said Beth, who had ceased to be stunned by falsehoods. "Then be good enough not even to open them in future."

Dan tried to express injury and indignation in a long, hard look; but Beth was reading another letter, and took no further notice of him.

He hung about a little watching her.

"Any news," he ventured at last, with an imperfect assumption of indifference.

"You know quite well what my news is," she answered bluntly, "and I am not going to discuss it with you. I wish you would leave me alone."

"Well, you're a nice pill!" said Dan, discomfited.

Beth looked up at him. "What are you doing with your hat on in my bedroom?" she asked sharply. "I thought I had made you understand that you must treat me with respect, even if I am your wife."

Dan uttered a coarse oath, and left the room, banging the door after him.

"Thank Heaven—at last!" Beth ejaculated. She had been too anxious to get rid of him to scruple about the means, but when he had gone a reaction set in, and she lay back on her pillows, flushed, excited, furious with him, disgusted with herself. She felt she was falling away from all her ideals. "As the husband is the wife is"—the words flashed through her mind, but she would not believe it inevitable. But even if she should degenerate, her own nature was too large, too strong, too generous to cast the blame on any one but herself. "No!" she exclaimed. "We are what we allow ourselves to be."

Swift following upon that thought came the recollection of a bad fall she had had when she was a little child in Ireland, and the way her mother had picked her up, and cuddled her, and comforted her. Beth burst into a paroxysm of tears. She had understood her mother better than her mother had understood her, had felt for her privations, had admired and imitated her patient endurance; and now to think that it was too late, to think that she had gone, and it would never be in Beth's power to brighten her life or lessen the hardship of it! That was all she thought of. Every week since her marriage she had sent her mother a long, cheerful, amusing letter, full of pleasant details—an exercise in that form of composition; but with never a hint of her troubles; and Mrs. Caldwell died under the happy delusion that it was well with Beth. She never suspected that she had married Beth to a low-born man—not low-born in the sense of being a tradesman's son, for a tradesman's son may be an honest and upright gentleman, just as a peer's son may be a cheat and a snob; but low-born in that he came of parents who were capable of fraud and deceit in social relations, and had taught him no scheme of life in which honour played a conspicuous part. Beth had done her best for her mother, but there was no one now to remind her of this for her comfort, poor miserable girl. Her courageous toil had gone for nothing—her mother would never even know of it; and it seemed to her in that moment of deep disheartenment as if everything she tried was to be equally ineffectual.

Hours later, Minna the housemaid found Beth sitting up in bed, sobbing hopelessly; and got her tea, and stayed with her, making her put some restraint upon herself by the mere fact of her presence; and presently Beth, in her human way, began to talk about her mother to the girl, which relieved her. Mrs. Caldwell had only been ill a few days, and not seriously, as it was supposed; the end had come quite suddenly, so that Beth had never been warned.

Dan did not come in till next morning, which was a great relief to her. She meant to speak about the news to him when he appeared, but somehow, the moment she saw him, her heart hardened, and she could not bring herself to utter a word on the subject. The position was awkward for him; but he got out of it adroitly by pretending he had seen an announcement of the death in the paper.

"I suppose I ought to go to the funeral," he said. "There is doubtless a will."

"Doubtless," said Beth, "but you will not benefit by it, if that is what you are thinking of. Mamma considered that I was provided for, and therefore she left the little she had to Bernadine. She told me herself, because she wanted me to understand her reason for making such a difference between us; and I think she was quite right. She may have left me two or three hundred pounds, but it will not be more than that."

"But even that will be something towards the bills," said Dan, his countenance, which had dropped considerably, clearing again.

Beth looked at him with a set countenance, but said no more. She had begun to observe that the bills only became pressing when her allowance was due.

CHAPTER XLII

SOME one in Slane gave Sir George Galbraith a hint of Dan's coarse jealousy, and he had judged it better for Beth that he should not call again; but his interest in her and his desire to help her increased if anything. He had read her manuscript carefully himself, and obtained Ideala's opinion of it also; but Beth had not done her best by any means in the one she had given him. She had written it for the purpose, for one thing, which was fatal, for her style had stiffened with anxiety to do her best, and her ideas, instead of flowing spontaneously, had been forced and formal, as her manner was when she was shy. It is one thing to have a fine theory of art and high principles (and an excellent thing, too), but it is quite another to put them into effect, especially when you're in a hurry to arrive. Hurry misplaced is hindrance. If Beth had given Sir George some one of the little things which she had written in sheer exuberance of thought and feeling, without hampering hopes of doing anything with them, he would have been very differently impressed; but, even as it was, what she had given him was as full of promise as it was full of faults, and he was convinced that he had not been mistaken in her, especially when he found that Ideala thought even better of her prospects than he did. Ideala, who was an impulsive and generous woman, wrote warmly on the subject, and Sir George sent her letter to Beth with a few lines of kindly expressed encouragement from himself. He returned her manuscript; but when Beth saw it again, she was greatly dissatisfied. The faults her friends had pointed out to her she plainly perceived, and more also; but she could not see the merits. Praise only made her the more fastidious about her work; but in that way it helped her.

Sir George's kindness did not stop at criticism however. He was cut off from her himself, and could expect no help from his wife, whose nervous system had suffered so much from the shock of unhappy circumstances in her youth that she could not now bear even to hear of, let alone to be brought in contact with, any form of sorrow or suffering; but there were other ladies—Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, for instance. Sir George had known her all her life, and went specially to ask her as a favour to countenance Beth.

"I want you to be kind to Mrs. Maclure, Angelica," he said. "She's far too good for that plausible bouncer of a barber's block she's married."

"Then why did she marry him?" Angelica interrupted, in her vivacious way.

"Pitchforked into it at the suggestion of her friends in her infancy, I should say, reasoning by induction," he answered. "That's generally the explanation in these cases. But, at any rate, she's not going to be happy with him. And she's a charming little creature, very sweet and docile naturally, and with unusual ability, or I'm much mistaken, and plenty of spirit, too, when she's roused, I should anticipate. But at present, in her childish ignorance, she's yielding where she should resist, and she'll be brutalised if no one comes to the rescue. I don't trust that man Maclure. A man who speaks flippantly of things that should be respected is not a man who will be scrupulous when his own interests are concerned; and such a man has it in his power to make the life of a girl a hell upon earth in ways which she will not complain of, if she has no knowledge to use in self-defence; and girls seldom have."

"As I have learnt, alas! from bitter experience in my work amongst the victims of holy matrimony," Angelica interposed bitterly. "Oh, how sickening it all is! Sometimes I envy Evadne in that she is able to refuse to know."

Sir George was silent for a little, then he said, "This is likely to be a more than usually pathetic case, because of the girl's unusual character and promise, and also because her brain is too delicately poised to stand the kind of shocks and jars that threaten her. You will take pity on her, Angelica?"

Mrs. Kilroy shrugged her shoulders. "How can I countenance a woman who acquiesces in such a position as her husband holds, and actually lives on his degrading work?"

"I don't believe she knows anything about it," he rejoined.

"If I were sure of that," said Angelica, meditating.

"It is easy enough to make sure," he suggested.

Mrs. Carne, wife of the leading medical man in Slane, conceived it to be her duty to patronise Beth to the extent of an occasional formal call, as she was the wife of a junior practitioner; and Beth duly returned these calls, because she was determined not to make enemies for Dan by showing any resentment for the slights she had suffered in Slane.

Feeling depressed indoors one dreary afternoon, she set off, alone as usual, to pay one of these visits. She rather hoped perhaps to find some sort of satisfaction by way of reward for the brave discharge of an uncongenial duty.

On the way into town, Dan passed her in his dogcart with a casual nod, bespattering her with mud. "You'll have your carriage soon, please God! and never have to walk. I hate to see a delicate woman on foot in the mud." Beth remembered the words so well, and Dan's pious intonation as he uttered them, and she laughed. She had a special little laugh for exhibitions of this kind of divergence between Dan's precepts and his practices. But even as she laughed her face contracted as with a sudden spasm of pain, and she ejaculated—"But I shall succeed!"

Mrs. Carne was at home, and Beth was shown into the drawing-room, where she found several other lady visitors—Mrs. Kilroy, Mrs. Orton Beg, Lady Fulda Guthrie, and Ideala. The last two she had not met before.

"Where will you sit?" said Mrs. Carne, who was an effusive little person. "What a day! You were brave to come out, though perhaps it will do you good. My husband says go out in all weathers and battle with the breeze; there's nothing like exercise."

"Battling with the breeze and an umbrella on a wet day is not exercise, it is exasperation," Beth answered, and at the sound of her peculiarly low, clear, cultivated voice, the conversation stopped suddenly, and every one in the room looked at her. She seemed unaware of the attention. In fact, she ignored every one present except her hostess. This was her habitual manner now, assumed to save herself from slights. When she entered, Mrs. Kilroy had half risen from her seat, and endeavoured to attract her attention; but Beth passed her by, deliberately chose a seat, and sat down. Her demeanour, so apparently cold and self-contained, was calculated to command respect, but it cost Beth a great deal to maintain it. She felt she was alone in an

unfriendly atmosphere—a poor little thing, shabbily dressed in home-made mourning, and despised for she knew not what offence; and she suffered horribly. She had grown very fragile by this time, and looked almost childishly young. Her eyes were unnaturally large and wistful, her mouth drooped at the corners, and the whole expression of her face was pathetic. Mrs. Kilroy looked at her seriously, and thought to herself, "That girl is suffering."

Mrs. Carne offered Beth tea, but she refused it. She could not accept such inhuman hospitality. She had come to do her duty, not to force a welcome. She glanced at the clock. Five minutes more, and she might go. The conversation buzzed on about her. She was sitting next to a strange lady, a serene and dignified woman, dressed in black velvet and sable. Beth glanced at her the first time with indifference, but looked again with interest. Mrs. Carne bustled up and spoke to the lady in her effusive way.

"You are better, I hope," she said, as she handed her some tea. "It really is *sweet* to see you looking so *much* yourself again."

"Oh yes, I am quite well again now, thanks to your good husband," the lady answered. "But he has given me so many tonics and things lately, I always seem to be shaking bottles. I am quite set in that attitude. Everything I touch I shake. I found myself shaking my watch instead of winding it up the other day."

"Ah, then, you are quite yourself again, I see," Mrs. Carne said archly. "But why didn't you come to the Wilmingtons' last night?"

"Oh, you know I never go to those functions if I can help it," the lady answered, her gentle rather drawling voice lending a charm to the words quite apart from their meaning. "I cannot stand the kind of conversation to which one is reduced on such occasions—if you can call that conversation which is but the cackle of geese, each repeating the utterances of the other. When the Lord loves a woman, I think He takes her out of society by some means or other, and keeps her out of it for her good."

Beth knew that if she had said such a thing, Mrs. Carne would have received it with a stony stare, but now she simpered. "That is so like you!" she gushed. "But the Wilmingtons were *dreadfully* disappointed."

"They will get over it," the lady answered, glancing round indifferently.

"How are you getting on with your new book, Ideala?" Mrs. Kilroy asked her across the room. Beth instantly froze to attention. This was her friend, then, Sir George's Ideala.

"I have not got into the swing of it yet," Ideala answered. "It is all dot-and-go-one—a uniform ruggedness which is not true either to life or mind. Our ways in the world are stony enough at times, but they are not all stones. There are smooth stretches along which we gallop, and sheltered grassy spaces where we rest."

"What *I* love about *your* work is the *style*," said Mrs. Carne.

"Do you?" Ideala rejoined, somewhat dryly as it seemed to Beth. "But what is style?"

"I am so bad at definitions," said Mrs. Carne, "but I *feel* it, you know."

"As if it were a thing in itself to be adopted or acquired?" Ideala asked.

"Yes, quite so," said Mrs. Carne in a tone of relief—as of one who has acquitted herself better than she expected and is satisfied.

"I am sure it is not," Beth burst out, forgetting herself and her slights all at once in the interest of the subject. "I have been reading the lives of authors lately, together with their works, and it seems to me, in the case of all who had genius, that their style was the outcome of their characters—their principles—the view they took of the subject—that is, if they were natural and powerful writers. Only the second-rate people have a manufactured style, and force their subject to adapt itself to it—the kind of people whose style is mentioned quite apart from their matter. In the great ones the style is the outcome of the subject. Each emotion has its own form of expression. The language of passion is intense; of pleasure jocund, easy, abundant; of content calm, of happiness strong but restrained; of love warm, tender. The language of artificial feeling is artificial; there is no mistaking insincerity when a writer is not sincere, and the language of true feeling is equally unmistakable. It is simple, easy, unaffected; and it is the same in all ages. The artificial styles of yesterday go out of fashion with the dresses their authors wear, and become an offence to our taste; but Shakespeare's periods

appeal to every generation. He wrote from the heart as well as the head, and triumphed in the grace of nature."

Beth stopped short and coloured crimson, finding that every one in the room was listening to her.

Mrs. Carne stood while she was speaking with a cup of tea in her hand, and tried to catch Ideala's eye in order to signal with raised eyebrows her contempt for Beth's opinion; but Ideala was listening with approval.

"That is exactly what I think," she exclaimed, "only I could not have expressed it so. You write yourself doubtless?"

But Beth had become confused, and only gazed at her by way of reply. She felt she had done the wrong thing to speak out like that in such surroundings, and she regretted every word, and burned with vexation. Then suddenly in herself, as before, something seemed to say, or rather to flash forth the exclamation for her comfort: "I shall succeed! I shall succeed!"

She drew herself up and looked round on them all with a look that transformed her. Such an assurance in herself was not to be doubted. The day would come when they would be glad enough to see her, when she too would be heard with respect and quoted. She, the least considered, she in her shabby gloves, neglected, slighted, despised, alone, she would arrive, would have done something—more than them all!

She arose with her eyes fixed on futurity, and was half-way home before she came to and found herself tearing along through the rain with her head forward and her hands clasped across her chest, urged to energy by the cry in her heart, "I shall succeed! I shall succeed!"

"Who was that?" said Ideala in a startled voice when Beth jumped up and left the room.

"The wife of that Dr. Maclure, you know," Mrs. Carne replied. "Her manners seem somewhat abrupt. She forgot to say good-bye. I did not know she was by way of being clever."

"By way of being clever!" Ideala ejaculated. "I wish I had known who she was. Why didn't you introduce her? By way of being clever, indeed! Why, she is just what I have missed being with all my cleverness, or I am much mistaken, and that is a genius. And what is more important to us, I suspect she is the genius for whom we are waiting. Why, *why* didn't you name her? It is the old story. She came unto her own, and her own received her not."

"I—I never dreamt you would care to know her—her position, you know," Mrs. Carne stammered disconcerted.

"Her position! What is her position to me?" Ideala exclaimed. "It is the girl herself I think of. Besides, I daresay she doesn't even know what her position is!"

"That is what Sir George says, and he knows her well," Mrs. Kilroy interposed.

"But I never suspected that she was in the least interesting," Mrs. Carne protested; "and I'm sure she doesn't look attractive—such an expression!"

"You are to blame for that, all of you," Ideala rejoined, with something in her gentle way of speaking which had the effect of strength and vehemence. "I know how it has been. She is sensitive, and you have made her feel there is something wrong. You have treated her so that she expects no kindness from you, and so, from diffidence and restraint of tenderness, her face has set hard into coldness. But that is only a mask. How you treat each other, you women! And you are as wanting in discernment, too, as you are in kindness and sympathy. She has had to put on that mask of coldness to hide what you make her suffer, and it will take long loving to melt it now, and make her look human again. You misinterpret her silence too. How can you expect her to be interesting if you take no interest in her? But look at her eyes? Any one with the least kindly discernment might have seen the love and living interest there! If she had been in a good position, everybody would have found her as singularly interesting as she, without caring a rap for our position, has found us. She sees through us all with those eyes of hers—ay, and beyond! She sees what we have never seen, and never shall in this incarnation; hers are the vision and the dream that are denied to us. Were she to come forward as a leader to-morrow, I would follow her humbly and do as she told me.... I read some of her writings the other day,

but I thought they were the work of a mature woman. Had I known she was such a child I should have wondered!"

"Dear me! does she really write?" said Mrs. Carne. "Well, you surprise me! I should never have dreamt that she had anything in her!"

"You make me feel ashamed of myself, Ideala," said Mrs. Kilroy with contrition. "I ought to have known. But I could think of nothing, see nothing in her but that horrible business. I shall certainly do my best now, however, when we return from town, to cultivate her acquaintance, if she will let me."

"Let you!" Mrs. Carne ejaculated with her insinuating smile. "I should think she would be flattered."

"I am not so sure of that," said Ideala.

"Neither am I," said Mrs. Kilroy. "I only wish I were. But she ignored us all rather pointedly when she came in."

"To save herself from being ignored, I suppose," said Ideala bitterly. "The girl is self-respecting."

"I confess I liked her the first time I saw her," said Mrs. Orton Beg; "but afterwards, when I heard what her husband was, I felt forced to ignore her. How can you countenance her if she approves?"

"It was a mistake to take her approval for granted," said Mrs. Kilroy. "Ideala would have inquired."

"Yes," said Ideala. "I take nothing for granted. If I hear anything nice, I believe it; but if I hear anything objectionable about any one, I either inquire about it or refuse to believe it point-blank. And in a case like this, I should be doubly particular, for, in one of its many moods, genius is a young child that gazes hard and sees nothing."

"And you really think the little woman is a genius, and will be a great writer some day?" Mrs. Carne asked with exaggerated deference to Ideala's opinion.

"I don't know about being a writer," said Ideala. "Genius is versatile. There are many ways in which she might succeed. It depends on herself—on the way she is finally impelled to choose. But great she will be in something—if she lives."

"Let us hope that she will be a great benefactor of her own sex then, and do great good," said the gentle Lady Fulda.

"Amen!" Ideala ejaculated fervently.

Mrs. Carne tried to put off her agreeable society smile and put on her Sunday-in-church expression, but was not in time. When we only assume an attitude once a week, be it mental or physical, we do not fall into it readily on a sudden.

"Not that working for women as a career is what I should wish her for her own comfort," said Ideala after a pause. "Women who work for women in the present period of our progress—I mean the women who bring about the changes which benefit their sex—must resign themselves to martyrdom. Only the martyr spirit will carry them through. Men will often help and respect them, but other women, especially the workers with methods of their own, will make their lives a burden to them with pin-pricks of criticism, and every petty hindrance they can put in their way. There is little union between women workers, and less tolerance. Each leader thinks her own idea the only good one, and disapproves of every other. They seldom see that many must be working in many ways to complete the work. And as to the bulk of women, those who will benefit by our devotion, they bespatter us with mud, stone us, slander us, calumniate us; and even in the very act of taking advantage of the changes we have brought about, ignore us, slight us, push us under, and step up on our bodies to secure the benefits which our endeavours have made it possible for them to enjoy. I know! I have worked for women these many years, and could I show you my heart, you would find it covered with scars—the scars of the wounds with which they reward me."

When Beth got in that day, she found Dan standing in the hall, examining a letter addressed to herself. She took it out of his hand without ceremony, and tore it open. "Hurrah!" she exclaimed, "it's accepted."

"What's accepted?" he asked.

"An article I sent to *Sunshine*. And the editor says he would like to see some more of my work," Beth rejoined, almost dancing with delight.

"I don't suppose that will put much in your pocket," Dan observed. "He wouldn't praise you if he meant to pay you."

"But he has sent me a cheque for thirty shillings," said Beth.

Dan's expression changed. "Then you may be sure it's worth double," he said. "But you might get some nice notepaper for me out of it, and have it stamped with my crest, like a good girl. It's necessary in my profession, and I've finished the last you got."

Beth laughed as she had laughed—that same peculiar mirthless little laugh—when he drove past her and splashed her with mud on the road. "It never seems to occur to you that I may have some little wants of my own, Dan," she said; "you are a perfect horseleech's daughter."

Dan gazed at her blankly. He never seemed to understand any such allusion. "You've got a grievance, have you?" he snarled. "Do *I* ever prevent you getting anything you like?"

Beth shrugged her shoulders by way of answer, and went into the dining-room. He followed her, bent on making a scene; and she, perceiving this, set herself down on a chair and folded her hands.

He took a turn up and down the room. "And this is my fine marriage into a county family, which was to have done so much for me!" he ejaculated at last. "But I might have known better, considering the hole I took you out of. You've soon forgotten all I've done for you."

Beth smiled enigmatically.

"Oh yes! it's a laughing matter," he proceeded. "I've just ruined myself by marrying you; that's what I've done. Not a soul in the place will come to the

house because of you. Nobody could ever stand you but me; and what have I got by it? Not a halfpenny! It was just a swindle, the whole business."

"Be careful!" Beth flashed forth. "If you make such assertions you must prove them. The day is past when a man might insult his wife with impunity. I have already told you I won't stand it. It would neither be good for you nor for me if I did."

"It *was* a swindle," he bawled. "Where are the seven or eight hundred a year I married you for?"

Beth looked at him a moment, then burst out laughing. "Dear Dan," she said, offering him the cheque, "you shall have the thirty shillings all to yourself. You deserve it for telling the truth for once. I consider I have had the best of the bargain, though. Thirty shillings is cheap for such valuable information."

"Oh, damn you!" said Dan, leaving the room and banging the door after him.

Beth signed the cheque and left it lying on his writing-table. She never saw it again.

Then she went up to her secret chamber, and spent long hours—sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, as if the marks of her married life on her character could be washed away with tears.

CHAPTER XLIII

BETH had made fifty pounds in eighteen months by her beautiful embroideries; but after her mother's death she did no more for sale, neither did she spend the money. She had suffered so many humiliations for want of money, it made her feel safer to have some by her. She gave herself up to study at this time, and wrote a great deal. It was winter now, and she was often driven down from her secret chamber to the dining-room by the cold. When Dan came in and found her at work, he would sniff contemptuously or facetiously, according to his mood at the moment. "Wasting paper as usual, eh? Better be sewing on my buttons," was his invariable remark. Not that his buttons were ever off, or that Beth ever sewed them on either. She was too good an organiser to do other people's work for them.

She made no reply to Dan's sallies. With him her mind was in a state of solitary confinement always—not a good thing for her health, but better on the whole than any attempt to discuss her ideas with him, or to talk to him about anything, indeed, but himself.

Beth fared well that winter, however—fared well in herself, that is. She had some glorious moments, revelling in the joy of creation. There is a mental analogy to all physical processes. Fertility in life comes of love; and in art the fervour of production is also accompanied by a rapture and preceded by a passion of its own. When Beth was in a good mood for work, it was like love—love without the lover; she felt all the joy of love, with none of the disturbance. When the idea of publication was first presented to her, it robbed her of this joy. As she wrote, she thought more of what she might gain than of what she was doing. Visions of success possessed her, and the ideas upon which her attention should have been fully concentrated were thinned by anticipations; and during that period her work was indifferent. Later, however, she worked again for work's sake, loving it; and then she advanced. She saw little of Dan in those days, and thought less; but when they met, she was, as usual, gentle and tolerant, patiently enduring his "cheeriness," and entering into no quarrel unless he forced one upon her.

One bright frosty morning he came in rather earlier than usual and found her writing in the dining-room.

"Well, I've had a rattling good ride this morning," he began, plunging into his favourite topic as usual without any pretence of interest in her or in her pursuits. "Nothing like riding for improving the circulation! I wish to goodness I could keep another horse. It would add to my income in the long run. But I'm so cursedly handicapped by those bills. They keep me awake at night thinking of them."

Beth sucked the end of her pencil and looked out of the window, wondering inwardly why he never tried to pay them.

"I calculate that they come to just three hundred pounds," he proceeded, looking keenly at Beth as he spoke; but she remained unmoved. "Don't you think," he ventured, "it would be a good thing to expend that three hundred pounds your mother left you on the debts? I know I could make money if I once got my head above water."

"That three hundred brings me in fifteen pounds a year," said Beth. "It is well invested, and I promised my mother not to touch any of my little capital. There is the interest, however, it arrived this morning. You can have *that* if you like."

"Well, that would be a crumb of comfort, at all events," he said, pouncing on the lawyer's letter, which was lying beside Beth on the table, and gloating on the cheque. "But don't you think, now that you have the interest, it would be a good time to sell and get the principal? Of course your mother was right and wise to advise you not to part with your capital; but this wouldn't be parting with it, because I should pay you back in time, you know. It would only be a loan, and I'd give you the interest on it regularly too; just think what a relief it would be to me to get those bills paid!" He ran his fingers up through his hair as he spoke, and gazed at himself in the glass tragically.

"Any news?" said Beth, after a little pause.

Dan, baffled, turned and began to walk up and down the room. "No, there never is any news in this confounded hole," he answered, venting his

irritation on the place. "Oh, by the way, though, I am forgetting. I was at the Pettericks' to-day. That girl Bertha is not getting on as I should like."

"The hysterical one?" said Beth.

"Ye—yes," he answered, hesitating. "The one who threatened to be hysterical at one time. But that's all gone off. Now she's just weak, and she should have electricity; but I can't be going there every day to apply it—takes too much time: so I suggested to her people that she should come here for a while, as a paying patient, you know."

"And is she coming?" Beth said, rather in dismay.

"Yes, to-morrow," he replied. "I said you'd be delighted; but you must write and say so yourself, just for politeness' sake. It will be a good thing for you too, you know. You are too much alone, and she'll be a companion for you. She's not half a bad girl."

"Shall I be obliged to give her much of my time?" Beth asked lugubriously.

"Oh dear, no! She'll look after herself," Dr. Maclure cheerfully assured her. "I'll hire a piano for her. Must launch out a little on these occasions, you know. It's setting a sprat to catch a whale."

The piano arrived that afternoon. Beth wished Dan had let her choose it; but a piano of any kind was a delight. She had not had one since her marriage. Dan had said at first that a piano was a luxury which they must not think of when they could not afford the necessaries; and a luxury he had considered it ever since.

Bertha Petterick was not the kind of person that Beth would have chosen for a companion, and she dreaded her coming; but before Bertha had been in the house a week she had so enlivened it that Beth wondered she had ever objected to her. Bertha fawned upon Beth from the first, and was by way of looking up to her, and admiring her intellect. She was four or five years older than Beth, but gave herself no airs on that account. She was a dark girl, good looking in a common kind of way, with a masculine stride in her walk, a deep mannish voice; and not at all intellectual, but very practical: what some people consider a fine girl and others a coarse one, according to their taste. She was a good shot, could make a dress, cook a dinner, ride to

hounds, and play any game; and she was what is called good-natured, that is to say, ready to do for any one anything that could be done on the spur of the moment. Things she might promise to do, or things requiring thought, she did not trouble herself about; but she would finish a pretty piece of work for Beth, gather flowers or buy them and do the table decorations, and keep things tidy in the sitting-rooms. She played and sang well, and was ready to do both at any time if she were asked, which was a joy to Beth; and her bright chatter kept Dan in a good humour, which was a relief. She had plenty of money, and spent it lavishly. Every time she went out she bought Beth something, a piece of music she had mentioned, a book she longed for, materials for work, besides flowers and fruit and sweets in unlimited quantities. Beth remonstrated, but Bertha begged Beth not to deprive her of the one pleasure she had in life just then, the pleasure of pleasing Beth, and of acknowledging what she never could repay but dearly appreciated—Beth's sisterly sympathy, her consistent kindness! Such sayings were tinged with sadness, which made Beth suspect that Bertha had some secret sorrow; but if so, it was most carefully concealed, for there was not a trace of it in her habitual manner. She showed no physical delicacy either; but then, as she said herself, she was picking up in such a wonderful way under the treatment, she really began to feel that there was very little the matter with her.

Dan managed to be at home a great deal to look after his patient, and was most attentive to her. He hired a brougham three times a week to do his rounds in, that she might accompany him, and so get the air without fatigue or risk of cold; and he would have her to sit with him in the dining-room when he was smoking, and rolled cigarettes for her; or would spend the evening with her in the drawing-room, listening to her playing and singing, or playing bezique with her, and seemingly well content, although in private he sometimes said to Beth it was all a beastly bore, but he must go through with it as a duty since he had undertaken it, it being his way to do a thing thoroughly if he did it at all.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might," he added piously. "If a thing's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well, I always think."

That was his formula for the time being, but Beth judged him by his demeanour, which was gay, and not by his professions, and did not pity him. She was in excellent spirits herself, for her writing was going well; and it varied the monotony pleasantly for her to have Bertha to talk to, and walk, play, or sew with, after her work. Bertha's demonstrations of affection, too, were grateful to Beth, who had had so little love either bestowed upon her or required of her.

Bertha had been in the house three months, when one day her mother called, and found Beth alone, Dan and Bertha having gone for a drive together. Mrs. Petterick had just returned from abroad, where the whole family had been living most of the time that Bertha had been with the Maclures.

"Really," Mrs. Petterick said, "I don't know how to thank you for your kindness to my girl. She's quite a different person I can see by her letters, thanks to the good doctor. Before he took her in hand she was quite hysterical, and had to lie down two or three times a day, because she said she had no strength for anything. But really three months is an abuse of hospitality; and I think she should be coming home now."

"Oh no, do let her stay a little longer if you can spare her," Beth pleaded. "It is so nice to have her here."

"Well, it is good of you to say so," said Mrs. Petterick, "but it must be a great expense to you. We weren't well off ourselves at one time. Mr. Petterick's a self-made man, and I know that every additional mouth makes a difference. But, however, you being proud, I won't offend you by offering money in exchange for kindness, which can't be repaid, but shan't be forgotten."

When Mrs. Petterick had gone, Beth sat awhile staring into the fire. She was somewhat stunned, for Dan had assured her that Bertha was a paying patient, and that, it seemed, had been a gratuitous lie. She was roused at last by Minna, the parlour-maid. "Please, ma'am, a lady wishes to see you," Minna said.

"Show her in," Beth answered listlessly. But the next moment she stiffened with astonishment, for the lady who entered was Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe.

"I am afraid I have taken you by surprise," Mrs. Kilroy began rather nervously.

"Will you sit down?" Beth said coldly. "You cannot wonder if I am surprised to see you. This is the first visit you have paid me, although we met directly after I came to Slane some years ago. You were kind and cordial on that occasion, but the next time I saw you—at that ball—you slighted me; and after that you shunned me until I met you the other day at Mrs. Carne's, and then you seemed inclined to take me up again. I do not understand such caprices, and I do not like them."

"It was not caprice," Mrs. Kilroy assured her. "I liked you very much the first time we met, and I should have called immediately; but when I asked for your address, I was told that your husband was in charge of the Lock Hospital——"

"Yes, the hospital for the diseases of women," Beth said. "But what difference does that make?"

"It made me jump to the hasty conclusion that you approved of the degradation of your own sex," said Angelica.

"The degradation of my own sex!" said Beth bewildered. "What is a Lock Hospital?"

Angelica explained the whole horrible apparatus for the special degradation of women.

"Now perhaps you will understand what we felt about you," Angelica concluded—"we who are loyal to our own sex, and have a sense of justice—when we thought you were content to live on the means your husband makes in such a shameful way."

An extraordinary look of relief came into Beth's face. "Then it was not my fault—not because I was horrid," she exclaimed. All the slights were as nothing the moment she gathered that she had not deserved them. Angelica stared at her. But it was not in Beth's nature to think long about herself; only the full force of what she had just heard as it concerned others did not come to her for some seconds. When it did, she was overcome. "How could you suppose that I knew?" she gasped at last. "This is the first hint I have had of

the loathsome business. My husband talks to me about—many things that he had better not have mentioned—but about this he has never said a word."

"Then he must have suspected that you would disapprove," said Mrs. Kilroy.

"Disapprove!" Beth ejaculated. "The whole thing makes me sick. I ought to have been told before I married him. I never would have spoken to a man in such a position had I known. You did well to avoid me."

"No," said Angelica. "I did ill, and I feel humiliated for my own want of penetration—for my hasty conclusion. It was Sir George Galbraith who first made me suspect that you knew nothing about it, and I would have come at once to make sure, but we were just leaving the neighbourhood, and we only returned yesterday. Ideala did not believe that you knew it either, and she rated us all for the way we had treated you. She has been in America ever since she met you at Mrs. Carne's, but she is coming home next week, and has written to entreat me to ask you to meet her. Will you? Will you come and stay with me? Do! and talk this over with us. I can see that it has been a great shock to you."

"I cannot answer you now," said Beth, "I must think—I must think what I had better do."

"Yes, think it over," said Angelica, "then write and tell me when you will come. Only do come. You will find yourself among friends—congenial friends, I venture to prophesy."

When Mrs. Kilroy had gone, Beth went to her bedroom, and waited there for Dan. It was the only place where she could be sure of seeing him alone. He dressed for dinner now that Miss Petterick was with them.

Dan came in whistling hilariously. He stopped short when he saw Beth's face.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Mrs. Kilroy has been here."

"I hope you thanked her for nothing!"

"I'm afraid I forgot to thank her at all," Beth said, "although she has put me under an obligation to her."

"May I ask what the obligation is?"

"She told me frankly why no decent woman will associate with us. It is not my fault after all, it seems, but yours—you and your Lock Hospital. It is against the Anglo-Saxon spirit to admit panders into society."

"Oh, she told you about that, did she, the meddling busybody!" he answered coolly. "I was afraid they would, some of them, damn them! and I knew you would go into hysterics. She didn't tell you the necessity for it, I suppose, nor the good it is doing; but I will; so just listen to me, then you'll see perhaps that I know more about it than these canting sentimentalists."

Beth, sitting in judgment on him, set her mouth and listened in silence until he stopped. In his own defence he gave her many revolting details couched in the coarsest language.

"But then, in the name of justice," she exclaimed, "what means do you take to protect those poor unfortunate women from disease? What do you do to the men who spread it? What becomes of diseased men?"

"Oh, they marry, I suppose. Anyhow, that is not my business. Doctors can't be expected to preach morals. Sanitation is our business."

"But aren't morals closely connected with sanitation?" Beth said. "And why, if sanitation is your business, do you take no radical measures with regard to this horrible disease? Why do you not have it reported, never mind who gets it, as scarlet fever, smallpox, and other diseases—all less disastrous to the general health of the community—are reported?"

Dan shrugged his shoulders. "It's a deuced awkward thing for a man to be suspected of disease. It's a stigma, and might spoil his prospects. Women are so cursedly prying nowadays. They've got wind of its being incurable, and many a one won't marry a man if a suspicion of it attaches to him."

"I see," said Beth. "The principles of the medical profession with regard to sanitation when women are in question seem to be peculiar. I wish to

Heaven I had known them sooner." She hid her face in her hands, and suddenly burst into tears.

Dan scowled. "Well, this is nice!" he exclaimed. "I have had a devilish hard day's work, and come in cheery, as usual, to do my best to make things pleasant for you, and this is the reception I get! You're a nice pill, indeed!" He went off muttering into his dressing-room and slammed the door.

When he appeared in the drawing-room, he found Beth and Bertha chatting together as usual, and as, during the rest of the evening, he could detect no difference in Beth's manner, he congratulated himself that she was going to accept the position as inevitable, and say no more about it. It was not Beth's way to return to a disagreeable subject once it had been discussed, unless she meant to do something in the matter, and Dan conceived that there was nothing to be done in this instance. He considered that he was not the sort of man it was safe for women to interfere with, and he guessed she knew it!

He was mistaken, however, when he supposed that she had let the subject drop, and was going to resign herself to an invidious position. She was merely letting it lapse until she understood it. It was all as new to her as it was horrifying, and she required time to study both sides of the question. Her own sense of justice was too acute to let her accept at once the accusation that so-called civilised men, who boast of their chivalrous protection of the "weaker sex," had imposed upon women a special public degradation, while the most abandoned and culpable of their own sex were not only allowed to go unpunished, but to spread vice and disease where they listed. The iniquitous injustice and cruelty of it all made her sick and sorry for men, and reluctant to believe it.

A few days after Mrs. Kilroy's visit, Mrs. Carne called on Beth. Mrs. Carne always followed the county people. To her they were a sacred set. Her faith in all they did was touching and sincere. The stupidest remark of the stupidest county lady impressed her more than the most brilliant wit of a professional man's wife. When she stayed at a country-house, whatever the tone of it, she felt like a shriven saint, so uplifted was she by reverence for

rank. On finding, therefore, that some of the most influential ladies in the county were diffidently anxious to win Beth into their set, rather than prepared to admit her with confident patronage, as Mrs. Carne would have expected, it was natural that she should revise her own opinion of Beth, and also seek to cultivate her acquaintance.

She called in the morning by way of being friendly; but Beth, who was hard at work at the time, did not feel grateful for the attention. Minna showed Mrs. Carne straight into the dining-room, where Beth usually worked now that Bertha was on the premises. Bertha happened to be out that morning, and Mrs. Carne surprised Beth sitting alone at a table covered with books and papers.

"And so the little woman is going to be a great one!" Mrs. Carne exclaimed playfully. "Well, I *was* surprised to hear it! I know I am not flattering to my own discernment when I say so; but there! I should never have supposed you were a genius. You are such a quiet little mouse, you know, you don't give yourself away much, if you will excuse the expression! I always say what I think."

"I hope you will not call me a genius again, Mrs. Carne," Beth said stiffly. "All exaggeration is distasteful to me."

"And to me, too, my dear child," Mrs. Carne hastened to assure her blandly. "But I always say what I think, you know."

Beth fixed her eyes on the clock absently.

When Dan came in to lunch that day, he seemed pleased to hear that Mrs. Carne had been.

"What had she to say for herself?" he asked.

"She said 'I always say what I think,'" Beth replied; "until it struck me that 'I always say what I think' is a person who only thinks disagreeable things."

"Well, *I* like her," said Dan; "and I always get on with her. If she's going to show up friendly at last, I hope you won't snub her. We can't afford to make enemies, according to your own account," he concluded significantly. "What do you think of her, Miss Petterick?" he added, by way of giving a

pleasanter turn to the conversation. He and his patient always addressed each other with much formality. Beth asked him once in private why he was so stiff with Bertha, and he explained that he thought it wiser, as a medical man, not to be at all familiar; formality helped to keep up his authority.

"I have had no opportunity of thinking anything about her," Bertha rejoined. "She has never spoken to me. I have heard her speak, though, and like her voice. It's so cooing. She makes me think of a dove."

"And I shouldn't be surprised to find," said Beth, with cruel insight, "that, like the dove, she conceals a villainous disposition and murderous proclivities by charms of manner and a winning voice. What are you going to do this afternoon, Bertha?"

Bertha glanced at Dan. "I am going to read 'The Moonstone' out in the garden the whole afternoon," she replied.

"Then you won't mind if I disappear till tea-time?" said Beth. "I want to do some work upstairs."

"No, I would rather be alone," Bertha answered frankly. "That book's entrancing."

"I shall go round on foot this afternoon, for exercise," Dan announced as he left the room.

Beth saw Bertha settled on a seat in the garden, and then retired to her secret chamber. She had not yet come to any conclusion with regard to Mrs. Kilroy's invitation, and she felt it was time she decided. She took her sewing, her accustomed aid to thought, and sat down on a high chair near the window. She always sat on a high chair, that she might not be enervated by lolling; that was one of her patient methods of self-discipline; and while she meditated, she did quantities of work for herself, making, mending, remodelling, that she might get all the wear possible out of her clothes, and not add a penny she could help to those terrible debts, the thought of which had weighed on her youth, and threatened to crush all the spirit out of her ever since her marriage. Dan had never considered her too young to be worried.

From where she sat she could see Bertha on a seat just below, with "The Moonstone" on her lap, but Bertha could not see her because of the curtain of creepers that covered the iron rail which formed a little balcony round the window. Besides, it was supposed that that was a blank window. It was the only one on that side of the house, too, and Bertha had settled herself in that secluded corner of the garden precisely because she thought she could not be overlooked.

Beth glanced at her from time to time mechanically, but without thinking of her. It struck her at last, however, that Bertha had never opened her book, which seemed odd after the special point she had made of being left alone to read it undisturbed. Then Beth noticed that she seemed to be on the look-out, as if she were expecting something or somebody; and presently Dan appeared, walking quickly and with a furtive air, as if he were afraid of being seen. Bertha flushed crimson and became all smiles as soon as she saw him. Beth's work dropped on her lap, she clasped her hands on it, her own face flushed, and her breath became laboured. Dan, after carefully satisfying himself that there was nobody about, sat down beside Bertha, put his arm round her waist, and kissed her. She giggled, and made a feeble feint of protesting. Then he took a jewel-case from his pocket, opened it, and held it out to her admiring gaze. It contained a handsome gold bracelet, which he presently clasped on her arm. She expressed her gratitude by lifting up her face to be kissed. Then he put his arm round her again, and she sat with her head on his shoulder, and they began to talk; but the conversation was interrupted by frequent kisses.

Beth had seen enough. She turned her back to the window, and sat quite still with her hands clasped before her. It was her first experience of that parasite, the girl who fastens herself on a married woman, accepts all that she can get from her in the way of hospitality and kindness, and treacherously repays her by taking her husband for a lover. Beth pitied Bertha, but with royal contempt. It all seemed so sordid and despicable. Jealous she was not. "Jealousy is a want of faith in one's self," she had said to Bertha's mother once, and now, in the face of this provocation, she was of the same mind. She had no words to express her scorn for a man who is false to his obligations, nor for the petty frauds and deceits which had made the position of those two tenable. As for Dan, he was beneath contempt; but—"I shall succeed!" The words sprang to her lips triumphantly. "Let him

wallow with his own kind in congenial mire as much as he likes. No wonder he suspects me! But I—I shall succeed!"

Meanwhile down in the garden Dan was gurgling to Bertha: "What should I do without you, darling? Life wasn't worth having till I knew you. I won't say a word against Beth. She has her good points, as you know, and I believe she means well; but she's spoilt my life, and my career too. I'm one that requires a lot of sympathy; but she never shows me any. She thinks of nobody but herself. Her own mother always said so. And after all I've done for her too! If only you knew! But of course I can't blow my own trumpet. They're all alike in that family, though. Her mother used to keep me playing cards till I was ruined. And Beth has no gratitude, and you can't trust her. She comes of a lying lot, and I'm of the same mind as my old father, who used to say he'd rather have a thief any day than a liar. You can watch a thief, but you can't watch a liar."

"Still, Dan," Bertha murmured, "I somehow think you ought to stick to her."

"So I would," said Dan. "No one can accuse me of not sticking to my duty. I'm an honourable man. It was she who cast me off. I'm nothing to her. And I should have been broken-hearted but for you, Bertha, I should indeed." Dan's fine eyes filled with tears, which Bertha tenderly wiped away.

"Of course it makes a great difference her having cast *you* off," Bertha conceded, after a little interlude.

"It makes *all* the difference," Dan rejoined. "She set me at liberty, and you are free too; so who have we to consider but ourselves? I admire a woman who has the pluck to be free!" he added enthusiastically.

"Then why don't you encourage Beth more to go her own way?" Bertha reasonably demanded. "She's always yearning for a career."

Dan hesitated. "Because I've been a fool, I think," he said at last. "I'll encourage her now, though. It would be a great blessing to us if she could get started as a writer. I see that now. She'd think of nothing else. And it would be a blessing to her too," he added feelingly.

"That's what I like about you, Dan," Bertha observed. "You always make every allowance for her, and consider her interests, although she has treated

you badly."

Dan pressed her hand to his lips. "I'll do what I can for her, you may be sure," he said, quite melted by his own magnanimity. "I wish I could do more. But she's been extravagant, and my means are dreadfully crippled."

"Then why do you buy me such handsome presents, you naughty man?" Bertha playfully demanded, holding up her arm with the bracelet on it.

"I must have a holiday sometimes," he rejoined. "Besides, I happen to be expecting a handsome cheque, an unusual occurrence, by any post now."

Beth's dividends were due that day.

Just as dinner was announced, Beth swept into the drawing-room in the best evening dress she had, a diaphonous black, set off by turquoise velvet, a combination which threw the beautiful milk-white of her skin into delicate relief. There was a faint flush on her face; on her forehead and neck the tendrils of her soft brown hair seemed to have taken on an extra crispness of curl, and her eyes were sparkling. She had never looked better. Bertha Petterick, in her common handsomeness, was as a barmaid accustomed to beer beside a gentlewoman of exceptional refinement. She wore the showy bracelet Dan had given her that afternoon, and it shone conspicuous in its tawdry newness on her arm; her dress was tasteless too, and badly put on, and altogether she contrasted unfavourably with Beth, and Dan observed it.

"Are you expecting any one in particular to-night?" he asked.

"No," Beth answered smiling. "I dressed for my own benefit. Nothing moves me to self-satisfaction like a nice dress. I have not enjoyed the pleasure much since I married. But I am going to begin now, and have a good time."

She turned as she spoke and led the way to the dining-room alone. Dr. Maclure absently offered his arm to Miss Petterick. He was puzzled to know what this sudden fit of self-assertion, combined with an unaccountable burst of high spirits on Beth's part, might portend. To conceal a certain uneasiness, he became extra facetious, not to say coarse. There was a public ball coming off in a few days, and he persisted in speaking of it as "The Dairy Show."

"Don't you begin to feel excited about it? I do!" Miss Petterick said to Beth. "I wish it were to-night."

"I am indifferent," Beth answered blandly, "because I am not going."

"Not going!" Dan exclaimed. "Then who's to chaperon me?"

"I should scarcely suppose," Beth answered, looking at him meditatively, "that you are in the stage of innocence which makes a chaperon necessary. Bertha, how you are loving that new bracelet! You've done nothing but fidget with it ever since we sat down."

"Ah!" Bertha answered archly, "you want to know where I got it, Madam Curious! Well, I'll tell you. It was sent me only to-day—by my young man!"

Dan looked at his plate complacently, but presently Beth saw a glance of intelligence flash between them—a glance such as she had often seen them exchange before, but had not understood; and she was thankful that she had not!—thankful that she had been able to live so long with Dr. Maclure without entertaining a single suspicion, without thinking one low thought about him. It was a hopeful triumph of cultivated nice-mindedness over the most evil communications.

When they were at dessert, the postman's knock resounded sharply. Dr. Maclure, who had been anxiously listening for it, and was peeling a pear for Miss Petterick at the moment, waited with the pear and the knife upheld in his hands, watching the door till the servant entered. She brought a letter on a salver, and was taking it to her master, when Beth said authoritatively, "That letter is for me, Minna; bring it here."

The girl obeyed.

Dan put down the knife and the pear. "What's yours is mine, I thought," he observed, with a sorry affectation of cheeriness.

"Not on this occasion," Beth answered quietly, taking up the letter and opening it as she spoke. "This happens to be peculiarly my own."

"Why, it's a cheque," he rejoined, with an affectation of surprise. "What luck! I haven't been able to sleep for nights thinking of the butcher's bill."

"For shame!" Beth said, bantering—"talking about bills before your guest! But since you introduced the subject I may add that the butcher must wait. I want this myself. I am going to stay with Mrs. Kilroy at Ilverthorpe on Wednesday, and it will just cover my expenses."

"This is the first I have heard of the visit," Dan ejaculated.

"I only decided to go this afternoon," Beth replied.

"You decided without consulting me? Well—I'm damned if you shall go; I shall not allow it."

"The word 'allow' is obsolete in the matrimonial dictionary, friend Daniel," Beth rejoined good-humouredly.

"But you are bound to obey me."

"And I'm ready to obey you when you endow me with all your worldly goods," she said; then, suddenly dropping her bantering tone, she spoke decidedly: "I am going to stay with Mrs. Kilroy on Wednesday, understand that at once, and do not let us have any vulgar dispute about it."

"But you can't leave Miss Petterick here alone with me!" he remonstrated.

"No, but she can go home," Beth answered coolly. "Her mother wants her, you know, and I have written to tell her to expect her to-morrow. Now, if you please, we will end the discussion."

She put the letter in her pocket, and began to crack nuts and eat them. But Dan could not keep away from the subject. "Gad!" he ejaculated, "I thought they'd get hold of you, that lot, and flatter you, and make a convenience of you—that's what they do! *I* know them! They think you're clever—how easy it is to be mistaken! But you'll see for yourself in time, and then you'll believe me—when it's too late. For then you'll have got your name mixed up with them, and you'll not get over that, I can tell you—they are well known for a nice lot. Your Mrs. Kilroy was notorious before she married. She was Angelica Hamilton-Wells, and she and her brother were called the Heavenly Twins. They are grandchildren of that blackguard old Duke of Morningquest. Nobody ever speaks of any of the family with the slightest respect. It's well known that Miss Hamilton-Wells asked old Kilroy to

marry her, and when a girl has to do that, you may guess what she is! But they are all besmirched, that lot," Dan concluded with his most high-minded manner on.

"I never believe anything I hear against anybody," said Beth, unconsciously quoting Ideala; "so please spare me the recital of all invidious stories."

"You'll only believe what suits yourself, I know," he said. "And I've no doubt you'll enjoy yourself. Galbraith will be there, and Mr. Theodore Hamilton-Wells, the fair-haired 'Diavolo,' who will suit your book exactly, I should think."

"I beg your pardon?" said Beth politely.

Dan poured himself out another glass of wine, and said no more.

He and Bertha managed to have a moment's conversation together before they retired that night.

"What does it mean?" Bertha anxiously demanded. "Does she suspect anything?"

"God knows!" Dan said piously, then added, after a moment's consideration, "How the devil can she? We've played our cards too well for that! No, she's just bent on making mischief; that's the kind of pill she is. If she keeps that money it will be downright robbery. But now you see what I have to put up with, and you can judge for yourself if I deserve it."

When he went to Beth, however, he assumed a very different tone. He entered the room with an air of deep dejection, and found her sitting beside her dressing-table in a white wrapper, reading quietly. She smiled when she saw his pose. It was what she had expected.

"I can't do without that money, Beth, on my word," he began plaintively. "I've been reckoning on it. I wouldn't take it from you, God knows, if I could help it; but I'm sore pressed." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, imagining that he still had to deal with the gentle sensitive girl, upon whom he had imposed so long and so successfully.

Beth watched him a moment with contempt, and then she laughed.

"It is no use, friend Daniel," she said in her neat, incisive, straightforward way. "I am not going to take you seriously any more. I am neither to be melted by your convenient tears, nor dismayed by your bogey bills. I have never seen any of those bills, by the way; the next time you mention them, please produce them. Let us be business-like. And in the meantime, just understand, once for all, like a good man, that I am not going to be domineered over by you as if I were a common degraded wife with every spark of spirit and self-respect crushed out of me by one brutal exaction or another. I shall do my duty—do my best to meet your reasonable wishes; but I will submit to no ordering and no sort of exaction." She rose and faced him. "And as we are coming to an understanding," she pursued, "just explain. Why did you tell me that Miss Petterick was to be a paying patient?"

"I never told you anything of the kind," said Dan, losing his head, and lying stupidly in his astonishment.

Beth shrugged her shoulders. "It is your own business," she rejoined—"at least it is you who will have to pay for her entertainment."

She returned to her book as she spoke, and continued to read with apparent calmness.

Now that she had taken up her position, she found herself quite strong enough to hold it against any Dan Maclure or Bertha Petterick. But Beth was being forced into an ugly and vulgar phase, and she knew and resented it, and was filled with dismay. She was taking on something of the colour of her surroundings involuntarily, inevitably, as certain insects do, in self-defence. She had spoken to Dan in his own tone in order to make him understand her; but was it necessary? Surely if she had resisted the impulse to try that weapon, she might have found another as effective, the use of which would not have compromised her gentlehood and lessened her self-esteem. Her dissatisfaction with herself for the part she had played was a cruel ache, and she thanked Heaven for the chance which would mercifully remove her from that evil atmosphere for a while, and prayed for time to reflect, for strength to be her better self. She was angry with herself, and grieved because she had fought Dan with his own weapons, and it did not occur to her for her comfort that she had only done so because he was

invulnerable to that which she would naturally have used—earnest, reasonable, calm discussion—and that fight him she must with something, somehow, or sink for ever down to the degraded level required of their wives by husbands of his way of thinking.

CHAPTER XLIV

ILVERTHORPE was at the other side of the county, and Beth had to go from Slane to Morningquest by train in order to get there. Dan continued to be disagreeable in private about her going, but he took her to the station, and saw her off, so that the public might know what an admirable husband he was.

On his way from the station he met Sir George Galbraith, and greeted him with effusion.

"I hope you were coming to see us," he said, "for that would show that you don't forget our humble existence. But my wife isn't at home, I am sorry to say. She has just gone to stay with Mrs. Kilroy."

Sir George looked keenly at him. "I hope she is quite well," he said formally.

"Not too well," Dan answered lugubriously; "and that is why I encouraged her to go. The fact is, Sir George, I think I've been making a mistake with Beth. My mother was my perfection of a woman. She didn't care much for books; but she had good sound common-sense, and she attended to her husband and her household, and preferred to stay at home; and I confess I wanted my wife to be like her. Especially I wanted to keep her pure-minded and unsuspecting of evil; and *that* she could not remain if she got drawn into Mrs. Kilroy's set, and mixed up with the questions about which women are now agitating themselves. I know you're with them and not with me in the matter, but you'll allow for my point of view. Well, with regard to Beth, I find I've made a mistake. I should have let her follow her own bent, see for herself, and become a woman of the day if she's so minded. As it is, she is growing morbid for want of an outlet, and hanging back herself, and it is I who have to urge her on. It's an heroic operation so far as I'm concerned, for the whole thing is distasteful to me; but I shall go through with it, and let her be as independent as she likes."

"This sounds like self-sacrifice," said Sir George. "I sincerely hope it may answer. We are going different ways, I think. Good-morning." He raised his hand to his hat in a perfunctory way, and hurried off. The next time he saw Mrs. Kilroy, he described this encounter with Dr. Maclure.

"This is a complete change of front," said Angelica; "what does it mean?"

"When a man of that kind tells his wife to make the most of her life in her own way and be independent, he means '*Don't bother me; another woman is the delight of my senses!*' When he says to the other woman '*Be free!*' he means '*Throw yourself into my arms!*'"

Angelica sighed. "Poor Beth!" she said, "what a fate to be tied to that plausible hog!"

From having been so much shut up in herself, Beth showed very little of the contrasts of her temperament on the surface,—her joy in life, her moments of exaltation, of devotion, of confidence, of harshness, of tenderness; her awful fits of depression, her doubts, her fears, her self-distrust; her gusts of passion, and the disconnected impulses wedged into the well-disciplined routine of a consistent life, ordered for the most part by principle, reason, and reflection. Few people, meeting her casually, would have suspected any contrasts at all; and even of those who knew her best, only one now and then appreciated the rate at which the busy mind was working, and the changes wrought by the growth which was continually in progress beneath her equable demeanour. Those about her, for want of discernment, expected nothing of her, and suffered shocks of surprise in consequence, which they resented, blaming her for their own defects.

But it was of much more importance to Beth that she should be able to pass on with ease from one thing to another than that she should have the approval of people who would have had her stay where they found her, not for her benefit, but for their own convenience in classifying her. Beth made stepping-stones of her knowledge of other people rather than of her own dead self. She picked to pieces the griefs they brought upon her, dissected them, and moralised upon them; and, in so doing, forgot the personal

application. While in the midst of what might have been her own life tragedy, she compared herself with those who had been through theirs and did not seem a bit the worse or the better, which observation stimulated her fortitude; when she contemplated the march of events, that mighty army of atoms, any one of which may be in command of us for a time, none remaining so for ever under healthy conditions, she perceived that life is lived in detail, not in the abstract. The kind of thing that makes the backbone of a three-volume novel, is but a phase or an incident; everything is but an incident with all of us, a heart-break to-day, a recollection to-morrow, a source of encouragement and of inspiration eventually perhaps; the which, if some would remember, there would be less despair and fewer suicides. The recognition of this fact had helped Beth's sense of proportion and was making her philosophical. She believed that life could be lived so as to make the joys as inevitable as the sorrows. We are apt to cultivate our sense of pleasure less than our sense of suffering, by appreciating small pleasures little, while heeding small pains excessively. Beth's deliberate intention, as well as her natural impulse, was to reverse this in her own case as much as possible; she would not let her physical sense of well-being on a fine morning and her intellectual delight in a good mood for work be spoilt because of some trouble of the night before. The trouble she would set aside so that it might not detract from the pleasure.

But fine mornings and good moods for work had not come to her aid since she discovered the mean treachery of Dan and Bertha, and when she left Slane she was still oppressed by the sense of their hypocrisy and deceit. As the train bore her swiftly away from them both, however, her spirits rose. The sun shone, the country looked lovely in its autumn bravery of tint and tone; she felt well, and the contemplation of such people as Dan and Bertha was not elevating; they must out of her mind like any other unholy thought, that she might be worthy to associate with the loyal ladies and noble gentlemen whose hands were outstretched to help her. The people we cling to are those with whom we find ourselves most at home. It is not the people who amuse us that we like best, but those who stir our deeper emotions, rouse in us possibilities of generous feeling which lie latent for the most part, and give form to our higher aspirations; and Beth anticipated with a happy heart that it was with such she was bound to abide.

Mrs. Kilroy met her at the station at Morningquest. "What a bonny thing you are!" she exclaimed in her queer abrupt way. "I didn't realise it till I saw you walking up the platform towards me. There's a cart to take your luggage to Ilverthorpe. Do you mind coming to lunch with Mrs. Orton Beg? She has a dear little house in the Close, and we thought you might like to see the Cathedral. Here's the carriage. No, you get in first."

"But does Mrs. Orton Beg want me?" Beth asked when they were seated.

"We all want you," said Mrs. Kilroy, "if you will forgive our first mistake with regard to you, and come out of yourself and be one of us. And you'll be specially fond of Mrs. Orton Beg when you know her, I fancy. She's just sweet! She used to hate our works and ways, and be very conventional; but Edith Beale's marriage opened her eyes. She would never have believed that men countenanced such an iniquity had she not seen it herself. The first effect of the shock was to narrow her judgment and make her severe on men generally; but she will get over that in time. Man, like woman, is too big a subject to generalise about. He has his faults, you know, but he must be educated; that is all he wants. He must be taught to have a better opinion of himself. At present, he wallows because he thinks he can't keep out of the mire; but of course he can when he learns how. He's not a bit worse than woman naturally, only he has a lower opinion of himself, and that keeps him down. With his training we shouldn't be a bit better than he is. In all things that concern men and women, you dear, you will find that, when they start fair, one is not a bit better or worse than the other. Here we are."

Mrs. Orton Beg came into the hall to greet her guest. She was a slender, elegant, middle-aged woman, in graceful black draperies, with hair prematurely grey, and a face that had always been interesting, but never handsome—a refined, intellectual, but not strong face; the face of a patient, self-contained, long-enduring person, of settled purpose, slowly arrived at, and then not easily shaken. She welcomed Beth cordially, and placed her at table so that she might look out at the old grey Cathedral. It was the first time Beth had seen it, and she could have lost herself in the sensation of realising its traditions, its beauty, and its age; but the conversation went on briskly, and she had to take her part. Lady Fulda Guthrie, an aunt of Mrs. Kilroy's, was the only other guest. She was a beautiful saint, with a soul

which had already progressed as far as the most spiritual part of Catholicism could take it, and she could get no farther in this incarnation.

"I hope you are prepared to discuss any and every thing, Mrs. Maclure," Mrs. Orton Beg warned Beth; "for that is what you will find yourself called upon to do among us. The peculiarity of man is that he will do the most atrocious things without compunction, but would be shocked if he were called upon to discuss them. Do what you like, is his principle, but don't mention it; people form their opinions in discussion, and opinions are apt to be adverse. Our principle is very much the opposite."

"I have just begun to know the necessity for open discussion," Beth answered tranquilly. "I do not see how we can arrive at happiness in life if we do not try to discover the sources of misery. I know of nothing that earnest men and women should hesitate to discuss openly on proper occasions."

"Oh, I'm thankful to hear you say 'men and women,'" Angelica broke in. "That is the right new spirit! Let us help one another. Any attempt to separate the interests of the sexes, as women here and there, and men generally, would have them separated, is fatal to the welfare of the whole race. The efforts of foolish people to divide the interests of men and women make me writhe—as if we were not utterly bound up in one another, and destined to rise or fall together! But this woman movement is towards the perfecting of life, not towards the disruption of it. I asked a sympathetic woman the other day why she took no part in it, and she answered profoundly, 'Because I am a part *of* it.' And I am sure she was right. I am sure it is evolutionary. It is an effort of the race to raise itself a step higher in the scale of being. For see what it resolves itself into! Men respond to what women expect of them. When warriors were the women's ideal, men were warriors. When women preferred knights, priests, or troubadours, a man's ambition was to be a knight, priest, or troubadour. When women thought drunkenness fine, men were drunken. Now women want husbands of a nobler nature, strong in all the attributes, moral and physical, of the perfect man, that their children may be noble too, and thus the ascent of man to higher planes of being become assured."

"Great is the power of thought," said Lady Fulda. "By thinking these things the race is evolving them. Thought married to suggestion is a creative force. If the race believed it would have wings; in the course of ages wings would come of the faith."

"And discussion is not enough," Beth resumed. "We should experiment. It is very well to hold opinions and set up theories, but opinions and theories are alike valueless until they are tested by experiment."

"I see you are a true radical," said Mrs. Orton Beg. "You would go to the root of the matter."

"Oh yes, I am a radical in that sense of the word," Beth answered. "I have a horror of conservatism. Nothing is stationary. All things are always in a state of growth or decay; and conservatism is a state of decay."

"Yes," said Angelica. "That is very true, especially as applied to women—if they are ever to advance."

"Then don't you think they are advancing?" Beth asked.

"Yes," said Angelica, "but not as much as they might. When you mix more with them in the way of work you will be disheartened. Women are their own worst enemies just now. They don't follow their leaders loyally and consistently; they have little idea of discipline; their tendency is to go off on side issues and break up into little cliques. They are largely actuated by petty personal motives, by petty jealousies, by pettinesses of all kinds. One amongst them will arise here and there, and do something great that is an honour to them all; but they do not honour her for it—perhaps because something in the way she dresses, or some trick of manner, does not meet with the approval of the majority. Women are for ever stumbling over trifling details. To prove themselves right pleases them better than to arrive at the truth; and a vulgar personal triumph is of more moment than the triumph of a great cause. In these things they are practically not a bit better than men."

"They seem worse, in fact, because we expect so much more of them in the way of loyalty and disinterestedness," said Mrs. Orton Beg; "and their power is so much greater, too, in social matters; when they misuse it, they do much more harm. This will not always be so, of course. As their minds

expand, they will see and understand better. At present they do not know enough to appreciate their own deficiencies—they do not measure the weakness of their vacillations by comparing it with the steady strength of purpose that prevails; and, for want of comprehension, they aim their silly animadversions to-day at some one whose work they are glad enough to profit by to-morrow; they make the task of a benefactress so hard that they kill her, and then they give her a public funeral. I pity them!"

"Oh, do not be hasty," said Lady Fulda. "Human beings are not like packs of cards, to be shuffled into different combinations at will and nobody the worse. There are feelings to be considered. The old sores must be tenderly touched even by those who would heal them. And when we uproot we must be careful to replant under more favourable conditions; when we demolish we should be prepared to rebuild, or no comfort will come of the changes. These things take time, and are best done deliberately, and even then the most cautious make their mistakes. But, still, I believe that the force which is carrying us along is the force that makes for righteousness. We women have in our minds now what will culminate in the recognition by future generations of the beauty of goodness. Woman is to be the mother of God in Man."

Beth's heart swelled at the words. This attitude was new to her; and yet all that was said she seemed to have heard before, and known from the first. And she knew more also, away back in that region beyond time and space to which she had access, and where she found herself at happy moments transported by an impulse outside herself, which she could not control by any effort of will. That day, with those new friends, she felt like one who returns to a happy home after weary wanderings, and is warmly welcomed. A great calm settled upon her spirit. She said little the whole time, but sat, sure of their sympathetic tolerance, and listened to them with that living light of interest in her eyes to which the heart responds with confidence more surely than to any spoken word. The evil influences which had held her tense at Slane had no power to trouble her here. She was high enough above Dan and Bertha to look down upon them dispassionately, knowing them for what they were, yet personally unaffected by their turpitude. It was as if she had heard of some bad deed, and knew it to be repulsive, a thing intolerable, meriting punishment; yet, because it did not concern her, it had

lapsed from her thoughts like a casual paragraph read in a paper which had not brought home to her any realisation of what it recorded.

During the afternoon her mind was stored with serene impressions—service in the venerable Cathedral; the fluting of an anthem by a boy with a birdlike voice; some strong words from the pulpit, not on the dry bones of doctrine, nor the doings of a barbarous people led by a vengeful demon of perplexing attributes whom they worshipped as a deity, but on the conduct of life—a vital subject. Then, as they drove through the beautiful old city, there came impressions of grey and green; grey gateways, ancient buildings, ivy, and old trees, and, over all, sounding slow, calm, and significant, the marvellous chime, the message which Morningquest heard hourly year by year, and heeded no more than it heeded death at a distance or political complications in Peru.

The same party met again at Iverthorpe, but there were others there as well—Ideala, Mrs. Kilroy's father and mother Mr. and Lady Adeline Hamilton-Wells, and Lady Galbraith, but not Sir George.

In the drawing-room after dinner, Beth was intent upon a portfolio of drawings, and Ideala, seeing her alone, went up to her.

"Are you fond of pictures?" she said to Beth.

"Yes, that is just the word," Beth answered. "I am so 'fond' of them that even such a collection as this, which shows great industry rather than great art, I find full of interest, and delight in. Happy for me, perhaps, that I don't know anything about technique. Subject appeals to my imagination as it used to do when I was a child, and loved to linger over the pictures on old-fashioned pieces of music. Those pictures lure me still with strange sensations such as no others make me feel. I wish I could realise now as vividly as I realised then the beauty of that lovely lady on the song, and the whole pathetic story—the gem that decked her queenly brow and bound her raven hair, remained a sad memorial of blighted love's despair; and that other young creature who wore a wreath of roses on the night when first we met; and the one who related that we met, 'twas in a crowd, and I thought he would shun me; he came, I could not breathe, for his eye was upon me, and concluded that 'twas thou that had caused me this anguish, my mother. There was the gallant corsair, too, just stepping out of a boat, waving his

hat. His curly hair, open shirt collar, and black tie with flying ends remain in my mind, intimately associated with Byron, young love, some who never smiled again, the sapphire night, crisp, clear, cold, thick-strewn with stars, all sparkling with frosty brightness—impressions I would not exchange for art understood, or anything I am capable of feeling now before the greatest work of art in the world—so strangely am I blunted."

"What, already!" Ideala said compassionately. "But that is only a phase. You will come out of it, and be young again and feel strongly, which is better than knowing, I concede. The truest appreciation of a work of art does not take place in the head, but in the heart; not in thinking, but in feeling. When we stand before a picture, it is not by the thoughts formulated in the mind, but by the appreciation which suffuses our whole being with pleasure that we should estimate it."

"But isn't that a sensuous attitude?" Beth objected.

"Yes, of the right kind," Ideala rejoined. "The senses have their uses, you know. And it is exactly your attitude as a child towards the pictures on the songs. You felt it all—all the full significance—long before you knew it so that you could render it into words; and felt more, probably, than you will ever be able to express. Feeling is the first stage of fine thought."

Mr. Hamilton-Wells strolled towards them. He was a rather tall, exceedingly thin man, with straight, thick, grey-brown hair, parted in the middle, and plastered down on either side of his head. He was dressed in black velvet. His long thin white hands were bedecked with handsome antique rings, art treasures in their way. One intaglio, carved in red coral, caught the eye especially, on the first finger of his right hand. As he talked he had a trick of shaking his hands back with a gesture that suggested lace ruffles getting in the way, and in his whole appearance and demeanour there was something that recalled the days when velvet and lace were in vogue for gentlemen. He spoke with great preciseness, and it was not always possible to be sure that he at all appreciated the effect of the extraordinary remarks he was in the habit of making; which apparent obliviousness enabled him to discourse about many things without offence which other people were obliged to leave unmentioned.

"Nowadays, when I see two ladies together in a corner, talking earnestly," he observed, "I always suspect that they are discussing the sex question."

"Oh, the sex question!" Ideala exclaimed. "I am sick of sex! Sex is a thing to be endured or enjoyed, not to be discussed."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Hamilton-Wells, nodding slowly, as if in profound consideration, and shaking back his imaginary ruffles. "Is that your opinion, Mrs. Maclure?"

"I keep a separate compartment in my mind for the sex question," Beth answered, colouring—"a compartment which has to be artificially lighted. There is no ray of myself that would naturally penetrate to it. When I take up a book, and find that it is nothing but *she was beautiful, he loved her*, I put it down again with a groan. The monotony of the subject palls upon me. It is the stock-in-trade of every author, as if there were nothing of interest in the lives of men and women but their sexual relations."

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Hamilton-Wells, with bland deliberation, "but society thinks of nothing else. Blatant sexuality is the predominant characteristic of the upper classes, and the rage for the sexual passion is principally set up and fostered by a literature inflated with sexuality, and by costumes which seem to be designed for the purpose. In the evening, now, just think! Even quite elderly ladies, with a laudable desire to please, offer themselves in evening dress—and a very great deal of themselves sometimes—to the eye that may be attracted."

When he had spoken, he shook back his imaginary ruffles, brought his hands together in front of him with the fingers tip to tip in a pious attitude, and strolled up the long room slowly, shaking his head at intervals with an intent expression, as if he were praying for society.

"What a bomb!" Beth gasped. "Is he always so?"

"Generally," Ideala rejoined. "And I can never make out whether he means well, but is stupid and tactless, or whether he delights to spring such explosives on inoffensive people. He sits on a Board of Guardians composed of ladies and gentlemen, and the other day, at one of their meetings, he proposed to remove the stigma attaching to illegitimacy. He said that illegitimacy cannot justly be held to reflect on anybody's conduct,

since, so he had always understood, illegitimacy was birth from natural causes."

"And what happened?"

Ideala slightly shrugged her shoulders. "The proposition was seriously discussed, and a parson and one or two other members of the board threatened to retire if he remained on it. But remain he did, and let them retire; and I cannot help fancying that his whole object was to get them to go. Sometimes I think that he must have a peculiar sense of humour, which it gives him great gratification to indulge, as others do good, by stealth. He makes questionable jests for himself only, and enjoys them alone. But apart from this eccentricity, he is a kind and generous man, always ready to help with time and money when there is any good to be done."

When Beth went to her room that night, she experienced a strange sense of satisfaction which she could not account for until she found herself alone, with no fear of being disturbed. It seemed to her then that she had never before known what comfort was, never slept in such a delightful bed, so fresh and cool and sweet. She was like one who has been bathed and perfumed after the defilements of a long dusty journey, and is able to rest in peace. As she stretched herself between the sheets, she experienced a blessed sensation of relief, which was a revelation to her. Until that moment, she had never quite realised the awful oppression of her married life; the inevitable degradation of intimate association with such a man as her husband.

The next day the ladies went out to sit on the lawn together in the shade of the trees, with their books and work. There were no sounds but such as, in the country, seem to accentuate the quiet, and are aids, not to thought, but to that higher faculty which awakes in the silence, and is to thought what the mechanical instrument is to the voice.

"How heavenly still it is!" Beth ejaculated. "It stirs me—fills me—how shall I express it?—makes me cognisant in some sort—conscious of things I don't know—things beyond all this, and even better worth our attention. The stillness here in these surroundings has the same benign effect on me that perfect solitude has elsewhere. What a luxury it is, though—solitude! I mean the privilege of being alone when one feels the necessity. I am

fortunate, however," she added quickly, lest she should seem to be making a personal complaint, "in that I have a secret chamber all to myself, and so high up that I can almost hear what the wind whispers to the stars to make them twinkle. I go there when I want to be alone to think my thoughts, and no one disturbs me—not even my nearest neighbours, the angels; though if they did sometimes, I should not complain."

"They come closer than you think, perhaps," said Lady Fulda, who had just strolled up, with a great bunch of lilies on her arm. "Consider the lilies," she went on, holding them out to Beth. "Look into them. Think about them. No, though, do not think about them—feel. There is purification in the sensation of their beauty."

"Is purification always possible?" Beth said. "Can evil ever be cast out once it has taken root in the mind?"

"Are you speaking of thoughts or acts, I wonder?" Lady Fulda rejoined, sitting down beside Beth and looking dreamily into her flowers. "You know what we hold here: that no false step is irretrievable so long as we desire what is perfectly right. It is not the things we know of, nor even the things we have done, if the act is not habitual,—but the things we approve of that brand us as bad. The woman whose principles are formed out of a knowledge of good and evil is better, is more to be relied upon, than the woman who does not know enough to choose between them. It is not what the body does, but what the mind thinks that corrupts us."

"But from certain deeds evil thoughts are inseparable," Beth sighed; "and surely toleration of evil comes from undue familiarity with it?"

"Yes, if you do not keep your condemnation side by side with your knowledge of it," Lady Fulda agreed.

The night before she returned to Slane, Beth attended a meeting of the new order which Ideala had founded. It was the first thing of the kind she had been to, and she was much interested in the proceedings. Only women were present. Beth was one of a semicircle of ladies who sat on the platform behind the chair. There were subjects of grave social importance under discussion, and most of the speaking was exceedingly good, wise, temperate, and certainly not wanting in humour.

Towards the end of the evening there was an awkward pause because a lady who was to have spoken had not arrived. Mrs. Kilroy, who was in the chair, looked round for some one to fill the gap, and caught Beth's eye.

"May I speak?" Beth whispered eagerly, leaning over to her. "I have something to say."

Angelica nodded, gave the audience Beth's name, and then leant back in her chair. The shorthand writers looked up indifferently, not expecting to hear anything worth recording.

Beth went forward to the edge of the platform with a look of intentness on her delicate face, and utterly oblivious of herself, or anything else but her subject. She never thought of asking herself if she could speak. All she considered was what she was going to say. She clasped her slender hands in front of her, and began, slowly, with the formula she had heard the other speakers use: "Madam Chairman, ladies—" She paused, then suddenly spoke out on *The Desecration of Marriage*.

At the first resonant notes of her clear, dispassionate voice, there was a movement of interest, a kind of awakening, in the hall, and the ladies on the platform behind her, who had been whispering to each other, writing notes and passing them about, and paying more attention to the business of the meeting generally than to the speakers, paused and looked up.

Suddenly Ideala, with kindling eyes, leant over to Mrs. Orton Beg, grasped her arm, and said something eagerly. Mrs. Orton Beg nodded. The word went round. Beth held the hall, and was still rising from point to point, carrying the audience with her to a pitch of excitement which finally culminated in a great burst of applause.

Beth, taken aback, stopped short, surprised and bewildered by the racket; looked about her, faltered a few more words, and then sat down abruptly.

The applause was renewed and prolonged.

"What does it mean?" Beth asked Ideala in an agony. "Did I say something absurd?"

"My dear child," Ideala answered, laughing, "they are not jeering, but cheering!"

"Is that cheering?" Beth exclaimed in an awe-stricken tone, overcome to find she had produced such an effect. "I feared they meant to be derisive."

"I didn't know you were a speaker," Mrs. Orton Beg whispered.

"I am not," Beth answered apologetically. "I never spoke before, nor heard any one else speak till to-night. Only I have thought and thought about these things, and I could not keep it back, what I had to say."

"That is the stuff an orator is made of," some strange lady muttered approvingly.

CHAPTER XLV

WHEN Beth returned to Slane, Dan received her so joyously she wondered what particularly successful piece of turpitude he had been busy about. He was always effusive to her when evil things went well with him. At first she had supposed that this effusiveness was the outcome of affection for her; but when she began to know him, she perceived that it was only the expression of some personal gratification. He had been quite demonstrative in his attentions to her during the time that Bertha Petterick stayed in the house.

"By the way, there is a letter for you," he said, when they were at lunch.

"Is there?" Beth answered. "Who from?"

"How the devil am I to know?" he rejoined, glancing up at the mantelpiece. "I can't tell who your correspondents are by instinct."

Beth's eye followed his to the mantelpiece, where she saw a large square envelope propped up against an ornament in a conspicuous position, and recognised the unmistakable, big, clear, firm hand of Bertha Petterick, and the thick kind of paper she always used.

Beth had been thinking about Bertha on the way home. She knew that, if Bertha had been as wrong in body as in mind and moral nature, she would have had compassion on her; and she had determined to tolerate her as it was, to do what she could for her maimed soul, just as she would have ministered to her had her malady been physical. But Dan's hypocrisy about the letter ruffled her into opposition. He knew Bertha's handwriting as well as she did, and was doubtless equally well acquainted with the contents of the letter; and this affectation of ignorance must therefore mean something special. Probably he was anxious to propitiate her with regard to whatever Bertha might be writing about. But Beth was not to be managed in that way, and so she let the letter be.

As she was leaving the room after lunch, Dan called after her: "You have forgotten your letter."

"It doesn't matter," Beth answered. "Any time will do for that."

The letter was left there for days unopened, and it had the effect of stopping the conversation at meals, for although Dan did not allude to it again, he constantly glanced at it, and it was evident that he had it on his mind.

At last, one day, when he came in, he said, "I have just seen Mrs. Petterick, and she tells me Bertha wrote to you days ago, and has had no answer."

"Indeed," Beth observed indifferently. "I shouldn't think she could have anything to say to me that specially required an answer."

Dan fidgeted about a little, then burst out suddenly, "Why the devil don't you open the girl's letter?"

"Because you pretended you didn't know who it was from," Beth said.

"I declare to God I never pretended anything of the kind," Dan answered hotly.

Beth laughed. Then she went to the mantelpiece, took down the letter, turned it over and displayed the huge monogram and scroll with "Bertha" printed on it, with which it was bedizened, laughed again a little, and threw the letter unopened into the fire, "There!" she said. "Let that be an end of the letter, and Bertha Petterick too, so far as I am concerned. She bores me, that girl; I will not be bothered with her."

"Well, well!" Dan exclaimed pathetically, looking hard at the ashes of the letter on the coals: "that's gratitude! I do my best to make an honest living for you, and you repay me by affronting one of my best patients. And what the unfortunate girl has done to offend you, the devil only knows. I'm sure she would have blacked your boots for you when she was here, she was so devoted."

"She *was* pretty servile, I grant that," Beth answered dispassionately. "But that is enough of Bertha Petterick, please. Here is the butcher's bill for the last month, and the baker's, the milk, the wine, the groceries, all nearly doubled on Bertha's account. If adding to your expenses in every way

makes a good patient, she was excellent, certainly. I'll leave you the bills to console you; but, if you value your peace of mind, don't dare to worry *me* about them. You were quite right when you said I was too young to be troubled about money matters, and I shall not let myself be troubled—especially when they are matters, like these bills, for which I am not responsible." She was leaving the room as she spoke, but stopped at the door: "And, Dan," she added, quoting his favourite phrase, "I'd be cheery if I were you. There's nothing like being cheery. Why, look at me! I never let anything worry me!"

She left Dan speechless, and went to her secret chamber, where she sat and suffered for an hour, blaming herself for her lightness, her contrariness, her want of dignity, and all those faults which were the direct consequence of Dan's evil influence. She was falling farther and farther away from her ideal in everything, and knew it, but seemed to have lost the power to save herself. The degeneration had begun in small matters of discipline, apparently unimportant, but each one of consequence, in reality, as part of her system of self-control. From the moment we do a thing thinking it to be wrong, we degenerate. If it be a principle that we abandon, it does not matter what the principle is, our whole moral fibre is loosened by the gap it makes. Beth, who had hitherto shunned easy-chairs, as Aunt Victoria had taught her, lest she should be enervated by lolling, now began to take to them, and so lost the strengthening effect of a wholesome effort. Other little observances, too, little regular habits which discipline mind and body to such good purpose, slipped from her,—such as the care of her skin after the manner of the ladies of her family, who had been renowned for their wonderful complexions. This had been enjoined upon her by her mother in her early girlhood as a solemn duty, and had entailed much self-denial in matters of food and drink, quantities being restricted, and certain things prohibited at certain times, while others were forbidden altogether. She had had to exercise patience, also, in the concoction and use of delicately perfumed washes of tonic and emollient properties, home distilled, so as to be perfectly pure; all of which had been strictly practised by her, like sacred rites or superstitious observances upon the exact performance of which good fortune depends. In such matters she now became lax. And, besides the care of her person, she neglected the care of her clothes, which had been so beneficial to her mind; for it must be remembered that it was during

those long hours of meditation, while she sat sewing, that her reading had been digested, her knowledge assimilated, her opinions formed, and her random thoughts collected and arranged, ready to be turned to account on an emergency. Until this time, too, she had kept Sunday strictly as a day of rest. Books and work, and all else that had occupied her during the week, were put away on Saturday night, and not taken out again until Monday morning; and the consequence was complete mental relaxation. But now she began to do all kinds of little things which she had hitherto thought it wrong to do on Sunday, so that the sanitary effect of the day of rest—or of change of occupation, for sometimes Sunday duties are arduous—was gradually lost, and she no longer returned to her work on Monday strengthened and refreshed. Little by little her "good reading" was also neglected, and instead of relying upon her own resolution, as had hitherto been her wont, she began to seek the prop of an odd cup of tea or coffee at irregular hours, to raise her spirits if she felt down, or stimulate her if she were out of sorts and work was not easy; all of which tended to weaken her will. Then, by degrees, she began to lose the balance of mind which had been wont to carry her on from one little daily doing to another, with calm deliberation, taking them each in turn without haste or rest, and finding time for them all. Now, the things that she did not care about she began to do with a rush, so as to get to her writing. She wanted to be always at that; and the consequence was a wearing sensation, as of one who is driven to death, and has never time enough for any single thing.

But it was in these days, nevertheless, that she began to write with decision. Hitherto, she had been merely trying her pen—feeling her way; but now she unconsciously ceased to follow in other people's footsteps, and struck out for herself boldly. She had come back from Ilverthorpe with a burning idea to be expressed, and it was for the shortest, crispest, clearest way to express it that she tried. Foreign phrases she discarded, and she never attempted to produce an eccentric effect by galvanising obsolete words, rightly discarded for lack of vitality, into a ghastly semblance of life. Her own language, strong and pure, she found a sufficient instrument for her purpose. When the true impulse to write came, her fine theories about style only hampered her, so she cast them aside, as habitual affectations are cast aside and natural emotions naturally expressed, in moments of deep feeling; and from

that time forward she displayed, what had doubtless been coming to her by practice all along, a method and a manner of her own.

She produced a little book at this time, the first thing of any real importance she had accomplished as yet; and during the writing of it she enjoyed an interval of unalloyed happiness, the most perfect that she had ever known. The world without became as nothing to her; it was the world within that signified. The terrible sense of loneliness, from which she had always suffered more or less, was suspended, and she began to wonder how it was she had ever felt so desolate, that often in the streets of Slane she would have been grateful to anybody who had spoken to her kindly. Now she said to herself, sincerely, "Never less alone than when alone!" And up in the quiet of her secret chamber, with the serene blue above, the green earth and the whispering trees below, and all her little treasures about her: the books, the pictures, the pretty hangings, and little ornaments for flowers; things she had indulged in by degrees since her mother's death had left her with the money in her hands which she had made to discharge Dan's debt—up there at her ease in that peaceful shrine, secure from intrusion, "There is no joy but calm!" was her constant ejaculation. Then again, too, she felt to perfection the fine wonder, the fine glow of a great inspiration, and realised anew that therein all the pleasures of the senses added together are contained; that inspiration in its higher manifestations is like love—that it is love, in fact—love without the lover; there being all the joy of love in it, but none of the trouble.

But, like most young writers when they set up a high ideal for themselves, and are striving conscientiously to arrive at it, because the thing came easily she fancied she had not done her best, and was dissatisfied. She talked to herself about fatal facility, without reflecting that in time ease comes by practice; nor did she discriminate between the flow of cheap ideas pumped up from any source for the occasion, which satisfies the conceit of shallow workers, and the deep stream that bubbles up of itself when it is once released, and flows freely from the convictions, the observations, and the knowledge of an earnest thinker. Diffidence is a help to some, but to Beth it was a hindrance, a source of weakness. There was no fear of her taking herself for a heaven-born genius. Her trouble had always been her doubt of the merit of anything she did. She should have been encouraged, but instead she had always been repressed. Accordingly, when she had finished her

little masterpiece, she put it away with the idea of rewriting it, and making something of it when she should be able; and then she began a much more pretentious work, and thought it must be better because of the trouble it gave her.

Gradually, from now, she gave up all her time to reading and writing, and she overdid it. Work in excess is as much a vice as idleness, and it was particularly bad for Beth, whose constitution had begun to be undermined by dutiful submission. The consulting rooms of specialists are full of such cases. There are marriages which for the ignorant girl preached into dutiful submission, whose "innocence" has been carefully preserved for the purpose, mean prostitution as absolute, as repugnant, as cruel, and as contrary to nature as that of the streets. Beth's marriage was one of those. Until she went to Ilverthorpe, she had never heard that there was a duty she owed to herself as well as to her husband; and, as Sir George Galbraith had said, her brain was too delicately poised for the life she had been leading. Work had been her opiate; but unfortunately she did not understand the symptoms which should have warned her that she was overdoing it, and her nerves became exceedingly irritable. Noises which she had never noticed in her life before began to worry her to death. Very often, when she was spoken to, she could hardly answer civilly. At meals everything that was handed to her was just the very thing she did not want. She quarrelled with all her food, drank quantities of strong coffee for the sake of the momentary exhilaration, and even tried wine; but as it only made her feel worse, she gave that up. Writing became a rage with her, and the more she had to force herself, the longer she sat at it. She would spend hours over one sentence, turning it and twisting it, and never be satisfied; and when she was at last obliged to stop and go downstairs lest she should be missed, she went with her brain congested, and her complexion, which was naturally pale and transparent, all flushed or blotched with streaks of crimson.

"What's the matter with your face?" Dan said to her one day, apt, as usual, to comment offensively on anything wrong.

"I should like you to tell me," Beth answered.

"You'd better take some citrate of iron and quinine."

"You've prescribed citrate of iron and quinine for everything I've ever had since I knew you," said Beth. "If I have any more of it, I shall be like the man in the quack advertisement, who felt he could conscientiously recommend a tonic because he had taken it for fourteen years. I should like something that would act a little quicker."

Dan left the room and banged the door.

That afternoon Beth, up in her shrine at work, suddenly began to wonder what he was doing. As a rule, she did not trouble herself about his pursuits, but now all at once she became anxious. The thought of all the unholy places that he might be at (and the unfortunate girl knew all about all of them, for there was no horror of life with which her husband had not made her acquainted), filled her with dread—with a sensation entirely new to her, and absolutely foreign to her normal nature. Her feeling for Dan and Bertha, when she discovered their treachery, had been one of contempt. Their disloyalty, and the petty mean deceits which it entailed, made it difficult to tolerate their presence, and she was always glad to get rid of them, wherever they might go. Now, however, she was seized upon with a kind of rage at the recollection of their intrigue, of the scene in the garden, the glances she had intercepted, their stolen interviews, clandestine correspondence, and impudent security. It was all retrospective this feeling, but the torment of it was none the less acute for that. She recalled the scene in the garden, and her heart throbbed with anger. She regretted her own temperate conduct, and imagined herself stealing out upon them, standing before them, and pouring forth floods of invective till they cowered. She wished she had refused to let Bertha enter the house again, and had threatened to expose Dan if he did not meekly submit to her dictation. She ought to have exposed him too. She should have gone to Bertha's mother. But where was Dan at that moment? She jumped up, rushed down to her room, put on her outdoor things in hot haste, and ran downstairs determined to go and see; but as she entered the hall at one end of it, Dan himself came in by the hall-door at the other. The relief was extraordinary.

"Hallo! where are you off to?" he said.

"Just going for a little walk," she answered, speaking ungraciously and without looking at him. Now that she saw him, her ordinary feeling for him

returned; but instead of being quiet and indifferent as usual, she found herself showing in her manner something of the contempt she felt, and it pleased her to do it. She was glad to go out, and be in the open air away from him; but she had not gone far before the torment in her mind began again. Why had he come in so unusually early? Was there anything going on in the house? He was always very familiar with the servants.

She stopped short at this, turned back, and went in as hurriedly as she had gone out. In the hall she stood a moment listening. The house seemed unusually quiet. A green baize door separated the kitchen and offices from the hall. She opened it, and saw Minna in the butler's pantry, cleaning the plate. Minna was parlour-maid now, a housemaid having been added to the establishment when Miss Petterick came, so that that young lady might be well waited on.

"I think we should give the girl full value for her money, you know, even if we do without something ourselves," Dan had said, in the generous thoughtful way that had so often imposed upon Beth.

Beth asked Minna where Drew, the housemaid, was.

"It's her afternoon out, ma'am," Minna answered.

"So it is," said Beth. "I had forgotten."

"Do you want anything, ma'am?" Minna asked. "You're looking poorly. Would you like a cup o' tea?"

"No, thank you," Beth rejoined, then changed her mind. "Yes, I should, though. Get me one while I'm taking my things off, and bring it to me in the dining-room. Where is your master?"

"I don't know, ma'am. I've not heard if he's come in; but it's full early for him yet," Minna replied, as she took off her working apron.

While she was talking to the girl, the worry in Beth's head stopped, and she felt as usual. Going quietly upstairs, she fancied she heard some one moving in her bedroom, and, entering it by way of the dressing-room, she discovered Dan on his knees on the floor, prying into one of the boxes she had had with her at Ilverthorpe, and kept locked until she should feel

inclined to unpack it. He seemed to have had all the contents out, and was just deftly repacking it. As he replaced the dresses, he felt in the pocket of each, and in one he found an old letter which he read.

Beth withdrew on tiptoe, and went downstairs again, wondering at the man. She took off her hat and jacket, and ensconced herself with the newspaper in an easy-chair. Minna came presently with fragrant tea and hot buttered toast, and talked cheerfully about some of her own interests. Beth treated her servants like human beings, and rarely had any trouble with them. She had learnt the art from Harriet, who had awakened her sympathies, and taught her practically, when she was a child, what servants have to suffer; and "well loved and well served" exactly described what Beth was as a mistress. When Minna withdrew, and Beth had had her tea and toast, she felt quite right again, and read the paper with interest. The shock of the real trouble had ousted the imaginary one for the moment.

The next morning, however, as she toiled with flushed face and weary brain, stultifying her work with painful elaboration, she was seized with another fit of jealous rage, just as she had been the day before. Her mind in a moment, like a calm sea caught by a sudden tempest, seethed with horrible suspicions of her husband. His gross ideas, expressed in coarse language, had hitherto been banished from her mind by her natural refinement; but now, like the works of a disordered machine, whirling with irresponsible force, thoughts suggested by him came crowding in the language he habitually used, and she found herself accusing him with conviction of all she had ever heard others accused of by him. For a little she pursued this turn of thought, then all at once she jumped up and rushed downstairs, goaded again to act—to avenge herself—to dog him down to one of his haunts, and there confront him, revile him, expose him.

It was a tranquil grey day in early autumn, the kind of day, full of quiet charm, which had always been grateful to Beth; but now, as she stood on the doorstep, with wrinkled forehead, dilated eyes, and compressed lips, putting her gloves on in feverish haste, she felt no tranquillising charm, and saw no beauty in the tangled hedgerows bright with briony berries, the tinted beeches, the Canadian poplars whispering mysteriously by the watercourse at the end of the meadow, the glossy iridescent plumes of the rooks that passed in little parties silhouetted darkly bright against the empty

sky; it was all without significance to her; her further faculty was suspended, and even the recollection of anything she had been wont to feel had lapsed, and she perceived no more in the scene surrounding, in the colours and forms of things, the sounds and motions, than those perceive whose eyes have never been opened to anything beyond what appears to the grazing cattle. In many a heavy hour she had found delight in nature; but now, again, she had lost that solace; the glory had departed, and she had sunk to one of the lowest depths of human pain.

Not understanding the frightful affliction that had come upon her, she made no attempt to control her disordered fancy, but hurried off into the town, and hovered about the places which Dan had pointed out as being of special evil interest, and searched the streets for him, acting upon the impulse without a doubt of the propriety of what she was doing. Had the obsession taken another form, had it seemed right to her to murder him, the necessity would have been as imperative, and she would have murdered him, not only without compunction, but with a sense of satisfaction in the deed.

She pursued her search for hours, but did not find him; then went home, and there he was, standing on the doorstep, looking out for her.

"Where on earth have you been?" he said.

"Where on earth have you been yourself?" she rejoined.

"Minding my own business," he answered.

"So have I," she retorted, pushing past him into the hall.

He had never seen her like that before, and he stood looking after her in perplexity.

She went upstairs and threw herself on her bed. The worry in her head was awful. Turn and toss as she would, the one idea pursued her, until at last she groaned aloud, "O God! release me from this dreadful man!"

After a time, being thoroughly exhausted, she dropped into a troubled sleep.

When she awoke, Dan was standing looking at her.

"Aren't you well, Beth?" he said. "You've been moaning and muttering and carrying on in your sleep as if you'd got fever."

"I don't think I am well," she answered in her natural manner, the pressure on her brain being easier at the moment of awakening.

He felt her pulse. "You'd better get into bed," he said, "and I'll fetch you a sedative draught. You'll be all right in the morning."

Beth was only too thankful to get into bed. When he returned with the draught, she asked him if he were going out again.

"No, not unless I'm sent for," he said. "Where the devil should I be going to? It's close on dinner-time."

Beth shut her eyes. "If he is sent for and goes," she reflected, "I shall know it is a ruse to deceive me; and I shall get up and follow him."

He left her to sleep and went downstairs. But Beth could not sleep. The draught quieted her mind for a little; then the worry began again as bad as ever, and she found herself straining her attention to discover to whom he was talking, for she fancied she heard him whispering with some one out in the passage. She bore the suspicion awhile, then jumped out of bed impetuously and opened the door. The gas was burning low in the passage, but she could see that there was no one about. Surely, though, there were voices downstairs? Barefooted, and only in her night-dress, she went to see. Yes, there were voices in the dining-room—now! She flung the door wide open. Dan and another man, a crony of his, who had dropped in casually, were sitting smoking and chatting over their whiskeys-and-sodas.

Beth, becoming conscious of her night-dress the moment she saw them, turned and fled back to her bed; greatly relieved in her mind by the shock of her own indiscretion.

"What a mad thing to do!" she thought. "I hope to goodness they didn't see me."

A mad thing to do!

The words, when they recurred to her, were a revelation. What had she been doing all day? Mad things! What was this sudden haunting horror that had

seized upon her? Why, madness! Dan was just as he had always been. The change was in herself, and only madness could account for such a change. There was madness in the family. She remembered her father and the "moon-faced Bessie"—the familiarities with servants, too; surely her mother had suffered, and doubtless this misery which had come upon her had been communicated to her before her birth. Jealous-mad she was; that was what it meant, the one idea goading her on to do what would otherwise have been impossible, possessing her in spite of herself, and not to be banished by any effort of will.

"Heaven help me!" she groaned. "What will become of me?"

Then, as if in reply, there rose to her lips involuntarily the assurance which recurred to her now for her help and comfort in every hard moment of her life like a refrain: "I shall succeed."

And she set herself bravely to conceal her trouble, whatever it cost her, and to conquer it.

But it was a hard battle. For months the awful worry in her head continued, the same thoughts haunted her, the same jealous rage possessed her, and she knew no ease except when Dan was at hand. The trouble always passed when she had him under observation. She could not read, she could not write, she was too restless to sit and sew for more than a few moments at a time. Up and down stairs she went, out of the house and in again, fancying always, when in one place, that she would be better in another, but finding no peace anywhere, no brightness in the sunshine, no beauty in nature, no interest in life. Through the long solitary hours of the long solitary days she fought her affliction with her mouth set hard in determination to conquer it. She met the promptings of her disordered fancy with answers from her other self. "He and Bertha Petterick are together, that is why he is so late," the fiend would asseverate. "Very likely," her temperate self would reply. "But they may have been together any day this two years, and I knew it, and pitied and despised them, but felt no pain; why should I suffer now? Because my mind is disordered. But I shall recover! I shall succeed!"

She would look at the clock, however, every five minutes in an agony of suspense until Dan came in. Then she had to fight against the impulse to question him, which beset her as strongly as the impulse to follow him, and

that was always upon her except when his presence arrested it. Never once through it all, however, did she think of death as a relief; it was life she looked to for help, more life and fuller. She could interest herself in nothing, care for nothing; all feeling of affection for any one had gone, and was replaced by suspicion and rage. In her torment her cry was, "Oh, if some one would only care for me! for me as I am with all my faults! If they would only forgive me my misery and help me to care again—help *me* also to the luxury of loving!"

Forgive her her misery! The world will forgive anything but that; it tramples on the wretched as the herd turns on a wounded beast, not to put it out of its pain, but because the sight of suffering is an offence to it. If we cannot enliven our acquaintances, they will do little to enliven us. Sad faces are shunned; and signs of suffering excite less sympathy than repulsion. The spirit of Christ the Consoler has been driven out from among us.

Beth poured herself out in letters at this time rather more than was her habit; it was an effort to get into touch with the rest of the world again. In one to Jim, speaking of her hopes of success, she said she should get on better with her work if she had more sympathy shown her; to which he replied by jeering at her. What did she mean by such nonsense? But that was the way with women; they were all sickly sentimental. Sympathy indeed! She should think herself devilish lucky to have a good husband and a home of her own. Many a girl would envy her. He wrote also to other members of the family on the subject, as if it were a rare joke worth spreading that Beth wanted more sympathy; and Beth received several letters in which the writers told her what their opinion was of her and her complaints as compared to that good husband of hers, who was always so bright and cheery. All their concern was for the worthy man who had done so much for Beth. They had no patience with her, could scarcely conceal their amusement with this last absurdity, but thought she should be laughed out of her fads and fancies. That was the only time Beth sought sympathy from any of her relations. Afterwards she took to writing them bitter letters in which she told them what she thought of them as freely as they told her. "What is the use," she said to Jim, "what is the use of sisters and wives being refined and virtuous if their fathers, brothers, husbands, are bar- loafers, men of corrupt imagination and depraved conversation? Surely, if we must live with such as these, all that is best in us adds to our misery

rather than helps us. If we did not love the higher life ourselves, it would not hurt us to be brought into contact with the lower."

On receiving this letter, Jim wrote kindly to Dan, and said many things about what women were coming to with their ridiculous notions. But men were men and women were women, and that was all about it,—a lucid conclusion that appealed to Dan, who quoted it to Beth in discussions on the subject ever afterwards.

Beth broke down and despaired many times during the weary struggle with her mental affliction. She felt herself woefully changed; and not only had the light gone out of her life, but it seemed as if it never would return. When she awoke in the morning, she usually felt better for awhile, but the terrible torment in her mind returned inevitably, and rest and peace were banished for the day. It was then she learnt what is meant by the inner calm, and how greatly to be desired it is—desired above everything. The power to pray left her entirely during this phase. She could repeat prayers and extemporise them as of old, but there was no more satisfaction in the effort than in asking a favour of an empty room. Sometimes, and especially during the hideous nights, when she slept but little, and only in short snatches, she felt tempted to take something, stimulant or sedative; but this temptation she resisted bravely, and, the whole time, an extra cup of tea or coffee for the sake of the momentary relief was the only excess she committed. If she had not exercised her will in this, her case would have been hopeless; but, as it was, her self-denial, and the effort it entailed, kept up her mental strength, and helped more than anything to save her.

To beguile the long hours, she often stood in the dining-room window looking out. The window was rather above the road, so that she looked down on the people who passed, and she could also see over the hedge on the opposite side of the road into the meadow beyond. Small things distracted her sometimes, though nothing pleased her. If two rooks flew by together, she hoped for a better day; if one came first, she would not accept the omen, but waited, watching for two. By a curious coincidence, they generally passed, first one for sorrow, then two for mirth, then three for a wedding; and she would say to herself, first, bad luck, then good luck, then a marriage; and wonder how it would come about, but anyhow—"I shall succeed!" would flash from her and stimulate her.

One day, as she stood there watching, she saw a horseman come slowly down the road.

"A bowshot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley sheaves,
The sun came dazzling through the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Launcelot."

Beth's attention sharpened to sudden interest. As he came abreast of the window, the rider looked up, and Beth's heart bounded at the sight of his face, which was the face of a man from out of the long ago, virile, knightly, high-bred, refined; the face of one that lives for others, and lives openly. He had glanced up indifferently, but, on seeing Beth, a look of interest came into his eyes. It was as if he had recognised her; and she felt herself as if she had seen him before, but when or where, in what picture, in what dream, she could not tell.

With the first flush of healthy interest she had experienced for a long time, she watched him till he was all but out of sight, then shut her eyes that she might not see him vanish, for fear of bad luck; a superstition she had not practised since she was a child. When he had gone, she found herself with a happy impression of him in her mind, an impression of quiet dignity, and of strength in repose. "A man to be trusted," she thought; "true and tender, a perfect knight." The flash of interest or recognition that came into his countenance when he saw her haunted her; she recalled the colour of his blue eyes, noted the contrast they were to his dark hair and clear dark skin, and was pleased. In the afternoon she sat and sewed, and smiled to herself over her work with an easy mind. Her restlessness had subsided; Dan scarcely cost her a thought; the tension was released and a reaction had set in; but, at the time, she herself was quite unaware of it. All she felt was a good appetite for her tea.

"Minna," she said to the parlour-maid, "bring me a big cup of tea and a good plate of buttered toast. I'm famishing."

"That's good news, ma'am," Minna answered, for it was long since Beth had had any appetite at all.

The next day Beth stood at the window again, but without intention. She was thinking of her knight of the noble mien, however, and at about the same hour as on the day before, he came again, riding slowly down the road; and again he looked at Beth with a flash of interest in his face, to which she involuntarily responded. When he was out of sight she opened the window, and perceived to her glad surprise that the air was balmy, and on all things the sun shone, shedding joy.

The horrid spell was broken.

CHAPTER XLVI

"A bowshot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves."

The words made music in Beth's heart as she dressed next morning, and, instead of the torment of mind from which she had suffered for so long, there was a great glad glow. Dan went and came as usual, but neither his presence nor absence disturbed her. She had recovered her self-possession, her own point of view, and he and his habits resumed their accustomed place in her estimation. During that dreadful phase she had seen with Dan's suspicious eyes, and seen evil only, but had not acquired his interest and pleasure in it; on the contrary, her own tendency to be grieved by it had been intensified. Now, however, she had recovered herself, her sense of proportion had been restored, and she balanced the good against the evil once more, and rejoiced to find that the weight of good was even greater than she had hitherto supposed.

But although the spell had been broken in a moment, her right mind was not permanently restored all at once. It was only gradually, as the tide goes out after a tempest, and leaves the storm-beaten coast in peace, that the worry in her head subsided. She had lapse after lapse. She would lie awake at night, a prey to horrible thoughts, or start up in the early morning with her mind all turgid with suspicions which goaded her to rush out and act, act—see for herself—do something. But the great difference now was that, although she was still seized upon by the evil, it no longer had the same power to grieve her. She had valiantly resisted it from the moment she recognised its nature, but now she not only resisted it, she conquered it, and found relief. When her imagination insisted on pursuing Dan to his haunts, she deliberately and successfully turned her attention to other things. She turned her attention to the friends she loved and trusted, she dwelt on the kindness they had shown her, she forced herself to sit down and write to them, and she would rise from this happy task with her reason restored, the mere expression of affection having sufficed to exorcise the devils of rage and hate.

But it was the strange exalted sentiment which her knight had inspired that began, continued, and completed her cure. Day after day he came riding down the road, riding into her life for a moment, then passing on and leaving her, not desolate, but greatly elated. She had known no feeling like this feeling, no hope or faith like the hope and faith inspired by that man's mien. She did not know his name, she had never heard his voice; their greeting—which was hardly a greeting, so restrained was the glance and the brightening of the countenance which was all the recognition that passed between them—was merely momentary, yet, in that moment, Beth was imbued with joy which lasted longer and longer each time, until at last it stayed with her for good, restored the charm of life to her, re-aroused her dormant further faculty, and quickened the vision and the dream anew. She prayed again in those days fervently, and in full faith, as of old; for when we pray with love in our hearts our prayers are granted, and her heart was full of love—a holy, impersonal love, such as we feel for some great genius, adored at a distance, for the grace of goodness he has imparted to us. And her heart being full of love, her brain teemed with ideas; the love she lived on, the ideas she held in reserve, for she had been so weakened by all she had suffered that the slightest exertion in the way of work exhausted her. In any case, however, great ideas must simmer long in the mind before they come to the boil, and the time was not lost.

In those days fewer people than ever came to the house. For weeks together Beth never spoke to a soul except the servants and her husband, and through the long hours when her head troubled her and she could not work, she felt her isolation extremely. Mrs. Kilroy and her other new friends sent her pamphlets and papers and hurried notes to keep her heart up and inform her of their progress, and Beth, knowing what the hurry of their lives was, and not expecting any attention, was grateful for all they paid her. She had no fear of losing touch with such friends after they had once received her into their circle as one of themselves, however seldom she might see them, and it was well for her mental health that she had them to rely on during that time of trial, for without them she would have had no sense of security in any relation in life.

She was gradually growing to be on much more formal terms with Dan than she had been, thanks to her own strength of character. She found she was able to reduce the daily jar, and even to keep his coarseness in check, by

extreme politeness. In any difference, his habit had been to try and shout her down; but the contrast of her own quiet dignified demeanour checked him in that. Beth had the magnetic quality which, when steadily directed, acts on people and forces them into any attitude desired; and Dan accommodated his manner and conversation to her taste more now than he had ever done before; but he felt the restraint, and was with her as little as possible, which, as she began to recover, was also a relief—for his blatant self-absorption, the everlasting I, I, I, of his conversation, and his low views of life, rasped her irritable nerves beyond endurance.

One day, coming into the drawing-room about tea-time, with muddy boots and his hat on, he found her lying on the sofa, prostrated with nervous headache. The days closed in early then, and she had had the fire lighted and the curtains drawn, but could not bear the gaslight because of her head.

"Well, this isn't brilliant," he began, at the top of his voice. "A little more light would suit me." He struck a match and turned the gas full on. "That's better," he said; "and some tea would be refreshing after my walk. I've done the whole trudge on foot this afternoon, and I consider that's a credit to me. You won't find many rising young men economising in the matter of horseflesh as I do, or in anything else. I'll undertake to say I spend less on myself than any other man in the diocese." He went to the door instead of ringing the bell, and shouted down the passage to Minna to bring him some tea.

Beth shut her eyes and groaned inwardly.

When the tea came, Dan poured some out for himself, remarking, "I suppose you've had yours." Beth had not, but she was beyond making any effort to help herself at the moment. Dan, who always ate at a greedy rate, left off talking for a little; and during the interval, Beth was startled by something cold touching her hand. She opened her eyes, and found a dainty little black-and-tan terrier standing up, with its forepaws on the couch, looking at her.

"You're a pretty thing," she said. "Where have you come from?"

"Oh, is that the dog?" said Dan, looking round to see to whom she was talking. "He followed me in. I don't know who he belongs to; but as I

happen to want a little dog, he's welcome."

"But he's very well-bred, isn't he," said Beth, "and valuable? Look at his pencilled paws, and thin tail, and sharp ears pricked to attention. He's listening to what we are saying with the greatest intelligence. I'm sure he's a pet, and his owners will want him back."

"Let them come and fetch him, then," said Dan.

Then it occurred to Beth that Dan had probably bought him to present to somebody, but chose to lie about it for reasons of his own, so she said no more.

The next night, about ten o'clock, Dan was called out, and did not return. Beth, being very wideawake, sat up late, playing patience first of all, and then reading a shilling shocker of Dan's, which she had taken up casually and become interested in. The story was of an extremely sensational kind, and she found herself being wrought up by it to a high pitch of nervous excitement. At the slightest noise she jumped; and then she became oppressed by the silence, and found herself peering into the dark corners of the room, and hesitating to glance over her shoulder, as if she feared to see something. She supposed the servants had not yet gone to bed, for she heard at intervals what seemed to be a human voice. After a time, however, it struck her that there was something unusual in the regularity of the sound, and, although she continued to read, she found herself waiting involuntarily, with strained attention, for it to be repeated. When it occurred again, she thought it sounded suspiciously like a cry of pain; and the next time it came she was sure of it. Instantly forgetting herself and her nervous tremors, she threw down her book and went to see what was the matter. She stood a moment in the hall, where the gas had been left burning, and listened; but all was still. Then she opened the door of communication into the kitchen regions, and found that that part of the house was all in darkness. The servants had gone to bed. Holding the door open, she stood a little, and listened again; but, as she heard nothing, she began to think her fancy had played her a trick, when, just beside her, as it seemed, some one shrieked. Beth, gasping with terror, ran back into the hall, and struck a match to light one of the bed-candles that stood on a table, her impulse being to go to the rescue in spite of her deadly fright. It seemed an age before she could get

the candle lit with her trembling hands, and, in the interval, the horrible cry recurred, and this time she thought it came from the surgery. Could any sick person have been left there locked up? Dan always kept the room locked up, and Beth had hardly ever been in it. She went to the door now, bent on breaking it open, but she found that for once the key had been left in the lock. She turned it and entered boldly; but her candle flickered as she opened the door, so that, at first, she could see nothing distinctly. She held it high above her head, however, and as the flame became steady she looked about her. There was no one to be seen. The room was large and bare. All that it contained was a bookcase, some shelves with books on them, a writing-table and chair, an arm-chair, a couch, and another table of common deal, like a kitchen table, on which was a variety of things—bottles, books, and instruments apparently—all covered up with a calico sheet.

Beth, checked again in her search, was considering what to do next, when the horrid cry was once more repeated. It seemed to come from under the calico sheet. Beth lighted the gas, put down her candle, and going to the table, took the sheet off deliberately, and saw a sight too sickening for description. The little black-and-tan terrier, the bonny wee thing which had been so blithe and greeted her so confidently only the evening before, lay there, fastened into a sort of frame in a position which alone must have been agonising. But that was not all.

Beth had heard of these horrors before, but little suspected that they were carried on under that very roof. She had turned sick at the sight, a low cry escaped her, and her great compassionate heart swelled with rage; but she acted without hesitation.

Snatching up her candle, she went to the shelves where the bottles were, looked along the row of red labels, found what she wanted, went back to the table, and poured some drops down the poor little tortured creature's throat.

In a moment its sufferings ceased.

Then Beth covered the table with the calico sheet mechanically, put the bottle back in its place, turned out the gas, and left the room, locking the door after her. Her eyes were haggard and her teeth were clenched, but she felt the stronger for a brave determination, and more herself than she had done for many months.

Maclure only came in to bathe and breakfast next morning, and she scarcely exchanged a word with him before he went out again; but in the afternoon he came into the drawing-room, where she was writing a letter, and began to talk as if he meant to be sociable. He had his usual air of having lavished much attention on his personal adornment—too much for manliness; and, in spite of the night work, his hair shone as glossy black, his complexion was as bright and clear, and his general appearance as fresh and healthy, as care of himself and complete indifference to other people, except in so far as his own well-being might be affected by them, could make it. Beth watched him surveying himself in the glass from different points of view with a complacent smile, and felt that his physical advantages, and the superabundant vitality which made the business of living such an easy enjoyable farce to him, made his inhuman callousness all the more repulsive.

"I should go out if I were you," he said, peering close into the glass at the corner of his eye, where he fancied he had detected the faint criss-cross of coming crows' feet "I'd never stay mugging up in the house, withering. Look at me! I go out in all weathers, and I'll undertake to say I'm a pretty good specimen both of health and spirits."

It was so unusual for Dan to recommend Beth to do anything for her own good that she began to wonder what he wanted; she had observed that he always felt kindly disposed towards people when he was asking a favour of them.

"And, by-the-bye," he pursued, turning his back to the mirror and craning his neck to see the set of his coat-tails, "you might do something for me when you are out. Wilberforce is worrying for his money. It's damned cheek. I sent him a large order for whisky the other day to keep him quiet, but it hasn't answered. I wish you would go and see him—go with a long face, like a good girl, and tell him I'm only waiting till I get my own accounts in. Have a little chat with him, you know, and all that sort of thing—lay yourself out to please him, in fact. He's a gentlemanly fellow for a wine-merchant, and has a weakness for pretty women. If you go, I'll take my dick he'll not trouble us with a bill for the next six months."

"It seems to me," said Beth in her quietest way, "that when a husband asks his wife to make use of her personal appearance or charm of manner to obtain a favour for him from another man, he is requiring something of her which is not at all consistent with her self-respect."

Dan stopped short with his hand up to his moustache to twist it, his bonhomie cast aside in a moment. "Oh, damn your self-respect!" he said brutally. "Your cursed book-talk is enough to drive a man to the devil. Anybody but you, with your 'views' and 'opinions' and fads and fancies generally, would be only too glad to oblige a good husband in such a small matter. And surely to God *I* know what is consistent with your self-respect! *I* should be the last person in the world to allow you to compromise it! But your eyes will be opened, and the cursed conceit taken out of you some day, madam, I can tell you! You'll live to regret the way you've treated me, I promise you!"

"My eyes have been pretty well opened as it is," Beth answered. "You left the key in the surgery door last night."

"And you went in there *spying* on me, did you? That was honourable!" he exclaimed in a voice of scorn.

"I heard the wretched creature you had been vivisecting crying in its agony, and I thought it was a human being, and went to see," Beth answered, speaking in the even, dispassionate way which she had found such an effectual check on Dan's vulgar bluster.

"You killed that dog, then!" he exclaimed, turning on her savagely. "How dare you?"

Beth rose from the writing-table, and went and stretched herself out on the sofa, deliberately facing him.

"How dare *you*?" she inquired.

"How dare I, indeed, in my own house!" he bawled. "Now, look here, madam, I'm not going to have any of your damned interference, and so I tell you."

"Please, I am not deaf," she remonstrated gently. "And now, look here, sir, I am not going to have any of your *damnable* cruelties going on under the same roof with me. I have endured your sensuality and your corrupt conversation weakly, partly because I knew no better, and partly because I was the only sufferer, as it seemed to me, in the narrow outlook I had on life until lately; but I know better now. I know that every woman who submits in such matters is not only a party to her own degradation, but connives at the degradation of her whole sex. Our marriage never can be a true marriage, the spiritual, intellectual, physical union of a man and a woman for the purpose of perfect companionship. We have none of the higher aspirations in common, we should be none the happier for tender experiences of parenthood, none the holier for any joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure, that might come to us to strengthen and ennoble us if rightly enjoyed or endured. And this, I think, is not altogether my fault. But however that may be, it is out of my power to remedy it now. All I can do is to prevent unedifying scenes between us by showing you such courtesy and consideration as is possible. On this occasion I will show you courtesy, but the consideration is due to me. A woman does not marry to have her heart wrung, her health destroyed, her life made wretched by anything that is preventable, and I intend to put a stop to this last discovered hellish practice of yours. I will not allow it, and if you dare to attempt it again, I will call in the townsfolk to see you at your brutal work."

She spoke with decision, in the tone of one who has determined on her plan of action and will fearlessly pursue it. A great gravity settled on Daniel Maclure. He stood still a little reflecting, then came to the fire, beside which Beth, who had risen restlessly as she spoke, was now sitting in an arm-chair. He drew up another chair, and sat down also, having resolved, in face of the gravity of the situation, to try some of his old tactics, and some new ones as well. His first pose was to gaze into the fire ruefully for awhile, and then his fine eyes slowly filled with tears.

"It must have been a brutal sight," he said at last, "and I can't tell you how sorry I am you saw it. I don't wonder you're shaken, poor little girl, and it's natural that the shock should have made you unreasonable and uncharitable—unlike yourself, in fact, for I never knew a more reasonable woman when you are in your right mind, or a more charitable. I'm not so bad, however, as

you think me. I never intended to inflict suffering on the creature. I didn't know he'd recover. I had given him a dose of curare."

"The drug that paralyses without deadening the sense of pain," Beth interposed. "I have heard of the tender mercies of the vivisector. He saves himself as much as he can in the matter of distracting noises."

Dan had mentioned curare to give a persuasive touch of scientific accuracy to his explanation, not suspecting that she knew the properties of the drug, and he was taken aback for a moment; but he craftily abandoned that point and took up another.

"These experiments must be made, in the interests of suffering humanity, more's the pity," he said, sighing.

"In the interests of cruel and ambitious scientific men, struggling to outstrip each other, and make money, and win fame for themselves regardless of the cost. They were ready enough in old days to vivisect human beings when it was allowed, and they would do it again if they dared."

"Now look here, Beth; don't be rabid," said Dan temperately. "Just think of the sufferings medical men are able to relieve nowadays in consequence of these researches."

"Good authorities say that nothing useful has been discovered by vivisection that could not have been discovered without it," Beth rejoined. "And even if it had been the means of saving human life, that would not justify your employment of it. There never could be a human life worth saving at such an expense of suffering to other creatures. It isn't as if you made an experiment and had done with it either. One generation after another of you repeats the same experiments to verify them, to see for yourselves, for practice; and so countless helpless creatures are being tortured continually by numbers of men who are degraded and brutalised themselves by their experiments. Had I known you were a vivisector, I should not only have refused to marry you, I should have declined to associate with you. To conceal such a thing from the woman you were about to marry was a cruel injustice—a fraud."

"I concealed nothing from you that you were old enough to understand and take a right view of," Dan protested.

"According to custom," said Beth. "Anything that might prevent a woman accepting a man is carefully concealed from her. That kind of cant is wearisome. You did not think me too young to put at the head of a house, or to run the risk of becoming a mother, although I have heard you dilate yourself on the horrors of premature motherhood. But that is the way with men. For anything that suits their own convenience they are ingenious in finding excuses. As a rule, they see but one side of a social question, and that is their own. I cannot understand any but unsexed women associating with vivisectors. Don't pretend you pursue such experiments reluctantly—you delight in them. But, whatever the excuse for them, I am sure that the time is coming when the vivisector will be treated like the people who prepared the dead for embalming in ancient Egypt. You will be called in when there is no help for it; but, your task accomplished, you will be driven out of all decent society, to consort with the hangman—if even he will associate with you."

"Well, well!" Dan ejaculated, gazing into the fire sorrowfully. "But I suppose this is what we should expect. It's the way of the world. A scientific man who devotes all his time and talents to relieving his fellow-creatures must expect to be misunderstood and reviled by way of reward. You send for us when you want us—there's nobody like the doctor then; but you'll grudge every penny you've got to give us, and you'd not pay at all if you could help it. I should know."

"I was not speaking of doctors," Beth rejoined. "I was speaking of vivisectors. But after all, what is the great outcome of your extraordinary science? What do you do with it? Keep multitudes alive and suffering who would be happily dead and at rest but for you! If you practised with the honest intention of doing as much good as you could, you would not be content merely to treat effects as you do for the most part; you would strike at causes also; and we should hear more of prevention and less of wonderful cures. You dazzle the blockhead public with a showy operation, and no one thinks of asking why it is that the necessity for this same operation recurs so often. You know, probably, but you disclaim responsibility in the matter. It is not your place to teach the public, you modestly protest."

"I don't know how you can say that in the face of the effort we have made to stamp out disease. Why, look at zymotic diseases alone!"

"Exactly!" Beth answered. "Zymotic diseases alone! But why draw the line there? And what are you doing to improve the race, to strengthen its power to resist disease? You talk about Nature when it suits you; but it is the cant of the subject you employ, for you are at variance with Nature. Your whole endeavour is to thwart her. Nature decrees the survival of the fittest; you exercise your skill to preserve the unfittest, and stop there—at the beginning of your responsibilities, as it seems to me. Let the unfit who are with us live, and save them from suffering when you can, by all means; but take pains to prevent the appearance of any more of them. By the reproduction of the unfit, the strength, the beauty, the morality of the race is undermined, and with them its best chances of happiness. Yes, you certainly do your best to stamp out measles, smallpox, scarlet fever, and all that group—diseases that do not necessarily leave any permanent mark on the constitution; but at the same time you connive at the spread of the worst disease to which we are liable. About that you preserve the strictest professional secrecy. Only to-day, in the *Times*, there is the report of a discussion on the subject at a meeting of the International Congress of Legal Medicine—where is it?" She took up the paper and read:—"There was an important debate on the spread of an infamous disease by wet nurses. This question is all the more urgent because, though the greatest dangers and complications are involved, *it is very generally neglected*.... When a doctor knows that the parents of a child are tainted, should he so far disregard the professional secrecy to which he is bound as to warn the nurse of her danger in suckling the child?' Apparently not! The poor woman must take her chance, as the child's unfortunate mother had to do when she married."

"Ah, now you see for yourself, and will become reasonable, it is to be hoped," he interrupted, rubbing his hands complacently; "for it is precisely in order to check that particular disease that appointments like mine are made."

"It is precisely in order to make vice safe for men that such appointments are made," she answered. "Medical etiquette would not stop where it does, at the degradation of those unfortunate women, if you were honestly attempting to put a stop to that disease. You would have it reported, irrespective of the sex of the sufferer, like any other disease that is dangerous to the health of the community. It is not contrary to etiquette to

break your peculiar professional secrecy in the case of a woman, but it would be in the case of a man; so you punish the women, and let the men go free to spread the evil from one generation to another as they like. O justice! O consistency! I don't wonder we have been shunned since we came to Slane. A man in your position is a mere pander, and right glad am I of what I have suffered from the scorn and contempt of the people who would not associate with us. It shows that the right spirit is abroad in the community."

"Pander!" Dan ejaculated. "I am sorry to hear you use such a word, Beth."

"It is the right word, unfortunately," she answered.

"You oughtn't to know anything about these things," the chaste Daniel observed, with an air of offended delicacy. "Women can't know enough to see the matter from the right point of view, and so they make mischief."

"Ah, you don't appreciate that women have grown out of their intellectual infancy," Beth said, "and have opinions and a point of view of their own in social matters, especially where their own sex is concerned. You are still in the days of old Chavasse, who expatiates in his 'Advice to a Wife' on the dangers of men marrying unhealthy women, but says not a word of warning to women on the risk of marrying unhealthy men. You would keep us blindfolded as we were in his day, and abandon us to our fate in like manner; but it can't be done any more, my friend. You can hide nothing from sensible women now that concerns the good of the community. We know there is no protection for women against this infamous disease, and no punishment for the men who spread it; and we consider the fact a disgrace to every medical man alive."

"You have a nice opinion of the men of your husband's profession!" Dan observed sarcastically.

"I have the highest opinion of medical men—such medical men as Sir George Galbraith," she replied. "I have seen something of their high-mindedness, their courage, their devotion, and their genuine disinterestedness; and I feel sure that in time their efforts will leaven the whole mass of callousness and cruelty against which they have to contend

in their profession. The hope of humanity is in the doctors, and they will not fail us. Like Christ, they will teach as well as heal."

"Rubbish!" said Dan. "As I've told you before, it isn't our business to mind the morals of the people. It's for the parsons to fight the devil."

"But," said Beth, "as I answered you before, you cannot attend to the health of the community properly without also minding its morals. The real old devil is disease."

Dan left his seat and walked to the window, where he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out for awhile.

"Well, this is enough jawbation for one day, I hope," he said at last, turning round. "Marrying a woman like you is enough to drive a man to the devil. I've a jolly good mind to go and get drunk. I declare to God if I could get drunk overnight and feel all right again in the morning, I'd be drunk every night. But it can't be done," he added regretfully. "There are drawbacks to everything."

Beth looked at him imperturbably while he was speaking, then turned her attention to the fire.

"You know my views now on the subject of vivisection," she said at last. "If there is any more of it here, I shall leave the house, and publish the reason. And you also know what I consider I owe myself in the way of self-respect. You must beguile your creditors by other means than my personal appearance."

She had spoken all through in the most temperate tone, and now, when she had finished, she leaned back in her chair and folded her hands with a sigh, as of one who had finished a hard task and would rest.

Dan looked at her with evident distaste, and considered a little, searching for something more to say that might move her, some argument that should persuade or convince; but, as nothing occurred to him, he left the room, banging the door after him in his ill-conditioned way, because he knew that the noise would be a racking offence to her overwrought nerves.

But from that time forward everything he did was an offence to Beth, a source of irritation. In spite of herself, she detected all the insincerity of his professions, the mean motives of his acts. Up to this time she had been more kindly disposed towards him than she herself knew. All she had wanted was to be able to care for him, to find some consistency in him, something to respect, and to which she could pin her faith; but now she knew him for what he was exactly—shallow, pretentious, plausible, vulgar-minded, without principle; a man of false pretensions and vain professions; utterly untrustworthy; saying what would suit himself at the moment, or just what occurred to him, not what he thought, but what he imagined he was expected to say. Beth had never heard him condemn a vice or habit which she did not afterwards find him practising himself. She used to wonder if he deceived himself, or was only intent on deceiving her; but from close observation of him at this period, she became convinced that, for the time being, he entered into whatever part he was playing, and hence his extreme plausibility. Beth found herself studying him continually with a curious sort of impersonal interest; he was a subject that repelled her, but from which, nevertheless, she could not tear herself away. His hands in particular, his handsome white hands, had a horrid sort of fascination for her. She had admired them while she thought of them as the healing hands of the physician, bringing hope and health; but now she knew them to be the cruel hands of the vivisector, associated with torture, from which humanity instinctively shrinks; and when he touched her, her delicate skin crisped with a shudder. She used to wonder how he could eat with hands so polluted, and once, at dessert, when he handed her a piece of orange in his fingers, she was obliged to leave it on her plate, she could not swallow it.

After that last scene the days dragged more intolerably than ever; but happily for Beth there were not many more of them without a break, for just as it seemed that endurance must end in some desperate act, Mrs. Kilroy sent her a pressing invitation to go and pay her a long visit in London; and Beth accepted it, and went with such a sense of relief as an invalid feels who, after long suffering, finds herself well, and out in the free fresh air once more.

CHAPTER XLVII

WHEN Beth went to stay with the Kilroys in London, it was a question whether she might not end by joining the valiant army of those who are in opposition to everything; but before she had been there a week, she had practically recovered her balance, and began to look out upon life once more with dispassionate attention. Her depression when she first arrived was evident, and the Kilroys were concerned to see her looking so thin and ill; but, by degrees, she expanded in that genial atmosphere, and although she said little as a rule, she had begun to listen and to observe again with her usual vivid interest. She could not have been better situated for the purpose, for people of all kinds came to the Kilroys; and in moving among them merely as an onlooker, she was bound to see and hear enough to take her out of herself. Her own personality was too distinct, however, for her to remain for long an onlooker merely. That mesmeric quality in her which, whether it fascinates or displeases, attracts or repels, marks a distinct personality which is not to be overlooked, made people ask at once who she was, in the hope that her acquaintance might be worth cultivating. For there was a certain air of distinction about her which made her look like a person with some sort of prestige, whom it might be useful to know—don't you know.

One afternoon soon after Beth's arrival, Mrs. Kilroy being at home to visitors, and the rooms already pretty full, Beth noticed among the callers an old-looking young man whose face seemed familiar to her. He wore a pointed beard upon his chin, and a small moustache cut away from his upper lip, and waxed and turned up at the ends. His face was thin and narrow, his forehead high and bald; what hair he had grew in a fringe at the back of his head, and was curly, and of a nondescript brown colour. Had he worn the dress of the Elizabethan period, he might have passed for a bad attempt to look like Shakespeare; and Beth thought that that perhaps might be the resemblance which puzzled her. While she was looking at him a lady was announced, a most demure-looking little person in a grey costume, and a small, close-fitting princess bonnet, tied under her chin, and trimmed with a big Alsatian bow in front. She entered smiling slightly, and she continued

to smile, as if she had set the smile on her lips as she put the bonnet on her head, to complete her costume. After she had shaken hands with Angelica, she looked round as if in search of some one else, and seemed satisfied when she discovered the old-looking young man of Shakesperian aspect. He was watching her, and their eyes met with a momentary significance, but they took no further notice of each other. Most people would have perceived no more in the glance than showed on the surface:—a lady and gentleman who looked at each other and then looked away, like indifferent acquaintances or casual strangers; but Beth's infallible intuition revealed to her an elaborate precaution in this seeming unconcern. It was clear to her that the two had expected to meet each other there, and their apparent insensibility to each other's presence was a pose, which, however, betrayed to her the intimacy it was affected to conceal. She hated herself for seeing so much, and burned with blame of Dan for opening her eyes to behold the inward wickedness beneath the conventional propriety of the outward demeanour; but therein she was unjust to Dan. He had opened her eyes sooner than they should have been opened, but in any case she must have seen for herself eventually. Nothing in life can be concealed from such a mind. What books could not teach her, she discovered from people by sympathy, by insight, by intuition; but she did not come into full possession of her faculties all at once. The conditions of her life had tended rather to retard than to develop the best that was in her, and the wonder was that her vision had not been permanently distorted, so that she could see nothing but evil in all things—see it, too, till her eyes were accustomed and her soul corrupted, so that she not only ceased to resent it, but finally accepted it as the inevitable order to which it is best to accommodate oneself if one is to get any good out of life. This is the fate of most young wives situated as Beth had been, the fate she had only narrowly escaped by help of the strength that came of the brave self-contained habits she had cultivated in her life of seclusion and thought. It was the result of this training, and her constancy in pursuing it, that her further faculty, hitherto so fitful, at last shot up a bright and steady light which made manifest to her the thoughts of others that they were not all evil, and helped her by the grace in her own heart to perceive hidden processes of love at work in other hearts, all tending to purification, and by the goodness of her own soul to search out the goodness in other souls as the elements find their constituent parts in the atmosphere.

Beth was looking her best that afternoon, although she had taken no pains with herself. She seemed well dressed by dint of looking well in her clothes; but she had not chosen to make herself look well. In the exasperated phase of revolt through which she was passing, she could not have been persuaded to dress so as to heighten the effect of her appearance, and so make of herself a trap to catch admiring glances. To be neat and fresh was all her care; but that was enough. The young man with the pointed beard, who had been looking about the room uneasily, seemed to have found what he wanted when he noticed her. He asked an elderly man standing near him who the young lady of distinguished appearance might be. "A friend of Mrs. Kilroy's, I believe," the gentleman answered, and moved off as if he resented the question.

But Pointed Beard was persistent. He asked two or three other people, strangers, who did not know either, and then he made his way to Mrs. Kilroy, but she was so surrounded he could not get near her. At last he bethought him of the servants who were handing tea about, and learnt Beth's name from one of them.

When Beth next noticed him, he was making his way towards her with a cup of tea in one hand and a plate of cakes in the other.

"I have ventured to bring you some tea," he said, "but I do not know if it is as you like it. I can easily get you some more, however, if it is not."

"Thank you; I do not want any," Beth answered somewhat coldly.

"I'll put it here, then, on this console," he rejoined. "If I move away I shall not be able to get near you again in this crowd. I wonder why Mrs. Kilroy has so many people. Now, *I* like just a few, eight or ten for a dinner, you know, and twenty or so on these sort of occasions. And they must all be interesting people, worth talking to. I am exceedingly fastidious about the kind of people I know. Even as a boy I was fastidious."

As he uttered that last sentence, Beth was again aware of something familiar in his appearance, and she felt sure she had heard him make that same remark more than once before—but when? but where?

"That is Lord Fitzkillingham," he continued, "that tall man who has just come in—see, there!—shaking hands with Mrs. Kilroy. He looks like a

duke, don't you know. I admire people of distinguished appearance much more than good-looking people—people who are merely good-looking, I mean, of course. I saw *you* directly I came into the room, and was determined to find out who you were; and I asked I can't tell you how many people, whether I knew them or not. What do you think of that for perseverance?"

"You certainly seem to be persistent," Beth answered with a smile.

"Oh, I'm nothing if not persistent," he rejoined complacently. "I'll undertake to find out anything I want to know. Do you see that lady there in black? I wanted to know her age, so I went to Somerset House and looked it up."

"What did you do that for?" Beth asked.

"I wanted to know."

"But did she want you to know?"

"Well, naturally not, or she would have told me. But it is no use trying to conceal things from me. I am not to be deceived."

"You must be quite a loss to Scotland Yard," Beth ventured. "You would have been admirably fitted for that—er—delicate kind of work."

"Well, I think I should," he rejoined. "You see I found *you* out, and it was not so easy, for—er—no one seemed to know you. However, that does not matter. We'll soon introduce you."

Beth smiled. "Thank you," she said drily, "that will be very nice."

"I'll bring Fitzkillingham presently; he'll do anything for me. He was one of our set at the 'Varsity. That's the best of going to the 'Varsity. You meet the right kind of people there, people who can help you, you know, if you can get in with them as I did. You'll like Fitzkillingham. He's a very good fellow."

"Indeed!" said Beth. "What has he done?"

"Done!" he echoed. "Oh, nothing that I know of. Consider his position! The Earl of Fitzkillingham, with a rent-roll of fifty thousand a year, has no need

to do; he has only to be. There, he's caught my eye. I'll go and fetch him."

"Pray do nothing of the kind," said Beth emphatically. "I have no wish to know him."

The young man, disconcerted, turned and looked her full in the face. "Why not?" he gasped.

"First of all, because you were going to present him without asking my permission," Beth said, "which is a liberty I should have had to resent in any case by refusing to know him; and secondly, because a man worth fifty thousand a year who has done no good in the world is not worth knowing. I don't think he should be allowed to *be* unless he can be made to *do*. Pray excuse me if I shock your prejudices," she added, smiling. "You do not know, perhaps, that in *our* set, knowing people for position rather than for character is quite out of date?"

The young man smiled superciliously. "That is rather a bourgeois sentiment, is it not?" he said.

"On the contrary," said Beth, "it is the other that is the huckster spirit. What is called knowing the right people is only the commercial principle of seeking some advantage. Certain people make a man's acquaintance, and pay him flattering attentions, not because their hearts are good and they wish to give him pleasure, but because there is some percentage of advantage to be gained by knowing him. That is to be bourgeois in the vulgar sense, if you like! And that is the trade-mark stamped upon most of us—selfishness! snobbishness! One sees it in the conventional society manners, which are superficially veneered, fundamentally bad; the outcome of self-interest, not of good feeling; one knows exactly how, where, and when they will break down."

"What are you holding forth about, Beth?" said Mrs. Kilroy, coming up behind her.

"The best people," Beth answered, smiling.

"You mean the people who call themselves the best people—Society, that is to say," said Mrs. Kilroy cheerfully. "Society is the scum that comes to the

surface because of its lightness, and does not count, except in sets where ladies' papers circulate."

"I am surprised to hear *you* talk so, Mrs. Kilroy," said Pointed Beard in an offended tone, as if society had been insulted in his person.

"I am sorry if I disappoint you," said Mrs. Kilroy. "And I confess I like my own set and their pretty manners; but I know their weaknesses. There is no snob so snobbish as a snob of good birth. The upper classes will be the last to learn that it is sterling qualities which are wanted to rule the world,—head and heart."

"This gentleman will tell you that all that is bourgeois," said Beth.

"I believe that at heart the bourgeois are sound," said Angelica. "Bourgeois signifies good, sound, self-respecting qualities to me, and steady principles."

"But scarcely 'pretty manners,' I should suppose," said Pointed Beard superciliously.

"Why not?" said Angelica. "Sincerity and refinement make good manners, and principle is the parent of both."

"Don't you think that for the most part Englishwomen are singularly lacking in charms of manner?" he asked precisely.

"Just as Englishmen are, and for the same reason," said Angelica; "because they only try to be agreeable when it suits themselves. A good manner is a decoration that must be kept on always if it is to be worn with ease. Good manners are rare because good feeling is rare, for good manners are the outcome of good feeling. Manners are not the mere society show of politeness, but the inward kindly sympathy of which politeness is the natural outward manifestation; given these, grace and charm of manner come of themselves."

She moved off as she spoke to attend to other guests.

"Mrs. Kilroy is obvious," said Pointed Beard, in a tone that suggested sympathy with Beth for being bored. "I wonder she did not give us 'For

manners are not idle,' et cetera, or something equally banal—the kind of thing we are taught in our infancy——"

"And fail to apply ever after," said Beth.

"I see you are ready," he observed fatuously, striking the personal note again, which she resented.

"I dislike that cant of the obvious which there is so much of here in town," she rejoined. "It savours of preciosity. All that is finest in thought is obvious. A great truth, well put, when heard for the first time, is so crystal clear to the mind, one seems to have known it always. No one fears to be obvious who has anything good to say."

He stroked his beard in silence for some seconds. "I suppose you go in for politics, and all that sort of thing," he said at last.

"Why?" Beth asked in her disconcerting way.

"Oh, judging by your friends."

"Not a safe guide," she assured him. "My friends have the most varied interests; and even if they had not, it would be somewhat monotonous for them to associate exclusively with people of the same pursuits."

"Then you do not take an interest in politics?" he jerked out, almost irritably, as if he had a right to know.

For a moment Beth had a mind to baffle him for his tasteless persistency, but her natural directness saved her from such small-mindedness. "If I must answer your catechism," she said, smiling, "social subjects interest me more. I find generalisations bald and misleading, and politics are a generalisation of events. I rarely read a political speech through, and remember very little of what it is all about when I do. Details, individuals, and actions fascinate me, but the circumstances of a people as a state rarely interest me much."

"Ah, I fear that is—er—a feminine point of view, rather—is it not?" he rejoined patronisingly.

"Yes," she said, "and a scientific method. We go from the particular to the general, and only draw broad conclusions when we have collected our facts in detail. But excuse me, I see a friend," she broke off hastily, seizing the chance to escape.

A little later Beth saw that the demure-looking little person in the princess bonnet was taking her leave. She passed down the room with her set little smile on her lips, looking about her, but apparently without seeing any one in particular till she got to the door, when her eye lighted on the young man of Shakesperian mien, and her smile flickered a moment, and went out. The young man turned and looked at a picture with an elaborately casual air, then sauntered across the room to Mrs. Kilroy, shook hands with her, spoke to one or two other people, and finally reached the door and opened it with the same solemn affectation of not being in a hurry, and disappeared. Beth wondered if he kept his caution up before the footmen in the hall, or if he made an undignified bolt of it the moment he was out of sight of society.

At dinner that evening she asked Mrs. Kilroy who and what that thin-nosed man, that sort of reminiscence of Shakespeare, was.

"He is by way of being a literary man, I believe," Angelica answered. "He is not a friend of ours, and I cannot think why he comes here. I never ask him. He got himself introduced to me somehow, and then came and called, which I thought an impertinence. Did you notice that woman with an Alsatian bow in her bonnet, that made her look like a horse with its ears laid back? Her pose is to improve young men. She improves them away from their wives, and I object to the method; and I do not ask her here either. Yet she comes. His wife I have much sympathy with; but he keeps her in the country, out of the way, so I see very little of her."

"What is his name?" Beth asked.

"Alfred Cayley Pounce."

"Why!" Beth exclaimed. "He must be a youth I knew long ago, when I was a child. I was sure I had seen him before. But what a falling off! I wondered if he were an old young man, or a young old man when I first saw him. He was refined as a boy and had artistic leanings; I should have thought he

might have developed something less banal in the time than a bald forehead."

"That kind of man spends most of his time in cultivating acquaintances," said Mr. Kilroy. "When he hasn't birth, his pose is usually brains. But Pounce took a fair degree at the University. And he's not such a bad fellow, really. He's precious, of course, and by way of being literary—that is to say, he is literary to the extent of having written some little things of no consequence, upon which he assumes the right to give his opinion, with appalling assurance, of the works of other people, which are of consequence. There is a perfect epidemic of that kind of assurance among the clever young men of the day, and it's wrecking half of them. A man who begins by having no doubt of the worth of his own opinion gets no further for want of room to move in."

Next day Beth was alone in a sunny sitting-room at the back of the house, looking out into grounds common to the whole square. It was about tea-time. The windows were wide open, the sunblinds were drawn down outside, and the warm air, fragrant with mignonette, streamed in over the window boxes. Angelica had given this room up to Beth, and here she worked or rested; read, wrote, or reflected, as she felt inclined; soothed rather than disturbed by the far-off sounds of the city, and eased in mind by the grace and beauty of her surroundings. For the room was a work of art in itself, an Adams room, with carved white panels, framing spaces of rich brocade, delicately tinted, on the walls; with furniture chosen for comfort as well as elegance, and no more of it than was absolutely necessary, no crowding of chairs and tables, no congestion of useless ornaments, no plethora of pictures, putting each other out—only two, in fact, one a summer seascape, with tiny waves bursting on shining sands; the other a corner of a beautiful old garden, shady with trees, glowing with flowers, whence two young lovers, sitting on an old stone seat, looked out with dreamy eyes on a bright glimpse, framed in foliage, of the peaceful country beyond. Angelica had thought that room out carefully for Beth, every detail being considered, so that the whole should make for rest and refreshment, and she had succeeded perfectly. Nothing could have eased Beth's mind of the effect of her late experiences, or strengthened it again more certainly, than the harmony, the quiet, and the convenience of everything about her—books on the shelves, needlework on the work-table, writing materials in

abundance on the bureau, exquisite forms of flowers, and prevailing tints of apple-blossom, white, and pink, and green; music when she chose to play; comfort of couch and chairs when she wished to repose; and, above all, freedom from intrusion, the right to do as she liked gladly conceded, the respect which adds to the dignity of self-respect, and altogether the kind of independence that makes most for pleasure and peace. Before she had been there three weeks she was happily released from herself by the recovery of her power to work. She began to revise the book she had thought so little of when it was first written. She had brought it to town because it was not very bulky, rather than because she had any hope of it; but when she took it out and read it here alone in peace, it seized upon her with power, and, in her surprise, like Galileo, she exclaimed: "But it does turn round!" The book was already "radiant with inborn genius," but it still lacked the "acquired art," and feeling this, she sat down to it regularly, and rewrote it from beginning to end, greatly enriching it. She had no amateur impatience to appear in print and become known; the thought of production induced her to delay and do her utmost rather than to make indiscreet haste; her delight was in the doing essentially; she was not one to glory in public successes, however great, or find anything but a tepid satisfaction therein compared to the warm delight that came when her thoughts flowed, and the material world melted out of mind.

She had been busy with her book that afternoon, and very happy, until tea came. Then, being somewhat tired, she got up from the bureau at which she worked, and went to the tea-table, leaving her papers all scattered about; and she was in the act of pouring herself out a cup of tea, when the door opened, and the footman announced, "Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce."

Very much surprised, she put the teapot down deliberately and looked at him. He held his hat to his breast, and bowed with exaggerated deference, in an affected, foreign way.

"I insisted on seeing you," he began, as if that were something to boast of. "Perhaps I ought to apologise."

Beth, not knowing what to say, asked him to sit down. Then there was a little pause. He looked at the tea-table.

"I see that you do take tea," he observed. "Why did you refuse it when I offered you some yesterday?"

"I am afraid I am not prepared to give you a reason," Beth answered stiffly.

"Would it be out of place if I were to ask for some tea?" he said.

Beth silently poured him out a cup, and he got up, took what he wanted in the way of sugar and cream and cake, and sat down again, making himself very much at home.

"Do take some yourself," he pleaded. "You are making me feel such an outsider."

"I beg your pardon," said Beth, helping herself.

She did not know whether to be annoyed or amused by his assurance. Had she not known who he was she would certainly have been annoyed; but the recollection of their days together, when the world was young and life was all pure poetry, came upon her suddenly as she found something of the boy in the face and voice of the man before her, making it impossible for her to treat him as a stranger, and melting her into a smile.

"Confess that you were surprised to see me," he said.

"I was," she answered.

"And not glad, perhaps," he pursued.

"Surprised means neither glad nor sorry," she observed.

"D'you know, the moment I saw you——" he began sentimentally; "but never mind that now," he broke off. "Let me give you my reason for coming, which is also my excuse. I hope you will accept it."

Beth waited quietly.

"I told you I could always find out anything I wanted to know about anybody," he pursued, "and last night I happened to sit next a lady at a dinner-party who turned out to be a great friend of yours. I always talk to strange ladies about what I've been doing; that kind of thing interests them, you know; and I described the party here yesterday afternoon, and said I

only met one lady in the whole assembly worth looking at and worth speaking to, and that was Mrs. Maclure, who was staying in the house. 'Oh, I know her quite well,' the lady said. 'She's a neighbour of mine at Slane. Her husband is a doctor, but I hear *she* is connected with some of the best county people in the north. She's very clever, I believe, and by way of being literary and all that sort of thing, don't you know. But I don't think she has any one to advise her.'

"Oh," said Beth, enlightened, "I know who my great friend is then—Mrs. Carne!"

"Yes," said Mr. Pounce, "and when I heard you were literary, I felt a further affinity, for, as I daresay you have heard, I am a literary man myself."

"Yes; I heard you were 'by way of being literary,' too," Beth rejoined.

"Who told you so?" he demanded quickly, his whole thought instantly concentrated on the interesting subject when it concerned himself.

"I do not feel at liberty to tell you," she replied.

"Was it Mrs. Kilroy?"

Beth made no sign.

"Was it Mr. Kilroy?" he persisted.

"I have already said that I shall not tell you, Mr. Pounce," she answered frigidly.

He sat in silence for a little, looking extremely annoyed. Beth, to relieve the tension, offered him some more tea, which he refused curtly; but as she only smiled at the discourtesy and helped herself, he saw fit to change his mind, and then resumed the conversation.

"When Mrs. Carne heard that I was a literary man," he said with importance, "she begged me to do what I could to help you. She said it would be a great kindness; so I promised I would, and here I am."

"So it seems," said Beth.

He stared at her. "I mean it," he said.

"I don't doubt it," Beth answered. "You and Mrs. Carne are extremely kind."

"Oh, not at all!" he assured her blandly. "To me, at all events, it will be a great pleasure to help and advise you."

"How do you propose to do it?" Beth asked, relaxing. Such obtuseness was not to be taken seriously.

He glanced over his shoulder at the bureau where her papers were spread. "I shall get you to let me see some of your work," he said, "and then I can judge of its worth."

"What have you done yourself?" she asked.

"I—well, I write regularly for the *Patriarch*," he said, with the complacency of one who thinks that he need say no more. "The editor himself came to stay with us last week, and that means something. Just now, however, I am contemplating a work of fiction, an important work, if I may venture to say so myself. It has been on my mind for years."

"Indeed," said Beth. "What is its purpose?"

"Purpose!" he ejaculated. "Had you said pur-port instead of pur-*pose*, it would have been a sensible question. It is hardly likely I shall write a novel with a purpose. I leave that to the ladies."

"I have read somewhere that Milton said the poet's mission was '*to allay the perturbation of the mind and set the affections in right tune*,'—is not that a purpose?" Beth asked. "And one in our own day has talked of '*that great social duty to impart what we believe and what we think we have learned. Among the few things of which we can pronounce ourselves certain is the obligation of inquirers after truth to communicate what they obtain.*'"

"But not in the form of fiction," Alfred Cayley Pounce put in dogmatically.

"Yet there is always purpose in the best work of the great writers of fiction," Beth maintained.

Not being able to deny this, he supposed sarcastically that she had read all the works to which she alluded.

"I see you suspect that I have not," she answered, smiling.

"I suspect you did not find that passage you quoted just now from Milton in his works," he rejoined.

"I said as much," she reminded him.

"Well, but you ought to know better than to quote an author you have not read," he informed her.

"Do you mean that I should read all a man's works before I presume to quote a single passage?"

"I do," he replied. "Women never understand thoroughness," he observed, largely.

"Some of us see a difference between thoroughness and niggling," Beth answered. "I should say, beware of endless preparation! We have heard of Mr. Casaubon and *The Key to all Mythologies*."

"I understand now what your friend Mrs. Carne meant about the manner in which you take advice," Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce informed her, in a slightly offended tone.

Beth, wondering inwardly why so many people assume they are competent to advise, prayed that she herself might always be modest enough to wait at least until her advice was asked.

"I hope I have not discussed your opinion impolitely," she said. "Pray excuse me if you think I have."

Mollified, he turned his attention once more to the littered bureau.

"You have a goodly pile of manuscript there," he remarked; "may I ask what it is?"

"It is a little book into which I am putting all my ignorance," she said.

"I hope you are not going to be diffident about letting me see it?" he answered encouragingly. "I could certainly give you some useful hints."

"You are too kind," she said; and he accepted the assertion without a suspicion of sarcasm. She rose when she had spoken, drew the lid of the bureau down over her papers, and locked it deliberately; but the precaution rather flattered him than otherwise.

"You need not be afraid," he said. "I promise to be lenient. And if we are as fast friends when the book appears as I trust we shall be, the *Patriarch* itself shall proclaim its merits; if not——"

"I suppose it will discover my faults," Beth put in demurely. "I wonder, by the way," she added, "who told you you are so much cleverer than I am?"

But fortunately Mrs. Kilroy came in and interrupted them before he had had time to grasp the remark, for which Beth, from whom it had slipped unawares, was devoutly thankful.

When he had gone, she sat and wondered if she had really understood him aright with regard to the *Patriarch*. Certainly he had seemed to threaten her, but it was hard to believe that he had sunk so low as to be capable of criticising her work, not on its own merits, but with regard to the terms he should be on with its author. She was too upright herself, however, to think such dishonest meanness possible, so she put the suspicion far from her, and tried to find some charitable explanation of the several signs of paltriness she had already detected, and to think of him as he had seemed to her in the old days, when she had endowed him with all the qualities she herself had brought into their acquaintance to make it pleasant and of good effect.

Beth had taken to rambling about alone in the quiet streets and squares for exercise; and as she returned a few days later from one of these rambles, she encountered Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce coming out of a florist's with a large bouquet of orchids in his hand.

"You see I do not forget you," he said, holding the bouquet out to her. "Every lady has her flower. These delicate orchids are for you."

But Beth ignored the offering. "You are still fond of flowers then?" slipped from her.

"We do not leave a taste for flowers behind us with our toys," he rejoined. "If we like flowers as children, we love them as men. The taste develops

like a talent when we cultivate it. To love flowers with true appreciation of their affinities in regard to certain persons, is an endowment, a grace of nature which bespeaks the most absolute refinement of mind. And what would life be without refinement of mind!"

Beth had walked on, and he was walking beside her.

"And how does the book progress?" he inquired.

"It is finished," she answered.

"What! already?" he exclaimed. "Why, it takes *me* a week to write five hundred words. But then, of course, my work is highly concentrated. I have sent home for some of it to show you. You see I am pertinacious. I said I would help you, and I will. I hope you will live to be glad that we have met. But you must not write at such a rate. You can only produce poor thin stuff in that way."

Beth shrugged her shoulders, and let him assume what he liked on the subject.

They walked on a little way in silence, then he began again about the flowers. "Flowers," he informed her, "were the great solace of my boyhood—the sole solace, I may say, for I had no friends, no companions, except a poor little chap, a cripple, on whom I took pity. My people did not think me strong enough for a public school, so they sent me to a private tutor, a man of excellent family, Rector of a large seaside parish in the north. He only took me as a favour; he had no other pupils. But it was very lonely in that great empty house. And the seashore, although it filled my mind with poetry, was desolate, desolate!"

Beth, as she listened to these meanderings of his fancy, and recalled old Vicar Richardson and the house full of children, thought of Mr. Pounce's remarks about feminine accuracy.

"But had you no girl-friend?" she asked.

"Only the lady of my dreams," he answered. "There was no *other* lady I should have looked at in the place. I was always refined. I met the lady of my dreams eventually. It was among the mountains of the Tyrol. Imagine a

lordly castle, with drawbridge and moat, portcullis and pleasure, and sauntering in the pleasure, among the flowers, a lady—dressed in white _____"

"Samite?" Beth ventured, controlling her countenance.

"I cannot recall the texture," he said seriously. "How could one think of textures at such a moment! That would have been too commercial! All I noted was the lily whiteness—and her eyes, dark eyes! All the poetry and passion of her race shone in them. And on the spot I vowed to win her. I went back to the 'Varsity, and worked myself into the best set. Lord Fitzkillingham became, as you know, my most intimate friend. He was my best man at the wedding."

"Then you married your ideal," said Beth. "You should be very happy."

He sighed. "I would not say a word against her for the world," he asserted. "When I compare her with other women, I see what a lucky man I must be thought. But," he sighed again, "I was very young, and youth has its illusions. As we grow older, mere beauty does not satisfy, mere cleverness and accomplishments do not satisfy, nor wealth, nor rank. A man may have all that, and yet may yearn for a certain something which is not there—and that something is the one thing needful."

They were opposite to the house by this time, and he looked up at the windows sentimentally. "Which is yours?" he asked. "I pass by daily and look up."

They had stopped at the door. "I cannot ask you in," Beth said hastily. "Please excuse me. This is my time for work."

"Ah, the time and the mood!" he ejaculated. "I know it all so well! Inspiration! Inspiration comes of congenial conversation, as I hope you will find. You will take my flowers. I cannot claim to have culled them for you, but at least I chose them."

As the door had been opened, and the footman in the hall stood looking on, Beth thought it better to take the flowers in a casual way as if they belonged to her. A card tied to the bouquet by a purple ribbon fell out from among the flowers as she took them. On it was written: "Mrs. Merton Merivale." Beth

held the flowers out to Mr. Pounce, with the card dangling, and raised her eyebrows interrogatively.

"Ah, yes," he began slowly, detaching the card as he spoke to gain time, and changing countenance somewhat. "I confess some one else had had the good taste to choose these orchids before I saw them; but I always insist on having just what *I* want, so I took them, and suggested that another bouquet might be made for the lady. I overlooked the card."

Beth bowed and left him without further ceremony.

She tossed the flowers under the table in the hall on her way upstairs, and never knew what became of them. Later in the day she described her morning's adventure to Angelica, and asked her if she knew who Mrs. Merton Merivale was.

"Oh, that woman in the princess bonnet with the big Alsatian bow, you know," Angelica said. "Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce's sometime intellectual affinity."

"Poor Alfred! he is too crude!" Beth ejaculated. "How I have outgrown him!"

Ideala called next day, and found Angelica alone. "I hear that Beth is with you?" she said. "What is she doing?"

"Writing a book."

"What kind of a book?"

"Not a book for babes, I should say," said Angelica. "She does not pretend to consider the young person in the least. It is for parents and guardians, she says, not for authors, to see to it that the books the young person reads are suitable to her age. She thinks it very desirable for her only to read such as are; but personally she does not see the sense of writing down to her, or of being at all cramped on her account. She means to address mature men and women."

"That is brave and good," said Ideala. "What is the subject?"

"I don't know," said Angelica; "but she is certain to put some of herself into it."

"If by that you mean some of her personal experiences, I should think you are wrong," said Ideala. "Genius experiences too acutely to make use of its own past in that way; it would suffer too much in the reproduction. And besides, it can make better use and more telling of what it intuitively knows than of what it has actually seen."

"I do not think you believe that Beth will succeed," said Angelica.

"On the contrary," Ideala rejoined, "I expect her success will be unique; only I don't know if it will be a literary success. Genius is versatile. But we shall see."

Having finished her book, Beth collected her friends and read it aloud to them. "I don't know what to think of it," she said. "Advise me. Is it worth publishing, or had I better put it aside and try again?"

"Publish it, by all means," was the unanimous verdict; and Mr. Kilroy took the manuscript himself to a publisher of his acquaintance, who read it and accepted it.

"Oh," Beth exclaimed, when she heard the reader's report, "I do know now what is meant by all in good time! If I had been able to publish the first things I wrote, how I should have regretted it now! And I did think so much of myself at that time, too! You should have heard how I dogmatised to Sir George Galbraith; and he was so good and kind—he never snubbed me. But I believe I am out of the amateur stage now, and far advanced enough to begin all over again humbly and learn my profession. But I find my point of view unchanged. Manner has always been less to me than matter. When I think of all the preventable sin and misery there is in the world, I pray God give us books of good intention—never mind the style! Polished periods put neither heart nor hope in us; theirs is the polish of steel which we admire for the labour bestowed upon it, but by which we do not benefit. The inevitable ills of life strengthen and refine when they are heroically borne; it is the preventable ones that act on our evil passions, and fill us with rage and bitterness; and what we want from the written word that reaches all of us is

help and advice, comfort and encouragement. If art interferes with that, then art had better go. It would not be missed by the wretched—the happy we need not consider. I am speaking of art for art's sake, of course."

"We need not trouble about that," said Ideala. "The works of art for art's sake, and style for style's sake, end on the shelf much respected, while their authors end in the asylum, the prison, and the premature grave. I had a lesson on that subject long ago, which enlarged my mind. I got among the people who talk of style incessantly, as if style were everything, till at last I verily believed it was. I began to lose all I had to express for worry of the way to express it! Then one day a wise old friend of mine took me into a public library; and we spent a long time among the books, looking especially at the ones that had been greatly read, and at the queer marks in them, the emphatic strokes of approval, the notes of admiration, the ohs! of enthusiasm, the ahs! of agreement. At the end of one volume some one had written: 'This book has done me good.' It was all very touching to me, very human, very instructive. I never quite realised before what books might be to people, how they might help them, comfort them, brighten the time for them, and fill them with brave and happy thoughts. But we came at last in our wanderings to one neat shelf of beautiful books, and I began to look at them. There were no marks in them, no signs of wear and tear. The shelf was evidently not popular, yet it contained the books that had been specially recommended to me as best worth reading by my stylist friends. 'There is style for you!' said my friend. 'Style lasts, you see. Style is engraved upon stone. All the other books about us wear out and perish, but here are your stylists still, as fresh as the day they were bought.' 'Because nobody reads them!' I exclaimed. 'Precisely,' he said. 'There is no comfort in life in them. They are the mere mechanics of literature, and nobody cares about them except the mechanics.' After that I prayed for notable matter to indite, and tried only for the most appropriate words in which to express it; and then I arrived. If you have the matter, the manner will come, as handwriting comes to each of us; and it will be as good, too, as you are conscientious, and as beautiful as you are good."

CHAPTER XLVIII

MR. ALFRED CAYLEY POUNCE called on Beth continually. He was announced one day when she was sitting at lunch with the Kilroys.

"Really I do not think I ought to let you be bored by that man," Mr. Kilroy exclaimed. "I once had ten minutes of the academic platitudes of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce, and that was enough to last me my life. You are too good-natured to see him so often. It is a weakness of yours, I believe, to suffer yourself rather than hurt other people's feelings, however much they may deserve it. But really you must snub him. There is nothing else for it. Send out and say you are engaged."

"If I do, he will wait until I am disengaged, or call again, or write in an offended tone to ask *when* I can be so good as to make it convenient to see him!" Beth answered in comical despair.

"I don't believe he bores her a bit at *present*," Angelica observed. "He is merely an intellectual exercise for Beth. She watches the workings of his mind quite dispassionately, draws him out with little airs and graces, and then adjusts him under the microscope. It interests her to dissect the creature. When she has studied him thoroughly, she will cast him out, as a worthless specimen."

"Oh, I hope that isn't true," said Beth, with a twinge of conscience. "I own it has interested me to see what he has developed into; but surely that isn't unfair?" She looked at Mr. Kilroy deprecatingly.

"It is vivisection," said Angelica.

"But under such agreeable anæsthetics that I should think he enjoys it," said Mr. Kilroy. "I should have no objection myself."

"Daddy, be careful!" Angelica cried. "A rare specimen like you is never safe when unscrupulous naturalists are about."

"But no microscope is needed to demonstrate Mr. Kilroy's position in the scale of being," Beth put in. "It is writ large all over him."

"Good and true, Beth!" said Angelica, smiling. "You can go and gloat over your worthless specimen as a reward, if you like. But the scientific mind is a mystery to me, and I shall never understand how you have the patience to do it."

Beth found Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce pacing about her sitting-room, biting his nails in an irritable manner.

"You were at lunch, I think," he said. "I wonder why I was not asked in?"

Beth said nothing.

"I consider it a slight on Mr. and Mrs. Kilroy's part," he pursued huffily. "Why should *I* be singled out for this kind of thing?"

"Aren't you just a little touchy?" Beth suggested.

"I confess I am sensitive, if that is what you mean," he replied.

"Well, yes, if you like," she said, "hyper-sensitive. But I thought you asked for me."

"It is true I came to see you; but that is no reason why I should be slighted by your friends—especially when I came because I think I have something to show you that will interest you." He took a little packet from the breast-pocket of his coat as he spoke, and began to undo it. "I took the trouble to go all the way home to get them to show you. My mother was the only person who had them. They are photographs of myself when I was a boy."

"I wonder your mother parted with them," Beth said.

"I persuaded her with difficulty," he rejoined complacently. "I have often tried before, but nothing would induce her to part with them, until this time, when a bright idea occurred to me. I told her they were to be published among portraits of celebrated people when my new book comes out, and naturally she liked the idea. Her only son, you know!"

"And are they to be published?" Beth asked.

"Oh—well—of course I hope so—some day," he answered, smiling and hesitating. "But the truth is I got them for you."

Beth did not thank him, but he was too engrossed with his own portraits to notice the omission. She was interested in them, too, when at last he let her look at them.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, showing her a good likeness of himself as she remembered him. "I was a pretty boy then, I think, with my curls! Burning the midnight oil had not bared my forehead in those days, and my beard had not grown. Life was all poetry then!" he sighed affectedly. What had once been spontaneous feeling in him had become a mere recollection, only to be called up by an effort.

"Later it became all excesses, I suppose," said Beth.

"Ah!" he ejaculated in a tone of pleased regret. "I had to live like other men of my standing, you know, and I had to pay for it. The boy was lost, but the man developed. You may think the change a falling off——"

He waited for Beth to express an opinion; but as it was impossible for her to say what she thought of the difference between the conceited, dissipated-looking, hysterical man of many meannesses, and the diffident unspoilt promising boy, she held her peace.

When she had seen the photographs, and he had looked at them himself to his heart's content, he did them up again, and then formally presented her with the packet. "Will you keep them?" he said solemnly.

"Oh no!" she answered with decision. "I am not the proper person to keep them. If they did not belong to your mother, they would be for your wife and children."

"Ah, my wife!" he ejaculated bitterly. "I haven't a word to say against my wife, remember that! Only—you are the one to whom I would confide them."

"I decline the responsibility," Beth said, keeping her countenance with difficulty.

He returned the packet to the breast-pocket of his coat. "I shall carry them here, then," he said, tapping his chest with the points of his fingers, "until you ask for them."

As usual, he stayed a preposterous time that day, and when at last he went, even Beth's kindly forbearance was exhausted, and she determined to see no more of him. He was not the man to take a hint, however, and it was no easy matter to get rid of him. He sent her flowers, for which she did not thank him, books which she did not read; wrote her long letters of the clever kind, discussing topics of the day or remarks she herself had made, which she left unanswered; called, but never found her at home, yet still persisted, until she was fain to exclaim: "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?"

"It is your own fault," said Angelica. "I warned you that good-nature is wasted on that sort of man."

"But surely he must see that I wish to avoid him," Beth exclaimed.

"Of course he sees it," Angelica rejoined, "but you may be sure that he interprets your reluctance in some way very flattering to himself."

"I shall really be rude to him," Beth said desperately. "He is a most exasperating person, the kind of man to drive a woman mad, and then blame her for it. I pity his wife!"

Beth stayed with the Kilroys until the end of June, when the season was all but over and everybody was leaving town; and it was the busiest and happiest time she had ever known. She had enjoyed the work, the play, the society, the solitude, and had blossomed forth in that congenial atmosphere both mentally and physically, and become a braver and a better woman.

The Kilroys were to go abroad the day that Beth returned to Slane. The evening before, she went with Angelica to a theatre. But Angelica, being much occupied at the moment with arrangements that had to be made for the carrying on of her special work during her absence, was not able to stay

for the whole performance, so she left Beth alone at the theatre, and sent the carriage back to take her home.

Beth, sitting in the corner of a box, had eyes for nothing the whole time but the play, which, being one of those that stimulate the mind, had appealed to her so powerfully that even after it was over she remained where she was a little, deep in thought. On leaving the theatre, she found the footman on the steps looking out for her, and he remained, standing a little behind her, till the carriage came up. While she waited, she was annoyed to see Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce making his way towards her officiously. "You are alone!" he exclaimed, with a note of critical disapproval in his voice, as if the circumstance reflected on somebody.

"Hardly!" Beth said, glancing up at her escort. "But even if I were, Mr. Pounce, I am in London, not in the dark ages, and as sure of respect here, at the doors of a theatre, as I am in my own drawing-room. I believe, by the way," she added lightly, not liking to hurt him by too blunt a snub, "I believe this is the only big city in Europe of which so much can be said; and English women may thank themselves for it. We demand not protection, but respect. Here is the carriage. Good night!" She stepped in as she spoke, and took her seat.

"Oh pray, you really must allow me to see you safe home," he exclaimed, following her into the carriage and taking the seat beside her before she could remonstrate. The servant shut the door, and they drove away. Beth boiled with indignation, but she thought it more dignified not to show it, and she dreaded to have a scene before the servants. Her demeanour was somewhat frigid, and she left him to open the conversation; but when he spoke she answered him in her usual tone. He, on the contrary, was extremely formal. He stroked his pointed beard, looked out of the window, and made remarks about the weather and the people in the streets, not avoiding the obvious, which was a relief.

The hall-door was opened as soon as the carriage stopped, and they got out.

"Thank you for your escort, and good night," Beth said, holding out her hand to him, but he ignored it.

"I feel faint," he said, and he looked it. "Will you let me come in and sit down a minute, and give me a glass of water?"

"Why, of course," Beth said. "But have something stronger than water. Come this way, into the library. Roberts, bring Mr. Pounce something to revive him."

"What will you have, sir?" the butler asked.

"A glass of water, nothing but a glass of water," Mr. Pounce said, most preciously, sinking into an easy-chair as he spoke.

The butler brought the water, and told Beth that Mr. and Mrs. Kilroy had not come in. She ordered some tea for herself.

Mr. Pounce sipped the water and appeared to revive.

"I have suffered terribly during the last three weeks," he said at last.

"Have you really?" Beth rejoined with concern. "What was the matter?"

"Need you ask!" he ejaculated. "Why, why have you treated me so?"

"Really, Mr. Pounce, I do not see that you have any claim on my special consideration," Beth answered coldly.

"I have the claim of one who is entirely devoted to you," he said.

"I have never accepted your devotion, and I will not have it forced upon me," Beth answered decidedly. "I should like you better, to tell the truth, if you were a little more devoted to your duty."

"You allude to my wife," he said. "Oh, how can I make you understand! But you have said it yourself—duty! What is duty? The conscientious performance of uncongenial tasks. But if a man does his duty, then he deserves his reward. I do my duty with what heart I have for it. No fault can be found with me either as a husband or a citizen. Therefore, as a man, I consider myself entitled to claim my reward."

"I am afraid you are not well," Beth said. "Don't you think you had better go home and rest?"

"Not until we come to an understanding," he answered tragically.

Beth shrugged her shoulders resignedly, folded her hands, and waited, more interested in him as a human specimen in spite of herself than disturbed by anything his attitude foreboded.

There was a bright wood fire burning on the hearth. Mrs. Kilroy liked to have one to welcome her when they had been out late, not for warmth so much as for cheerfulness. The summer midnight was chilly enough, however, for the gentle heat to be grateful; and Beth turned to the blaze and gazed into it tranquilly. The clock on the mantelpiece struck one. Roberts brought in a tray with refreshments on it, and set it down on a small table beside Beth. Before she helped herself she asked Mr. Pounce what he would have, but he curtly declined to take anything. She shrugged her shoulders, and fell to herself with a healthy appetite.

"How can you—how can you?" he ejaculated several times.

"I'm hungry," she said, laughing, "and I really don't see why I shouldn't eat."

"You have no feeling for me," he complained.

"I have a sort of feeling that you are posing," she answered bluntly; "and I wish you wouldn't. You'd better have some sandwiches."

"How terribly complex life is!" he muttered.

"Life is pretty much what we make of it by the way we live it," she rejoined, taking another sandwich. "We are what we allow ourselves to be. The complexities come of wrong thinking and wrong doing. Right and wrong are quite distinct; there is no mistaking one for the other. In any dilemma we have only to think what is right to be done, and to do it, and there is an end of all perplexities and complexities. Principle simplifies everything."

"I see you have never loved," he declared, "or you would not think the application of principle such a simple thing."

"It is principle that makes love last," Beth answered, "and introduces something permanent into this weary world of change. There is nothing in life so well worth living for as principle; the most exquisite form of

pleasure is to be found in the pain of sacrificing one's inclinations in order to live up to one's principles—so much so that in time, when principle and inclination become identical, and we cease to feel tempted, something of joy is lost, some gladness that was wont to mingle with the trouble."

"But principles themselves are mutable," he maintained. "They get out of date. And there are, besides, exceptional characters that do not come under the common law of humanity; exceptional temperaments, and exceptional circumstances to which common principles are inapplicable, or for which they are inadequate."

"That is the hypocrisy of the vicious," Beth said, with her eyes fixed meditatively on the fire, "the people who lay down excellent principles, and publicly profess them for the sake of standing well with society, but privately make exceptions for themselves in any arrangement that may suit their own convenience. Your people of 'exceptional temperament' settle moral difficulties by not allowing any moral consideration to clash with their inclinations, and misery comes of it. The plea of exceptional character, exceptional circumstances, exceptional temperament, and what not, is merely another way of expressing exceptional selfishness and excusing exceptional self-indulgence."

"Surely *you* are not content to be a mere slave to social convention!" he exclaimed.

"I am talking of fundamental principles, not of social conventions," she replied; "please to discriminate. Self-control is not slavery, but emancipation; to control our passions makes us lords of ourselves and free of our most galling bonds—the bonds of the flesh."

"What a drawback the want of—er—a proper philosophic training is," he observed. "Culture does a great deal. It makes us more modest, for one thing. I don't suppose you know, for instance, that you are setting up an opinion of your own in opposition to such men as Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer maintained that as the man of genius gave his whole life for the profit of humanity, he had a license of conduct which was not accorded to the rest of mankind."

"If culture leaves us liable to be taken in by a false postulate of any man's, however well turned the postulate or able the man, then I have no respect for culture. The fact that Schopenhauer said such a thing does not prove it true. An assertion like that is a mere matter of opinion. Half the worry in the world is caused by differences of opinion. Let us have the facts and form our own opinions. Have the men of genius who allowed themselves license of conduct been any the better for it? the happier? the greater? Schopenhauer himself, for instance!" She smiled at him with honest eyes when she had spoken, and took another sandwich. "But don't let us talk sophistry and silliness," she proceeded, "nor the kind of abstract that serves as a cover for unrighteousness. Those tricks don't carry conviction to my uncultivated mind. I know how they're done."

"You are lowering yourself in my estimation," he said severely.

"And what comes after that?" she asked.

He shook his head and gazed at her reproachfully. "How can you be so trivial," he said, "in a moment like this?—you who are situated even as I am. If we were to die now, in six months it would be as though we had never been. No one would remember us."

"But what have we done for any one," Beth asked, in her equable way, "that we should be specially remembered?"

He made no reply, and Beth went on with the sandwiches.

"I thought," he began at last, "I did think that you at least would understand and feel for me."

Beth stopped eating and considered a moment.

"Are you in any real trouble?" she asked at last.

He rose and began to pace up and down. "I will tell you," he said, "and leave you to judge for yourself."

Beth looked somewhat ruefully at the tray, and wished that the conversation had been more suited to the satisfaction of an honest appetite.

"I have made it plain to you what my marriage is without blaming anybody," he proceeded. "It is the rock upon which all my hopes were wrecked. I found my ideal. I won her like a man. I haven't a word to say against her. She is a woman who might have made any ordinary man happy; but she has been no help to me. It is not her fault. She has done her best. And it is not my fault."

"Then whose fault is it?" said Beth; "it must be somebody's. I think of marriage as I think of life; it is pretty much what people choose to make it. It does not fail when husband and wife have good principles, and live up to them; and good manners in private as well as in public—not to mention high ideals. When we are not happy in the intimate relations of life, it is generally for some trivial reason—as often as not because we don't take the trouble to make ourselves agreeable, as because we fail in other duties. I consider it a duty to be agreeable. In married life happiness depends on loyalty, to begin with, the loyalty that will not even let its thoughts stray. All that we want in everyday intercourse is truth and affection, kindness, consideration, and unvarying politeness. If people practised these as a duty from the first, sympathy would eventually come of the effort. Marriage is the state that develops the noblest qualities, and that is why happily married people are the best worth knowing, the most delightful to live amongst. You have no fault to find with your wife, therefore the fault must be in yourself if you are not happy. Do your duty like a man, and cure yourself of it."

"It surprises me to hear you talk in that way," he exclaimed, "you who have suffered so much yourself!"

"I make no pretence of having suffered," she answered. "I have no patience with people who do. We have our destiny in our own hands to make or mar, most of us. If we fail in one thing we shall succeed in another. Life is a fertile garden, full of plants that bud and blossom and bear fruit not once but every season while it lasts. If the crop of happiness fails one year, we should set to work bravely, and cultivate it all the more diligently for the next."

"All this is beside the mark," he responded peevishly. "You are offering me the generalisations that only apply to ordinary people. Allowance *must* be made for exceptional natures. Look at me! I tell you if I had met the right

woman, I should have been at the top of the tree by this time. I have the greatest respect for woman. I believe that her part in life is to fertilise the mind of man; and if the able man does not find the right woman for this purpose, he must remain sterile, and the world will be the loser. I never knew such a woman till I met you; but in you I have discovered one rich in all womanly attributes, mental, moral, and physical; and, beyond these, dowered also with genius, the divine gift—the very woman to help a man to do his best."

"And what is the man going to do for me?" Beth inquired with a twinkle in her eyes.

"He would surround you with every comfort, every luxury—jewels——"

"Like a ballet-girl!" she interjected. "I am really afraid you are old-fashioned. You begin by offering me gewgaws—the paltry price women set on themselves in the days of their intellectual infancy. We know our value better now."

"You should have all that an ideal woman ought to have," he put in. "What more can a woman require?"

"She would like to know what all she ought to have consists of," Beth replied. "As a rule, a man's ideal woman is some one who will make him comfortable; and he thinks he has done all that is necessary for her when he allows her to contribute to his happiness."

"Ah, be serious!" he ejaculated. "You should be above playing in that cruel way with a man who is in earnest. Hear what I have to say. Remember *we* are the people who make history. You talk about knowing your own value! You do not know it. Without me you never will know it. You do not know what is being said already about your unpublished work. Those who have read it tell me you promise to be to England what Georges Sand was to France when she appeared, a new light on the literary horizon. But where would Georges Sand have been without De Musset? They owe half their prestige to each other. While they were alive every one talked of them, and now that they are dead reams are written about them. Let us also go down to posterity together. All I want is you; what you want is me. Will you—will you let me be to you—De Musset?"

"What you really do want," said Beth, "is a sense of humour."

"For God's sake, do not be trivial!" he exclaimed. "You cannot think what this means to me—how I have set my heart on it—how I already seem to hear the men at the clubs mention my name and yours when I pass. Night after night I have paced up and down outside this house, looking up at your window, thinking it all out."

Beth flushed angrily. "I consider that a most improper proceeding," she said, "and I do not know how you can excuse it to yourself."

"I—much may be excused when a man feels as strongly as I do," he protested.

"And how about your wife?" said Beth, "where do you place her in your plans? Has she no feelings to be considered?"

"I shall not hurt her feelings, I assure you, I never do," he answered. "I keep her in a quiet country place so that she may hear no gossip, and I excuse my long absences from home on the plea of work. She understands that my interests would suffer if I were not on the spot."

"In other words, you lie to your wife," said Beth, aghast at the shabby deceit.

"That is scarcely polite language," he rejoined in an offended tone.

"It is correct language," she retorted. "We shall understand what we are talking about much better if we call things by their right names. But are you never afraid of what your wife may be driven to in the dulness of the country, while you are here in town, dancing attendance on other men's wives?"

"Never in the least," he answered complacently. "She is entirely devoted to me and to her duty. Her faith in me is absolute."

"And so you deceive her."

"I am not bound to tell her all my doings," he protested.

"You are in honour bound not to deceive her," Beth said; "and if you deceive her it is none the less low because she does not suspect you. On the contrary. It seems to me that one of the worst things that can happen to a man is to have docile women to deal with."

"I am grieved to hear you talk like that," he said. "I am really grieved. It shows a want of refinement that surprises and shocks me. I maintain that I do her no injury. These things can always be arranged so that no one is injured; that is all that is necessary."

"These things can never be arranged so that no one is injured," Beth replied. "We injure ourselves, if no one else. We are bound to deteriorate when we live deceitfully. How can you be honest and manly and lead a double life? The false husband in whom his wife believes must be a sneak; and for the man who rewards a good faithful wife by deceiving her, I have no term of contempt sufficiently strong."

"I am disappointed in you," he said. "I should never have suspected that you were so narrow and conventional."

"Are you prepared to defy public opinion?" Beth asked.

"No, that would be gross," he said. "Outwardly we must conform. Only the *élite* understand these things, and only the *élite* need know of them. You are of the *élite* yourself; you must know, you must feel the power, the privilege conferred by a great passion."

"Pray do not class me with the *élite* if passion is what they respect," Beth said. "Passion at the best—honourable passion—is but the efflorescence of a mere animal function. The passion that has no honourable object is a gaudy, unwholesome weed, rapid of growth, swift and sure to decay."

"Passion is more than that, the passion of which I speak. It is a great mental stimulant," he declared.

"Yes," said Beth, "passion is a great mental stimulant—passion resisted."

"Georges Sand, whom I would have you follow, always declared that she only wrote her best under the influence of a strong passion," he assured her.

"But how do we know that she might not have written better than that best under some holier influence?" Beth rejoined. "George Eliot's serener spirit appeals to me more. I believe it is only those who renounce the ruinous riot of the senses, and find their strength and inspiration in contemplation, who reach the full fruition of their powers. Ages have not talked for nothing of the pains of passion and the pleasures of love. Love is a great ethical force; but passion, which is compact of every element of doubt and deceit, is cosmic and brutal, a tyrant if we yield to it, but if we master it, an obedient servant willing to work. I would rather die of passion myself, as I might of any other disease, than live to be bound by it."

Pounce, who had been pacing about the room restlessly until now, sat down by the fire, and gazed into it for a little, discomfited. He had come primed with the old platitudes, the old sophistries, the old flatteries, come to treat amicably, and found himself met with armed resistance, his flatteries and platitudes ridiculed, his sophistries exposed, and his position attacked with the confidence and courage of those who are sure of themselves.

"Have you no feeling for me?" he said at last, after a long pause, speaking somewhat hoarsely.

"I feel sorry for you," was the unexpected answer.

"Pity is akin to love," he said.

"Pity is also akin to contempt," she rejoined. "And how can a woman feel anything else for a man who is false to the most sacred obligations? who makes vows and breaks them according to his inclination? If we make a law of our own inclinations, what assurance can we give to any one that we shall ever be true?"

"I have found at last what I have yearned for all my life long," he protested. "I know I shall never waver in my devotion to you."

"That may be," she answered. "But what guarantee could you give me that *I* should not waver? What comfort would your fidelity be if I tired of you in a month?"

Again he was discomfited, and there was another pause.

"If you did change," he said at last, "I should be the only sufferer."

Beth sat silent for a little, then she said slowly, "What you have ventured to propose to me to-night, Mr. Cayley Pounce, is no more credit to your intelligence than it is to your principles. You come here and find me living openly, in an assured position, with powerful friends, whose affection and respect for me rest on their confidence in me, and with brilliant prospects besides, as you say, which, however, depend to a great extent upon my answering to the expectations I have raised. You allow that I have some ability, some sense, and yet you offer me in exchange for all these——"

"I offer you *love!*" he exclaimed fervently.

"Love!" she ejaculated with contempt, "you offer me yourself for a lover, and you seek to inspire confidence in me by deceiving your wife. You would have me sacrifice a position of safety for a position of danger—one that might be changed into an invidious position by the least indiscretion—and all for what?"

"For love of you," he pleaded, "that I may help you to develop the best that is in you."

"All for the prestige of having your name associated with mine by men about town in the event of mine becoming distinguished," she interrupted.

He winced.

"I only ask you to do what George Eliot did greatly to her advantage," he answered reproachfully.

"You asked me to do what Georges Sand did greatly to her detriment," Beth said. "George Eliot is an after-thought. And you certainly have no intention of asking me to do what she did, for she acted openly, she deceived no one, and injured no one."

"And you do not blame her?" he exclaimed with a flash of hope.

Beth answered indirectly: "When I think about that, I ask myself have Church and State arranged the relations of the sexes successfully enough to convince us that they cannot be better arranged? Are marriages holier now than they were in the days when there were no churches to bless them? or happier here than in other countries where they are simple private contracts? And it seems to me that we have no historical proof that the legal bond is necessarily the holiest between man and woman, or that there is never justification for a more irregular compact. I know that 'holy matrimony' is often a state of absolute degradation, especially for the woman; and I believe that two honourable people can live together honourably without the conventional bond, so long as no one else is injured, no previous compact broken. But all the same I think the legal bond is best. It is a safeguard to the family and a restraint on the unprincipled. And, at any rate, all my experience, all my thought, all my hope argue for the dignity of permanence in human relations. Anything else is bad for the individual, for the family, for the state. As civilisation, as evolution advances from lower to higher, we find it makes more and more for monogamy. Our highest types of men and women are monogamous. Those whose contracts are lightly made and lightly broken are trivial people. That useful Oneida Creek experiment proved that the instinct, if not the ideal, of modern humanity is monogamous."

"What was that?" he asked.

"A number of people formed a community at Oneida Creek to live together in a kind of ordered promiscuity, but the experiment failed because it was found eventually that the members were living together secretly in pairs. No. The more I know of life the less I like the idea of allowing any laxity in the marriage relation. In certain cases of course there is good and sufficient reason for two people to separate. But I believe that right-minded people can generally, and almost always do, make their marriages answer. Marriage is compact of every little incident in life, it is not merely made up of one strong feeling, otherwise men and women would be as the animals who pair and part casually; therefore, if two people are disappointed in each other in some things, they must have other things in common to fall back upon. My ideal of life is love in marriage and loyal friends."

"It is interesting to hear you express these views," he said bitterly, "considering what your experience has been."

"I don't see that my petty personal experience has anything to do with the truth of the matter," said Beth, bristling somewhat. "You really have a poor opinion of me if you think I shall allow my judgment to be warped by anything that may happen to myself. Because my own experience is not a happy one, you would have me declare that family life is a mistake! Doubtless many an outcry is raised for no better reason. But do you not see yourself that the tranquil home-life is the most beautiful, the most conducive to the development of all that is best in us—that there is nothing like the delight of being a member of a large and united family. Can you come into a house like this and not see it?"

"This house was not always a model of domestic felicity," he sneered.

"That proves my point," she rejoined. "The difficulties can be lived down if people are right-minded."

"Your argument does not alter the fact that I am a miserable man," he said dejectedly.

"You were not born to be a miserable man," she answered gently, "and 'we always may be what we might have been.' But you have lost much ground, Alfred Cayley Pounce, since the days when you roamed about the cliffs and

sandy reaches of Rainharbour with Beth Caldwell, making plans. You had your ideals then, and lived up to them. You cultivated your flowers for delight in their beauty, and went to your modelling for love of the work. You gave your flowers to your friends with an honest intention to please; you modelled with honest ambition to do good work. In those days you were above caring to cultivate the acquaintance of the best people. You had touched the higher life at that time; you had felt such rapture in it as has never come to you since—even among the best people—I am sure; yet you fell away; you deserted Beth—not basely, perhaps, but weakly; and you have been deteriorating ever since."

He had started straight in his chair when she mentioned Beth Caldwell, and was staring at her now with puzzled intentness.

"What do you know about Beth?" he said quickly. "Have you ever met her?"

She smiled. "I can honestly say I never have," she answered. But she looked away from him into the fire as she spoke, and he recognised the set of her head on her shoulders as she turned it; he had noted it often.

"God!" he exclaimed, "what a blind idiot I have been—Beth! Beth!" He threw himself down on his knees beside her chair, caught her hand, and covered it with kisses.

Beth snatched her hand away, and he returned embarrassed to his seat and sat gazing at her for a little, then took out his handkerchief and suddenly burst into tears.

"What a mess I have made of my life!" he exclaimed. "Everything that would have been best for me has been within reach at some time or other, but I invariably took the wrong thing and let the right one go. But, Beth, I was only a boy then, and I suffered when they separated us."

This reflection seemed to ease his mind on the subject. That she might also have suffered did not occur to him; as usual his whole concern was for himself.

"Yes, you are right, Beth," he proceeded. "I *have* deteriorated; but 'we always may be what we might have been'—and you have been sent to me

again as a sign that it is not too late for me. You were my first love, my earliest ideal, and I have not changed, you see, I have been true to you; for, although I never suspected you were Beth, I recognised my rightful mate in you the moment we met. Yes, I was on the right road when we were boy and girl together, but the promise of that time has not been fulfilled. All the poetry in me has lain dormant since the days when you drew it forth. I gave up modelling when I went to the 'Varsity because they didn't care for that kind of thing in my set, you know. They were all men of position, who wouldn't associate with artists unless they were at the top of the tree; clever fellows, and good themselves at squibs and epigrams. If you'd ever been to the 'Varsity you'd know that a man must adapt himself to his environment if he means to get on. My dream had been to make my visions of beauty visible, as you used to suggest; but I had to give that up, there was nothing else for it. Still, I was not content to do nothing, to be nobody; therefore, when I abandoned the clay, I took to the pen; I gave up the marble for the manuscript. Many men of position have written, you know, and so long as you didn't mug, fellows didn't mind. In fact, they thought you smart if they fancied you could dash things off without an effort. You understand now why I am a literary man instead of a sculptor."

"Perfectly," Beth said drily. "It was in those days, I suppose, that you were bitten by French literature, and began to idealise mean intrigues, and to delight in foul matter if the manner of its presentation were an admirable specimen of style."

"Ah," he said solemnly, "style is everything."

"It is all work of word-turning and little play of fancy with those who make style everything," said Beth, glad to get away from love, "and that makes your Jack-of-style a dull boy and morbid in spite of his polish. Less style and more humour would be the saving of some of you, the making of others."

"Flaubert wrote 'Madame Bovary' six times," he assured her impressively.

"I wonder how much it lost each time," said Beth. "But you know what Flaubert himself said about style before he had done—just what I am saying!"

"I cannot understand your being insensible to the charms of style," he said, evading the thrust.

"I am not. I only say it is not of the most vital importance. Thackeray was a Titan—well, look at his slipshod style in places, his careless grammar, his constant tautology. He knew better, and he could have done better, and it would have been well if he had, I don't deny it; but his work would not have been a scrap more vital, nor he himself the greater. I have seen numbers of people here in town studying art. They go to the schools to learn to draw, not because they have ideas to express, apparently, but in the hope that ideas will come when they know how to express them. And I think it is the same in literature. One school talks of style as if it were the end and not the means. They form a style, but have nothing to express that is worth expressing. It would be better to pray the gods to send them the matter; if the matter is there in the mind it will out, and the manner will form itself in the effort to produce it—so said the great."

There was a pause, during which Alfred Cayley Pounce sighed heavily and Beth looked at the clock.

"You were stimulating as a child, Beth," he said at last, "and you are stimulating still. Think what it would be to me to have you always by my side! I cannot—I cannot let you go again now that I have found you! We were boy and girl together."

"That does not alter anything in our present position," Beth answered; "nor does it affect my principles in any way. But even if I had been inclined—if I had had no principles, I should have been just clever enough to know better than to run any risk of the kind you suggest. You do not know perhaps that you have injured your own standing already—that there are houses in which you are not welcome because you are suspected of intrigue."

"*Me*—suspected of intrigue!" he exclaimed. "It isn't possible!"

Beth laughed. "If it is so disagreeable to be suspected," she said, "what would it be to be found out! And what have you gained by it? What says the Dhammapada? '*There is bad reputation, and the evil way (to hell); there is the short pleasure of the frightened in the arms of the frightened, and the*

king imposes heavy punishment; therefore let no man think of his neighbour's wife."

"It is evident that you don't trust me," he said in an injured tone. "Ah, Beth! does the fact that we were boy and girl together not weigh with you?"

"Well, it would," Beth said soberly, "even if worldly wisdom were my only guide in life. I should think of the time that we got into that scrape, and you wriggled out of it, leaving me to shift for myself as best I could; and I should remember the boy is father to the man. But I have been trying to show you that worldly wisdom is not my only guide in life. I have professed the most positive puritan principles of conduct, and given you the reasons upon which they are based, yet you persist; you ignore what I say as if you had not heard me or did not believe me, and pursue the subject as if you were trying to weary me into agreement. And you have wearied me, but not into agreement; so, if you please, we will not discuss it any longer."

"You will be sorry, I think, some day for the way you have treated me," he exclaimed, showing temper; "and what you expect to gain by it I cannot imagine."

"Oh, please," Beth protested, "I am not imbued with the commercial spirit of the churches. I do not expect a percentage in the way of reward on every simple duty I do."

"Virtue is its own reward," he sneered.

"It has been said that 'the pleasure of virtue is one which can only be obtained on the express condition of its not being the object sought,'" she rejoined good-naturedly. "Try it, Alfred, and see if you do not become a happier man insensibly. Order your thoughts to other and nobler ends, for thoughts are things, and we are branded or beautified by them. An American scientist has been making experiments to test the effect of thought on the body, and has found that a continuous train of evil thought injures the health and spoils the personal appearance, but high and holy thoughts have a beautifying effect. Be a man and embrace a manly creed. *Live for others, live openly.* Deceit is treachery, and treachery is cowardice of the most despicable kind. Life has to be lived. It might as well be lived earnestly. Life is better lived when it is held earnestly. Personally I detest all

flippancy and cynicism, all cheapening of serious subjects by lack of reverence. Irreverence portends defects of character and poverty of intellect. All serious subjects are sacred subjects, and to treat them with levity or insincerity is to prove yourself a person to be avoided."

Alfred Cayley Pounce was stooping forward with his elbows on his knees and his face between his hands, gazing blankly into the fire. The light shone on his bald forehead and accentuated the lines which wounded vanity, petty purposes thwarted, and an ignoble life had written prematurely on his face, and his attitude emphasised the attenuation of his body. He looked a poor, peevish, neurotic specimen; and although he had only himself to thank for it, Beth, remembering the promise of his youth, felt a qualm of pity.

"What a mistake my marriage has been!" he ejaculated at last. "But I doubt if I should ever have found a woman who would have understood me enough to be all in all to me. For a man of my temperament there is nothing but celibacy."

"I don't believe in celibacy at all," Beth said cheerfully. "Celibacy is an attempt to curb a healthy instinct with a morbid idea. He is the best man and the truest gentleman who honourably fulfils every function of life. And I don't believe your marriage was of necessity a mistake either. But if you must be miserable, be loyal as well. You will find that the best in the end. If, being miserable, we are also disloyal, then we are insensibly degraded—so insensibly, perhaps, that we are not conscious of any part of the process, and only become aware of what has been going on when we have to face a crisis, and find ourselves prepared to act ignobly, and to justify the act with specious excuses." She glanced up at the mantelpiece. "Come," she said, "it is four o'clock, and I am sleepy. I must go to bed."

He started to his feet. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "you can talk of being sleepy when I——"

"Never mind about that now," said Beth, yawning frankly. "Everybody has gone to bed and forgotten us, I suppose. I shall have to let you out."

She gathered the evening cloak she had come back in from the theatre about her as she spoke, and led the way. He let her open the hall-door for him. It

was grey daylight in the street. At the foot of the steps a policeman was standing on the pavement making a note in a little book.

"Is it any use whistling for a hansom at this hour?" Beth asked.

The policeman looked up at her. "I'll try, miss, if you like," he said.

He whistled several times, but there was no response, and Alfred Cayley Pounce at last crammed his hat down on his head with a peevish show of impatience, and walked off down the street, without a word of leave-taking. The fact that Beth was sleepy had wounded his vanity more than any word she had said. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders as she watched him depart, then went down on to the pavement and strolled about, enjoying the freshness. The policeman kept watch and ward, meanwhile, at the open door, and, before she went in, Beth stood and talked to him a little in her pretty kindly way. She found his tone and manner in their simple directness strengthening and refreshing to the mind after the tortuous posings of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce.

CHAPTER XLIX

AT breakfast next morning Beth described the way in which Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce had forced his attentions upon her the night before. Mr. Kilroy was exceedingly angry. "He shall not come into any house of mine again," he declared, and gave the old butler Roberts, who happened to be the only servant in the room at the moment, orders to that effect. "Do you mean to say," he asked Beth, "that the fellow had the assurance to tell you he had actually been hanging about the house?"

"He seemed rather proud of that, as of something poetical and romantic," Beth answered.

"I suppose the illness was all an excuse," Angelica observed.

"I don't know," Beth said. "He certainly looked ill, but he's a poor neurotic creature now, and might easily work himself up into a state of hysterical collapse, I should think. What was your impression, Roberts?"

"He looked real bad, ma'am; and well he might, the way he's been goin' on, 'anging about 'alf the night We've all seen im," Roberts rejoined imperturbably.

"Why didn't you report it to me?" Mr. Kilroy wanted to know.

"Well, sir, I couldn't be sure it was this 'ouse, sir, in partic'lar. You see there's a good many in the square, sir. I was just waitin' to make sure. He come after you'd gone last night, and said he 'ad to meet the ladies, but he'd forgotten where they were goin' to, and James, suspectin' nothin', told 'im."

"Well, I don't think he will trouble me again," Beth said cheerfully, concerned to see Mr. Kilroy so seriously annoyed. "I told him what I thought of him in such unmistakable terms that he walked out of the house without any form of farewell."

Angelica looked grave. "I am afraid you've made a spiteful enemy, Beth," she observed. "That kind of cat-man is capable of any meanness if his

vanity is wounded; if he can injure you, he will."

"Oh, as to that, I don't see what he can do," said Mr. Kilroy.

"He can supply the press with odious personal paragraphs, spread calumnies at the clubs, and write scratch-cat criticisms on the book when it appears," Angelica said. "There are plenty of people who will listen to that kind of man, and take their opinions from him."

"But what does it matter," said Beth in her tolerant way. "All you whom I love and respect will judge me and my work for yourselves. If you are pleased, I shall rejoice; if you find fault, I shall be grateful and profit. But I should be a poor shallow thing, like society itself, if I allowed myself to be disturbed or influenced by the Alfred Cayley Pounces of the press. And as to society!" Beth laughed. "At first, when I went anywhere, I used to ask myself all the time when would the pleasure begin! But now I am younger, thanks to you; and I enjoy everything. I look on and laugh. But for the rest, I must be indifferent. It would be an insult to one's intellect to set any store on such tinsel as that of which the verdicts of society are made."

Beth had been thinking a good deal about Dan lately, and had come to the conclusion that, with all his faults, he was very much to be preferred to the Alfred Cayley Pounce kind of creature. She had more hope of him, somehow; and she went back determined that it should not be her fault if they did not arrive at a better understanding. He gave her a good opportunity on the evening of her arrival. They were sitting out in the garden after dinner, on that comfortable seat by the privet hedge which Beth overlooked from her secret chamber. Behind them the hedge was thick, and in front a border of flowers surrounded a little green lawn, which was shut in beyond by a belt of old trees in full foliage. It was an exquisite evening, warm and still; and Dan, having dined well, and begun a good cigar, was in a genial mood. As he grew older he attached a more enormous importance than ever to meals. If the potatoes were boiled when he wanted them mashed or baked, it made a serious difference to him, and he would grow red in the face and shout at the servants if his eggs for breakfast were done

a moment more or less than he liked. He was a ridiculous spectacle in his impatience if dinner were late, and a sad one in his sensual satisfaction if it answered to his expectations. Beth watched him at such times with sensations that passed through various degrees of irritation from positive contempt to the kindly tolerance one feels for the greed of a hungry child. Dan had been "doing himself well," as he called it, during her absence, and was looking somewhat bloated and blotched. His wonderful complexion was no longer so clear and bright as it had been; the red was redder and the white opaque. A few more years and his character would be seen distinctly in the shape and colour of his face; and Beth, who had marked the first signs of deterioration slowly set in, was saddened by the progress it had made. Alfred Cayley Pounce would succumb to his nerves, Daniel Maclure to his tissues; the one was earning atrophy for himself, the other fatty degeneration. Beth was right. The real old devil is disease, and our evil appetites are his ministers.

"You seem solemn this evening," Daniel said to her. "I suppose you're regretting your friends."

"Yes," said Beth; "but I have been away long enough, and I am glad to be back. I saw some things in the great wicked city that made me think—Dan," she broke off abruptly, "I wish you and I were better friends. So very little would bring us to a right understanding, and I am sure we should both be the better and the happier."

"Speak for yourself," said Dan complacently. "Personally, I feel good enough and happy enough. We have our differences, like other people, I suppose; but whose fault is that, I should like to know?"

"Partly mine," Beth acknowledged. "I don't think I should have been so defiant. But if you had been different, I should have been different."

"If *I* had been different!" he ejaculated, knocking the ash from the end of his cigar. "Well, I'd like to know what fault you have to find with me? Different indeed!"

"That is the principal one," Beth answered, smiling. "Your great fault is that you don't believe you have any faults."

"Oh, well," he conceded, "of course I know I've my faults. Who hasn't? But I'll undertake to say that they're a *man's* faults. Now, come!"

This reflection seemed to deepen his self-satisfaction, as if it must be allowed that he was all the better for the faults to which he alluded. As he spoke, Beth seemed to see him at her wardrobe with his hand in the pocket of one of her dresses, hunting for treasonable matter to satisfy his evil suspicions, and she sighed. She would not acknowledge to herself that she was fighting for the impossible, yet even at the outset she half despaired of ever making him understand. It is pitiful to think of her, with her tender human nature, seeking a true mate where human law required that she should find one, only to be repulsed and baffled and bedraggled herself in the end if she persevered. A good man might have failed to comprehend Beth, but a good man would have felt the force of goodness in her, and would have revered her. Maclure recognised no force in her and felt no reverence; all that was not animal in her was as obscure to him as to the horse in his stable that whinnied a welcome to her when she came because he expected sugar. It is pleasant to give pleasure; but there must be more in marriage for it to be satisfactory than free scope to exercise the power to please.

"Well, look here, Dan," Beth pursued. "I'll make a bargain with you. If you will do your best to correct your faults—what *I* think your faults—I'll do my best to correct all you find in me. Only let us discuss them temperately, and try conscientiously to live up to some ideals of thought and conduct."

Dan smoked on silently for a little, then he said, with some show of irritation tempering his self-satisfaction, "Well, all I can say is, I cannot for the life of me see what you have to complain of."

"I have to complain of your conduct with Bertha Petterick, for one thing," Beth answered desperately. "Let us be frank with each other. I know that you have not been loyal to me. I saw you together here on this seat the day you gave her the bracelet. I saw you put it on her arm and kiss her; and that decided me to go to Ilverthorpe."

Dan looked round about him with an altered countenance, but nothing that he knew to be a window overlooked the spot, neither was it possible to see

through the thickness of the privet hedge, nor from any other point, without being seen.

"You must have imagined it!" he exclaimed.

"I did not imagine that bracelet," Beth replied.

"Well, even if I did give her the bracelet," he said, "you're not going to be nasty-minded enough to insinuate that there was anything in that!"

"There was deceit in it," Beth answered, "and in your whole attitude towards that girl while she was under this roof. If we act so that we cannot be open and honest about our dealings with people, then there must be something wrong. Life would be intolerable if it had to be lived among people any one of whom, while professing friendship for us, was deceiving us in some vital particular. From the moment that we act on our own inclinations rather than up to what the noblest of our friends expect of us, we have gone wrong. But you and I are both young enough, Dan, to put the past behind us, and forget it. Let us start together afresh in another place, where there will be no evil associations, nothing to vex us by reminding us of unhappy days; and let us be loyal to each other, and honest and open in every act, making due allowance for each other, and doing our best to help and please each other. We shall be happy, I am sure. You will see we shall be very happy."

Dan took his cigar out of his mouth, and flicked the ash from the end of it with his little finger: "You'd have me give up my appointment here, I suppose, and the half of my income with it?"

"Most of all I would have you give up your appointment here," she answered earnestly. "No honest woman can endure to have her husband pandering to vice. It would not be so much of a sacrifice either," she added, "for the next session will end this iniquity."

"Thanks to the influence of you cursed women," he exclaimed.

"Thanks to our influence, yes," she answered dispassionately, "and to some sense of justice in men."

"If you knew how men talk about women who meddle in these matters," he said, "you would keep out of them, I think."

"Oh, I know the kind of thing they say," she answered, smiling; "but the people you mean have no influence nowadays. The blatant protest of the debauched against our demand for a higher standard of life is not the voice of the community. It is the cry of those who feel their existence threatened, who only live upon lies, and must be extinguished when the inevitable day of reckoning comes which shall expose them. Even now the kind of man who catches at every straw of opinion which shall secure to him his sacred carnal rights, at no matter what cost of degradation and disease to women, is out of date, and we pay no attention to him."

"Oh, women!" Dan jeered. "That is all very fine! But who the devil cares what women think?"

"Now don't be old-fashioned, Dan," Beth answered, laughing. "When women only did what they were told, men used to vow at their feet that there was nothing they couldn't accomplish, their influence was so great. But now that women have proved that what they choose to do they can do, men sneer at their pretensions to power, and try to depreciate them by comparing the average woman with men in the front rank of their professions. Really, men are disheartening."

The evening calm had deepened about them, a big bright star was shining above the belt of trees, and waves of perfume from the flowers made the air a delight to inhale.

"What a heavenly night!" Beth pursued. "Who would live in London when they might be here?"

"Well, that's consistent!" he exclaimed, "after entreating me to leave the place!"

"This is not the only peaceful spot in the world," she said with a little sigh; "and I would rather live in London even than have you here in an invidious position. Dan, give it up, there's a good fellow! and learn to look on life from this newer, wider point of view. You will find interests and pleasures in it you have never even suspected, I assure you, and you will never regret it."

"For the life of me," he said again, throwing the end of his cigar into the bushes with an irritated jerk of his arm,— "for the life of me, I cannot see what you have to complain of; and I shall certainly not give up any bird in the hand for two such birds in the bush as you promise me." He rose as he spoke, and shook out first one leg and then the other to straighten his trousers. "I'm going out," he added. "I've a patient to see. Ta! ta! Take care of yourself."

Some little time after Beth's return, they were sitting at lunch together, and Maclure was reading a daily paper.

"Matters look bad for that fellow, Cayley Pounce," he observed.

"Why, what has he been doing?" Beth asked.

"Poking a fellow's eye out with his umbrella," Dan answered. "He was talking to a girl in the street one night, and got into a row with some roughs, and jabbed one in the eye with his umbrella, and the fellow died. The inquiry is now going on, and it's likely the coroner's jury will bring in a verdict of manslaughter against Mr. Cayley Pounce. His defence is that he wasn't anywhere near that part of London on that particular night, and it's a case of mistaken identity; but as he refuses to say where he was, and produces no evidence by way of an alibi, that story won't avail him much."

"What night was it?" said Beth.

"On the 30th, just after midnight," Dan read out of the paper.

"Why, that was the night he insisted on escorting me home from the theatre," Beth exclaimed. "He did not leave the Kilroys' until four o'clock in the morning."

"Then why on earth doesn't he say so?" Dan asked.

"I can't imagine," Beth said. "I let him out myself; everybody else had gone to bed. And I'm sure of the time, because I thought he was never going

away, and I was tired; and I looked at the clock and said, 'It's four o'clock, and I must go to bed.'"

Dan's face had darkened. "Do you mean to say you were sitting up with him alone?" he demanded.

"Yes, for my sins!" Beth answered in a tone of disgust. "The Kilroys were out when I returned from the theatre, and did not come in till very late; and they went straight upstairs, supposing I had gone to bed. As a rule they come into the library first. So Mr. Cayley Pounce was left on my hands."

"Then," said Dan, pushing his plate away from him with a clatter, "it is obvious why he is holding his tongue. He is determined not to compromise you."

"Thank you!" said Beth, bristling. "I should think I am not so easily compromised."

"Gad!" Dan ejaculated, "I don't know what you call easily compromised! A man takes you home from a theatre, and stays with you alone till four o'clock in the morning; if that isn't compromising I don't know what is. No jury in the world would acquit you, and the fellow knows that perfectly well, and is holding his tongue to screen you."

"I should think it's a great deal more likely he's holding his tongue in order to get the credit of it," Beth observed drily. "It is a mere pose. He knows I shall have to come forward to clear him if he doesn't explain himself. I suppose I must go at once and stop the case; but if it were not for his wife I declare I should hesitate. What is the form of procedure? You will come with me, of course?"

"I go with you!" Dan exclaimed brutally, "and see you make a public exhibition of yourself, and bring disgrace on my name in a court of justice! I'm damned if I do! And what's more, if you go, you don't return to this house. I've too much self-respect for that. You hadn't much of a reputation when I married you, and if you lose the little you've got, you can go and I shall divorce you. My wife must be above suspicion."

Beth folded her serviette slowly while he was speaking, and, when he stopped, she rose from the table.

"It is unfortunate for me," she said, "that the Kilroys have gone abroad. They know the man and the facts of the case, and would have advised me. In their absence I must do what seems right without advice. I cannot see that I have any choice in the matter. You could make it perfectly easy for me by supporting me; if you do not support me I must go alone. I shall pack up and go to town at once in order to appear in court to-morrow morning, and I shall telegraph to Roberts, the Kilroys' butler, to meet me there, and confirm my story. There are the coachman and footman too, and the police constable—witnesses enough, in all conscience."

"You are determined to go?" Dan demanded angrily.

"I must go," she rejoined.

"It is going to the devil, then," said Dan deliberately; "and I always said you would. Remember, you don't return to this house!"

When Beth arrived in town, she found that there would be no need to appear in the case at all, for the Kilroys' old butler Roberts had seen the name of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce in the papers, and had unwittingly frustrated his manœuvre by going to the coroner's court himself and volunteering to give evidence. He was accompanied by the footman who had been out with the carriage on the night in question, and the two together had no difficulty in proving an alibi. Thus, in an ordinary commonplace manner, what had promised to be the triumph of his life, the moment when he should stand confessed to the world a chivalrous gentleman, sacrificing himself to save a lady of prepossessing appearance, was converted into another of the many failures of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce. This ended the case so far as he and Beth were concerned; but with regard to Dan, Beth recognised that her position remained the same. There was no return for her from the step she had taken, and she would have to begin her life anew.

CHAPTER L

BETH went out into the world alone, knowingly and willingly. The prospect had no terrors for her, neither did she feel any regret for the past. She took it all as a matter of course. The days with Dan at Slane were over, but life had still to be lived, and she set to work to arrange it and live it to the best of her ability; what she most urgently felt being merely that there were things she must see to at once and settle about, and that she was rather pushed for time. The first thing she did in London was to buy a map so that she might find her way about economically, and some newspapers recommended to her by the stationers as likely to have advertisements of respectable lodgings in them. She studied these over a cup of coffee and a roll, cut all the promising addresses out of the papers, found on the map the best way to go by omnibus or railway, and then set off on her quest, taking the red Hammersmith 'bus first of all, and explored West Kensington. Her efforts in that direction were not successful. Everything she saw at first was dear, dingy, and disheartening. Landladies, judging her by her appearance, would only show her their best rooms. When she explained that all she wanted was a nice, clean, roomy attic because she was poor, they became suspicious, and declared that she wasn't likely to get anything of that sort in a good neighbourhood. Beth wondered what the bad neighbourhoods were like if the one she was in were a good one. Later in the afternoon she found herself on the Bayswater side in a street of tall houses off the main thoroughfare. They were good houses, that must have been built for the families of affluent people, and Beth was afraid it would be useless to ask at any of them for the modest kind of accommodation which was all she could afford. While she hesitated, however, standing in the street before the one she had come to find, the hall-door opened, and a young man came out. He and Beth looked at each other as he ran down the steps, and Beth saw something so attractive in his face that she spoke to him without hesitation.

"Can you tell me," she said, "if they have any attics to let at a moderate price in this house?"

"Well, *I* got one out of them," he said, smiling, "and I guess there's another empty that would just about hold you, dress boxes and all. I'll ring the bell, if you'll allow me, and get Ethel Maud Mary to show you up. You'll make a better bargain with her than with her ma."

The door was opened at this moment by a grimy servant.

"Gwendolen, will you give my compliments to Miss Ethel, if you please," the young man said with grave formality, "and ask her if she will be so good as to speak to me here for a moment."

Gwendolen nodded and retired to the back regions, whence presently a plump, fair-complexioned, yellow-haired young person came hurrying with a look of inquiry on her face.

"Oh, Miss Ethel," the young man began, taking off his hat, "I'm real sorry to trouble you, but I want to introduce this young lady. I've been recommending her to get a room here. I know she'll find you moderate and comfortable, and the situation is one of the best for getting into town."

Beth recognised the wording of the advertisement that had brought her to the house.

"It *is* handy," Miss Ethel agreed. "But we've nothing but an attic unlet. Are you in Art, miss?"

"No, Literature," Beth answered, with presence of mind.

"*Lady's*, I suppose?" Ethel Maud Mary observed, meaning lady's papers, and glancing at Beth's dress. "You've got to be smart for that, and it doesn't leave much for living. Come this way, miss, please. And thank you, Mr. Brock, for mentioning us."

She led the way upstairs, talking all the time with cheerful inconsequence. "He's a real gentleman is Mr. Brock, as doubtless you know, though an American, and dry, and you never know which is his fun; and in Art, which is not much to reckon on, and that's why I thought that you might be, though you do look more like Fashion. Art is apt to be towzled, but why, goodness knows. You're not used to the stairs, I see. I wish it wasn't such a height up."

"Oh, I don't mind the height, if the price is proportionately low," Beth said. "I must live within my means, and keep out of debt, you know."

"That's a rhyme—low and you know. Did you do it on purpose?" Ethel Maud Mary asked with interest.

"No," said Beth.

"Then that's for luck," said Ethel. "You'll keep out of debt all right. I see it in your face. And I know a face when I see it. They'll keep you on the *Lady's* for the sake of your appearance, even if you're not much use. You're elegant and speak nice, and that's what they want to go about for them, particularly if it's a man."

"If what is a man?" Beth asked.

"The editor, you know. We 'ad a young lady here who used to say she'd undertake to get an extra half-sovereign out of any editor in town; but editresses there was no managing. Which is yours?"

"I don't know yet," said Beth. "I've only just arrived."

"What are you getting?"

"A pound a week," Beth answered, that being her exact income; "but I have a little by me besides, to keep me going till I get started, you know."

Ethel Maud Mary nodded her yellow head intelligently, and began to climb the narrow flight of stairs which led to the attics, moving her lips the while, as if she were making calculations. There was no carpet on this last flight of stairs, but the boards were well washed, and the attic itself smelt sweet and clean.

"This is it," Ethel explained. "Mr. Brock is in the other, next door. There's only two of them. This is the biggest room, but the other is north, and has the biggest window, and being in Art, he's got to think of the light. If you look out there to the right, you'll see some green in the Park. You'll like the Park. It's no distance if you're a walker. Now, just let's see. I've been calculating about the money. Mr. Brock pays fourteen shillings, but you'll not be able to afford more than seven out of a pound. You shall have it for seven."

"But surely that will be a loss to you!" Beth exclaimed.

Ethel sat herself down on the side of the bed and smiled up at her. "I'll not pretend we couldn't get more if we waited," she said; "but waiting's a loss, and we're doing very well downstairs, and can afford to pick and choose. You'll find in business that it pays better in the end to get a good tenant you can trust, who'll stay, than one who gives you double the amount for a month, and then goes off with the blankets."

"You don't deceive me a bit," said Beth, sitting down opposite to her on a cane-bottomed chair. "Your good-heartedness shines out of your face. But I'm not going to take a mean advantage of it. There's an honest atmosphere in this house that would suit me, I feel, and I am sure I shall do well here; but all the same I won't come unless you make a bargain with me. If I take the rooms for such a small sum now, while I am poor, will you let me make it up to you when I succeed? I shall succeed!" The last words burst from her involuntarily, forced from her with emphasis in spite of herself.

"That's what *I* like to hear; that's spirit, that is!" Ethel Maud Mary exclaimed, nodding approvingly. "You'll do all right. So it's a bargain. Washing's included, you know. You didn't bring your box, did you?"

"No, I left my luggage at Charing Cross when I arrived last night. I slept at the hotel," Beth answered.

"At the Charing Cross Hotel? Gracious! that must have cost you a small fortune."

"I didn't know what to do," Beth explained apologetically.

"You should have tried the Strand, Surrey Street, and there. You'd have got bed and breakfast for five shillings, and that's more than enough. However, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You'll have to fetch your luggage, I suppose. You can go by train from Nottinghill Gate to Charing Cross. It's about as cheap as the 'bus, and much quicker. I'll come with you, and show you the way, if you like. A breath of fresh air will do me good."

"Yes, do come," Beth answered gratefully, glad of the kindly human fellowship. "What is your name, may I ask?"

"Ethel Maud Mary Gill; and what is yours, if you please?"

"Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure."

Beth had emptied her secret chamber and packed all her little possessions before she left Slane. She had sometimes suspected that Dan would be glad of an excuse to get rid of her, to relieve himself of the cost of her keep; and that he would do it in some gross way, and so as to put all the blame of it upon her, if possible, she also expected. She was therefore prepared to consider the matter settled the moment he threatened her, and would have felt it useless to remonstrate even had she been inclined. But she was not inclined. She had for years done everything patiently that any one in any code of morality could expect of her in such a marriage, and no good had come of it. As Daniel Maclure was, so would he remain for ever; and to associate with him intimately without being coarsened and corrupted was impossible. Beth had fought hard against that, and had suffered in the struggle; but she had been lowered in spite of herself, and she knew it, and resented it. She was therefore as glad to leave Maclure as he was to get rid of her; and already it seemed as if with her married life a great hampering weight had fallen from her, and left her free to face a promising future with nothing to fear and everything to hope. Poverty was pleasant in her big bright attic, where all was clean and neat about her. There she could live serenely, and purify her mind by degrees of the garbage with which Dan's habitual conversation had polluted it.

The settling-in occupied her for some days, and the housekeeping was a puzzle when she first began. She had only been able to bring the most precious of her possessions, her books and papers, and clothes enough for the moment, away with her from Slane; the rest she had left ready packed to be sent to her when she should be settled. When she wrote to Maclure for them, she sent him some housekeeping keys she had forgotten to leave behind, and an inventory of everything she had had charge of, which she had always kept carefully checked. He acknowledged the receipt of this letter, and informed her that he had gone over the inventory himself, and found some of the linen in a bad state and one silver teaspoon missing. Beth replied that the linen had been fairly worn out, but she could not account for the missing spoon, and offered to pay for it. Dr. Maclure replied by return of post on a post-card that the price was seven shillings. Beth sent him a

postal order for that amount. He then wrote to say that the cost of the conveyance of the luggage to the station was half-a-crown. Beth sent him half-a-crown, and then the correspondence ended. She received letters from some of her relations, however, to whom Maclure had hastened to send his version of the story. Poor old Aunt Grace Mary was the only one, who did not accept it. "Write and tell me the truth of the matter, my dear," she said. The others took it for granted that Beth could have nothing to say for herself, and her brother Jim was especially indignant and insulting, his opinion of her being couched in the most offensive language. Having lived with disreputable women all his life, he had the lowest possible opinion of the whole sex, his idea being that any woman would misconduct herself if she had the chance and was not well watched. He warned Beth not to apply to him if she should be starving, or to claim his acquaintance should she meet him in the street. Beth's cheeks burned with shame when she read this letter and some of the others she received, and she hastened to destroy them; but the horror they set up in her brought on a nervous crisis such as she had suffered from in the early days when Dan first brought her down to his own low level of vice and suspicion, and turned her deadly sick. She answered none of these letters, and, by dint of resolutely banishing all thought of them and of the writers, she managed in time to obliterate the impression; but she had to live through some terrible hours before she succeeded.

Once settled in her attic home, she returned to the healthy, regular, industrious habits which had helped her so much in the days when she had been at her best. Her life was of the simplest, but she had to do almost everything for herself, such time as Gwendolen could command for attendance being wholly insufficient to keep the attic in order. Her daily duties kept her in health, however, by preventing indolence either of mind or body, and so were of infinite use. She had added a few things to the scanty furniture of her attic—a new bath, a second-hand writing-table, book-shelves with a cupboard beneath for cups, saucers, and glasses, and a grandfather chair—all great bargains, as Ethel Maud Mary assured her. Ethel Maud Mary's kindness was inexhaustible. She took Beth to the second-hand shop herself, and showed her that the writing-table and book-shelves would be as good as new when they were washed and rubbed up a bit; and all the grandfather chair wanted was a new cretonne cover at

sixpence a yard—four yards, two shillings, and she could make it herself. She also advised Beth to buy a little oil-stove, the only one she knew of that really didn't smell if you attended to it yourself; and a tin to hold oil for it—crystal oil at sevenpence a gallon, the best.

"You can do all you want with that, and keep yourself warm enough too when the weather's bad," she said; "and there's no waste, for you can turn it out when you've done with it. Fires are too dear for you at sixpence a scuttle for coals, and they're dirtier besides, and a trouble to light and look after. You'll find it as good as a lamp, too, if you're doing nothing particular at night."

When Beth had made a cosy corner of the window for work, arranged her books, put her ornaments about on mantelpiece and brackets, hung her pictures and the draperies she had used in her secret chamber, spread the rugs and covered the grandfather chair, her attic looked inviting. The character of her little possessions gave the poor place a distinction which enchanted Ethel Maud Mary.

Beth fetched up the water overnight for her bath in the morning, and made coffee for her breakfast on the little oil-stove. She lived principally on bread and butter, eggs, sardines, salad, and slices of various meats bought at a cook-shop and carried home in a paper. Sometimes, when she felt she could afford it, she had a hot meal at an eating-house for the good of her health; but she scarcely required it, for she never felt stronger in her life, and so long as she could get good coffee for her breakfast and tea for her evening meal, she missed none of the other things to which she had been accustomed. She made delicious coffee in a tin coffee-pot, and brewed the best tea she had ever drunk in brown earthenware, which Ethel Maud Mary considered the best thing going for tea. She used to join Beth in a cup up in the attic, but she never came empty-handed. Dull wet days, likely to be depressing, were the ones on which her yellow head appeared oftenest at the top of the attic stairs.

"Miss Maclure, may I come in?" she would say, after knocking.

And Beth would answer, rising from her work with a smile of welcome, "Yes, by all means. I'm delighted to see you. You take the big chair and I'll make the tea. I'm dying for a cup."

Then Ethel Maud Mary would uncover something she held in her hand, which would prove to be cakes, or hot buttered toast and watercresses, or a bag of shrimps and some thin bread and butter; and Beth, sparkling at the kindness, would exclaim, "I never was so spoilt in my life!" to which Ethel Maud Mary would rejoin, "There'll not be much to boast about between two of us."

Beth was busy with another book by this time, but found the work more of a task and less of a pleasure than it used to be. Ethel Maud Mary still took it for granted that she was a journalist, and showed no interest in her work beyond hoping that she got her pay regularly, and would soon be making more. Beth wondered sometimes when the little book which had been accepted in the summer would appear, and what she would get for it, if anything, and she thought of inquiring, but she put it off. Her new work took all her time and strength, and wearied her, so that nothing else seem to signify.

Besides Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen, the only person she had to talk to was Arthur Milbank Brock, the young American, her neighbour in the next attic. She met him coming upstairs with his hat in his hand soon after her instalment, and was even more attracted by his face than she had been when she first saw him in the street.

"You've settled in by this time, I hope," he said.

"Yes, and very comfortably too, thanks to you," Beth answered.

"Ah, Ethel Maud Mary's a good sort," he replied, "golden hair, blue eyes, and all. She has the looks of a lady's novel and the heart of a holy mother. Her grammar and spelling are defective, but her sense is sound. I wouldn't give much for her opinion of a work of art, but I'd take her advice in a difficulty if it came anywhere within range of her experience. She knows this world well, but picks her steps through it in such a way that I guess she'll reach the threshold of the next with nice clean shoes."

He stepped aside for Beth to pass when he had spoken, and stood a moment watching her thoughtfully as she descended. "And may you too," he said to himself as he turned to go up, then, perceiving that the hope implied a doubt, he began to wonder whence it came.

As Beth went out, she reflected on his face, on a certain gravity which heightened its refinement. It was a young face, but worn, as by some past trial or present care, and with an habitually sober expression which contrasted notably with the cheery humour of his speech, adding point to it, as is frequently the case with his countrymen. He wore his thick brown hair rather longer than is usual, but was clean shaven. His features were delicate and regular, his eyes deep and dark, his head large and finely formed. In figure he was tall and slim, and in his whole appearance there was something almost ethereal, as of a young poet or philosopher still moving among his fellow-men, yet knowing himself to be prematurely smitten, set apart, and consecrated to death, by some insidious slow disease from which there is no escape. This was Beth's first notion of him, but she always hoped it was fanciful. She thought about him a good deal in the solitary walks which were her principal recreation. When she was tired of working or wanted to think, she used to go out and wander alone. At first she was afraid to venture far, for she had always been assured that she had no head for topography, and would never be able to find her way; and so long as she went about under escort, with some one to save her the necessity of observing, she never knew where she was. Now, however, that she had to look after herself, she found no difficulty after her first timidity wore off; and this little experience taught her why it is that the intelligence of women seems childishly defective as regards many of the details of the business of life. They have the faculty, but when they are not allowed to act for themselves, it remains imperfectly developed or is altogether atrophied for want of exercise.

It was in these days of peace that the ugly downward droop of the corners of Beth's mouth, which had always spoilt the expression of her face, entirely disappeared, and her firm-set lips softened into keeping with the kindness of her beautiful grey eyes; but she still wanted much loving to bring out the natural tenderness which had been so often and so cruelly nipped back in its growth. Beth had been born to be a woman, but circumstances had been forcing her to become a career. Strangely enough, some of the scenes she saw during her rambles in London helped to soften her. While she was under her husband's influence, she saw the evil only, and was filled with bitterness. London meant for her in those days the dirt and squalor of the poor, the depravity of the rich, the fiendish triumph of the lust

of man, and the horrible degradation of her own sex; but now that her mind was recovering its tone, and she could see with her own eyes, she discovered the good at war with the evil, the courage and kindliness of the poor, signs of the growth of better feeling in the selfish and greedy rich, the mighty power of purity at war with the license of man, and the noble attitude of women wherever injustice was rife, the weak oppressed, and the wronged remained unrighted; then her heart expanded with pity, and instead of the torment of unavailing hate, she began to revive in the glow of strengthening gleams of hope. It was in those days too that she learnt to appreciate the wonder and beauty of the most wonderful and beautiful city ever seen; and her eyes grew deep from long looking and earnest meditating upon it. She occasionally experienced the sickening sensation of being followed about by one of those specimens of mankind so significantly called "sly dogs" by their fellow-men. They made themselves particularly objectionable in Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park; but she found that an appeal to a policeman or a Park-keeper, or to any decent workman, was enough to stop the nuisance. Genuine respect for women, which is an antidote to the moral rottenness that promotes the decay of nations, and portends the indefinite prolongation of the life of a race, is of slow growth, but it is steadily increasing among the English-speaking peoples.

During her rambles, Beth composed long letters to her friends, but somehow none of them were ever written. She had managed to send a few hurried lines of explanation to Mrs. Kilroy in the midst of her packing before she left Slane. As she had not known where she would be, she had asked Angelica to address her letters to Slane to be forwarded; but no reply had come as yet, and Beth was just a little sore and puzzled about it. However, she knew that, what with her public and private duties, Angelica was overwhelmed with work, and might well have overlooked the fact that she had not answered Beth's letter, so Beth determined to write again. Time passed, however, and she got into such a groove of daily duties that anything outside the regular routine required a special effort which she always postponed, and letters were quite outside the regular routine. After the first no one wrote to her except the old lawyer who sent her half-yearly dividend; and she had written to no one. She had dropped altogether out of her own world, yet, because of her work and of her power to interest herself in every one about her, and to appreciate the goodness of her humblest

friends, her life was full, and she had not known a moment's discontent. Little things were great pleasures now. To be able to get on the top of an omnibus at Piccadilly Circus when the sun was setting, and ride to Hammersmith Broadway, engrossed in watching the wonderful narrow cloudscape above the streets, changing from moment to moment in form and colour; the mystery of the hazy distances, the impression of the great buildings and tall irregular blocks of houses appearing all massed together among the trees from different points of view, and taking on fine architectural effects, now transformed into huge grey palaces, large and distinct, now looming in the mist, sketchily, with uncertain outlines, and all the fascination of the fabrics, innocent of detail, that confront the dreamer in enchanted woods, or lure him to the edge of fairy lakes with twinkling lights all multiplied by their own reflection in the water. Beth had rolled in that direction in luxurious carriages often, and never joyed in the scene, her mind being set on other things—things prosaic, such as what she should wear, or whether she was late, scraps of society gossip, conversations which had satiated without satisfying her, and remained in her mind to be items of weariness if not of actual irritation. She had noticed in those days how very seldom she saw a happy face in a carriage, unless it was a very young face, full of expectation. Even the very coachmen and footmen in the Park looked enervated, as the long lines of carriages passed in wearisome procession. And in everything there had been that excess which leaves no room for healthy desire. At first, the shop windows, set out with tasteless profusion, no article in the heterogeneous masses telling, however beautiful, each being eclipsed by the other in the horrible glut, had interested her, and she had looked at everything. But she soon sickened at the sight. The vast quantities of things, crowded together, robbed her of all pleasure of choice, and made her feel as if she had eaten too much. Occasionally she would see two or three things of beauty displayed with art in a large window; but everywhere else excessive quantity produced indifference, disgust, or satiety, according to the mood of the moment. And even in the days of her poverty and obscurity, when her faculties were sharpened into proper appreciation by privation, those congested windows teeming with jewels, with wearing apparel, with all things immoderately, set up a sort of mental dyspepsia that was distressing, and she was glad to turn away to relieve the consequent brain-fag. But by degrees she became accustomed to the tasteless profusion. It did not please her any better, but at all events it did

not afflict her by always obtruding itself upon her attention. She saw it, not in detail, but as a part of the picture; and she found in the new view of London and of London life from the top of omnibuses more of the unexpected, of delight, of beauty for the eyes and of matter for the mind, of humour, pathos, poetry, of tragedy and comedy, suggestive glimpses caught in passing and vividly recollected, than she could have conceived possible when she rolled along with society on carriage cushions, soothed by the stultifying ease into temporary sensuous apathy.

Winter set in suddenly and with terrible severity that year. London became a city of snow, cruelly cold, but beautiful, all its ugliness disguised by the white mantle, all its angles softened, all its charms enhanced. Commonplace squares, parks, gardens, and dirty streets were transformed into fairyland by the delicate disposition of snow in festoons on door-post and railing, ledge and lintel, from roof to cellar. The trees especially, all frosted with shining filigree, were a wonder to look upon; and Beth would wander about the alleys in Kensington Gardens, and gaze at the glory of the white world under the sombre grey of the murky clouds, piled up in awesome magnificence, until she ached with yearning for some word of human speech, some way to express it, to make it manifest.

She returned one afternoon somewhat wet and weary from one of her rambles. The little window of her attic was half snowed up, and the gloom under the sloping roof struck a chill to her heart as she entered; but when she had lighted the lamp (a new investment that helped up the temperature besides giving light), and set her little oil-stove going with the kettle on it, her surroundings took on an air of homely comfort that was grateful. As she busied herself preparing the tea, she noticed that her neighbour in the next attic was coughing a good deal, and then it occurred to her that she had not seen him about lately, and she wondered if he could be ill. The thought of a young man of small means, ill alone in a London lodging, probably without a bell in the room, and certainly with no one anxious to answer it if he should ring, though not cheering, is stimulating to the energy of the benevolent, and Beth went downstairs to ask as soon as the notion occurred to her.

"Mr. Brock? there now!" Gwendolen exclaimed in dismay. "If I didn't forget altogether! I've so much to see to, and the missus ill in bed with bronchitis,

and Miss Ethel run off her feet, and not too fit 'erself with that cold as 'ud be called influenza if it wasn't for frightening the lodgers. Whatever it is, it's going through the 'ouse, and Mr. Brock seems to have got it bad. 'E ast me when I went wiv 'is shyving-water this morning to tike 'im some coals and mike 'im some tea, an' I never thought no more about it—I clean forgot."

"This morning!" Beth cried. "Why that was at eight o'clock, and now it is four!"

"I'll get 'em at once," Gwendolen said with contrition. But the girl herself looked worn to death. She had been on her feet since early morning, and had no prospect of a rest till she dropped on her bed late at night, too exhausted to undress.

"Never mind," Beth said. "Give me the coals, and I'll carry them up, and see to the rest. I have nothing else to do."

"Bless you," Gwendolen muttered.

Beth found Mr. Brock in bed, with bright eyes, and burning spots of colour on each cheek. A lamp was burning beside him. When he saw who it was, he raised his eyebrows; but smiled at the same time, as if he were both surprised and pleased. The room struck cold to Beth.

"What! no fire?" she exclaimed.

"I tried to light the pesky thing," he said, "but it wouldn't burn."

"Gwendolen forgot you altogether," Beth said. "She has far too much to do, poor girl, and I have only just heard that you were ill. Why didn't you call me?"

He smiled again.

"We are all of the same family here, you know," Beth said, "the great human family. You had only to say 'Sister!' and I should have come."

The smile faded from his lips, but it was replaced by another expression, which, when she saw it, caused Beth to ejaculate inwardly, "Surely of such are the Kingdom——"

Each had seen in the other's face at the same time something there is no human utterance to describe, and, recognising it, had reverently held their peace.

Beth fetched her oil-stove first, with the kettle on it, and, while the water was boiling, she cut bread and butter and lighted the fire.

"We'll have tea together, if you please," she said cheerfully. "I've a horrible suspicion that you've had nothing to eat or drink all day."

Her sympathy recalled his pleasant, patient smile.

"My appetite is not devouring," he said, "but my thirst is. Talk about selling one's birthright! I'd sell my brains, I believe, for a cup of tea at this moment."

"There's a bowl full for nothing, then," Beth rejoined. "Sip it while I boil you an egg."

He took the bowl in both hands and tried the tea.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with a long-drawn sigh, "it's nectar! it's mead! it's nepenthe! it's all the drinks ever brewed for all the gods in one! But I'm afraid to touch it lest I should finish it."

"Don't be afraid, then," said Beth, "for you'll find it like liquor for the gods in another respect; it will be to be had whenever you want it. What's the matter?"

"Did I make lament?" he asked. "I didn't know it. But I'm all one ache. I can't lie still for it, and I can't move without adding to it. I've been watching the ice-floes on the river from the Embankment and bridges by all lights lately; I never saw finer effects—such colour! It's wonderful what colour there is under your sombre sky if you know how to look for it; and it has the great advantage over the colour other countries teem with of being unexpected. It's not obvious; you have to look out for it; but when you have found it, you rejoice in it as in something rare and precious, and it excites you to enthusiasm beyond your wont—which should prevent chills, but it doesn't, as witness my aches."

Beth felt his hand and found it dry and burning.

"The doctor is the next and only thing for you, young man, after this frugal meal," she said, "and I'll go and fetch him. I hope to goodness these are the right things to give you."

He objected to the doctor, but she paid no attention to his remonstrance, and when she had done all she could think of for the moment, she put on her wet boots and walking things again, got the address of a good man from Ethel Maud Mary, and sallied out into the snow once more.

Rheumatic fever was the doctor's diagnosis, and his directions to Beth concluded with a long list of expensive medical comforts which it seemed were absolutely necessary. She went out again when he had gone, and brought back everything, toiling up the long flights of stairs with both arms full, breathless but cheerful; and having set all in order for use—sheets of medicated cotton-wool, medicines, Valentine's extract, clinical thermometer and chart—she settled herself to watch the patient, the clock, and the temperature of the room, which had to be equable, with the exactness and method of a capable nurse. Before the household retired, she went downstairs to fetch more coals, fearing they might run short in the night.

"He's 'ad one scuttle to-day," Gwendolen reminded her, warningly.

"He must have two more, then, if necessary," said Beth.

"They're sixpence a scuttle, you know," Gwendolen remonstrated.

"Two for a shilling, and no charge for delivery," said Beth as she toiled up the long ascent once more with her heavy burden.

"Eh! it would be a gay glad world if they all took it like you," Gwendolen muttered, as she stood, with the pencil in her mouth, studying the slate that hung outside the coal-cellar, and let her generosity war with her accuracy and honesty for a little before she made two more strokes on the line that began with the name of Brock; and no sooner done than regretted.

"I wish to goodness I'd put 'em down to old Piggot and Mother Hauseman," she thought. "They'd never miss the money, and it 'ud be a good deed for the likes of them to help their betters, and might likely profit their own souls, though unbeknown."

For many weeks Beth watched beside the sick man's bed, doing all that was possible to ease his pain day and night, snatching brief intervals of rest when she could, and concealing her weariness at all times. She used to wonder at the young man's uncomplaining fortitude, his gentleness, gratitude, and unselfish concern about her fatigue. Even when he was at his worst, he would struggle back to consciousness in order to entreat her to lie down; and when, to please him, she had settled herself on a little couch there was in his room, he would make a superhuman effort to keep still as long as his flickering consciousness lasted. There was only one thing he was ever exacting about—to keep her in sight. So long as he could see her he was satisfied, and would lie for hours, patiently controlling himself for fear of disturbing her by uttering exclamations or making other signs of suffering; but when she had to leave him alone, he broke down and moaned in his weakness and pain for her to come back and help him.

The doctor having declared that the north-east aspect of his attic was all against the patient, Beth insisted on changing with him, and, as soon as he could be moved, she, Ethel Maud Mary, and Gwendolen, with the doctor's help, carried him into her room in a sheet; an awkward manœuvre because of his length, which made it hard to turn him on the narrow landing; his weight was nothing, for he was mere skin and bone by that time—all eyes, as Beth used to tell him.

It was Christmas Eve when they moved him, and late that night Beth kept her vigil by him, sitting over the fire with her elbows on her knees and her face between her hands, listening dreamily to the clang and clamour of the church-bells, which floated up to her over the snow, mellowed by distance and full-fraught with manifold associations. As she sat there she pondered. She thought of the long way she had drifted from the days when she knelt in spirit at the call of the bells and lost herself in happy prayer. She thought of her husband's hypocrisy, and the way in which, when it dawned upon her, her own faith had melted from her; and she pondered on the difference it would have made if only she had been married early—just to a good man. It would not have been necessary for her to have loved him—not with passion—only to have relied upon him. Some one to trust, she craved for, more than some one to love; yet she allowed that a loveless marriage is a mock marriage. She did not regret the loss of her conventional faith, but she

wished she could join the congregation just for the human fellowship. She felt the need of union, of some central station, a centre of peace, unlike the church, the house of disunion. Without knowing it, she leant to Quaker-Catholicism, the name assumed for her religious principles by Caroline Fox—Quaker-Catholicism having direct spiritual teaching for its distinctive dogma.

"What are you thinking about?" Arthur Brock said suddenly from the bed.

Beth started. She thought he was asleep.

"God," she said; with a gasp, "and going to church," she added, laughing at her own abruptness. "I was wanting a church to go to."

"You don't belong to the Established Church, then," he said. "Well, I don't go to church myself; but I make a difference on Sundays. I don't work, and I read another kind of book. It is my day for the plains of heaven. I should like to be there all the time, if I could manage it; but I can't, not being a monk in a cell. When I can, I make the ascent, however, with the help of the books that take one there."

"I used to read religious books too," said Beth; "but I found little illumination in them, most of them being but the dry husks of the subject, uninformed of the spirit, containing no vital spark, and stained with blood."

"How?" he exclaimed.

"This God of the Hebrews," Beth began, looking dreamily into the fire, "what is his history? He loved cruelty and bloodshed. The innocent animals first suffered in his service; but, not content with that, he went from bad to worse, as men do, and ended by demanding human sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own son. And for that specially we are required to adore him, although it must be clear to the commonest capacity to-day that the worship of such a deity is devil-worship. I do not say there is no God; I only say this is not God—this blood-lover, this son-slayer, this blind omniscience, this impotent omnipotence, this merciful cruelty, this meek arrogance, this peaceful combatant; this is not God, but man. The mind of man wars with the works of God to mar them. Man tries to make us believe that he is made in the image of God; but what happened was just the reverse. Man was of a better nature originally, a more manifold nature. He had intellect for a toy to

play with on earth, and spirit for a power to help him to heaven. But instead of toiling to strengthen his spirit, he preferred to play with his intellect; and he played until he became so expert in the use of it, and so interested in the game, that he forgot his origin. And then it was that he projected an image of himself into space, and was so delighted with his own appearance from that point of view, that he called it God and fell down and worshipped it. If you would understand man, consider God; if you would know his God, study man."

Arthur Brock reflected for a little.

"What you say sounds real smart," he said at last, "and there's a kind of glamour in your words that dazzles and prevents one seeing just how much they mean at first. It is true that religion culminates in human sacrifice both here and in Africa, and, for refinement of horror, we have here the literal bloody sacrifice of a son by his father. But that is not God, as you say; that is the ultimate of the priest. And the priest is the same at all times, in all ages, beneath all veneers of civilisation. His credit depends upon a pretence to power. He is not a humble seeker after truth, but a bigoted upholder of error and an impudent time-server. He destroys the scientific discoverer in one age; in the next he finds his own existence is threatened because he refuses to acknowledge that the discoverer was right; then he confesses the truth, and readjusts his hocus-pocus to suit it. He does not ask us to pin our faith to fancies which seem real to a child in its infancy, yet he would have us credulous about those which were the outcome of the intellectual infancy of the race. What he can't get over in himself is the absence of any sense of humour. I'm real sorry for him at times, and I tell him so."

Beth smiled. "I could not be so kindly courteous," she said. "Some things make me fierce. The kingdom of heaven is or is not within us, I believe; and half the time I know it is not in me, because there is no room for anything in me but the hate and rage that rend me for horror of all the falsehood, injustice, and misery I know of and cannot prevent. A sense of humour would save the church perhaps; but I'm too sore to see it. All I can say is: your religion to me is horrifying—human sacrifice and devil-worship, survivals from an earlier day welded on to our own time, and assorting ill with it. I would not accept salvation at the hands of such futile omnipotence, such cruel mercy, such blood-stained justice. The sight of

suffering was grateful to man when the world was young, as it still is to savages; but we revolt from it now. We should not be happy in heaven, as the saved were said to be in the old tales, within sight of the sinners suffering in hell."

"Which is to say that there is more of Christ in us now than there was in the days of old," he said, speaking dispassionately, and with the confident deliberation of one who takes time to think. "I believe those old tales were founded on muddle-headed confusion of mind in the days when dreams were as real to mankind as the events of life. There are obscure tribes still on earth who cannot distinguish between what they have done and what they have only dreamt they did, and probably every race has gone through that stage of development. I don't know if excessive piety be a disease of the nerves, as some say, although what is piety in one generation does appear to be perversity in the next, as witness the sons of the clergy, and other children of pious people, who don't answer to expectation, as a rule. And I don't go much on churches or creeds, or faith in this personality or that. The old ideas have lost their hold upon me, as they have upon you; but that is no reason why we should give up the old truths that have been in the world for all time, the positive right and wrong, which are facts, not ideas. I believe that there is good and evil, that the one is at war with the other always; and that good can do no evil, evil no good. I've got beyond all the dogma and fiddle-faddle of the intellect with which the church has overlaid the spirit, and all the ceremonial so useful and necessary for individual souls in early stages of development. I used to think if I could find a religion with no blood in it, I would embrace it. Now I feel sure that it does not matter what the expression of our religious nature is so that it be religious. Religion is an attitude of mind, the attitude of prayer, which includes reverence for things holy and deep devotion to them. I would not lose that for anything—the right of appeal; but now, when I think of our Father in heaven, I do not despise our mother on earth."

Beth sat some time looking thoughtfully into the fire. "Go to sleep," she said at last, abruptly. "You ought not to be talking at this time of night."

"I wish you would go to sleep yourself," he said, as he settled himself obediently; "for I lose half the comfort of being saved, while you sit up there suffering for me."

The expression was not too strong for the strain Beth had to put upon herself in those days; for she had no help. Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen felt for her and her patient, as they said; but there of necessity their kindness ended. The other lodgers kept Gwendolen for ever running to and fro; each seemed to think she had nobody else to look after, and it was seldom indeed that any of them noticed her weariness or took pity on her. Beth did everything for herself, fetched the coals from the cellar, the water from the bath-room, swept and dusted, cleaned the grate, ran out to do the shopping, and returned to do the cooking and mending. Ethel Maud Mary stole the time to run up occasionally to show sympathy; but her own poor little hands were overfull, what with her mother ill in bed, both ends to be made to meet, and lodgers uncertain in money matters. She lost all her plumpness that winter, her rose-leaf complexion faded to the colour of dingy wax, and her yellow hair, so brightly burnished when she had time to brush it, became towzled and dull; but her heart beat as bravely-kind as ever, and she never gave in.

She climbed up one day in a hurry to Mr. Brock's room, which Beth occupied, snatching a moment to make inquiries and receive comfort; and as soon as she entered she subsided suddenly on to a chair out of breath.

"How you do it a dozen times a day, Miss Maclure, I can't think," she gasped.

"Those stairs have taught me what servants suffer," Beth said, as if that, at all events, were a thing for which to be thankful.

"You'd not have driven 'em, even if you hadn't known what they suffer," said Ethel Maud Mary. "That's the worst of this world. All the hard lessons have got to be learnt by the people who never needed them to make them good, while the bad folk get off for nothing."

"I don't know about not needing them," said Beth. "But I do know this: that every sorrowful experience I have ever had has been an advantage to me sooner or later."

"I wish I could believe that Ma's temper would be an advantage to me," Ethel Maud Mary said, sighing; "she's that wearing! But there, poor dear! she's sick, and there's no keeping the worries from her. There's only you and

Mr. Brock in the house just now that pays up to the day, so you may guess what it is! He's getting on nicely now, I suppose; but you shouldn't be sitting here in the cold. A shawl don't make the difference; it's the air you breathe; and you ought to have your oil-stove going. Isn't the fire enough for him? I can't think so many degrees it need be in his room always, when there's no degree at all in yours."

"Oh, I'm hardy," said Beth. "I never was better."

"You look it," Ethel Maud Mary said sarcastically, "like a pauper just out of prison. What are you worrying about?"

"Beef-tea," said Beth. And so she was, and bread and butter, fuel, light, and lodging—everything, in fact, that meant money; for the money was all but done, and she had had a shock on the subject lately that had shaken her considerably.

She had spread out a newspaper to save the carpet, and was kneeling on the floor, one morning, in front of the window, cleaning and filling the little oil-stove, and Arthur was lying contentedly watching her—"superintending her domestic duties," he used to call it, that being all that he was equal to in his extreme weakness just then.

"You're a notable housekeeper," he said. "I shouldn't have expected you from your appearance to be able to cook and clean as you do."

"I used to do this kind of thing as a child to help a lazy servant we had, bless her," Beth answered. "The cooking and cleaning she taught me have stood me in good stead."

"If you had a daughter, how would you bring her up?" he asked.

Beth opened the piece of paper with which she was cleaning the oil off the stove, and regarded it thoughtfully. "I would bring her up in happy seclusion, to begin with," she said. "She should have all the joys of childhood; and then an education calculated to develop all her intellectual powers without forcing them, and at the same time to fit her for a thoroughly normal woman's life: childhood, girlhood, wifeness, motherhood, each with its separate duties and pleasures all complete. I would have her happy in each, steadfast, prudent, self-possessed,

methodical, economical; and if she had the capacity for any special achievement, I think that such an education would have developed the strength of purpose and self-respect necessary to carry it through. I would also have her to know thoroughly the world that she has to live in, so that she might be ready to act with discretion in any emergency. I should, in fact, want to fit her for whatever might befall her, and then leave her in confidence to shape her own career. The life for a woman to long for—and a man too, I think—is a life of simple duties and simple pleasures, a normal life; but I only call that life normal which is suited to the requirements of the woman's individual temperament."

"You don't clamour for more liberty, then?"

"It depends upon what you mean by that. The cry for more liberty is sometimes the cry of the cowardly anxious to be excused from their share of the duties and labours of life; and it is also apt to be a cry not for liberty but for licence. One must discriminate."

"But how?"

"By the character and principles of the people you have to deal with—obviously."

She had lighted her little oil-stove by this time, and set a saucepan of water on it to boil. Then she fetched a chopping board and a piece of raw beef-steak, which she proceeded to cut up into dice and put into a stone jar until it was crammed full. Her sensitive mouth showed some shrinking from the rawness, and her white fingers were soon dyed red; but she prepared the meat none the less carefully for that. When the jar was filled and the contents seasoned, she put it in the pot on the stove for the heat to extract the juice.

"What is it going to be to-day?" he asked.

"Beef-jelly," she said. "You must be tired of beef-tea."

"I'm tired of nothing you do for me," he rejoined. "This is the homiest time I've had in England."

Beth smiled. In spite of poverty, anxiety, and fatigue, it was the "homiest time" she had had since Aunt Victoria's death, and she loved it. Now that she had some one she could respect and care for dependent on her, whose every look and word expressed appreciation of her devotion, the time never hung heavily on her hands, as it used to do in the married days that had been so long in the living. It was all as congenial as it was new to her, this close association with a man of the highest character and the most perfect refinement. She had never before realised that there could be such men, so heroic in suffering, so unselfish, and so good; and this discovery had stimulated her strangely—filled her with hope, strengthened her love of life, and made everything seem worth while.

She went on with her work in silence after that last remark of his, and he continued to watch her with all an invalid's interest in the little details of his narrow life.

"It would be a real relief to me to be able to get up and do all that for you," he finally observed. "I don't feel much of a man lying here and letting you work for me."

"This is woman's work," Beth said.

"Woman's work and man's work are just anything they can do for each other," he rejoined. "I wonder if I should get on any quicker with a change of treatment. Resignation is generally prescribed for rheumatism, and a variety of drugs which distract attention from the seat of pain to other parts of the person, and so relieve the mind. My head is being racked just now by that last dose I took. I should like to try Salisbury."

"What is Salisbury?" Beth asked.

"Principally beef and hot water, to begin with," he replied. "You'll find a little work on the subject among my books."

Beth read the volume, and then said, "You shall try Salisbury. It is easy enough."

"Yes," he answered. "It is easy enough with a nurse like you."

But in order to carry out the treatment some things had to be bought, and this led to the discovery which was a shock to Beth. Arthur's income depended principally upon the pictures he sold, and no more money came in after he fell ill. He had had some by him, but not nearly so much as he supposed, and it was all gone now, in spite of the utmost economy on Beth's part. Her own, too, was running short, but she had not troubled about that, because she still had some of her secret hoard to fall back upon. She had left it in one of the boxes which were sent on after her from Slane—a box which she had not opened until now, when she wanted the money. The money, however, was not there. She searched and searched, but in vain; all she found was the little bag that had contained it. She was stunned by the discovery, and sat on the floor for a little, with the contents of the box all scattered about her, trying to account for her loss. Then all at once a vision of Maclure, as she had seen him on one occasion with the bunch of duplicate keys, peering into her dress-basket with horrid intentness, flashed before her; but she banished it resolutely with the inevitable conclusion to which it pointed. She would not allow her mind to be sullied by such a suspicion. And as to the money, since it was lost, why should she waste her time worrying about it? She had better set herself to consider how to procure some more. She had still some of Arthur Brock's, but that she kept that she might be able to tell him truthfully that it was not all done when he asked about it—a pious fraud which relieved his mind and kept him from retarding his recovery by attempting to begin work again before he was fit for it. What money she had of her own would last but a little longer, and how to get more was the puzzle.

Her evening dresses had been in the box which she had just unpacked, and while she was still sitting on the floor amongst them cogitating, Ethel Maud Mary came into the attic out of breath to ask how she was getting on.

"Why," she exclaimed in admiration of Beth's finery, "you've got some clothes! They'd fetch something, those frocks, if you sold them."

"Then tell me where to sell them, for money I must have," Beth rejoined precipitately.

"And it's no use keeping gowns; they only go out of fashion," Ethel Maud Mary suggested, as if she thought Beth should have an excuse. "Gwendolen

would manage it best. She's great at a bargain; and there's a place not far from here. I'd begin with the worst, if I was you."

"Advise me, then, there's a dear," said Beth, and Ethel Maud Mary knelt down beside her, and proceeded to advise.

Only a few shillings was the result of the first transaction; but the better dresses had good trimmings on them, and real lace, which fetched something, as Ethel Maud Mary declared it would, if sold separately; so, with the strictest self-denial, Beth was still able to pay her way and provide for the sick man's necessities.

From the time she put him on the Salisbury treatment, he suffered less and began to gain strength; but the weather continued severe, and Beth suffered a great deal herself from exposure and cold and privations of all kinds. She used to be so hungry sometimes that she hurried past the provision shops when she had to go out, lest she should not be able to resist the temptation to go in and buy good food for herself. If her sympathy with the poor could have been sharpened, it would have been that winter by some of the sights she saw. Sometimes she was moved by pity to wrath and rebellion, as on one occasion when she was passing a house where there had evidently been a fashionable wedding. The road in front of the house, and the red cloth which covered the steps and pavement, were thickly strewn with rice, and on this a band of starving children had pounced, and were scraping it up with their bony claws of hands, clutching it from each other, fighting for it, and devouring it raw, while a supercilious servant looked on as though he were amused. Beth's heart was wrung by the sight, and she hurried by, cursing the greedy rich who wallow in luxury while children starve in the streets.

In a squalid road which she had often to cross there was a butcher's shop, where great sides of good red beef with yellow fat were hung in the doorway. Coming home one evening after dark, she noticed in front of her a gaunt little girl who carried a baby on her arm and was dragging a small child along by the hand. When they came to the butcher's shop, they stopped to look up at the great sides of beef, and the younger child stole up to one of them, laid her little hand upon it caressingly, then kissed it. The butcher came out and ordered them off, and Beth pursued her way through

the mire with tears in her eyes. She had suffered temptation herself that same evening. She had to pass an Italian eating-house where she used to go sometimes, before she had any one depending on her, to have a two-shilling dinner—a good meal, decently served. Now, when she was always hungry, this was one of the places she had to hurry past; but even when she did not look at it, she thought about it, and was tormented by the desire to go in and eat enough just for once. Visions of thick soup, and fried fish with potatoes, and roast beef with salad, whetted an appetite that needed no whetting, and made her suffer an ache of craving scarcely to be controlled. That day had been a particularly hungry one. The coffee was done, every precious tea-leaf she had to husband for Arthur, and the butter had also to be carefully economised because a good deal was required for his crisp toast, which was unpalatable without it. Beth lived principally on the crusts she cut off the toast. When they were very stale, she steeped them in hot water, and sweetened them with brown sugar. This mess reminded her of Aunt Victoria's bread-puddings, and the happy summer when they lived together, and she learnt to sit upright on Chippendale chairs. She would like to have talked to Arthur of those tender memories, but she could not trust herself, being weak; the tears were too near the surface.

That day she had turned against her crusts, even with sugar, and had felt no hunger until she got out into the air, when an imperious craving for food seized upon her suddenly, and she made for the Italian restaurant as if she had been driven. The moment she got inside the place, however, she recovered her self-possession. She would die of hunger rather than spend two precious shillings on herself while there was that poor boy at home, suffering in silence, gratefully content with the poorest fare she brought him, always making much of all she did.

Beth got no farther than the counter.

"I want something savoury for an invalid," she said.

That evening, for the first time, Arthur sat up by the fire in the grandfather chair with a blanket round him, and enjoyed a dainty little feast which had been especially provided, as he understood, in honour of the event.

"But why won't you have some yourself?" he remonstrated.

"Well, you see," Beth answered, "I went to the Italian restaurant when I was out."

"Oh, did you?" he said. "That's right. I wish you would go every day, and have a good hot meal. Will you promise me?"

"I'll go every day that I possibly can," Beth answered, smiling brightly as she saw him fall to contentedly with the appetite of a thriving convalescent. Practising pious frauds upon him had become a confirmed habit by this time—of which she should have been ashamed; but instead, she felt a satisfying sense of artistic accomplishment when they answered, and was only otherwise affected with a certain wonderment at the very slight and subtle difference there is between truth and falsehood as conveyed by the turn of a phrase.

But now the money ran shorter and shorter; she had nothing much left to sell; and it was a question whether she could possibly hold out until her half-year's dividend was due. Perhaps the old lawyer would let her anticipate it for once. She wrote and asked him, but while she was waiting for a reply the pressure became acute.

Out of doors one day, walking along dejectedly, wondering what she should do when she came to her last shilling, her eye rested on a placard in the window of a fashionable hairdresser's shop, and she read mechanically: "A GOOD PRICE GIVEN FOR FINE HAIR." She passed on, however, and was half-way down the street before it occurred to her that her own hair was of the finest; but the moment she thought of it, she turned back, and walked into the hairdresser's shop in a business-like way without hesitation. A gentleman was sitting beside the counter at one end of the shop, waiting to be attended on; Beth took a seat at the other end, and waited too. She sat there, deep in thought and motionless, until she was roused by somebody saying, "What can I do for you, miss?"

Then she looked up and saw the proprietor, a man with a kindly face.

"Can I speak to you for a moment?" she asked.

"Come this way, if you please," he replied, after a glance at her glossy dark-brown hair and shabby gloves.

When she went in that day, Arthur uttered an exclamation.

"Do you mean to say you've had your hair cut short?" he asked, speaking to her almost roughly. "Are you going to join the unsexed crew that shriek on platforms?"

"I don't know any unsexed crew that shriek on platforms," she answered, "and I am surprised to hear you taking the tone of cheap journalism. There has been nothing in the woman movement to unsex women except the brutalities of the men who oppose them."

He coloured somewhat, but said no more—only sat looking into the fire with an expression on his face that cut Beth to the quick. It was the first cloud that had come to overshadow the perfect sympathy of their intercourse. She was getting his tea at the moment, and, when it was ready, she put it beside him and retired to his attic, which she occupied, and looked at herself in the glass for the first time since she had sacrificed her pretty hair. At the first glance, she laughed; then her eyes filled with tears, and she threw herself on the bed and sobbed silently—not because she regretted her hair, but because he was hurt, and for once she had no comfort to give him.

Just after she left him, an artist friend of his, Gresham Powell, came in casually to look him up, and was surprised to find he had been so ill.

"I missed you about," he said, "but I thought you had shut yourself up to work. Who's been looking after you?"

Brock gave him the history of his illness.

Powell shook his head when he heard of Beth's devotion.

"Take care, my boy," he said. "The girls you find knocking about town in these sort of places are not desirable associates for a promising young man. They're worse than the regular bad ones—more likely to trap you, you know, especially when you're shorn of your strength and have good reason to be grateful. You might think you were rewarding her by marrying her; but you'll find your mistake. Look at Simpson! Could a man have done a girl a worse turn than he did when he married Florrie Crone? They haven't a thought in common except when he's ill and she nurses him; but a man can't

be always getting ill in order to keep in touch with his wife. I don't know, of course, what this girl's like; but half of them are adventuresses bent on marrying gentlemen. Is she a clergyman's daughter, by any chance?"

"I know nothing about her but her name," Brock answered coldly. "She has never tried to excite sympathy in any way."

"Well, they are of all kinds, of course," said Powell temperately. "But you'd better break away in any case. Nothing will set you up so soon as a change. Come with me. I'm going into the country to see the spring come in, and the fruit trees flower, and to hear the nightingales. I know a lovely spot. Come!"

"I'll think about it, and let you know," Arthur Brock answered to get rid of him.

When he had gone Beth appeared. To please Arthur, she had covered her cropped head with a white muslin mob-cap bound round with a pale pink ribbon, and put on a high ruffle and a large white apron, in which she looked pretty and prim, like a sweet little Puritan, in spite of the pale pink vanity; and Arthur smiled when he saw her, but afterwards grumbled: "Why did you cut your pretty hair off? I shouldn't have thought you could do such a tasteless thing."

Beth knelt down beside his chair to mend the fire, and then she began to tidy the hearth.

"Am I not the same person?" she asked.

"No, not quite," he answered. "You have set up a doubt where all was settled certainty."

She had taken off the gloves she wore to do the grate, and was about to pull herself up from her knees by the arm of his chair when he spoke, but paused to ponder his words. It was with her left hand that she had grasped the arm of his chair, and he happened to notice it particularly as it rested there.

"You wear a wedding-ring, I see," he remarked. "Do you find it a protection?"

"I never looked at it in that light," she answered. "In this vale of tears I have a husband. That is why I wear it."

There was a perceptible pause, then he asked with an effort, "Where is your husband?"

"At home, I suppose," said Beth, her voice growing strident with dislike of the subject. "We do not correspond. He wishes to divorce me."

"And what shall you do if he tries?" Brock asked.

"Nothing," she replied, and was for leaving him to draw his own conclusions, but changed her mind. "Shall I tell you the story," she said after a while.

"No, don't tell me," he rejoined quickly. "Your past is nothing to me. Nothing that you may have done, and nothing that you may yet do, can alter my feeling—my respect for you. As I have known you, so will you always be to me—the sweetest, kindest friend I ever had, the best woman I ever knew."

Men are monotonous creatures. Given a position, and ninety-nine out of a hundred will come to the same conclusion about it, only by diverse methods, according to their prejudices; and this is especially the case when women are in question. Woman is generally out of focus in the mind of man; he sees her less as she is than as she ought or ought not to be. Beth did not thank Arthur Brock for his magnanimity. The fact that he should shrink from hearing the story bespoke a doubt that made his generous expression an offence. It may be kind to ignore the past of a guilty person, but the innocent ask to be heard and judged; and full faith has no fear of revelations.

Beth rose from her knees, and began to prepare the invalid's evening meal in silence. Usually they chattered like children the whole time, but that evening they were both constrained. One of those subtle changes, so common in the relations of men and women, had set in suddenly since the morning; they were not as they had been with each other, nor could they continue together as they were; there must be a readjustment, which was in preparation during the pause.

"You have heard me speak of Gresham Powell?" Brock began at last. "He was here this afternoon. He thinks I had better go away with him into the country for a change as soon as I can manage it."

"It is a good idea," said Beth—"inland of course, not near the sea with your rheumatism. I will get your things ready at once."

This immediate acquiescence depressed him. He played with his supper a little, pretending to eat it, then forgot it, and sat looking sadly into the fire. Beth watched him furtively, but once he caught her gazing at him with concern.

"What's the matter?" he asked, with an effort to be cheerful.

"The matter is the pained expression in your eyes," she answered. "Are you suffering again?"

"Just twinges," he said, then set his firm full lips, resolute to play the man.

But the twinges were mental, not bodily, and Beth understood. Their happy days were done, and there was nothing to be said. They must each go their own way now, and the sooner the better. Fortunately the old lawyer had consented without demur to let Beth have her half-year's dividend in advance, so that there was money for Arthur. He expressed some surprise that there should be, but took what she gave him without suspicion, and did not count it. He was careless in money matters, and had forgotten what he had had when he was taken ill.

"You're a great manager," he said to Beth. "But I suppose you haven't paid up everything. You must let me know. It *will* be good to be at work again!"

"Yes," Beth answered; "but don't worry about it. You won't want money before you are well able to make it."

"I wish I knew for certain that you would go somewhere yourself to see the spring come in," he said, looking at her wistfully.

"All in good time," she answered in her sprightliest way.

When the last morning came, Beth attended to her usual duties methodically. She had made every arrangement for him, packed the things he was to take, and put away those that were to be left behind. When the cab was called, she went downstairs with him, and stood with Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen on the doorstep in the spring sunshine, smiling and waving her hand to him as he drove off. Her last words to him were, "You

will go home before we meet again. Give my love to America—and may she send us many more such men," Beth added under her breath.

"Amen!" Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen echoed.

When the cab was out of sight, Beth turned and went into the house, walking wearily. At the foot of the stairs she looked up as if she were calculating the distance; then she began the long ascent with the help of the banisters, counting each step she took mechanically. The attic seemed strangely big and bare when she entered it—it was as if something had been taken away and left a great gap. There was something crude and garish about the light in it, too, which gave an unaccustomed look to every familiar detail. The first thing she noticed was the chair beside the fire, the old grandfather chair in which he had been sitting only a few minutes before, resting after the effort of dressing—the chair in which she had seen him sit and suffer so much and so bravely. She would never see him there again, nor hear his voice—the kindest voice she had ever heard. At his worst, it was always of her he thought, of her comfort, of her fatigue; but all that was over now. He had gone, and there could be no return—nothing could ever be as it had been between them, even if they met again; but meet again they never would, Beth knew, and at the thought she sank on the floor beside the senseless chair, and, resting her head against it, broke down and cried the despairing cry of the desolate for whom there is no comfort and no hope.

The fire she had lighted for Arthur to dress by had gone out; there were no more coals. The remains of his breakfast stood on the table; she had not touched anything herself as yet. But she felt neither cold nor hunger; she was beyond all that. The chair was turned with its back to the window, and as she cowered beside it, she faced the opposite whitewashed wall. A ray of sunshine played upon it, wintry sunshine still, crystal cold and clear. Beth began to watch it. There was something she had to think about—something to see to—something she must think about—something she ought to see to, but precisely what it was she could not grasp. It seemed to be hovering on the outskirts of her mind, but it always eluded her. However, she had better not move for fear of making a noise. And there was far too much noise as it was—the wind rising and the waves breaking

"All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos——"

No, though; it was a procession of camels crossing the desert, and in the distance was an oasis surrounded by palms, and there was white stonework gleaming between the trees in the wonderful light. And those great doors that opened from within? They were opening although she had not knocked. She was expected, then—there, where there was no more weariness, nor care, nor hunger. But that was not where she wished to go. No! no! that did not tempt her.

"Take me where I shall not remember," she implored.

Poor Beth! the one boon she had to ask of Heaven at five-and-twenty was oblivion: "Let me be where I shall forget."

Downstairs on the doorstep, Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen lingered a while before they turned to follow Beth into the house, and, as they did so, they noticed that a lady had stopped her carriage in the middle of the road, jumped out impetuously, and was running towards them, regardless of the traffic.

"That was Mrs. Maclure who was standing with you here just now and went into the house?" she exclaimed.

"*Miss* Maclure," Ethel Maud Mary corrected her.

"Oh, Miss or Mrs., what does it matter?" the lady cried. "It was Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure looking like death—where is she? Take me to her at once!" She emphasised the request with an imperious stamp of her foot.

A few minutes later, Angelica, kneeling on the attic floor beside Beth, cried aloud in horror, "Why, she is dead!"

CHAPTER LI

ONE warm morning when the apple-trees were out, Arthur Brock was sitting with Gresham Powell in the garden of the farm-house where they were lodging in the country, turning over a portfolio full of Powell's sketches, and Powell was looking at them over his shoulder, and discussing them with him. Arthur had just come upon a clever study of the head of a girl in a hat, and was looking hard at it.

"That's a study in starvation," Powell explained. "It's an interesting face, isn't it? She came into a hairdresser's one day when I was there, and sat down just in that attitude, and I sketched her on the spot. She was too far through at the moment to notice me. Look at her pretty hair particularly. You'll see why in the next sketch, which is the sequel."

Brock took up the next sketch hurriedly. It was the same girl in the same hat, but with her hair cut short.

"I asked the barber fellow about her when she'd gone," Gresham pursued. "He'd taken her into an inner room, and when she came out she was cropped like that. She told him she had come to her last shilling, and she had an invalid at home depending on her entirely, and she entreated him to give her all he could for her hair. I believe the chap did too," he seemed so moved by her suffering and gentleness. "What's the matter?"

Brock had risen abruptly with the sketches still in his hand. The colour had left his face, and he looked as pinched and ill as he had done during the early days of his convalescence.

"The matter!" he ejaculated. "I've just discovered what a blind fool I am, that's what's the matter; and I'll keep these two studies with your permission to remind me of the fact. Choose amongst mine any you like instead of them, old chap, but these you must let me have."

Without waiting for an answer, he took the sketches away with him into the house. When he returned a short time afterwards, he was dressed for a

journey, and had a travelling bag in his hand.

"I'm going to town," he said, "to see the original of these sketches. I've run up an account with her I shall never be able to settle, but at all events I can acknowledge my debt, dolt that I am! *I* was that invalid. And I thought myself such a gentleman too! not counting my change and asking no questions, trusting her implicitly: that was my pose from the day you came and poisoned my mind. Before that I had neither trusted nor distrusted, but just taken things for granted as they came, beautifully. I was too self-satisfied even to suspect that she might be imposing her bounty upon me, starving herself that I might have all I required, and sending me off here finally with the last penny she had in the world. I told you I was wondering she did not answer my letters. I expect she hadn't the stamp. But you said it was out of sight out of mind, and she'd be trying it on with some one else in my absence. If I'd the strength, I'd thrash you, Gresham, for an evil-minded bounder."

"I'll carry your bag to the station, old chap," Gresham replied with contrition, "and take the thrashing at your earliest convenience."

Ethel Maud Mary was standing on the steps in the sunshine looking out when Arthur Brock arrived, just as she had stood to watch him depart, but in the interval a happy change had pleasantly transformed her. Her golden hair was brightly burnished again, her blue eyes sparkled, and her delicate skin had recovered its rose-leaf tinge. She wore a new frock, a new ring, a new watch and chain, and there was a new look in her face, one might say, as if the winter of care had passed out of her life with the snow and been forgotten in the spring sunshine of better prospects.

"O Mr. Brock!" she exclaimed; "you back! But none too well yet, judging by appearances."

"Where is Mrs. Maclure?" he demanded.

"I wish I knew!" Ethel Maud Mary rejoined, becoming important all at once. "She's gone for good, that's all I can tell you. O Mr. Brock! fancy her being tip-top all the time, and us not suspecting it, though I might have thought something when I saw the dresses she sold when you were ill, only

I'd got the fashion papers in my mind, and didn't know but what she'd been paid in dresses! Come into the parlour; you look faint."

"You said she sold her dresses?"

"Yes; sit down, Mr. Brock. A glass of port wine is what you want, as she'd say herself if she was here; and you'll get it good too, for it's been sent for Ma. My! the things that have come! Look at me—all presents—everything she ever heard me say I'd like to have; and Gwendolen the same."

She got out the wine and the biscuits from a chiffonier as she chattered, and set them before him.

"Yes, she sold her dresses, and her rings, and her books, and every other blessed thing she possessed except what had belonged to an old aunt. She got *them* out too, one day, but cried so when it came to parting with them, I persuaded her to wait. I said something would turn up, I was sure. And something did, for *you* went away, and directly after—the next minute, so to speak, for you were scarcely out of sight—a lady stopped her carriage—a fine carriage and pair and coachman and footman all silver-mounted—and ran up the steps in a great way. She'd seen Mrs. Maclure go into the house, and she said she'd been hunting for her everywhere for months, and all her friends were in a way about her, not knowing what had happened to her. I took the lady up to the attic, and there was Mrs. Maclure lying on the floor looking like death, with her head up against the big chair where you used to sit. We thought she *was* dead at first, but the doctor came and brought her round. He said it was just exhaustion from fatigue and starvation."

Arthur Brock uttered an exclamation.

"You needn't reproach yourself, Mr. Brock," Ethel Maud Mary pursued sympathetically. "You weren't worse than the rest of us. I saw her every day, and never suspected she was denying herself everything, she was always so much the same—happy, you know, in her quiet way."

"Do you think she was happy?" he groaned.

"Yes, she was happy," Ethel Maud Mary said simply. "She's that disposition—contented, you know; and she was happy from the first; but she was happier still from the time she had you to care for. I'd read about ladies of

that kind, Mr. Brock, but had not seen one before. It's being good does it, I suppose. Do you know she'd not have told a lie was it ever so, Mrs. Maclure wouldn't!"

"And she went away with that lady?" Arthur asked, after a pause.

"Yes, if you can call it going," Ethel Maud Mary replied; "for the lady didn't ask her leave, but just rolled her up in wraps, and had her carried down to the carriage and took her off. And that's all we know about her. She's written me a letter I'd like to show you, and sent me money, pretending she owed it, because I'd let her have her attic too cheap. She sent the presents afterwards, but no address. The lady came back once alone, and had the attic photographed, with everything arranged just as Mrs. Maclure used to have it. And she bought all the things in it that belonged to us, and had them and all Mrs. Maclure's own things taken away to keep, she said. She sat a long time in the attic, looking at it, just as if she was trying to imagine what living in it was like, and she kept dabbing her eyes with a little lace handkerchief, and then she got up and sighed and said, 'Poor Beth! poor Beth!' several times. She talked to me a lot about Mrs. Maclure. She seemed to know all about me, and treated me as if we'd been old friends. And she knew all about you too, and asked after you kindly. She said Mrs. Maclure was going to be a great woman—a great genius or something of that sort—and do a lot for the world; and she wanted to know if you'd ever suspected it. I told her I thought not. The two letters you wrote she took to give Mrs. Maclure, so she'd get *them* all right."

"And see the particular kind of fatuous ass I am set down clearly in my own handwriting!" he said to himself.

Then he rose. "I'll just go up and look at the attics," he said.

Ethel Maud Mary waited below, and waited long for him. When at last he came down, he shook hands with her, but without looking at her.

"I'm going to find that lady—Mrs. Maclure," he said, jamming his hat down on his head, "if I have to spend the rest of my life in the search."

CHAPTER LII

BETH, surrounded by friends, saw the spring come in that year at Ilverthorpe, and felt it the fairest spring she could remember. Blackbird and thrush sang in an ecstasy by day, and all night long the nightingales trilled in the happy dusk. She did not ask herself why it was there was a new note in nature that year, nor did she trouble herself about time or eternity. Her eternity was the exquisite monotony of tranquil days, her time-keepers the spring flowers, the apple-blossom and quince, daffodil, wallflower, lilac and laburnum, the perfumed calycanthus, forget-me-nots, pansies, hyacinths, lilies-of-the-valley in the woods, and early roses on a warm south wall; and over all the lark by day, and again at night the nightingale. In a life like hers, after a period of probation there comes an interval of this kind occasionally, a pause for rest and renewal of strength before active service begins again.

While she had been shut up with Arthur, seeing no papers and hearing no news, her book had come out and achieved a very respectable success, for the sort of thing it was; and she was pleased to hear it, but not elated. The subject had somehow lapsed from her mind, and the career of the book gave her no more personal pleasure than if it had been the work of a friend. Had it come out when it was first finished, she would have felt differently about it; but now she saw it as only one of the many things which had happened to her, and considered it more as the old consider the works of their youth, estimating them in proportion, as is the habit of age, and moderately rather than in excess. For the truth was that a great change had come over Beth during the last few months in respect to her writing; her enthusiasm had singularly cooled; it had ceased to be a pleasure, and become an effort to her to express herself in that way.

Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce had been looking out for Beth's book, and, while waiting for it to appear, he had, misled by his own suppositions, prepared an elaborate article upon the kind of thing he expected it to be. Nothing was wanting to complete the article but a summary of the story and quotations from it, for which he had left plenty of space. He condemned the book

utterly from the point of view of art, and for the silly ignorance of life displayed in it, and the absurd caricatures which were supposed to be people; he ridiculed the writer for taking herself seriously (but without showing why exactly she should not take herself seriously if she chose); he pitied her for her disappointment when she should realise where in literature her place would be; and he ended with a bitter diatribe against the works of women generally, as being pretentious, amateur, without originality, and wanting in humour, like the wretched stuff it had been his painful duty to expose. Unfortunately for him, however, the book appeared anonymously, and immediately attracted attention enough to make him wish to discover it; and before he found out that Beth was the author, he had committed himself to a highly eulogistic article upon it in *The Patriarch*, which he took the precaution to sign, that the coming celebrity might know to whom gratitude was due, and in which he declared that there had arisen a new light of extraordinary promise on the literary horizon. The book, as it happened, was not a work of fiction at all.

Beth had heard nothing more from Dr. Maclure, and knew nothing about him, except that he must have lost his degrading appointment, the Acts having been rescinded. He had forwarded none of the letters her friends had addressed to her at Slane. The Kilroys had endeavoured to obtain her address from him, but he denied that he knew it. Unknown to her, Mr. Kilroy, Mr. Hamilton-Wells, and Sir George Galbraith had taken the best legal advice in the hope of getting her a divorce; but there was little chance of that, as the acute mental suffering her husband had caused her had merely injured her health and endangered her reason, which does not amount to cruelty in the estimation of the law. The matter was therefore allowed to drop, and Beth had not yet begun to think of the future, when one day she received a letter from Dan, couched in the most affectionate terms, entreating her to return to him.

"You must own that I had cause for provocation," he said, "but I confess that I was too hasty. It is natural, though, that a man should feel it if his wife gets herself into such a position, however innocently; and the more he has trusted, loved, and respected his wife, the more violent will the reaction be.

I know, however, that I have had my own shortcomings since we were married, and therefore that I should make every allowance for you. So let us be friends, Beth, and begin all over again, as you once proposed. I am ready to leave Slane and settle wherever you like. Make your own conditions; anything that pleases you will please me."

This letter upset Beth very much. She would almost rather have had an action for divorce brought against her than have been asked to return to Daniel Maclure.

"Ought I to go back?" she asked, willing, with the fatuous persistency of women in like cases, to persevere if it were thought right that she should, although she knew pretty well that the sacrifice would be unavailing so far as he was concerned, and would only entail upon herself the common lot of women so mated—a ruined constitution and corroded mind.

"Why does he suddenly so particularly wish it?" was the question.

The obvious explanation was indirectly conveyed in a letter from her old lawyer. He had written to her in her London lodgings, first of all, but the letter was returned from the Dead Letter Office. Then he had written to Slane, but as he received no answer to that letter and it was not returned, he went in person to inquire about it. Dan declared that he knew nothing about the letter, or about Beth either, if she had left London; but he thought her intimate friends the Kilroys might know where she was. The old gentleman applied to the Kilroys, and having found Beth, wrote to inform her that her great-aunt Victoria Bench's investments had recovered at last, as he had always been pretty sure that they would, and she would accordingly, for the future, find herself in receipt of an income of seven or eight hundred pounds a year. Dan's sudden magnanimity was accounted for. Beth put his effusion and the lawyer's letter before her friends, and asked to be advised. They decided unanimously that, on the one hand, Dan was not a proper person for her to live with, that no decent woman could associate with a man of his mind, habits, and conversation without suffering injury in some sort; while, on the other, they pointed out that, although it would be nice, it would not be good for Dan to have the benefit of Beth's little income. While he was forced to work, he would have to conduct himself with a certain

amount of propriety; but if Beth relieved him of the necessity, there would be nothing to restrain him.

This episode roused Beth from her tranquil apathy, and made her think of work once more. But first she had to settle somewhere and make a home for herself; and although she had ample means for all her requirements now, it was not an easy thing to find the special conditions on which she had set her heart. The first impulse of a woman of noble nature is to be consistent, to live up to all she professes to admire. As Beth grew older, to live for others became more and more her ideal of life;—not to live in the world, however, or to be of it, but to work for it.

"I must be quiet," she said to Angelica one day when they were discussing her future. "I am done for so far as work is concerned when I come into contact with crowds. I want to live things then; I don't want to think about them. Excitement makes me content to be, and careless about doing. My truest and best life is in myself, and I can only live it in circumstances of tranquil monotony. People talk so much about making the most of life, but their attempts are curiously bungling. What they call living is for the most part more pain than pleasure to them; for the truth is, that life should not be lived by men of mind, but contemplated; it is the spectator, not the actor, who enjoys and profits. The actor has his moment of applause, but all the rest is misery. People rush to great centres to obtain a knowledge of life, and do not succeed, for there they see nothing but broad effects. We find our knowledge of life in individuals, not in crowds. There is no more individuality in a crowd of people than there is in a flock of sheep. All I know of life, of its infinite diversity, I have learnt here and there from some one person or another, known intimately. A solitary experience, rightly considered in all its bearings, teaches us more than numbers of those incidents of which we see the surface only 'in the joy of eventful living;' and, if the truth were known, I expect it would be found that each one of us had obtained the most valuable part of our experience in such homely details of simple unaffected human nature as came under our observation in our native villages."

"Yes," Angelica answered thoughtfully, "the looker-on sees most of the game. But I don't think you allow enough for differences of temperament.

You are thinking of the best conditions for creative work. You mustn't lose sight of all the active service that is going on."

"No; but it is in retirement that the best preparation is made for active service also. And I was thinking of active service more than of creative work just then. The truth is, I am in a state of being oppressed by the thought of my new book. I don't know what has come to me. I am all fretty about it. Writing has lost its charm. I doubt if I shall ever do well enough to make it worth while to write at all. And even if I could, I don't think mere literary success would satisfy me. I have tasted enough of that to know what it would be—a sordid triumph, a mere personal thing."

"Ideala does not think that it is necessarily as a literary woman that you will succeed," Angelica answered. "I thought it was because all the indications you have given of special capacity seem to me to lie in that direction. However, versatile people make mistakes sometimes. They don't always begin with the work they are best able to do; but there is no time lost, for one thing helps another—one thing is necessary to another, I *should* say, perhaps. Your writing may have helped to perfect you in some other form of expression."

"You cheer me!" Beth exclaimed. "But what form?" She reflected a little, and then she put the puzzle from her. "It will come to me, I dare say," she said, "if I shut the din of the world far from me, and sit with folded arms in contemplation, waiting for the moment and the match which shall fire me to the right pitch of enthusiasm. Nothing worth doing in art is done by calculation."

"I think you are right to keep out of the crowd," said Angelica. "You will get nothing but distraction from without. I should take one of the privileges of a great success to be the right to refuse all invitations that draw one into the social swim. Men and women of high purpose do not arrive in order to be crowded into stuffy drawing-rooms to be stared at."

"My idea of perfect bliss," Beth pursued, "when my work is done, and my friends are not with me, is to lie my length upon a cliff above the sea, listening to the many-murmurous, soothed by it into a sense of oneness with Nature, till I seem to be mixed with the elements, a part of sky and sea and shore, and akin to the wandering winds. This mood for my easy moments;

but give me work for my live delight. I know nothing so altogether ecstatic as a good mood for work."

"What you call work is power of expression," said Angelica; "the power to express something in yourself, I fancy."

"Ye—yes," Beth answered, hesitating, as if the notion were new to her. "I believe you are right. What I call work is the effort to express myself."

Mr. Kilroy had come in while they were talking, and sat listening to the last part of the conversation.

"I have just the sort of 'neat little cot in a quiet spot, with a distant view of the rolling sea' that you yearn for, Beth," he said, smiling, when she paused, "and I have come to ask you and Angelica to drive over with me to see it."

"You mean Ilverthorpe Cottage," said Angelica, jumping up. "O Daddy! it's the very place. Two storeys, Beth, ivy, roses, jasmine, wisteria without; and within, space and comfort of every kind—and the sea in sight! Such a pretty garden, too, grass and trees and shrubs and flowers. And near enough for us all to see you as often as you wish. Beth, be excited too! I must bring my violin, I think, and play a triumphal march on the way."

Ilverthorpe Cottage was all and more than Angelica had said, and Beth did not hesitate to take it. It was Mr. Kilroy's property, and the rent was suspiciously low, but Beth supposed that that was because the house was out of the way. She and Angelica spent long happy days in getting it ready for occupation, choosing paper, paint, and furnishings. Mr. Kilroy saw to the stables, which he completed with a saddle-horse and a pony-carriage. There was a short cut across the fields, a lovely walk, from Ilverthorpe House to the Cottage, and when Angelica could not accompany her, Beth would stroll over alone to see how things were getting on, and wander about her little demesne, and love it. Outside her garden, in front of the house, the highroad ran, a sheltered highroad, with a raised footpath, bordered on either side with great trees, oak and elm, chestnut and beech, and a high hawthorn hedge just whitening into blossom. The field-path came out on this highroad, down which she had to walk a few hundred yards to her own gate. Day after day there was an old Irish labourer, a stonebreaker, by the wayside, kneeling on a sack beside a great heap of

stones, who gave her a cheery good-morrow as she passed. Once she went across the road and spoke to him. He had the face of a saint at his devotions.

"You kneel there all day long," she said, "and as you kneel you pray, perhaps. Will you pray for me? Pray, pray that I may"—she was going to say succeed, but stopped—"that I may be good."

The man raised his calm eyes, and looked her in the face. "You *are* good, lady," he said simply.

"Yet pray," she entreated; "and pray too that all I do may be good, and of good effect."

"All you do is good, lady," he answered once more, in the same quiet tone of conviction.

"But I want all I do to be the best for the purpose that can be done."

She put some money in his hand and turned away, and as she went he watched her. She had touched him with her soft gloveless fingers in giving him the money, and when she had gone, he was conscious of the touch; it tingled through him, and he looked at the spot on which the impression remained, as if he expected it to be in some sort visible.

"Now Our Lady love you and the saints protect you, bless your sweet face," he muttered; "and may all you do be the best that can be done for every one. Amen."

A few months in her lovely little house sufficed to restore Beth's mind to its natural attitude—an attitude of deep devotion. She even began to work again, but rather with a view to making herself useful to her friends than to satisfy any ambition or craving of her own. Whatever she did, however, she approached in the spirit of the great musician who dressed himself in his best, and prayed as at a solemn service, when he shut himself up to compose. Beth had stepped away from the old forms by this time. She had escaped from the bondage of the letter that killeth into the realm of the

spirit that giveth life. It is not faith in any particular fetish that makes a mind religious, but the quality of reverence. Churches Beth had come to look upon, not with distrust, but with indifference, as an ineffectual experiment of man's. She could find no evidence of a holier spirit or a more divine one in the church than in any other human institution for the propagation of instruction. The church has never been superior to the times, never as far advanced as the best men of the day, never a leader, but rather an opposer of progress, hindering when ideas were new, and only coming in to help when workers without had proved their discoveries, and it was evident that credit would be lost by refusing to recognise them. There is no cruelty the church has not practised, no sin it has not committed, no ignorance it has not displayed, no inconsistency it has not upheld, from teaching peace and countenancing war, to preaching poverty and piling up riches. True, there have been great saints in the church; but then there have been great saints out of it. Saintliness comes of conscientiously cultivating the divine in human nature; it is a seed that is sown and flourishes under the most diverse conditions.

Beth thought much on religion in those quiet days, and read much, looking for spiritual sustenance among the garbage of mind with which man has overlaid it, and finding little to satisfy her, until one night, quite suddenly, as she sat holding her mind in the attitude of prayer, there came to her a wonderful flash of illumination. She had not been occupied with the point that became apparent. It entered her mind involuntarily, and was made clear to her without conscious effort on her part; but it was that which she sought, the truth that moves, makes evident, makes easy, props and stays, and is the instigator of religious action, the source of aspiration, the ground of hope—the which was all contained for Beth in the one old formula interpreted in a way that was new to her: *The communion of saints* (that inexplicable sympathy between soul and soul), *the forgiveness of sins*, (working out our own salvation in fear and trembling), *the resurrection of the body* (reincarnation), *and the life everlasting* (which is the crown or glory, the final goal).

"But God?" Beth questioned.

"God is love," she read in the book that lay open on the table before her.

Then she clasped her hands over the passage and laid her head on them, and for a long time she sat so, not thinking, but just repeating it to herself softly: "God is love," till all at once there was a blank in her consciousness; thought was suspended. When it returned, she looked up, and in herself were the words: "God is Love—no! *Love is God!*"

In the joy of the revelation, she arose, and, going to the window, flung it wide open. Far down the east the dawn was dimly burning; the faint sweet breath of it fanned her cheeks; her chest expanded with a great throb, and she exclaimed aloud: "I follow, follow—*God*—I know not where."

Beth had a task before her that day which she did not relish in the anticipation. She was going as a stopgap to speak at a large meeting to oblige Angelica. She had the credit of being able to speak, and she herself supposed that she could in a way, because of the success of her first attempt; but she did not consent to try again without much hesitation and many qualms, and she would certainly not have consented had not her friends been in a difficulty, with no one at hand to help them out of it but herself. But to be drawn from her hallowed seclusion into such a blaze of publicity, even for once, was not at all to her mind, and much of her wakefulness of the night before had been caused by her shrinking from the prospect.

Late that night after the meeting she returned to her cottage alone, cowering in a corner of the Kilroys' carriage. She was cowering from the recollection of a great crowd that rose with deafening shouts and seemed to be rushing at her—cowering, too, from the inevitable which she had been forced to recognise—her vocation—discovered by accident, and with dismay, for it was not what she would have chosen for herself in any way had it occurred to her that she had any choice in the matter. There were always moments when she would fain have led the life which knows no care beyond the cultivation of the arts, no service but devotion to them, no pleasure like the enjoyment of them,—a selfish life made up of impersonal delights, such as music, which is emotion made audible, painting, which is emotion made visible, and poetry, which is emotion made comprehensible;—and such a

life could not have been anything but grateful to one like Beth, who had the capacity for so many interests of the kind. She was debarred from all that, however, by grace of nature. Beth could not have lived for herself had she tried. So that now, when the call had come, and the way in which she could best live for others was made plain to her, she had no thought but to pursue it.

The carriage put her down at her garden-gate, and she stood awhile in the moonlight, listening to it as it rolled away with patter of horses' hoofs and rattle of harness, listening intently as if the sound concerned her. Then she let herself in, and was hurrying up to her room, but stopped short on the stairs, cowering from the crowd that rose and cheered and cheered and seemed to be rushing at her.

Her bedroom had windows east, west, and south, so that she had sunrise and sunset and the sun all day. When she went in now, she found the lamps lighted and all the windows shut, and she went round and flung them open with an irritable gesture. Her nerves were overwrought; the slightest contrariety upset her. The sweet fresh country air streamed in and the tranquil moonlight. These alone would ordinarily have been enough to soothe her, but now she paid no heed to them. When she had opened the windows, she began to take off her things in feverish haste, pacing about the room restlessly the while, as if that helped her to be quicker. Everything she wore seemed too hot, too heavy, or too tight, and she flung hat and cloak and bodice down just where she took them off in her haste to get rid of them. Throwing her things about like that was an old trick of her childhood, and becoming conscious of what she was doing, she remembered it, and began to think of herself as she had been then, and so forget her troubled self as she was at that moment—fresh from the excitement and terror of an extraordinary achievement, a great success. For she had spoken that night as few have spoken—spoken to a hostile audience and fascinated them by the power of her personality, the mesmeric power which is part of the endowment of an orator, and had so moved them that they rose at last and cheered her for her eloquence, whether they held her opinions or not. Then there had come friendly handshakes and congratulations and encouragement; and one had said, "Beth is launched at last upon her true career."

"But who could have thought that that was her bent?" another had asked.

Beth did not hear the answer, but she knew what it should have been. She had been misled herself, and so had every one else, by her pretty talent for writing, her love of turning phrases, her play on the music of words. The writing had come of cultivation, but this—the last discovered power—was the natural gift. Angelica had said that all the indications had pointed to literary ability in Beth, but there had been other indications hitherto unheeded. There was that day at Castletownrock when Beth invited the country people in to see the house, and, for the first time, found words flowing from her lips eloquently; there were her preachings to Emily and Bernadine in the acting-room, of which they never wearied; her first harangue to the girls who had caught her bathing on the sands, and the power of her subsequent teaching which had bound them to the Secret Service of Humanity for as long as she liked; there was her storytelling at school, too, and her lectures to the girls—not to mention the charm of her ordinary conversation when the mood was upon her, as in the days when she used to sit and fish with the bearded sailors, and held them with curious talk as she had held the folk in Ireland, fascinating them. And then there was the unexpected triumph of her first public attempt—indications enough of a natural bent, had there been any one to interpret them.

Beth, as she thought on these things, wandered from window to window, too restless and excited to sit still; but, even occupied as she was, after she had changed her dress the old trick came upon her, and she was all the while observing.

It was autumn, and on the south she overlooked a field of barley, standing in stooks, waiting to be carted. She noticed how the long, irregular rows and their shadows showed in the moonlight. Across the field the farm to which it belonged nestled in an apple-orchard. From the east end of the house she obtained a glimpse of the sea, which was near enough, for the drowsy murmur of it reached her even in calm weather. To the west the highroad ran, and in her wanderings from window to window Beth paused to contemplate it, to follow it in imagination whither it led, to think of the weary way it was to so many weary feet, to mourn because she could not offer rest and refreshment to every one that passed.

The night was clear and the air was crisp, with a suspicion of frost in it, such as sometimes comes in the late autumn. The moon was sinking, and the stars shone out ever more brightly. Down in the roadway a little brazier burned, where the road had been taken up and blocked for repairs, and over the brazier the old watchman, who should have been guarding the tools and materials that had been left lying about, dozed in a sort of sentry-box. It occurred to Beth that the task was long and dreary, and that the air grew chilly towards the dawn. Surely some food would cheer and refresh him, and help to pass the time. She went down to the pantry and got some, then carried it out on a tray. But the old man was sound asleep, and, standing there in her long white wrapper, she had to call him several times, "Old man! old man!" before she roused him.

He awoke at last with a start, and seeing the unexpected apparition in the dim light, exclaimed, "Holy Mother! why have you come to me?"

Beth silently set the tray before him and slipped away, leaving him in the happy certainty that a heavenly vision had been vouchsafed him.

But the moon set, the stars paled, and, from her window to the east, Beth watched the dark melt to dusk, and the dusk pale to an even grey, into which were breathed the burnished colours of the happy dawn. Then, when

the sun was high, and the accustomed sounds of life and movement that held her ear by day had well begun, down the long road beneath the old gnarled trees the postman came beladen, and there were brought to her pamphlets, papers, cards, letters, telegrams, a fine variety of praise, abuse, sympathy, derision, insults, and admiration. Quietly Beth read, and knew what it meant, all of it—success! and the success she had most desired: that her words should come with comfort to thousands of those that suffer, who, when they heard, would raise their heads once more in hope. In one paper that she opened she read: "A great teacher has arisen among us, a woman of genius—" Hastily she put the paper aside, burning with a kind of shame, although alone, to see so much said of herself. Beth was one of the first swallows of the woman's summer. She was strange to the race when she arrived, and uncharitably commented upon; but now the type is known, and has ceased to surprise.

When she was dressed that morning, she went down to her bright little breakfast parlour. Before her was the harvest-field, looking its loveliest in the early morning sunlight. As she contemplated the peaceful scene, she thought that she should feel herself a singularly fortunate being. The dead would be with her no more, alas! except in the spirit; but all else that heart could desire, was it not hers? The answer came quick, No! Something was wanting. But she did not ask herself what the something was.

The harvesters were not at work that morning, and she had not seen a soul since she sat down to breakfast; but before she left the table, a horseman came out from the farm, and rode towards her across the long field, deliberately. She watched him, absently at first, but as he approached he reminded her of the Knight of her daily vision, her saviour, who had come to rescue her in the dark days of her deep distress at Slane—

"A bowshot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves."

"The barley-sheaves!" suddenly Beth's heart throbbed and fluttered and stood still. The words had come to her as the interpretation of an augury, the fulfilment of a promise. It seemed as if she ought to have known it from the first, known that he would come like that at last, that he had been coming, coming, coming through all the years. As he drew near, the rider looked up

at her, the sun shone on his face, he raised his hat. In dumb emotion, not knowing what she did, Beth reached out her hands towards him as if to welcome him. He was not the Knight of her dark days, however, this son of the morning, but the Knight of her long winter vigil—Arthur Brock.

Transcriber's note

The following have been changed, as they appear to be typesetter's errors.

All other colloquialisms, non-standard spelling, grammar and punctuation have been left as they appear in the original book.

To assist the reader, a hyperlinked chapter listing has been added to this html version.

There was no table of contents in the original book.

Page 2

"I had quite forgotten the whisky," she said to the maid-of [hyphen added] all-work,

Page 34

"What does she do it for? [added "]

Page 220

Do I separate myself from Count Bartahlinski [changed to Bartahlinsky]?

Page 290

Miss Bey had had great experience of girls, and her sharp manner, which was mainly acquired in the effort to maintain displine, [changed to "discipline"] somewhat belied her kindly nature.

Page 395

"I calcalute [changed to calculate?] that they come to just three hundred pounds,"

Page 468

If we were to die now, in six months it would be as though we had never bee [added n]

Page 469

I never knew such a woman tiil [changed to till?] I met you;

Page 522

bordered on either side with great trees, oak and elm, chestnut and beech, and a high hawthorn hedge just whitening into blossom.
[changed to blossom]

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King Solomon's Mines

H. Rider Haggard



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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK KING SOLOMON'S MINES ***

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KING SOLOMON'S MINES

by

H. RIDER HAGGARD

DEDICATION

**This faithful but unpretending record
of a remarkable adventure
is hereby respectfully dedicated
by the narrator,**

ALLAN QUATERMAIN,

**to all the big and little boys
who read it.**

PREPARER'S NOTE

This was typed from a 1907 edition published by Cassell and Company, Limited.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author ventures to take this opportunity to thank his readers for the kind reception they have accorded to the successive editions of this tale during the last twelve years. He hopes that in its present form it will fall

into the hands of an even wider public, and that in years to come it may continue to afford amusement to those who are still young enough at heart to love a story of treasure, war, and wild adventure.

Ditchingham,
11 March, 1898.

POST SCRIPTUM

Now, in 1907, on the occasion of the issue of this edition, I can only add how glad I am that my romance should continue to please so many readers. Imagination has been verified by fact; the King Solomon's Mines I dreamed of have been discovered, and are putting out their gold once more, and, according to the latest reports, their diamonds also; the Kukuanas or, rather, the Matabele, have been tamed by the white man's bullets, but still there seem to be many who find pleasure in these simple pages. That they may continue so to do, even to the third and fourth generation, or perhaps longer still, would, I am sure, be the hope of our old and departed friend, Allan Quatermain.

H. Rider Haggard.
Ditchingham, 1907.

INTRODUCTION

Now that this book is printed, and about to be given to the world, a sense of its shortcomings both in style and contents, weighs very heavily upon me. As regards the latter, I can only say that it does not pretend to be a full account of everything we did and saw. There are many things connected with our journey into Kukuanaland that I should have liked to dwell upon at length, which, as it is, have been scarcely alluded to. Amongst these are the

curious legends which I collected about the chain armour that saved us from destruction in the great battle of Loo, and also about the "Silent Ones" or Colossi at the mouth of the stalactite cave. Again, if I had given way to my own impulses, I should have wished to go into the differences, some of which are to my mind very suggestive, between the Zulu and Kukuana dialects. Also a few pages might have been given up profitably to the consideration of the indigenous flora and fauna of Kukuana land.[1] Then there remains the most interesting subject—that, as it is, has only been touched on incidentally—of the magnificent system of military organisation in force in that country, which, in my opinion, is much superior to that inaugurated by Chaka in Zululand, inasmuch as it permits of even more rapid mobilisation, and does not necessitate the employment of the pernicious system of enforced celibacy. Lastly, I have scarcely spoken of the domestic and family customs of the Kukuanas, many of which are exceedingly quaint, or of their proficiency in the art of smelting and welding metals. This science they carry to considerable perfection, of which a good example is to be seen in their "tollas," or heavy throwing knives, the backs of these weapons being made of hammered iron, and the edges of beautiful steel welded with great skill on to the iron frames. The fact of the matter is, I thought, with Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, that the best plan would be to tell my story in a plain, straightforward manner, and to leave these matters to be dealt with subsequently in whatever way ultimately may appear to be desirable. In the meanwhile I shall, of course, be delighted to give all information in my power to anybody interested in such things.

And now it only remains for me to offer apologies for my blunt way of writing. I can but say in excuse of it that I am more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot make any pretence to the grand literary flights and flourishes which I see in novels—for sometimes I like to read a novel. I suppose they—the flights and flourishes—are desirable, and I regret not being able to supply them; but at the same time I cannot help thinking that simple things are always the most impressive, and that books are easier to understand when they are written in plain language, though perhaps I have no right to set up an opinion on such a matter. "A sharp spear," runs the Kukuana saying, "needs no polish"; and on the same principle I venture to

hope that a true story, however strange it may be, does not require to be decked out in fine words.

Allan Quatermain.

[1] I discovered eight varieties of antelope, with which I was previously totally unacquainted, and many new species of plants, for the most part of the bulbous tribe.—A.Q.

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KING SOLOMON'S MINES

CHAPTER I

I MEET SIR HENRY CURTIS

It is a curious thing that at my age—fifty-five last birthday—I should find myself taking up a pen to try to write a history. I wonder what sort of a history it will be when I have finished it, if ever I come to the end of the trip! I have done a good many things in my life, which seems a long one to me, owing to my having begun work so young, perhaps. At an age when other boys are at school I was earning my living as a trader in the old Colony. I have been trading, hunting, fighting, or mining ever since. And yet it is only eight months ago that I made my pile. It is a big pile now that I have got it—I don't yet know how big—but I do not think I would go through the last fifteen or sixteen months again for it; no, not if I knew that I should come out safe at the end, pile and all. But then I am a timid man, and dislike violence; moreover, I am almost sick of adventure. I wonder why I am going to write this book: it is not in my line. I am not a literary man, though very devoted to the Old Testament and also to the "Ingoldsby Legends." Let me try to set down my reasons, just to see if I have any.

First reason: Because Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good asked me.

Second reason: Because I am laid up here at Durban with the pain in my left leg. Ever since that confounded lion got hold of me I have been liable to this trouble, and being rather bad just now, it makes me limp more than ever. There must be some poison in a lion's teeth, otherwise how is it that when your wounds are healed they break out again, generally, mark you, at the same time of year that you got your mauling? It is a hard thing when one has shot sixty-five lions or more, as I have in the course of my life, that the sixty-sixth should chew your leg like a quid of tobacco. It breaks the routine of the thing, and putting other considerations aside, I am an orderly man and don't like that. This is by the way.

Third reason: Because I want my boy Harry, who is over there at the hospital in London studying to become a doctor, to have something to amuse him and keep him out of mischief for a week or so. Hospital work must sometimes pall and grow rather dull, for even of cutting up dead bodies there may come satiety, and as this history will not be dull, whatever else it may be, it will put a little life into things for a day or two while Harry is reading of our adventures.

Fourth reason and last: Because I am going to tell the strangest story that I remember. It may seem a queer thing to say, especially considering that there is no woman in it—except Foulata. Stop, though! there is Gagoola, if she was a woman, and not a fiend. But she was a hundred at least, and therefore not marriageable, so I don't count her. At any rate, I can safely say that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history.

Well, I had better come to the yoke. It is a stiff place, and I feel as though I were bogged up to the axle. But, "*sutjes, sutjes*," as the Boers say—I am sure I don't know how they spell it—softly does it. A strong team will come through at last, that is, if they are not too poor. You can never do anything with poor oxen. Now to make a start.

I, Allan Quatermain, of Durban, Natal, Gentleman, make oath and say—That's how I headed my deposition before the magistrate about poor Khiva's and Ventvögel's sad deaths; but somehow it doesn't seem quite the right way to begin a book. And, besides, am I a gentleman? What is a gentleman? I don't quite know, and yet I have had to do with niggers—no, I will scratch out that word "niggers," for I do not like it. I've known natives who *are*, and so you will say, Harry, my boy, before you have done with this tale, and I have known mean whites with lots of money and fresh out from home, too, who *are not*.

At any rate, I was born a gentleman, though I have been nothing but a poor travelling trader and hunter all my life. Whether I have remained so I know not, you must judge of that. Heaven knows I've tried. I have killed many men in my time, yet I have never slain wantonly or stained my hand in innocent blood, but only in self-defence. The Almighty gave us our lives, and I suppose He meant us to defend them, at least I have always acted on that, and I hope it will not be brought up against me when my clock strikes.

There, there, it is a cruel and a wicked world, and for a timid man I have been mixed up in a great deal of fighting. I cannot tell the rights of it, but at any rate I have never stolen, though once I cheated a Kafir out of a herd of cattle. But then he had done me a dirty turn, and it has troubled me ever since into the bargain.

Well, it is eighteen months or so ago since first I met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good. It was in this way. I had been up elephant hunting beyond Bamangwato, and had met with bad luck. Everything went wrong that trip, and to top up with I got the fever badly. So soon as I was well enough I trekked down to the Diamond Fields, sold such ivory as I had, together with my wagon and oxen, discharged my hunters, and took the post-cart to the Cape. After spending a week in Cape Town, finding that they overcharged me at the hotel, and having seen everything there was to see, including the botanical gardens, which seem to me likely to confer a great benefit on the country, and the new Houses of Parliament, which I expect will do nothing of the sort, I determined to go back to Natal by the *Dunkeld*, then lying at the docks waiting for the *Edinburgh Castle* due in from England. I took my berth and went aboard, and that afternoon the Natal passengers from the *Edinburgh Castle* transhipped, and we weighed and put to sea.

Among these passengers who came on board were two who excited my curiosity. One, a gentleman of about thirty, was perhaps the biggest-chested and longest-armed man I ever saw. He had yellow hair, a thick yellow beard, clear-cut features, and large grey eyes set deep in his head. I never saw a finer-looking man, and somehow he reminded me of an ancient Dane. Not that I know much of ancient Danes, though I knew a modern Dane who did me out of ten pounds; but I remember once seeing a picture of some of those gentry, who, I take it, were a kind of white Zulus. They were drinking out of big horns, and their long hair hung down their backs. As I looked at my friend standing there by the companion-ladder, I thought that if he only let his grow a little, put one of those chain shirts on to his great shoulders, and took hold of a battle-axe and a horn mug, he might have sat as a model for that picture. And by the way it is a curious thing, and just shows how

the blood will out, I discovered afterwards that Sir Henry Curtis, for that was the big man's name, is of Danish blood.[1] He also reminded me strongly of somebody else, but at the time I could not remember who it was.

The other man, who stood talking to Sir Henry, was stout and dark, and of quite a different cut. I suspected at once that he was a naval officer; I don't know why, but it is difficult to mistake a navy man. I have gone shooting trips with several of them in the course of my life, and they have always proved themselves the best and bravest and nicest fellows I ever met, though sadly given, some of them, to the use of profane language. I asked a page or two back, what is a gentleman? I'll answer the question now: A Royal Naval officer is, in a general sort of way, though of course there may be a black sheep among them here and there. I fancy it is just the wide seas and the breath of God's winds that wash their hearts and blow the bitterness out of their minds and make them what men ought to be.

Well, to return, I proved right again; I ascertained that the dark man *was* a naval officer, a lieutenant of thirty-one, who, after seventeen years' service, had been turned out of her Majesty's employ with the barren honour of a commander's rank, because it was impossible that he should be promoted. This is what people who serve the Queen have to expect: to be shot out into the cold world to find a living just when they are beginning really to understand their work, and to reach the prime of life. I suppose they don't mind it, but for my own part I had rather earn my bread as a hunter. One's halfpence are as scarce perhaps, but you do not get so many kicks.

The officer's name I found out—by referring to the passengers' lists—was Good—Captain John Good. He was broad, of medium height, dark, stout, and rather a curious man to look at. He was so very neat and so very clean-shaved, and he always wore an eye-glass in his right eye. It seemed to grow there, for it had no string, and he never took it out except to wipe it. At first I thought he used to sleep in it, but afterwards I found that this was a mistake. He put it in his trousers pocket when he went to bed, together with his false teeth, of which he had two beautiful sets that, my own being none of the best, have often caused me to break the tenth commandment. But I am anticipating.

Soon after we had got under way evening closed in, and brought with it very dirty weather. A keen breeze sprung up off land, and a kind of aggravated Scotch mist soon drove everybody from the deck. As for the *Dunkeld*, she is a flat-bottomed punt, and going up light as she was, she rolled very heavily. It almost seemed as though she would go right over, but she never did. It was quite impossible to walk about, so I stood near the engines where it was warm, and amused myself with watching the pendulum, which was fixed opposite to me, swinging slowly backwards and forwards as the vessel rolled, and marking the angle she touched at each lurch.

"That pendulum's wrong; it is not properly weighted," suddenly said a somewhat testy voice at my shoulder. Looking round I saw the naval officer whom I had noticed when the passengers came aboard.

"Indeed, now what makes you think so?" I asked.

"Think so. I don't think at all. Why there"—as she righted herself after a roll—"if the ship had really rolled to the degree that thing pointed to, then she would never have rolled again, that's all. But it is just like these merchant skippers, they are always so confoundedly careless."

Just then the dinner-bell rang, and I was not sorry, for it is a dreadful thing to have to listen to an officer of the Royal Navy when he gets on to that subject. I only know one worse thing, and that is to hear a merchant skipper express his candid opinion of officers of the Royal Navy.

Captain Good and I went down to dinner together, and there we found Sir Henry Curtis already seated. He and Captain Good were placed together, and I sat opposite to them. The captain and I soon fell into talk about shooting and what not; he asking me many questions, for he is very inquisitive about all sorts of things, and I answering them as well as I could. Presently he got on to elephants.

"Ah, sir," called out somebody who was sitting near me, "you've reached the right man for that; Hunter Quatermain should be able to tell you about elephants if anybody can."

Sir Henry, who had been sitting quite quiet listening to our talk, started visibly.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low deep voice, a very suitable voice, it seemed to me, to come out of those great lungs. "Excuse me, sir, but is your name Allan Quatermain?"

I said that it was.

The big man made no further remark, but I heard him mutter "fortunate" into his beard.

Presently dinner came to an end, and as we were leaving the saloon Sir Henry strolled up and asked me if I would come into his cabin to smoke a pipe. I accepted, and he led the way to the *Dunkeld* deck cabin, and a very good cabin it is. It had been two cabins, but when Sir Garnet Wolseley or one of those big swells went down the coast in the *Dunkeld*, they knocked away the partition and have never put it up again. There was a sofa in the cabin, and a little table in front of it. Sir Henry sent the steward for a bottle of whisky, and the three of us sat down and lit our pipes.

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry Curtis, when the man had brought the whisky and lit the lamp, "the year before last about this time, you were, I believe, at a place called Bamangwato, to the north of the Transvaal."

"I was," I answered, rather surprised that this gentleman should be so well acquainted with my movements, which were not, so far as I was aware, considered of general interest.

"You were trading there, were you not?" put in Captain Good, in his quick way.

"I was. I took up a wagon-load of goods, made a camp outside the settlement, and stopped till I had sold them."

Sir Henry was sitting opposite to me in a Madeira chair, his arms leaning on the table. He now looked up, fixing his large grey eyes full upon my face. There was a curious anxiety in them, I thought.

"Did you happen to meet a man called Neville there?"

"Oh, yes; he outspanned alongside of me for a fortnight to rest his oxen before going on to the interior. I had a letter from a lawyer a few months back, asking me if I knew what had become of him, which I answered to the best of my ability at the time."

"Yes," said Sir Henry, "your letter was forwarded to me. You said in it that the gentleman called Neville left Bamangwato at the beginning of May in a wagon with a driver, a voorlooper, and a Kafir hunter called Jim, announcing his intention of trekking if possible as far as Inyati, the extreme trading post in the Matabele country, where he would sell his wagon and proceed on foot. You also said that he did sell his wagon, for six months afterwards you saw the wagon in the possession of a Portuguese trader, who told you that he had bought it at Inyati from a white man whose name he had forgotten, and that he believed the white man with the native servant had started off for the interior on a shooting trip."

"Yes."

Then came a pause.

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry suddenly, "I suppose you know or can guess nothing more of the reasons of my—of Mr. Neville's journey to the northward, or as to what point that journey was directed?"

"I heard something," I answered, and stopped. The subject was one which I did not care to discuss.

Sir Henry and Captain Good looked at each other, and Captain Good nodded.

"Mr. Quatermain," went on the former, "I am going to tell you a story, and ask your advice, and perhaps your assistance. The agent who forwarded me your letter told me that I might rely on it implicitly, as you were," he said, "well known and universally respected in Natal, and especially noted for your discretion."

I bowed and drank some whisky and water to hide my confusion, for I am a modest man—and Sir Henry went on.

"Mr. Neville was my brother."

"Oh," I said, starting, for now I knew of whom Sir Henry had reminded me when first I saw him. His brother was a much smaller man and had a dark beard, but now that I thought of it, he possessed eyes of the same shade of grey and with the same keen look in them: the features too were not unlike.

"He was," went on Sir Henry, "my only and younger brother, and till five years ago I do not suppose that we were ever a month away from each other. But just about five years ago a misfortune befell us, as sometimes does happen in families. We quarrelled bitterly, and I behaved unjustly to my brother in my anger."

Here Captain Good nodded his head vigorously to himself. The ship gave a big roll just then, so that the looking-glass, which was fixed opposite us to starboard, was for a moment nearly over our heads, and as I was sitting with my hands in my pockets and staring upwards, I could see him nodding like anything.

"As I daresay you know," went on Sir Henry, "if a man dies intestate, and has no property but land, real property it is called in England, it all descends to his eldest son. It so happened that just at the time when we quarrelled our father died intestate. He had put off making his will until it was too late. The result was that my brother, who had not been brought up to any profession, was left without a penny. Of course it would have been my duty to provide for him, but at the time the quarrel between us was so bitter that I did not—to my shame I say it (and he sighed deeply)—offer to do anything. It was not that I grudged him justice, but I waited for him to make advances, and he made none. I am sorry to trouble you with all this, Mr. Quatermain, but I must to make things clear, eh, Good?"

"Quite so, quite so," said the captain. "Mr. Quatermain will, I am sure, keep this history to himself."

"Of course," said I, for I rather pride myself on my discretion, for which, as Sir Henry had heard, I have some repute.

"Well," went on Sir Henry, "my brother had a few hundred pounds to his account at the time. Without saying anything to me he drew out this paltry sum, and, having adopted the name of Neville, started off for South Africa in the wild hope of making a fortune. This I learned afterwards. Some three years passed, and I heard nothing of my brother, though I wrote several times. Doubtless the letters never reached him. But as time went on I grew more and more troubled about him. I found out, Mr. Quatermain, that blood is thicker than water."

"That's true," said I, thinking of my boy Harry.

"I found out, Mr. Quatermain, that I would have given half my fortune to know that my brother George, the only relation I possess, was safe and well, and that I should see him again."

"But you never did, Curtis," jerked out Captain Good, glancing at the big man's face.

"Well, Mr. Quatermain, as time went on I became more and more anxious to find out if my brother was alive or dead, and if alive to get him home again. I set enquiries on foot, and your letter was one of the results. So far as it went it was satisfactory, for it showed that till lately George was alive, but it did not go far enough. So, to cut a long story short, I made up my mind to come out and look for him myself, and Captain Good was so kind as to come with me."

"Yes," said the captain; "nothing else to do, you see. Turned out by my Lords of the Admiralty to starve on half pay. And now perhaps, sir, you will tell us what you know or have heard of the gentleman called Neville."

[1] Mr. Quatermain's ideas about ancient Danes seem to be rather confused; we have always understood that they were dark-haired people. Probably he was thinking of Saxons.—Editor.

CHAPTER II

THE LEGEND OF SOLOMON'S MINES

"What was it that you heard about my brother's journey at Bamangwato?" asked Sir Henry, as I paused to fill my pipe before replying to Captain Good.

"I heard this," I answered, "and I have never mentioned it to a soul till to-day. I heard that he was starting for Solomon's Mines."

"Solomon's Mines?" ejaculated both my hearers at once. "Where are they?"

"I don't know," I said; "I know where they are said to be. Once I saw the peaks of the mountains that border them, but there were a hundred and thirty miles of desert between me and them, and I am not aware that any white man ever got across it save one. But perhaps the best thing I can do is to tell you the legend of Solomon's Mines as I know it, you passing your word not to reveal anything I tell you without my permission. Do you agree to that? I have my reasons for asking."

Sir Henry nodded, and Captain Good replied, "Certainly, certainly."

"Well," I began, "as you may guess, generally speaking, elephant hunters are a rough set of men, who do not trouble themselves with much beyond the facts of life and the ways of Kafirs. But here and there you meet a man who takes the trouble to collect traditions from the natives, and tries to make out a little piece of the history of this dark land. It was such a man as this who first told me the legend of Solomon's Mines, now a matter of nearly thirty years ago. That was when I was on my first elephant hunt in the Matabele country. His name was Evans, and he was killed the following year, poor fellow, by a wounded buffalo, and lies buried near the Zambesi

Falls. I was telling Evans one night, I remember, of some wonderful workings I had found whilst hunting koodoo and eland in what is now the Lydenburg district of the Transvaal. I see they have come across these workings again lately in prospecting for gold, but I knew of them years ago. There is a great wide wagon road cut out of the solid rock, and leading to the mouth of the working or gallery. Inside the mouth of this gallery are stacks of gold quartz piled up ready for roasting, which shows that the workers, whoever they were, must have left in a hurry. Also, about twenty paces in, the gallery is built across, and a beautiful bit of masonry it is."

"'Ay,' said Evans, 'but I will spin you a queerer yarn than that'; and he went on to tell me how he had found in the far interior a ruined city, which he believed to be the Ophir of the Bible, and, by the way, other more learned men have said the same long since poor Evans's time. I was, I remember, listening open-eared to all these wonders, for I was young at the time, and this story of an ancient civilisation and of the treasures which those old Jewish or Phoenician adventurers used to extract from a country long since lapsed into the darkest barbarism took a great hold upon my imagination, when suddenly he said to me, 'Lad, did you ever hear of the Suliman Mountains up to the north-west of the Mushakulumbwe country?' I told him I never had. 'Ah, well,' he said, 'that is where Solomon really had his mines, his diamond mines, I mean.'

"'How do you know that?' I asked.

"'Know it! why, what is "Suliman" but a corruption of Solomon?[1] Besides, an old Isanusi or witch doctress up in the Manica country told me all about it. She said that the people who lived across those mountains were a "branch" of the Zulus, speaking a dialect of Zulu, but finer and bigger men even; that there lived among them great wizards, who had learnt their art from white men when "all the world was dark," and who had the secret of a wonderful mine of "bright stones."

"Well, I laughed at this story at the time, though it interested me, for the Diamond Fields were not discovered then, but poor Evans went off and was killed, and for twenty years I never thought any more of the matter. However, just twenty years afterwards—and that is a long time, gentlemen; an elephant hunter does not often live for twenty years at his business—I

heard something more definite about Suliman's Mountains and the country which lies beyond them. I was up beyond the Manica country, at a place called Sitanda's Kraal, and a miserable place it was, for a man could get nothing to eat, and there was but little game about. I had an attack of fever, and was in a bad way generally, when one day a Portugee arrived with a single companion—a half-breed. Now I know your low-class Delagoa Portugee well. There is no greater devil unhung in a general way, battering as he does upon human agony and flesh in the shape of slaves. But this was quite a different type of man to the mean fellows whom I had been accustomed to meet; indeed, in appearance he reminded me more of the polite doms I have read about, for he was tall and thin, with large dark eyes and curling grey mustachios. We talked together for a while, for he could speak broken English, and I understood a little Portugee, and he told me that his name was José Silvestre, and that he had a place near Delagoa Bay. When he went on next day with his half-breed companion, he said 'Good-bye,' taking off his hat quite in the old style.

"Good-bye, senor,' he said; 'if ever we meet again I shall be the richest man in the world, and I will remember you.' I laughed a little—I was too weak to laugh much—and watched him strike out for the great desert to the west, wondering if he was mad, or what he thought he was going to find there.

"A week passed, and I got the better of my fever. One evening I was sitting on the ground in front of the little tent I had with me, chewing the last leg of a miserable fowl I had bought from a native for a bit of cloth worth twenty fowls, and staring at the hot red sun sinking down over the desert, when suddenly I saw a figure, apparently that of a European, for it wore a coat, on the slope of the rising ground opposite to me, about three hundred yards away. The figure crept along on its hands and knees, then it got up and staggered forward a few yards on its legs, only to fall and crawl again. Seeing that it must be somebody in distress, I sent one of my hunters to help him, and presently he arrived, and who do you suppose it turned out to be?"

"José Silvestre, of course," said Captain Good.

"Yes, José Silvestre, or rather his skeleton and a little skin. His face was a bright yellow with bilious fever, and his large dark eyes stood nearly out of his head, for all the flesh had gone. There was nothing but yellow parchment-like skin, white hair, and the gaunt bones sticking up beneath.

"Water! for the sake of Christ, water!" he moaned and I saw that his lips were cracked, and his tongue, which protruded between them, was swollen and blackish.

"I gave him water with a little milk in it, and he drank it in great gulps, two quarts or so, without stopping. I would not let him have any more. Then the fever took him again, and he fell down and began to rave about Suliman's Mountains, and the diamonds, and the desert. I carried him into the tent and did what I could for him, which was little enough; but I saw how it must end. About eleven o'clock he grew quieter, and I lay down for a little rest and went to sleep. At dawn I woke again, and in the half light saw Silvestre sitting up, a strange, gaunt form, and gazing out towards the desert. Presently the first ray of the sun shot right across the wide plain before us till it reached the faraway crest of one of the tallest of the Suliman Mountains more than a hundred miles away.

"There it is!" cried the dying man in Portuguese, and pointing with his long, thin arm, 'but I shall never reach it, never. No one will ever reach it!"

"Suddenly, he paused, and seemed to take a resolution. 'Friend,' he said, turning towards me, 'are you there? My eyes grow dark.'

"Yes,' I said; 'yes, lie down now, and rest.'

"Ay,' he answered, 'I shall rest soon, I have time to rest—all eternity. Listen, I am dying! You have been good to me. I will give you the writing. Perhaps you will get there if you can live to pass the desert, which has killed my poor servant and me.'

"Then he groped in his shirt and brought out what I thought was a Boer tobacco pouch made of the skin of the Swart-vet-pens or sable antelope. It was fastened with a little strip of hide, what we call a rimpi, and this he tried to loose, but could not. He handed it to me. 'Untie it,' he said. I did so,

and extracted a bit of torn yellow linen on which something was written in rusty letters. Inside this rag was a paper.

"Then he went on feebly, for he was growing weak: 'The paper has all that is on the linen. It took me years to read. Listen: my ancestor, a political refugee from Lisbon, and one of the first Portuguese who landed on these shores, wrote that when he was dying on those mountains which no white foot ever pressed before or since. His name was José da Silvestra, and he lived three hundred years ago. His slave, who waited for him on this side of the mountains, found him dead, and brought the writing home to Delagoa. It has been in the family ever since, but none have cared to read it, till at last I did. And I have lost my life over it, but another may succeed, and become the richest man in the world—the richest man in the world. Only give it to no one, senor; go yourself!'

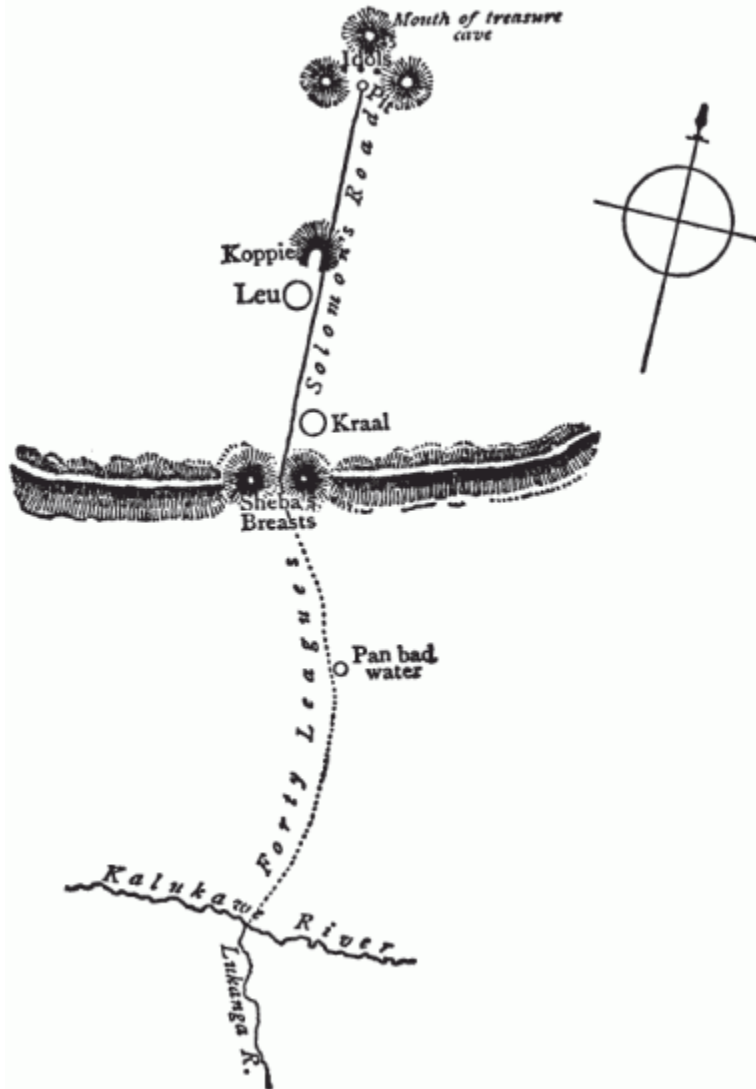
"Then he began to wander again, and in an hour it was all over.

"God rest him! he died very quietly, and I buried him deep, with big boulders on his breast; so I do not think that the jackals can have dug him up. And then I came away."

"Ay, but the document?" said Sir Henry, in a tone of deep interest.

"Yes, the document; what was in it?" added the captain.

"Well, gentlemen, if you like I will tell you. I have never showed it to anybody yet except to a drunken old Portuguese trader who translated it for me, and had forgotten all about it by the next morning. The original rag is at my home in Durban, together with poor Dom José's translation, but I have the English rendering in my pocket-book, and a facsimile of the map, if it can be called a map. Here it is."



"I, José da Silvestra, who am now dying of hunger in the little cave where no snow is on the north side of the nipple of the southernmost of the two mountains I have named Sheba's Breasts, write this in the year 1590 with a cleft bone upon a remnant of my raiment, my blood being the ink. If my slave should find it when he comes, and should bring it to Delagoa, let my friend (name illegible) bring the matter to the knowledge of the king, that he may send an army which, if they live through the desert and the mountains, and can overcome the brave Kukuanes and their devilish arts, to which end many priests should be brought, will make him the richest king since Solomon. With my own eyes I have seen the countless diamonds stored in Solomon's treasure chamber behind the white Death; but through the treachery of Gagool the witch-finder I might bring nought away, scarcely my life. Let him who comes follow the map, and climb the snow of Sheba's left breast till he reaches the nipple, on the north side of which is the great road Solomon made, from whence three days' journey to the King's Palace. Let him kill Gagool. Pray for my soul. Farewell.

José da Silvestra."[2]

When I had finished reading the above, and shown the copy of the map, drawn by the dying hand of the old Dom with his blood for ink, there followed a silence of astonishment.

"Well," said Captain Good, "I have been round the world twice, and put in at most ports, but may I be hung for a mutineer if ever I heard a yarn like this out of a story book, or in it either, for the matter of that."

"It's a queer tale, Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry. "I suppose you are not hoaxing us? It is, I know, sometimes thought allowable to take in a greenhorn."

"If you think that, Sir Henry," I said, much put out, and pocketing my paper—for I do not like to be thought one of those silly fellows who consider it witty to tell lies, and who are for ever boasting to newcomers of extraordinary hunting adventures which never happened—"if you think that, why, there is an end to the matter," and I rose to go.

Sir Henry laid his large hand upon my shoulder. "Sit down, Mr. Quatermain," he said, "I beg your pardon; I see very well you do not wish to deceive us, but the story sounded so strange that I could hardly believe it."

"You shall see the original map and writing when we reach Durban," I answered, somewhat mollified, for really when I came to consider the question it was scarcely wonderful that he should doubt my good faith.

"But," I went on, "I have not told you about your brother. I knew the man Jim who was with him. He was a Bechuana by birth, a good hunter, and for a native a very clever man. That morning on which Mr. Neville was starting I saw Jim standing by my wagon and cutting up tobacco on the disselboom.

"'Jim,' said I, 'where are you off to this trip? It is elephants?'

"'No, Baas,' he answered, 'we are after something worth much more than ivory.'

"'And what might that be?' I said, for I was curious. 'Is it gold?'

"'No, Baas, something worth more than gold,' and he grinned.

"I asked no more questions, for I did not like to lower my dignity by seeming inquisitive, but I was puzzled. Presently Jim finished cutting his tobacco.

"'Baas,' said he.

"I took no notice.

"'Baas,' said he again.

"'Eh, boy, what is it?' I asked.

"'Baas, we are going after diamonds.'

"'Diamonds! why, then, you are steering in the wrong direction; you should head for the Fields.'

"'Baas, have you ever heard of Suliman's Berg?'—that is, Solomon's Mountains, Sir Henry.

"'Ay!'

"'Have you ever heard of the diamonds there?'

"'I have heard a foolish story, Jim.'

"'It is no story, Baas. Once I knew a woman who came from there, and reached Natal with her child, she told me:—she is dead now.'

"'Your master will feed the assvögels'—that is, vultures—'Jim, if he tries to reach Suliman's country, and so will you if they can get any pickings off your worthless old carcass,' said I.

"He grinned. 'Mayhap, Baas. Man must die; I'd rather like to try a new country myself; the elephants are getting worked out about here.'

"'Ah! my boy,' I said, 'you wait till the "pale old man" gets a grip of your yellow throat, and then we shall hear what sort of a tune you sing.'

"Half an hour after that I saw Neville's wagon move off. Presently Jim came back running. 'Good-bye, Baas,' he said. 'I didn't like to start without bidding you good-bye, for I daresay you are right, and that we shall never trek south again.'

"'Is your master really going to Suliman's Berg, Jim, or are you lying?'

"'No,' he answered, 'he is going. He told me he was bound to make his fortune somehow, or try to; so he might as well have a fling for the diamonds.'

"'Oh!' I said; 'wait a bit, Jim; will you take a note to your master, Jim, and promise not to give it to him till you reach Inyati?' which was some hundred miles off.

"'Yes, Baas.'

"So I took a scrap of paper, and wrote on it, 'Let him who comes . . . climb the snow of Sheba's left breast, till he reaches the nipple, on the north side of which is Solomon's great road.'

"'Now, Jim,' I said, 'when you give this to your master, tell him he had better follow the advice on it implicitly. You are not to give it to him now, because I don't want him back asking me questions which I won't answer. Now be off, you idle fellow, the wagon is nearly out of sight.'

"Jim took the note and went, and that is all I know about your brother, Sir Henry; but I am much afraid—"

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "I am going to look for my brother; I am going to trace him to Suliman's Mountains, and over them if necessary, till I find him, or until I know that he is dead. Will you come with me?"

I am, as I think I have said, a cautious man, indeed a timid one, and this suggestion frightened me. It seemed to me that to undertake such a journey would be to go to certain death, and putting other considerations aside, as I had a son to support, I could not afford to die just then.

"No, thank you, Sir Henry, I think I had rather not," I answered. "I am too old for wild-goose chases of that sort, and we should only end up like my poor friend Silvestre. I have a son dependent on me, so I cannot afford to risk my life foolishly."

Both Sir Henry and Captain Good looked very disappointed.

"Mr. Quatermain," said the former, "I am well off, and I am bent upon this business. You may put the remuneration for your services at whatever figure you like in reason, and it shall be paid over to you before we start. Moreover, I will arrange in the event of anything untoward happening to us or to you, that your son shall be suitably provided for. You will see from this offer how necessary I think your presence. Also if by chance we should reach this place, and find diamonds, they shall belong to you and Good equally. I do not want them. But of course that promise is worth nothing at all, though the same thing would apply to any ivory we might get. You may pretty well make your own terms with me, Mr. Quatermain; and of course I shall pay all expenses."

"Sir Henry," said I, "this is the most liberal proposal I ever had, and one not to be sneezed at by a poor hunter and trader. But the job is the biggest I have come across, and I must take time to think it over. I will give you my answer before we get to Durban."

"Very good," answered Sir Henry.

Then I said good-night and turned in, and dreamt about poor long-dead Silvestre and the diamonds.

[1] Suliman is the Arabic form of Solomon.—Editor.

[2] Eu José da Silvestra que estou morrendo de fome ná pequena cova onde não ha neve ao lado norte do bico mais ao sul das duas montanhas que chamei scio de Sheba; escrevo isto no anno 1590; escrevo isto com um pedaço d'osso n' um farrapo de minha roupa e com sangue meu por tinta; se o meu escravo dêr com isto quando venha ao levar para Lourenzo Marquez, que o meu amigo ————— leve a cousa ao conhecimento d' El Rei, para que possa mandar um exercito que, se desfiler pelo deserto e pelas montonhas e mesmo sobrepujar os bravos Kukuanes e suas artes diabolicas, pelo que se deviam trazer muitos padres Far o Rei mais rico depois de Salomão Com meus proprios olhos vé os di amantes sem conto guardados nas camaras do thesouro de Salomão a traz da morte branca, mas pela traição de Gagoal a feiticeira achadora, nada poderia levar, e apenas a minha vida. Quem vier siga o mappa e trepe pela neve de Sheba peito à esquerda até chegar ao bica, do lado norte do qual està a grande estrada do Solomão por elle feita, donde ha tres dias de jornada até ao Palacio do Rei. Mate Gagoal. Reze por minha alma. Adeos. José da Silvestra.

CHAPTER III

UMBOPA ENTERS OUR SERVICE

It takes from four to five days, according to the speed of the vessel and the state of the weather, to run up from the Cape to Durban. Sometimes, if the landing is bad at East London, where they have not yet made that wonderful harbour they talk so much of, and sink such a mint of money in, a ship is delayed for twenty-four hours before the cargo boats can get out to take off the goods. But on this occasion we had not to wait at all, for there were no breakers on the Bar to speak of, and the tugs came out at once with the long strings of ugly flat-bottomed boats behind them, into which the packages were bundled with a crash. It did not matter what they might be, over they went slap-bang; whether they contained china or woollen goods they met with the same treatment. I saw one case holding four dozen of champagne smashed all to bits, and there was the champagne fizzing and boiling about in the bottom of the dirty cargo boat. It was a wicked waste, and evidently so the Kafirs in the boat thought, for they found a couple of unbroken bottles, and knocking off the necks drank the contents. But they had not allowed for the expansion caused by the fizz in the wine, and, feeling themselves swelling, rolled about in the bottom of the boat, calling

out that the good liquor was "tagati"—that is, bewitched. I spoke to them from the vessel, and told them it was the white man's strongest medicine, and that they were as good as dead men. Those Kafirs went to the shore in a very great fright, and I do not think that they will touch champagne again.

Well, all the time that we were steaming up to Natal I was thinking over Sir Henry Curtis's offer. We did not speak any more on the subject for a day or two, though I told them many hunting yarns, all true ones. There is no need to tell lies about hunting, for so many curious things happen within the knowledge of a man whose business it is to hunt; but this is by the way.

At last, one beautiful evening in January, which is our hottest month, we steamed past the coast of Natal, expecting to make Durban Point by sunset. It is a lovely coast all along from East London, with its red sandhills and wide sweeps of vivid green, dotted here and there with Kafir kraals, and bordered by a ribbon of white surf, which spouts up in pillars of foam where it hits the rocks. But just before you come to Durban there is a peculiar richness about the landscape. There are the sheer kloofs cut in the hills by the rushing rains of centuries, down which the rivers sparkle; there is the deepest green of the bush, growing as God planted it, and the other greens of the mealie gardens and the sugar patches, while now and again a white house, smiling out at the placid sea, puts a finish and gives an air of homeliness to the scene. For to my mind, however beautiful a view may be, it requires the presence of man to make it complete, but perhaps that is because I have lived so much in the wilderness, and therefore know the value of civilisation, though to be sure it drives away the game. The Garden of Eden, no doubt, looked fair before man was, but I always think that it must have been fairer when Eve adorned it.

To return, we had miscalculated a little, and the sun was well down before we dropped anchor off the Point, and heard the gun which told the good folks of Durban that the English Mail was in. It was too late to think of getting over the Bar that night, so we went comfortably to dinner, after seeing the Mails carried off in the life-boat.

When we came up again the moon was out, and shining so brightly over sea and shore that she almost paled the quick, large flashes from the lighthouse. From the shore floated sweet spicy odours that always remind

me of hymns and missionaries, and in the windows of the houses on the Berea sparkled a hundred lights. From a large brig lying near also came the music of the sailors as they worked at getting the anchor up in order to be ready for the wind. Altogether it was a perfect night, such a night as you sometimes get in Southern Africa, and it threw a garment of peace over everybody as the moon threw a garment of silver over everything. Even the great bulldog, belonging to a sporting passenger, seemed to yield to its gentle influences, and forgetting his yearning to come to close quarters with the baboon in a cage on the foc'sle, snored happily at the door of the cabin, dreaming no doubt that he had finished him, and happy in his dream.

We three—that is, Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good, and myself—went and sat by the wheel, and were quiet for a while.

"Well, Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry presently, "have you been thinking about my proposals?"

"Ay," echoed Captain Good, "what do you think of them, Mr. Quatermain? I hope that you are going to give us the pleasure of your company so far as Solomon's Mines, or wherever the gentleman you knew as Neville may have got to."

I rose and knocked out my pipe before I answered. I had not made up my mind, and wanted an additional moment to decide. Before the burning tobacco had fallen into the sea I had decided; just that little extra second did the trick. It is often the way when you have been bothering a long time over a thing.

"Yes, gentlemen," I said, sitting down again, "I will go, and by your leave I will tell you why, and on what conditions. First for the terms which I ask.

"1. You are to pay all expenses, and any ivory or other valuables we may get is to be divided between Captain Good and myself.

"2. That you give me £500 for my services on the trip before we start, I undertaking to serve you faithfully till you choose to abandon the enterprise, or till we succeed, or disaster overtakes us.

"3. That before we trek you execute a deed agreeing, in the event of my death or disablement, to pay my boy Harry, who is studying medicine over there in London, at Guy's Hospital, a sum of £200 a year for five years, by which time he ought to be able to earn a living for himself if he is worth his salt. That is all, I think, and I daresay you will say quite enough too."

"No," answered Sir Henry, "I accept them gladly. I am bent upon this project, and would pay more than that for your help, considering the peculiar and exclusive knowledge which you possess."

"Pity I did not ask it, then, but I won't go back on my word. And now that I have got my terms I will tell you my reasons for making up my mind to go. First of all, gentlemen, I have been observing you both for the last few days, and if you will not think me impertinent I may say that I like you, and believe that we shall come up well to the yoke together. That is something, let me tell you, when one has a long journey like this before one.

"And now as to the journey itself, I tell you flatly, Sir Henry and Captain Good, that I do not think it probable we can come out of it alive, that is, if we attempt to cross the Suliman Mountains. What was the fate of the old Dom da Silvestra three hundred years ago? What was the fate of his descendant twenty years ago? What has been your brother's fate? I tell you frankly, gentlemen, that as their fates were so I believe ours will be."

I paused to watch the effect of my words. Captain Good looked a little uncomfortable, but Sir Henry's face did not change. "We must take our chance," he said.

"You may perhaps wonder," I went on, "why, if I think this, I, who am, as I told you, a timid man, should undertake such a journey. It is for two reasons. First I am a fatalist, and believe that my time is appointed to come quite without reference to my own movements and will, and that if I am to go to Suliman's Mountains to be killed, I shall go there and shall be killed. God Almighty, no doubt, knows His mind about me, so I need not trouble on that point. Secondly, I am a poor man. For nearly forty years I have hunted and traded, but I have never made more than a living. Well, gentlemen, I don't know if you are aware that the average life of an elephant

hunter from the time he takes to the trade is between four and five years. So you see I have lived through about seven generations of my class, and I should think that my time cannot be far off, anyway. Now, if anything were to happen to me in the ordinary course of business, by the time my debts are paid there would be nothing left to support my son Harry whilst he was getting in the way of earning a living, whereas now he will be set up for five years. There is the whole affair in a nutshell."

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry, who had been giving me his most serious attention, "your motives for undertaking an enterprise which you believe can only end in disaster reflect a great deal of credit on you. Whether or not you are right, of course time and the event alone can show. But whether you are right or wrong, I may as well tell you at once that I am going through with it to the end, sweet or bitter. If we are to be knocked on the head, all I have to say is, that I hope we get a little shooting first, eh, Good?"

"Yes, yes," put in the captain. "We have all three of us been accustomed to face danger, and to hold our lives in our hands in various ways, so it is no good turning back now. And now I vote we go down to the saloon and take an observation just for luck, you know." And we did—through the bottom of a tumbler.

Next day we went ashore, and I put up Sir Henry and Captain Good at the little shanty I have built on the Berea, and which I call my home. There are only three rooms and a kitchen in it, and it is constructed of green brick with a galvanised iron roof, but there is a good garden with the best loquat trees in it that I know, and some nice young mangoes, of which I hope great things. The curator of the botanical gardens gave them to me. It is looked after by an old hunter of mine named Jack, whose thigh was so badly broken by a buffalo cow in Sikukunis country that he will never hunt again. But he can potter about and garden, being a Griqua by birth. You will never persuade a Zulu to take much interest in gardening. It is a peaceful art, and peaceful arts are not in his line.

Sir Henry and Good slept in a tent pitched in my little grove of orange trees at the end of the garden, for there was no room for them in the house, and what with the smell of the bloom, and the sight of the green and golden

fruit—in Durban you will see all three on the tree together—I daresay it is a pleasant place enough, for we have few mosquitos here on the Berea, unless there happens to come an unusually heavy rain.

Well, to get on—for if I do not, Harry, you will be tired of my story before ever we fetch up at Suliman's Mountains—having once made up my mind to go I set about making the necessary preparations. First I secured the deed from Sir Henry, providing for you, my boy, in case of accidents. There was some difficulty about its legal execution, as Sir Henry was a stranger here, and the property to be charged is over the water; but it was ultimately got over with the help of a lawyer, who charged £20 for the job—a price that I thought outrageous. Then I pocketed my cheque for £500.

Having paid this tribute to my bump of caution, I purchased a wagon and a span of oxen on Sir Henry's behalf, and beauties they were. It was a twenty-two-foot wagon with iron axles, very strong, very light, and built throughout of stink wood; not quite a new one, having been to the Diamond Fields and back, but, in my opinion, all the better for that, for I could see that the wood was well seasoned. If anything is going to give in a wagon, or if there is green wood in it, it will show out on the first trip. This particular vehicle was what we call a "half-tented" wagon, that is to say, only covered in over the after twelve feet, leaving all the front part free for the necessaries we had to carry with us. In this after part were a hide "cartle," or bed, on which two people could sleep, also racks for rifles, and many other little conveniences. I gave £125 for it, and think that it was cheap at the price.

Then I bought a beautiful team of twenty Zulu oxen, which I had kept my eye on for a year or two. Sixteen oxen is the usual number for a team, but I took four extra to allow for casualties. These Zulu cattle are small and light, not more than half the size of the Africander oxen, which are generally used for transport purposes; but they will live where the Africanders would starve, and with a moderate load can make five miles a day better going, being quicker and not so liable to become footsore. What is more, this lot were thoroughly "salted," that is, they had worked all over South Africa, and so had become proof, comparatively speaking, against red water, which so frequently destroys whole teams of oxen when they get

on to strange "veldt" or grass country. As for "lung sick," which is a dreadful form of pneumonia, very prevalent in this country, they had all been inoculated against it. This is done by cutting a slit in the tail of an ox, and binding in a piece of the diseased lung of an animal which has died of the sickness. The result is that the ox sickens, takes the disease in a mild form, which causes its tail to drop off, as a rule about a foot from the root, and becomes proof against future attacks. It seems cruel to rob the animal of his tail, especially in a country where there are so many flies, but it is better to sacrifice the tail and keep the ox than to lose both tail and ox, for a tail without an ox is not much good, except to dust with. Still it does look odd to trek along behind twenty stumps, where there ought to be tails. It seems as though Nature made a trifling mistake, and stuck the stern ornaments of a lot of prize bull-dogs on to the rumps of the oxen.

Next came the question of provisioning and medicines, one which required the most careful consideration, for what we had to do was to avoid lumbering the wagon, and yet to take everything absolutely necessary. Fortunately, it turned out that Good is a bit of a doctor, having at some point in his previous career managed to pass through a course of medical and surgical instruction, which he has more or less kept up. He is not, of course, qualified, but he knows more about it than many a man who can write M.D. after his name, as we found out afterwards, and he had a splendid travelling medicine chest and a set of instruments. Whilst we were at Durban he cut off a Kafir's big toe in a way which it was a pleasure to see. But he was quite nonplussed when the Kafir, who had sat stolidly watching the operation, asked him to put on another, saying that a "white one" would do at a pinch.

There remained, when these questions were satisfactorily settled, two further important points for consideration, namely, that of arms and that of servants. As to the arms I cannot do better than put down a list of those which we finally decided on from among the ample store that Sir Henry had brought with him from England, and those which I owned. I copy it from my pocket-book, where I made the entry at the time.

"Three heavy breech-loading double-eight elephant guns, weighing about fifteen pounds each, to carry a charge of eleven drachms of black

powder." Two of these were by a well-known London firm, most excellent makers, but I do not know by whom mine, which is not so highly finished, was made. I have used it on several trips, and shot a good many elephants with it, and it has always proved a most superior weapon, thoroughly to be relied on.

"Three double-500 Expresses, constructed to stand a charge of six drachms," sweet weapons, and admirable for medium-sized game, such as eland or sable antelope, or for men, especially in an open country and with the semi-hollow bullet.

"One double No. 12 central-fire Keeper's shot-gun, full choke both barrels." This gun proved of the greatest service to us afterwards in shooting game for the pot.

"Three Winchester repeating rifles (not carbines), spare guns.

"Three single-action Colt's revolvers, with the heavier, or American pattern of cartridge."

This was our total armament, and doubtless the reader will observe that the weapons of each class were of the same make and calibre, so that the cartridges were interchangeable, a very important point. I make no apology for detailing it at length, as every experienced hunter will know how vital a proper supply of guns and ammunition is to the success of an expedition.

Now as to the men who were to go with us. After much consultation we decided that their number should be limited to five, namely, a driver, a leader, and three servants.

The driver and leader I found without much difficulty, two Zulus, named respectively Goza and Tom; but to get the servants proved a more difficult matter. It was necessary that they should be thoroughly trustworthy and brave men, as in a business of this sort our lives might depend upon their conduct. At last I secured two, one a Hottentot named Ventvögel, or "windbird," and one a little Zulu named Khiva, who had the merit of speaking English perfectly. Ventvögel I had known before; he was one of the most perfect "spoorers," that is, game trackers, I ever had to do with,

and tough as whipcord. He never seemed to tire. But he had one failing, so common with his race, drink. Put him within reach of a bottle of gin and you could not trust him. However, as we were going beyond the region of grog-shops this little weakness of his did not so much matter.

Having secured these two men I looked in vain for a third to suit my purpose, so we determined to start without one, trusting to luck to find a suitable man on our way up country. But, as it happened, on the evening before the day we had fixed for our departure the Zulu Khiva informed me that a Kafir was waiting to see me. Accordingly, when we had done dinner, for we were at table at the time, I told Khiva to bring him in. Presently a tall, handsome-looking man, somewhere about thirty years of age, and very light-coloured for a Zulu, entered, and lifting his knob-stick by way of salute, squatted himself down in the corner on his haunches, and sat silent. I did not take any notice of him for a while, for it is a great mistake to do so. If you rush into conversation at once, a Zulu is apt to think you a person of little dignity or consequence. I observed, however, that he was a "Keshla" or ringed man; that is, he wore on his head the black ring, made of a species of gum polished with fat and worked up in the hair, which is usually assumed by Zulus on attaining a certain age or dignity. Also it struck me that his face was familiar to me.

"Well," I said at last, "What is your name?"

"Umbopa," answered the man in a slow, deep voice.

"I have seen your face before."

"Yes; the Inkoosi, the chief, my father, saw my face at the place of the Little Hand"—that is, Isandhlwana—"on the day before the battle."

Then I remembered. I was one of Lord Chelmsford's guides in that unlucky Zulu War, and had the good fortune to leave the camp in charge of some wagons on the day before the battle. While I was waiting for the cattle to be inspanned I fell into conversation with this man, who held some small command among the native auxiliaries, and he had expressed to me his doubts as to the safety of the camp. At the time I told him to hold his

tongue, and leave such matters to wiser heads; but afterwards I thought of his words.

"I remember," I said; "what is it you want?"

"It is this, 'Macumazahn.'" That is my Kafir name, and means the man who gets up in the middle of the night, or, in vulgar English, he who keeps his eyes open. "I hear that you go on a great expedition far into the North with the white chiefs from over the water. Is it a true word?"

"It is."

"I hear that you go even to the Lukanga River, a moon's journey beyond the Manica country. Is this so also, 'Macumazahn?'"

"Why do you ask whither we go? What is it to you?" I answered suspiciously, for the objects of our journey had been kept a dead secret.

"It is this, O white men, that if indeed you travel so far I would travel with you."

There was a certain assumption of dignity in the man's mode of speech, and especially in his use of the words "O white men," instead of "O Inkosis," or chiefs, which struck me.

"You forget yourself a little," I said. "Your words run out unawares. That is not the way to speak. What is your name, and where is your kraal? Tell us, that we may know with whom we have to deal."

"My name is Umbopa. I am of the Zulu people, yet not of them. The house of my tribe is in the far North; it was left behind when the Zulus came down here a 'thousand years ago,' long before Chaka reigned in Zululand. I have no kraal. I have wandered for many years. I came from the North as a child to Zululand. I was Cetewayo's man in the Nkomabakosi Regiment, serving there under the great Captain, Umslopogaasi of the Axe, [1] who taught my hands to fight. Afterwards I ran away from Zululand and came to Natal because I wanted to see the white man's ways. Next I fought against Cetewayo in the war. Since then I have been working in Natal. Now

I am tired, and would go North again. Here is not my place. I want no money, but I am a brave man, and am worth my place and meat. I have spoken."

I was rather puzzled by this man and his way of speech. It was evident to me from his manner that in the main he was telling the truth, but somehow he seemed different from the ordinary run of Zulus, and I rather mistrusted his offer to come without pay. Being in a difficulty, I translated his words to Sir Henry and Good, and asked them their opinion.

Sir Henry told me to ask him to stand up. Umbopa did so, at the same time slipping off the long military great coat which he wore, and revealing himself naked except for the moocha round his centre and a necklace of lions' claws. Certainly he was a magnificent-looking man; I never saw a finer native. Standing about six foot three high he was broad in proportion, and very shapely. In that light, too, his skin looked scarcely more than dark, except here and there where deep black scars marked old assegai wounds. Sir Henry walked up to him and looked into his proud, handsome face.

"They make a good pair, don't they?" said Good; "one as big as the other."

"I like your looks, Mr. Umbopa, and I will take you as my servant," said Sir Henry in English.

Umbopa evidently understood him, for he answered in Zulu, "It is well"; and then added, with a glance at the white man's great stature and breadth, "We are men, thou and I."

[1] For the history of Umslopogaasi and his Axe, the reader is referred to the books called "Allan Quatermain" and "Nada the Lily."—Editor.

CHAPTER IV

AN ELEPHANT HUNT

Now I do not propose to narrate at full length all the incidents of our long travel up to Sitanda's Kraal, near the junction of the Lukanga and Kalukwe Rivers. It was a journey of more than a thousand miles from Durban, the last three hundred or so of which we had to make on foot, owing to the frequent presence of the dreadful "tsetse" fly, whose bite is fatal to all animals except donkeys and men.

We left Durban at the end of January, and it was in the second week of May that we camped near Sitanda's Kraal. Our adventures on the way were many and various, but as they are of the sort which befall every African hunter—with one exception to be presently detailed—I shall not set them down here, lest I should render this history too wearisome.

At Inyati, the outlying trading station in the Matabele country, of which Lobengula (a great and cruel scoundrel) is king, with many regrets we parted from our comfortable wagon. Only twelve oxen remained to us out of the beautiful span of twenty which I had bought at Durban. One we lost from the bite of a cobra, three had perished from "poverty" and the want of water, one strayed, and the other three died from eating the poisonous herb called "tulip." Five more sickened from this cause, but we managed to cure them with doses of an infusion made by boiling down the tulip leaves. If administered in time this is a very effective antidote.

The wagon and the oxen we left in the immediate charge of Goza and Tom, our driver and leader, both trustworthy boys, requesting a worthy Scotch missionary who lived in this distant place to keep an eye on them. Then, accompanied by Umbopa, Khiva, Ventvögel, and half a dozen bearers whom we hired on the spot, we started off on foot upon our wild quest. I remember we were all a little silent on the occasion of this departure, and I think that each of us was wondering if we should ever see our wagon again; for my part I never expected to do so. For a while we tramped on in silence, till Umbopa, who was marching in front, broke into a Zulu chant about how

some brave men, tired of life and the tameness of things, started off into a vast wilderness to find new things or die, and how, lo and behold! when they had travelled far into the wilderness they found that it was not a wilderness at all, but a beautiful place full of young wives and fat cattle, of game to hunt and enemies to kill.

Then we all laughed and took it for a good omen. Umbopa was a cheerful savage, in a dignified sort of way, when he was not suffering from one of his fits of brooding, and he had a wonderful knack of keeping up our spirits. We all grew very fond of him.

And now for the one adventure to which I am going to treat myself, for I do dearly love a hunting yarn.

About a fortnight's march from Inyati we came across a peculiarly beautiful bit of well-watered woodland country. The kloofs in the hills were covered with dense bush, "idoro" bush as the natives call it, and in some places, with the "wacht-eeen-beche," or "wait-a-little thorn," and there were great quantities of the lovely "machabell" tree, laden with refreshing yellow fruit having enormous stones. This tree is the elephant's favourite food, and there were not wanting signs that the great brutes had been about, for not only was their spoor frequent, but in many places the trees were broken down and even uprooted. The elephant is a destructive feeder.

One evening, after a long day's march, we came to a spot of great loveliness. At the foot of a bush-clad hill lay a dry river-bed, in which, however, were to be found pools of crystal water all trodden round with the hoof-prints of game. Facing this hill was a park-like plain, where grew clumps of flat-topped mimosa, varied with occasional glossy-leaved machabells, and all round stretched the sea of pathless, silent bush.

As we emerged into this river-bed path suddenly we started a troop of tall giraffes, who galloped, or rather sailed off, in their strange gait, their tails screwed up over their backs, and their hoofs rattling like castanets. They were about three hundred yards from us, and therefore practically out of shot, but Good, who was walking ahead, and who had an express loaded with solid ball in his hand, could not resist temptation. Lifting his gun, he let drive at the last, a young cow. By some extraordinary chance the ball

struck it full on the back of the neck, shattering the spinal column, and that giraffe went rolling head over heels just like a rabbit. I never saw a more curious thing.

"Curse it!" said Good—for I am sorry to say he had a habit of using strong language when excited—contracted, no doubt, in the course of his nautical career; "curse it! I've killed him."

"*Ou, Bougwan,*" ejaculated the Kafirs; "*ou! ou!*"

They called Good "Bougwan," or Glass Eye, because of his eye-glass.

"Oh, 'Bougwan!'" re-echoed Sir Henry and I, and from that day Good's reputation as a marvellous shot was established, at any rate among the Kafirs. Really he was a bad one, but whenever he missed we overlooked it for the sake of that giraffe.

Having set some of the "boys" to cut off the best of the giraffe's meat, we went to work to build a "schem" near one of the pools and about a hundred yards to its right. This is done by cutting a quantity of thorn bushes and piling them in the shape of a circular hedge. Then the space enclosed is smoothed, and dry tambouki grass, if obtainable, is made into a bed in the centre, and a fire or fires lighted.

By the time the "schem" was finished the moon peeped up, and our dinners of giraffe steaks and roasted marrow-bones were ready. How we enjoyed those marrow-bones, though it was rather a job to crack them! I know of no greater luxury than giraffe marrow, unless it is elephant's heart, and we had that on the morrow. We ate our simple meal by the light of the moon, pausing at times to thank Good for his wonderful shot; then we began to smoke and yarn, and a curious picture we must have made squatting there round the fire. I, with my short grizzled hair sticking up straight, and Sir Henry with his yellow locks, which were getting rather long, were rather a contrast, especially as I am thin, and short, and dark, weighing only nine stone and a half, and Sir Henry is tall, and broad, and fair, and weighs fifteen. But perhaps the most curious-looking of the three, taking all the circumstances of the case into consideration, was Captain John Good, R.N. There he sat upon a leather bag, looking just as though he

had come in from a comfortable day's shooting in a civilised country, absolutely clean, tidy, and well dressed. He wore a shooting suit of brown tweed, with a hat to match, and neat gaiters. As usual, he was beautifully shaved, his eye-glass and his false teeth appeared to be in perfect order, and altogether he looked the neatest man I ever had to do with in the wilderness. He even sported a collar, of which he had a supply, made of white gutta-percha.

"You see, they weigh so little," he said to me innocently, when I expressed my astonishment at the fact; "and I always like to turn out like a gentleman." Ah! if he could have foreseen the future and the raiment prepared for him.

Well, there we three sat yarning away in the beautiful moonlight, and watching the Kafirs a few yards off sucking their intoxicating "daccha" from a pipe of which the mouthpiece was made of the horn of an eland, till one by one they rolled themselves up in their blankets and went to sleep by the fire, that is, all except Umbopa, who was a little apart, his chin resting on his hand, and thinking deeply. I noticed that he never mixed much with the other Kafirs.

Presently, from the depths of the bush behind us, came a loud "*woof, woof!*" "That's a lion," said I, and we all started up to listen. Hardly had we done so, when from the pool, about a hundred yards off, we heard the strident trumpeting of an elephant. "*Unkungunklovo! Indlovu!*" "Elephant! Elephant!" whispered the Kafirs, and a few minutes afterwards we saw a succession of vast shadowy forms moving slowly from the direction of the water towards the bush.

Up jumped Good, burning for slaughter, and thinking, perhaps, that it was as easy to kill elephant as he had found it to shoot giraffe, but I caught him by the arm and pulled him down.

"It's no good," I whispered, "let them go."

"It seems that we are in a paradise of game. I vote we stop here a day or two, and have a go at them," said Sir Henry, presently.

I was rather surprised, for hitherto Sir Henry had always been for pushing forward as fast as possible, more especially since we ascertained at Inyati that about two years ago an Englishman of the name of Neville *had* sold his wagon there, and gone on up country. But I suppose his hunter instincts got the better of him for a while.

Good jumped at the idea, for he was longing to have a shot at those elephants; and so, to speak the truth, did I, for it went against my conscience to let such a herd as that escape without a pull at them.

"All right, my hearties," said I. "I think we want a little recreation. And now let's turn in, for we ought to be off by dawn, and then perhaps we may catch them feeding before they move on."

The others agreed, and we proceeded to make our preparations. Good took off his clothes, shook them, put his eye-glass and his false teeth into his trousers pocket, and folding each article neatly, placed it out of the dew under a corner of his mackintosh sheet. Sir Henry and I contented ourselves with rougher arrangements, and soon were curled up in our blankets, and dropping off into the dreamless sleep that rewards the traveller.

Going, going, go—What was that?

Suddenly, from the direction of the water came sounds of violent scuffling, and next instant there broke upon our ears a succession of the most awful roars. There was no mistaking their origin; only a lion could make such a noise as that. We all jumped up and looked towards the water, in the direction of which we saw a confused mass, yellow and black in colour, staggering and struggling towards us. We seized our rifles, and slipping on our veldtschoons, that is shoes made of untanned hide, ran out of the scherm. By this time the mass had fallen, and was rolling over and over on the ground, and when we reached the spot it struggled no longer, but lay quite still.

Now we saw what it was. On the grass there lay a sable antelope bull—the most beautiful of all the African antelopes—quite dead, and transfixed by its great curved horns was a magnificent black-maned lion, also dead. Evidently what had happened was this: The sable antelope had come down

to drink at the pool where the lion—no doubt the same which we had heard—was lying in wait. While the antelope drank, the lion had sprung upon him, only to be received upon the sharp curved horns and transfixed. Once before I saw a similar thing happen. Then the lion, unable to free himself, had torn and bitten at the back and neck of the bull, which, maddened with fear and pain, had rushed on until it dropped dead.

As soon as we had examined the beasts sufficiently we called the Kafirs, and between us managed to drag their carcasses up to the scherm. After that we went in and lay down, to wake no more till dawn.

With the first light we were up and making ready for the fray. We took with us the three eight-bore rifles, a good supply of ammunition, and our large water-bottles, filled with weak cold tea, which I have always found the best stuff to shoot on. After swallowing a little breakfast we started, Umbopa, Khiva, and Ventvögel accompanying us. The other Kafirs we left with instructions to skin the lion and the sable antelope, and to cut up the latter.

We had no difficulty in finding the broad elephant trail, which Ventvögel, after examination, pronounced to have been made by between twenty and thirty elephants, most of them full-grown bulls. But the herd had moved on some way during the night, and it was nine o'clock, and already very hot, before, by the broken trees, bruised leaves and bark, and smoking droppings, we knew that we could not be far from them.

Presently we caught sight of the herd, which numbered, as Ventvögel had said, between twenty and thirty, standing in a hollow, having finished their morning meal, and flapping their great ears. It was a splendid sight, for they were only about two hundred yards from us. Taking a handful of dry grass, I threw it into the air to see how the wind was; for if once they winded us I knew they would be off before we could get a shot. Finding that, if anything, it blew from the elephants to us, we crept on stealthily, and thanks to the cover managed to get within forty yards or so of the great brutes. Just in front of us, and broadside on, stood three splendid bulls, one of them with enormous tusks. I whispered to the others that I would take the middle one; Sir Henry covering the elephant to the left, and Good the bull with the big tusks.

"Now," I whispered.

Boom! boom! boom! went the three heavy rifles, and down came Sir Henry's elephant dead as a hammer, shot right through the heart. Mine fell on to its knees and I thought that he was going to die, but in another moment he was up and off, tearing along straight past me. As he went I gave him the second barrel in the ribs, and this brought him down in good earnest. Hastily slipping in two fresh cartridges I ran close up to him, and a ball through the brain put an end to the poor brute's struggles. Then I turned to see how Good had fared with the big bull, which I had heard screaming with rage and pain as I gave mine its quietus. On reaching the captain I found him in a great state of excitement. It appeared that on receiving the bullet the bull had turned and come straight for his assailant, who had barely time to get out of his way, and then charged on blindly past him, in the direction of our encampment. Meanwhile the herd had crashed off in wild alarm in the other direction.

For awhile we debated whether to go after the wounded bull or to follow the herd, and finally deciding for the latter alternative, departed, thinking that we had seen the last of those big tusks. I have often wished since that we had. It was easy work to follow the elephants, for they had left a trail like a carriage road behind them, crushing down the thick bush in their furious flight as though it were tambouki grass.

But to come up with them was another matter, and we had struggled on under the broiling sun for over two hours before we found them. With the exception of one bull, they were standing together, and I could see, from their unquiet way and the manner in which they kept lifting their trunks to test the air, that they were on the look-out for mischief. The solitary bull stood fifty yards or so to this side of the herd, over which he was evidently keeping sentry, and about sixty yards from us. Thinking that he would see or wind us, and that it would probably start them off again if we tried to get nearer, especially as the ground was rather open, we all aimed at this bull, and at my whispered word, we fired. The three shots took effect, and down he went dead. Again the herd started, but unfortunately for them about a hundred yards further on was a nullah, or dried-out water track, with steep banks, a place very much resembling the one where the Prince Imperial was

killed in Zululand. Into this the elephants plunged, and when we reached the edge we found them struggling in wild confusion to get up the other bank, filling the air with their screams, and trumpeting as they pushed one another aside in their selfish panic, just like so many human beings. Now was our opportunity, and firing away as quickly as we could load, we killed five of the poor beasts, and no doubt should have bagged the whole herd, had they not suddenly given up their attempts to climb the bank and rushed headlong down the nullah. We were too tired to follow them, and perhaps also a little sick of slaughter, eight elephants being a pretty good bag for one day.

So after we were rested a little, and the Kafirs had cut out the hearts of two of the dead elephants for supper, we started homewards, very well pleased with our day's work, having made up our minds to send the bearers on the morrow to chop away the tusks.

Shortly after we re-passed the spot where Good had wounded the patriarchal bull we came across a herd of eland, but did not shoot at them, as we had plenty of meat. They trotted past us, and then stopped behind a little patch of bush about a hundred yards away, wheeling round to look at us. As Good was anxious to get a near view of them, never having seen an eland close, he handed his rifle to Umbopa, and, followed by Khiva, strolled up to the patch of bush. We sat down and waited for him, not sorry of the excuse for a little rest.

The sun was just going down in its reddest glory, and Sir Henry and I were admiring the lovely scene, when suddenly we heard an elephant scream, and saw its huge and rushing form with uplifted trunk and tail silhouetted against the great fiery globe of the sun. Next second we saw something else, and that was Good and Khiva tearing back towards us with the wounded bull—for it was he—charging after them. For a moment we did not dare to fire—though at that distance it would have been of little use if we had done so—for fear of hitting one of them, and the next a dreadful thing happened—Good fell a victim to his passion for civilised dress. Had he consented to discard his trousers and gaiters like the rest of us, and to hunt in a flannel shirt and a pair of veldt-schoons, it would have been all right. But as it was, his trousers cumbered him in that desperate race, and

presently, when he was about sixty yards from us, his boot, polished by the dry grass, slipped, and down he went on his face right in front of the elephant.

We gave a gasp, for we knew that he must die, and ran as hard as we could towards him. In three seconds it had ended, but not as we thought. Khiva, the Zulu boy, saw his master fall, and brave lad as he was, turned and flung his assegai straight into the elephant's face. It stuck in his trunk.

With a scream of pain, the brute seized the poor Zulu, hurled him to the earth, and placing one huge foot on to his body about the middle, twined its trunk round his upper part and *tore him in two*.

We rushed up mad with horror, and fired again and again, till presently the elephant fell upon the fragments of the Zulu.

As for Good, he rose and wrung his hands over the brave man who had given his life to save him, and, though I am an old hand, I felt a lump grow in my throat. Umbopa stood contemplating the huge dead elephant and the mangled remains of poor Khiva.

"Ah, well," he said presently, "he is dead, but he died like a man!"

CHAPTER V

OUR MARCH INTO THE DESERT

We had killed nine elephants, and it took us two days to cut out the tusks, and having brought them into camp, to bury them carefully in the sand under a large tree, which made a conspicuous mark for miles round. It was a wonderfully fine lot of ivory. I never saw a better, averaging as it did between forty and fifty pounds a tusk. The tusks of the great bull that killed poor Khiva scaled one hundred and seventy pounds the pair, so nearly as we could judge.

As for Khiva himself, we buried what remained of him in an ant-bear hole, together with an assegai to protect himself with on his journey to a better world. On the third day we marched again, hoping that we might live to return to dig up our buried ivory, and in due course, after a long and wearisome tramp, and many adventures which I have not space to detail, we reached Sitanda's Kraal, near the Lukanga River, the real starting-point of our expedition. Very well do I recollect our arrival at that place. To the right was a scattered native settlement with a few stone cattle kraals and some cultivated lands down by the water, where these savages grew their scanty supply of grain, and beyond it stretched great tracts of waving "veld" covered with tall grass, over which herds of the smaller game were wandering. To the left lay the vast desert. This spot appears to be the outpost of the fertile country, and it would be difficult to say to what natural causes such an abrupt change in the character of the soil is due. But so it is.

Just below our encampment flowed a little stream, on the farther side of which is a stony slope, the same down which, twenty years before, I had seen poor Silvestre creeping back after his attempt to reach Solomon's Mines, and beyond that slope begins the waterless desert, covered with a species of karoo shrub.

It was evening when we pitched our camp, and the great ball of the sun was sinking into the desert, sending glorious rays of many-coloured light flying all over its vast expanse. Leaving Good to superintend the arrangement of our little camp, I took Sir Henry with me, and walking to the top of the slope opposite, we gazed across the desert. The air was very clear, and far, far away I could distinguish the faint blue outlines, here and there capped with white, of the Suliman Berg.

"There," I said, "there is the wall round Solomon's Mines, but God knows if we shall ever climb it."

"My brother should be there, and if he is, I shall reach him somehow," said Sir Henry, in that tone of quiet confidence which marked the man.

"I hope so," I answered, and turned to go back to the camp, when I saw that we were not alone. Behind us, also gazing earnestly towards the far-off mountains, stood the great Kafir Umbopa.

The Zulu spoke when he saw that I had observed him, addressing Sir Henry, to whom he had attached himself.

"Is it to that land that thou wouldst journey, Incubu?" (a native word meaning, I believe, an elephant, and the name given to Sir Henry by the Kafirs), he said, pointing towards the mountain with his broad assegai.

I asked him sharply what he meant by addressing his master in that familiar way. It is very well for natives to have a name for one among themselves, but it is not decent that they should call a white man by their heathenish appellations to his face. The Zulu laughed a quiet little laugh which angered me.

"How dost thou know that I am not the equal of the Inkosi whom I serve?" he said. "He is of a royal house, no doubt; one can see it in his size and by his mien; so, mayhap, am I. At least, I am as great a man. Be my mouth, O Macumazahn, and say my words to the Inkoos Incubu, my master, for I would speak to him and to thee."

I was angry with the man, for I am not accustomed to be talked to in that way by Kafirs, but somehow he impressed me, and besides I was curious to know what he had to say. So I translated, expressing my opinion at the same time that he was an impudent fellow, and that his swagger was outrageous.

"Yes, Umbopa," answered Sir Henry, "I would journey there."

"The desert is wide and there is no water in it, the mountains are high and covered with snow, and man cannot say what lies beyond them behind the place where the sun sets; how shalt thou come thither, Incubu, and wherefore dost thou go?"

I translated again.

"Tell him," answered Sir Henry, "that I go because I believe that a man of my blood, my brother, has gone there before me, and I journey to seek him."

"That is so, Incubu; a Hottentot I met on the road told me that a white man went out into the desert two years ago towards those mountains with one servant, a hunter. They never came back."

"How do you know it was my brother?" asked Sir Henry.

"Nay, I know not. But the Hottentot, when I asked what the white man was like, said that he had thine eyes and a black beard. He said, too, that the name of the hunter with him was Jim; that he was a Bechuana hunter and wore clothes."

"There is no doubt about it," said I; "I knew Jim well."

Sir Henry nodded. "I was sure of it," he said. "If George set his mind upon a thing he generally did it. It was always so from his boyhood. If he meant to cross the Suliman Berg he has crossed it, unless some accident overtook him, and we must look for him on the other side."

Umbopa understood English, though he rarely spoke it.

"It is a far journey, Incubu," he put in, and I translated his remark.

"Yes," answered Sir Henry, "it is far. But there is no journey upon this earth that a man may not make if he sets his heart to it. There is nothing, Umbopa, that he cannot do, there are no mountains he may not climb, there are no deserts he cannot cross, save a mountain and a desert of which you are spared the knowledge, if love leads him and he holds his life in his hands counting it as nothing, ready to keep it or lose it as Heaven above may order."

I translated.

"Great words, my father," answered the Zulu—I always called him a Zulu, though he was not really one—"great swelling words fit to fill the mouth of a man. Thou art right, my father Incubu. Listen! what is life? It is a feather, it is the seed of the grass, blown hither and thither, sometimes multiplying itself and dying in the act, sometimes carried away into the heavens. But if that seed be good and heavy it may perchance travel a little

way on the road it wills. It is well to try and journey one's road and to fight with the air. Man must die. At the worst he can but die a little sooner. I will go with thee across the desert and over the mountains, unless perchance I fall to the ground on the way, my father."

He paused awhile, and then went on with one of those strange bursts of rhetorical eloquence that Zulus sometimes indulge in, which to my mind, full though they are of vain repetitions, show that the race is by no means devoid of poetic instinct and of intellectual power.

"What is life? Tell me, O white men, who are wise, who know the secrets of the world, and of the world of stars, and the world that lies above and around the stars; who flash your words from afar without a voice; tell me, white men, the secret of our life—whither it goes and whence it comes!

"You cannot answer me; you know not. Listen, I will answer. Out of the dark we came, into the dark we go. Like a storm-driven bird at night we fly out of the Nowhere; for a moment our wings are seen in the light of the fire, and, lo! we are gone again into the Nowhere. Life is nothing. Life is all. It is the Hand with which we hold off Death. It is the glow-worm that shines in the night-time and is black in the morning; it is the white breath of the oxen in winter; it is the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself at sunset."

"You are a strange man," said Sir Henry, when he had ceased.

Umbopa laughed. "It seems to me that we are much alike, Incubu. Perhaps *I* seek a brother over the mountains."

I looked at him suspiciously. "What dost thou mean?" I asked; "what dost thou know of those mountains?"

"A little; a very little. There is a strange land yonder, a land of witchcraft and beautiful things; a land of brave people, and of trees, and streams, and snowy peaks, and of a great white road. I have heard of it. But what is the good of talking? It grows dark. Those who live to see will see."

Again I looked at him doubtfully. The man knew too much.

"You need not fear me, Macumazahn," he said, interpreting my look. "I dig no holes for you to fall in. I make no plots. If ever we cross those mountains behind the sun I will tell what I know. But Death sits upon them. Be wise and turn back. Go and hunt elephants, my masters. I have spoken."

And without another word he lifted his spear in salutation, and returned towards the camp, where shortly afterwards we found him cleaning a gun like any other Kafir.

"That is an odd man," said Sir Henry.

"Yes," answered I, "too odd by half. I don't like his little ways. He knows something, and will not speak out. But I suppose it is no use quarrelling with him. We are in for a curious trip, and a mysterious Zulu won't make much difference one way or another."

Next day we made our arrangements for starting. Of course it was impossible to drag our heavy elephant rifles and other kit with us across the desert, so, dismissing our bearers, we made an arrangement with an old native who had a kraal close by to take care of them till we returned. It went to my heart to leave such things as those sweet tools to the tender mercies of an old thief of a savage whose greedy eyes I could see gloating over them. But I took some precautions.

First of all I loaded all the rifles, placing them at full cock, and informed him that if he touched them they would go off. He tried the experiment instantly with my eight-bore, and it did go off, and blew a hole right through one of his oxen, which were just then being driven up to the kraal, to say nothing of knocking him head over heels with the recoil. He got up considerably startled, and not at all pleased at the loss of the ox, which he had the impudence to ask me to pay for, and nothing would induce him to touch the guns again.

"Put the live devils out of the way up there in the thatch," he said, "or they will murder us all."

Then I told him that, when we came back, if one of those things was missing I would kill him and his people by witchcraft; and if we died and he

tried to steal the rifles I would come and haunt him and turn his cattle mad and his milk sour till life was a weariness, and would make the devils in the guns come out and talk to him in a way he did not like, and generally gave him a good idea of judgment to come. After that he promised to look after them as though they were his father's spirit. He was a very superstitious old Kafir and a great villain.

Having thus disposed of our superfluous gear we arranged the kit we five—Sir Henry, Good, myself, Umbopa, and the Hottentot Ventvögel—were to take with us on our journey. It was small enough, but do what we would we could not get its weight down under about forty pounds a man. This is what it consisted of:—

The three express rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition.

The two Winchester repeating rifles (for Umbopa and Ventvögel), with two hundred rounds of cartridge.

Five Cochrane's water-bottles, each holding four pints.

Five blankets.

Twenty-five pounds' weight of biltong—i.e. sun-dried game flesh.

Ten pounds' weight of best mixed beads for gifts.

A selection of medicine, including an ounce of quinine, and one or two small surgical instruments.

Our knives, a few sundries, such as a compass, matches, a pocket filter, tobacco, a trowel, a bottle of brandy, and the clothes we stood in.

This was our total equipment, a small one indeed for such a venture, but we dared not attempt to carry more. Indeed, that load was a heavy one per man with which to travel across the burning desert, for in such places every additional ounce tells. But we could not see our way to reducing the weight. There was nothing taken but what was absolutely necessary.

With great difficulty, and by the promise of a present of a good hunting-knife each, I succeeded in persuading three wretched natives from the village to come with us for the first stage, twenty miles, and to carry a large gourd holding a gallon of water apiece. My object was to enable us to refill our water-bottles after the first night's march, for we determined to start in the cool of the evening. I gave out to these natives that we were going to shoot ostriches, with which the desert abounded. They jabbered and shrugged their shoulders, saying that we were mad and should perish of thirst, which I must say seemed probable; but being desirous of obtaining the knives, which were almost unknown treasures up there, they consented to come, having probably reflected that, after all, our subsequent extinction would be no affair of theirs.

All next day we rested and slept, and at sunset ate a hearty meal of fresh beef washed down with tea, the last, as Good remarked sadly, we were likely to drink for many a long day. Then, having made our final preparations, we lay down and waited for the moon to rise. At last, about nine o'clock, up she came in all her glory, flooding the wild country with light, and throwing a silver sheen on the expanse of rolling desert before us, which looked as solemn and quiet and as alien to man as the star-studded firmament above. We rose up, and in a few minutes were ready, and yet we hesitated a little, as human nature is prone to hesitate on the threshold of an irrevocable step. We three white men stood by ourselves. Umbopa, assegai in hand and a rifle across his shoulders, looked out fixedly across the desert a few paces ahead of us; while the hired natives, with the gourds of water, and Ventvögel, were gathered in a little knot behind.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Henry presently, in his deep voice, "we are going on about as strange a journey as men can make in this world. It is very doubtful if we can succeed in it. But we are three men who will stand together for good or for evil to the last. Now before we start let us for a moment pray to the Power who shapes the destinies of men, and who ages since has marked out our paths, that it may please Him to direct our steps in accordance with His will."

Taking off his hat, for the space of a minute or so, he covered his face with his hands, and Good and I did likewise.

I do not say that I am a first-rate praying man, few hunters are, and as for Sir Henry, I never heard him speak like that before, and only once since, though deep down in his heart I believe that he is very religious. Good too is pious, though apt to swear. Anyhow I do not remember, excepting on one single occasion, ever putting up a better prayer in my life than I did during that minute, and somehow I felt the happier for it. Our future was so completely unknown, and I think that the unknown and the awful always bring a man nearer to his Maker.

"And now," said Sir Henry, "*trek!*"

So we started.

We had nothing to guide ourselves by except the distant mountains and old José da Silvestre's chart, which, considering that it was drawn by a dying and half-distraught man on a fragment of linen three centuries ago, was not a very satisfactory sort of thing to work with. Still, our sole hope of success depended upon it, such as it was. If we failed in finding that pool of bad water which the old Dom marked as being situated in the middle of the desert, about sixty miles from our starting-point, and as far from the mountains, in all probability we must perish miserably of thirst. But to my mind the chances of our finding it in that great sea of sand and karoo scrub seemed almost infinitesimal. Even supposing that da Silvestra had marked the pool correctly, what was there to prevent its having been dried up by the sun generations ago, or trampled in by game, or filled with the drifting sand?

On we tramped silently as shades through the night and in the heavy sand. The karoo bushes caught our feet and retarded us, and the sand worked into our veldtschoons and Good's shooting-boots, so that every few miles we had to stop and empty them; but still the night kept fairly cool, though the atmosphere was thick and heavy, giving a sort of creamy feel to the air, and we made fair progress. It was very silent and lonely there in the desert, oppressively so indeed. Good felt this, and once began to whistle "The Girl I left behind me," but the notes sounded lugubrious in that vast place, and he gave it up.

Shortly afterwards a little incident occurred which, though it startled us at the time, gave rise to a laugh. Good was leading, as the holder of the compass, which, being a sailor, of course he understood thoroughly, and we were toiling along in single file behind him, when suddenly we heard the sound of an exclamation, and he vanished. Next second there arose all around us a most extraordinary hubbub, snorts, groans, and wild sounds of rushing feet. In the faint light, too, we could descry dim galloping forms half hidden by wreaths of sand. The natives threw down their loads and prepared to bolt, but remembering that there was nowhere to run to, they cast themselves upon the ground and howled out that it was ghosts. As for Sir Henry and myself, we stood amazed; nor was our amazement lessened when we perceived the form of Good careering off in the direction of the mountains, apparently mounted on the back of a horse and halloaing wildly. In another second he threw up his arms, and we heard him come to the earth with a thud.

Then I saw what had happened; we had stumbled upon a herd of sleeping quagga, on to the back of one of which Good actually had fallen, and the brute naturally enough got up and made off with him. Calling out to the others that it was all right, I ran towards Good, much afraid lest he should be hurt, but to my great relief I found him sitting in the sand, his eye-glass still fixed firmly in his eye, rather shaken and very much frightened, but not in any way injured.

After this we travelled on without any further misadventure till about one o'clock, when we called a halt, and having drunk a little water, not much, for water was precious, and rested for half an hour, we started again.

On, on we went, till at last the east began to blush like the cheek of a girl. Then there came faint rays of primrose light, that changed presently to golden bars, through which the dawn glided out across the desert. The stars grew pale and paler still, till at last they vanished; the golden moon waxed wan, and her mountain ridges stood out against her sickly face like the bones on the cheek of a dying man. Then came spear upon spear of light flashing far away across the boundless wilderness, piercing and firing the veils of mist, till the desert was draped in a tremulous golden glow, and it was day.

Still we did not halt, though by this time we should have been glad enough to do so, for we knew that when once the sun was fully up it would be almost impossible for us to travel. At length, about an hour later, we spied a little pile of boulders rising out of the plain, and to this we dragged ourselves. As luck would have it, here we found an overhanging slab of rock carpeted beneath with smooth sand, which afforded a most grateful shelter from the heat. Underneath this we crept, and each of us having drunk some water and eaten a bit of biltong, we lay down and soon were sound asleep.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before we woke, to find our bearers preparing to return. They had seen enough of the desert already, and no number of knives would have tempted them to come a step farther. So we took a hearty drink, and having emptied our water-bottles, filled them up again from the gourds that they had brought with them, and then watched them depart on their twenty miles' tramp home.

At half-past four we also started. It was lonely and desolate work, for with the exception of a few ostriches there was not a single living creature to be seen on all the vast expanse of sandy plain. Evidently it was too dry for game, and with the exception of a deadly-looking cobra or two we saw no reptiles. One insect, however, we found abundant, and that was the common or house fly. There they came, "not as single spies, but in battalions," as I think the Old Testament^[1] says somewhere. He is an extraordinary insect is the house fly. Go where you will you find him, and so it must have been always. I have seen him enclosed in amber, which is, I was told, quite half a million years old, looking exactly like his descendant of to-day, and I have little doubt but that when the last man lies dying on the earth he will be buzzing round—if this event happens to occur in summer—watching for an opportunity to settle on his nose.

At sunset we halted, waiting for the moon to rise. At last she came up, beautiful and serene as ever, and, with one halt about two o'clock in the morning, we trudged on wearily through the night, till at last the welcome sun put a period to our labours. We drank a little and flung ourselves down on the sand, thoroughly tired out, and soon were all asleep. There was no need to set a watch, for we had nothing to fear from anybody or anything in

that vast untenanted plain. Our only enemies were heat, thirst, and flies, but far rather would I have faced any danger from man or beast than that awful trinity. This time we were not so lucky as to find a sheltering rock to guard us from the glare of the sun, with the result that about seven o'clock we woke up experiencing the exact sensations one would attribute to a beefsteak on a gridiron. We were literally being baked through and through. The burning sun seemed to be sucking our very blood out of us. We sat up and gasped.

"Phew," said I, grabbing at the halo of flies which buzzed cheerfully round my head. The heat did not affect *them*.

"My word!" said Sir Henry.

"It is hot!" echoed Good.

It was hot, indeed, and there was not a bit of shelter to be found. Look where we would there was no rock or tree, nothing but an unending glare, rendered dazzling by the heated air that danced over the surface of the desert as it dances over a red-hot stove.

"What is to be done?" asked Sir Henry; "we can't stand this for long."

We looked at each other blankly.

"I have it," said Good, "we must dig a hole, get in it, and cover ourselves with the karoo bushes."

It did not seem a very promising suggestion, but at least it was better than nothing, so we set to work, and, with the trowel we had brought with us and the help of our hands, in about an hour we succeeded in delving out a patch of ground some ten feet long by twelve wide to the depth of two feet. Then we cut a quantity of low scrub with our hunting-knives, and creeping into the hole, pulled it over us all, with the exception of Ventvögel, on whom, being a Hottentot, the heat had no particular effect. This gave us some slight shelter from the burning rays of the sun, but the atmosphere in that amateur grave can be better imagined than described. The Black Hole of Calcutta must have been a fool to it; indeed, to this moment I do not

know how we lived through the day. There we lay panting, and every now and again moistening our lips from our scanty supply of water. Had we followed our inclinations we should have finished all we possessed in the first two hours, but we were forced to exercise the most rigid care, for if our water failed us we knew that very soon we must perish miserably.

But everything has an end, if only you live long enough to see it, and somehow that miserable day wore on towards evening. About three o'clock in the afternoon we determined that we could bear it no longer. It would be better to die walking than to be killed slowly by heat and thirst in this dreadful hole. So taking each of us a little drink from our fast diminishing supply of water, now warmed to about the same temperature as a man's blood, we staggered forward.

We had then covered some fifty miles of wilderness. If the reader will refer to the rough copy and translation of old da Silvestra's map, he will see that the desert is marked as measuring forty leagues across, and the "pan bad water" is set down as being about in the middle of it. Now forty leagues is one hundred and twenty miles, consequently we ought at the most to be within twelve or fifteen miles of the water if any should really exist.

Through the afternoon we crept slowly and painfully along, scarcely doing more than a mile and a half in an hour. At sunset we rested again, waiting for the moon, and after drinking a little managed to get some sleep.

Before we lay down, Umbopa pointed out to us a slight and indistinct hillock on the flat surface of the plain about eight miles away. At the distance it looked like an ant-hill, and as I was dropping off to sleep I fell to wondering what it could be.

With the moon we marched again, feeling dreadfully exhausted, and suffering tortures from thirst and prickly heat. Nobody who has not felt it can know what we went through. We walked no longer, we staggered, now and again falling from exhaustion, and being obliged to call a halt every hour or so. We had scarcely energy left in us to speak. Up to this Good had chatted and joked, for he is a merry fellow; but now he had not a joke in him.

At last, about two o'clock, utterly worn out in body and mind, we came to the foot of the queer hill, or sand koppie, which at first sight resembled a gigantic ant-heap about a hundred feet high, and covering at the base nearly two acres of ground.

Here we halted, and driven to it by our desperate thirst, sucked down our last drops of water. We had but half a pint a head, and each of us could have drunk a gallon.

Then we lay down. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I heard Umbopa remark to himself in Zulu—

"If we cannot find water we shall all be dead before the moon rises to-morrow."

I shuddered, hot as it was. The near prospect of such an awful death is not pleasant, but even the thought of it could not keep me from sleeping.

[1] Readers must beware of accepting Mr. Quatermain's references as accurate, as, it has been found, some are prone to do. Although his reading evidently was limited, the impression produced by it upon his mind was mixed. Thus to him the Old Testament and Shakespeare were interchangeable authorities.—Editor.

CHAPTER VI

WATER! WATER!

Two hours later, that is, about four o'clock, I woke up, for so soon as the first heavy demand of bodily fatigue had been satisfied, the torturing thirst from which I was suffering asserted itself. I could sleep no more. I had been dreaming that I was bathing in a running stream, with green banks and trees upon them, and I awoke to find myself in this arid wilderness, and to remember, as Umbopa had said, that if we did not find water this day we

must perish miserably. No human creature could live long without water in that heat. I sat up and rubbed my grimy face with my dry and horny hands, as my lips and eyelids were stuck together, and it was only after some friction and with an effort that I was able to open them. It was not far from dawn, but there was none of the bright feel of dawn in the air, which was thick with a hot murkiness that I cannot describe. The others were still sleeping.

Presently it began to grow light enough to read, so I drew out a little pocket copy of the "Ingoldsby Legends" which I had brought with me, and read "The Jackdaw of Rheims." When I got to where

"A nice little boy held a golden ewer,
Embossed, and filled with water as pure
As any that flows between Rheims and Namur,"

literally I smacked my cracking lips, or rather tried to smack them. The mere thought of that pure water made me mad. If the Cardinal had been there with his bell, book, and candle, I would have whipped in and drunk his water up; yes, even if he had filled it already with the suds of soap "worthy of washing the hands of the Pope," and I knew that the whole consecrated curse of the Catholic Church should fall upon me for so doing. I almost think that I must have been a little light-headed with thirst, weariness and the want of food; for I fell to thinking how astonished the Cardinal and his nice little boy and the jackdaw would have looked to see a burnt up, brown-eyed, grizzly-haired little elephant hunter suddenly bound between them, put his dirty face into the basin, and swallow every drop of the precious water. The idea amused me so much that I laughed or rather cackled aloud, which woke the others, and they began to rub *their* dirty faces and drag *their* gummed-up lips and eyelids apart.

As soon as we were all well awake we began to discuss the situation, which was serious enough. Not a drop of water was left. We turned the bottles upside down, and licked their tops, but it was a failure; they were dry as a bone. Good, who had charge of the flask of brandy, got it out and looked at it longingly; but Sir Henry promptly took it away from him, for to drink raw spirit would only have been to precipitate the end.

"If we do not find water we shall die," he said.

"If we can trust to the old Dom's map there should be some about," I said; but nobody seemed to derive much satisfaction from this remark. It was so evident that no great faith could be put in the map. Now it was gradually growing light, and as we sat staring blankly at each other, I observed the Hottentot Ventvögel rise and begin to walk about with his eyes on the ground. Presently he stopped short, and uttering a guttural exclamation, pointed to the earth.

"What is it?" we exclaimed; and rising simultaneously we went to where he was standing staring at the sand.

"Well," I said, "it is fresh Springbok spoor; what of it?"

"Springbucks do not go far from water," he answered in Dutch.

"No," I answered, "I forgot; and thank God for it."

This little discovery put new life into us; for it is wonderful, when a man is in a desperate position, how he catches at the slightest hope, and feels almost happy. On a dark night a single star is better than nothing.

Meanwhile Ventvögel was lifting his snub nose, and sniffing the hot air for all the world like an old Impala ram who scents danger. Presently he spoke again.

"I *smell* water," he said.

Then we felt quite jubilant, for we knew what a wonderful instinct these wild-bred men possess.

Just at that moment the sun came up gloriously, and revealed so grand a sight to our astonished eyes that for a moment or two we even forgot our thirst.

There, not more than forty or fifty miles from us, glittering like silver in the early rays of the morning sun, soared Sheba's Breasts; and stretching away for hundreds of miles on either side of them ran the great Suliman Berg. Now that, sitting here, I attempt to describe the extraordinary

grandeur and beauty of that sight, language seems to fail me. I am impotent even before its memory. Straight before us, rose two enormous mountains, the like of which are not, I believe, to be seen in Africa, if indeed there are any other such in the world, measuring each of them at least fifteen thousand feet in height, standing not more than a dozen miles apart, linked together by a precipitous cliff of rock, and towering in awful white solemnity straight into the sky. These mountains placed thus, like the pillars of a gigantic gateway, are shaped after the fashion of a woman's breasts, and at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form of a recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep. Their bases swell gently from the plain, looking at that distance perfectly round and smooth; and upon the top of each is a vast hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast. The stretch of cliff that connects them appears to be some thousands of feet in height, and perfectly precipitous, and on each flank of them, so far as the eye can reach, extent similar lines of cliff, broken only here and there by flat table-topped mountains, something like the world-famed one at Cape Town; a formation, by the way, that is very common in Africa.

To describe the comprehensive grandeur of that view is beyond my powers. There was something so inexpressibly solemn and overpowering about those huge volcanoes—for doubtless they are extinct volcanoes—that it quite awed us. For a while the morning lights played upon the snow and the brown and swelling masses beneath, and then, as though to veil the majestic sight from our curious eyes, strange vapours and clouds gathered and increased around the mountains, till presently we could only trace their pure and gigantic outlines, showing ghostlike through the fleecy envelope. Indeed, as we afterwards discovered, usually they were wrapped in this gauze-like mist, which doubtless accounted for our not having seen them more clearly before.

Sheba's Breasts had scarcely vanished into cloud-clad privacy, before our thirst—literally a burning question—reasserted itself.

It was all very well for Ventvögel to say that he smelt water, but we could see no signs of it, look which way we would. So far as the eye might reach there was nothing but arid sweltering sand and karoo scrub. We

walked round the hillock and gazed about anxiously on the other side, but it was the same story, not a drop of water could be found; there was no indication of a pan, a pool, or a spring.

"You are a fool," I said angrily to Ventvögel; "there is no water."

But still he lifted his ugly snub nose and sniffed.

"I smell it, Baas," he answered; "it is somewhere in the air."

"Yes," I said, "no doubt it is in the clouds, and about two months hence it will fall and wash our bones."

Sir Henry stroked his yellow beard thoughtfully. "Perhaps it is on the top of the hill," he suggested.

"Rot," said Good; "whoever heard of water being found at the top of a hill!"

"Let us go and look," I put in, and hopelessly enough we scrambled up the sandy sides of the hillock, Umbopa leading. Presently he stopped as though he was petrified.

"*Nanzia manzie!*" that is, "Here is water!" he cried with a loud voice.

We rushed up to him, and there, sure enough, in a deep cut or indentation on the very top of the sand koppie, was an undoubted pool of water. How it came to be in such a strange place we did not stop to inquire, nor did we hesitate at its black and unpleasant appearance. It was water, or a good imitation of it, and that was enough for us. We gave a bound and a rush, and in another second we were all down on our stomachs sucking up the uninviting fluid as though it were nectar fit for the gods. Heavens, how we did drink! Then when we had done drinking we tore off our clothes and sat down in the pool, absorbing the moisture through our parched skins. You, Harry, my boy, who have only to turn on a couple of taps to summon "hot" and "cold" from an unseen, vasty cistern, can have little idea of the luxury of that muddy wallow in brackish tepid water.

After a while we rose from it, refreshed indeed, and fell to on our "biltong," of which we had scarcely been able to touch a mouthful for twenty-four hours, and ate our fill. Then we smoked a pipe, and lay down by the side of that blessed pool, under the overhanging shadow of its bank, and slept till noon.

All that day we rested there by the water, thanking our stars that we had been lucky enough to find it, bad as it was, and not forgetting to render a due share of gratitude to the shade of the long-departed da Silvestra, who had set its position down so accurately on the tail of his shirt. The wonderful thing to us was that the pan should have lasted so long, and the only way in which I can account for this is on the supposition that it is fed by some spring deep down in the sand.

Having filled both ourselves and our water-bottles as full as possible, in far better spirits we started off again with the moon. That night we covered nearly five-and-twenty miles; but, needless to say, found no more water, though we were lucky enough the following day to get a little shade behind some ant-heaps. When the sun rose, and, for awhile, cleared away the mysterious mists, Suliman's Berg with the two majestic Breasts, now only about twenty miles off, seemed to be towering right above us, and looked grander than ever. At the approach of evening we marched again, and, to cut a long story short, by daylight next morning found ourselves upon the lowest slopes of Sheba's left breast, for which we had been steadily steering. By this time our water was exhausted once more, and we were suffering severely from thirst, nor indeed could we see any chance of relieving it till we reached the snow line far, far above us. After resting an hour or two, driven to it by our torturing thirst, we went on, toiling painfully in the burning heat up the lava slopes, for we found that the huge base of the mountain was composed entirely of lava beds belched from the bowels of the earth in some far past age.

By eleven o'clock we were utterly exhausted, and, generally speaking, in a very bad state indeed. The lava clinker, over which we must drag ourselves, though smooth compared with some clinker I have heard of, such as that on the Island of Ascension, for instance, was yet rough enough to make our feet very sore, and this, together with our other miseries, had

pretty well finished us. A few hundred yards above us were some large lumps of lava, and towards these we steered with the intention of lying down beneath their shade. We reached them, and to our surprise, so far as we had a capacity for surprise left in us, on a little plateau or ridge close by we saw that the clinker was covered with a dense green growth. Evidently soil formed of decomposed lava had rested there, and in due course had become the receptacle of seeds deposited by birds. But we did not take much further interest in the green growth, for one cannot live on grass like Nebuchadnezzar. That requires a special dispensation of Providence and peculiar digestive organs.

So we sat down under the rocks and groaned, and for one I wished heartily that we had never started on this fool's errand. As we were sitting there I saw Umbopa get up and hobble towards the patch of green, and a few minutes afterwards, to my great astonishment, I perceived that usually very dignified individual dancing and shouting like a maniac, and waving something green. Off we all scrambled towards him as fast as our wearied limbs would carry us, hoping that he had found water.

"What is it, Umbopa, son of a fool?" I shouted in Zulu.

"It is food and water, Macumazahn," and again he waved the green thing.

Then I saw what he had found. It was a melon. We had hit upon a patch of wild melons, thousands of them, and dead ripe.

"Melons!" I yelled to Good, who was next me; and in another minute his false teeth were fixed in one of them.

I think we ate about six each before we had done, and poor fruit as they were, I doubt if I ever thought anything nicer.

But melons are not very nutritious, and when we had satisfied our thirst with their pulpy substance, and put a stock to cool by the simple process of cutting them in two and setting them end on in the hot sun to grow cold by evaporation, we began to feel exceedingly hungry. We had still some biltong left, but our stomachs turned from biltong, and besides, we were

obliged to be very sparing of it, for we could not say when we should find more food. Just at this moment a lucky thing chanced. Looking across the desert I saw a flock of about ten large birds flying straight towards us.

"*Skit, Baas, skit!*" "Shoot, master, shoot!" whispered the Hottentot, throwing himself on his face, an example which we all followed.

Then I saw that the birds were a flock of *pauw* or bustards, and that they would pass within fifty yards of my head. Taking one of the repeating Winchesters, I waited till they were nearly over us, and then jumped to my feet. On seeing me the *pauw* bunched up together, as I expected that they would, and I fired two shots straight into the thick of them, and, as luck would have it, brought one down, a fine fellow, that weighed about twenty pounds. In half an hour we had a fire made of dry melon stalks, and he was toasting over it, and we made such a feed as we had not tasted for a week. We ate that *pauw*; nothing was left of him but his leg-bones and his beak, and we felt not a little the better afterwards.

That night we went on again with the moon, carrying as many melons as we could with us. As we ascended we found the air grew cooler and cooler, which was a great relief to us, and at dawn, so far as we could judge, we were not more than about a dozen miles from the snow line. Here we discovered more melons, and so had no longer any anxiety about water, for we knew that we should soon get plenty of snow. But the ascent had now become very precipitous, and we made but slow progress, not more than a mile an hour. Also that night we ate our last morsel of biltong. As yet, with the exception of the *pauw*, we had seen no living thing on the mountain, nor had we come across a single spring or stream of water, which struck us as very odd, considering the expanse of snow above us, which must, we thought, melt sometimes. But as we afterwards discovered, owing to a cause which it is quite beyond my power to explain, all the streams flowed down upon the north side of the mountains.

Now we began to grow very anxious about food. We had escaped death by thirst, but it seemed probable that it was only to die of hunger. The events of the next three miserable days are best described by copying the entries made at the time in my note-book.

"21st May.—Started 11 a.m., finding the atmosphere quite cold enough to travel by day, and carrying some water-melons with us. Struggled on all day, but found no more melons, having evidently passed out of their district. Saw no game of any sort. Halted for the night at sundown, having had no food for many hours. Suffered much during the night from cold.

"22nd.—Started at sunrise again, feeling very faint and weak. Only made about five miles all day; found some patches of snow, of which we ate, but nothing else. Camped at night under the edge of a great plateau. Cold bitter. Drank a little brandy each, and huddled ourselves together, each wrapped up in his blanket, to keep ourselves alive. Are now suffering frightfully from starvation and weariness. Thought that Ventvögel would have died during the night.

"23rd.—Struggled forward once more as soon as the sun was well up, and had thawed our limbs a little. We are now in a dreadful plight, and I fear that unless we get food this will be our last day's journey. But little brandy left. Good, Sir Henry, and Umbopa bear up wonderfully, but Ventvögel is in a very bad way. Like most Hottentots, he cannot stand cold. Pangs of hunger not so bad, but have a sort of numb feeling about the stomach. Others say the same. We are now on a level with the precipitous chain, or wall of lava, linking the two Breasts, and the view is glorious. Behind us the glowing desert rolls away to the horizon, and before us lie mile upon mile of smooth hard snow almost level, but swelling gently upwards, out of the centre of which the nipple of the mountain, that appears to be some miles in circumference, rises about four thousand feet into the sky. Not a living thing is to be seen. God help us; I fear that our time has come."

And now I will drop the journal, partly because it is not very interesting reading; also what follows requires telling rather more fully.

All that day—the 23rd May—we struggled slowly up the incline of snow, lying down from time to time to rest. A strange gaunt crew we must have looked, while, laden as we were, we dragged our weary feet over the dazzling plain, glaring round us with hungry eyes. Not that there was much use in glaring, for we could see nothing to eat. We did not accomplish more than seven miles that day. Just before sunset we found ourselves exactly

under the nipple of Sheba's left Breast, which towered thousands of feet into the air, a vast smooth hillock of frozen snow. Weak as we were, we could not but appreciate the wonderful scene, made even more splendid by the flying rays of light from the setting sun, which here and there stained the snow blood-red, and crowned the great dome above us with a diadem of glory.

"I say," gasped Good, presently, "we ought to be somewhere near that cave the old gentleman wrote about."

"Yes," said I, "if there is a cave."

"Come, Quatermain," groaned Sir Henry, "don't talk like that; I have every faith in the Dom; remember the water! We shall find the place soon."

"If we don't find it before dark we are dead men, that is all about it," was my consolatory reply.

For the next ten minutes we trudged in silence, when suddenly Umbopa, who was marching along beside me, wrapped in his blanket, and with a leather belt strapped so tightly round his stomach, to "make his hunger small," as he said, that his waist looked like a girl's, caught me by the arm.

"Look!" he said, pointing towards the springing slope of the nipple.

I followed his glance, and some two hundred yards from us perceived what appeared to be a hole in the snow.

"It is the cave," said Umbopa.

We made the best of our way to the spot, and found sure enough that the hole was the mouth of a cavern, no doubt the same as that of which da Silvestra wrote. We were not too soon, for just as we reached shelter the sun went down with startling rapidity, leaving the world nearly dark, for in these latitudes there is but little twilight. So we crept into the cave, which did not appear to be very big, and huddling ourselves together for warmth, swallowed what remained of our brandy—barely a mouthful each—and tried to forget our miseries in sleep. But the cold was too intense to allow us

to do so, for I am convinced that at this great altitude the thermometer cannot have marked less than fourteen or fifteen degrees below freezing point. What such a temperature meant to us, enervated as we were by hardship, want of food, and the great heat of the desert, the reader may imagine better than I can describe. Suffice it to say that it was something as near death from exposure as I have ever felt. There we sat hour after hour through the still and bitter night, feeling the frost wander round and nip us now in the finger, now in the foot, now in the face. In vain did we huddle up closer and closer; there was no warmth in our miserable starved carcasses. Sometimes one of us would drop into an uneasy slumber for a few minutes, but we could not sleep much, and perhaps this was fortunate, for if we had I doubt if we should have ever woke again. Indeed, I believe that it was only by force of will that we kept ourselves alive at all.

Not very long before dawn I heard the Hottentot Ventvögel, whose teeth had been chattering all night like castanets, give a deep sigh. Then his teeth stopped chattering. I did not think anything of it at the time, concluding that he had gone to sleep. His back was resting against mine, and it seemed to grow colder and colder, till at last it felt like ice.

At length the air began to grow grey with light, then golden arrows sped across the snow, and at last the glorious sun peeped above the lava wall and looked in upon our half-frozen forms. Also it looked upon Ventvögel, sitting there amongst us, *stone dead*. No wonder his back felt cold, poor fellow. He had died when I heard him sigh, and was now frozen almost stiff. Shocked beyond measure, we dragged ourselves from the corpse—how strange is that horror we mortals have of the companionship of a dead body—and left it sitting there, its arms clasped about its knees.

By this time the sunlight was pouring its cold rays, for here they were cold, straight into the mouth of the cave. Suddenly I heard an exclamation of fear from someone, and turned my head.

And this is what I saw: Sitting at the end of the cavern—it was not more than twenty feet long—was another form, of which the head rested on its chest and the long arms hung down. I stared at it, and saw that this too was a *dead man*, and, what was more, a white man.

The others saw also, and the sight proved too much for our shattered nerves. One and all we scrambled out of the cave as fast as our half-frozen limbs would carry us.

CHAPTER VII

SOLOMON'S ROAD

Outside the cavern we halted, feeling rather foolish.

"I am going back," said Sir Henry.

"Why?" asked Good.

"Because it has struck me that—what we saw—may be my brother."

This was a new idea, and we re-entered the place to put it to the proof. After the bright light outside, our eyes, weak as they were with staring at the snow, could not pierce the gloom of the cave for a while. Presently, however, they grew accustomed to the semi-darkness, and we advanced towards the dead man.

Sir Henry knelt down and peered into his face.

"Thank God," he said, with a sigh of relief, "it is *not* my brother."

Then I drew near and looked. The body was that of a tall man in middle life with aquiline features, grizzled hair, and a long black moustache. The skin was perfectly yellow, and stretched tightly over the bones. Its clothing, with the exception of what seemed to be the remains of a woollen pair of hose, had been removed, leaving the skeleton-like frame naked. Round the neck of the corpse, which was frozen perfectly stiff, hung a yellow ivory crucifix.

"Who on earth can it be?" said I.

"Can't you guess?" asked Good.

I shook my head.

"Why, the old Dom, José da Silvestra, of course—who else?"

"Impossible," I gasped; "he died three hundred years ago."

"And what is there to prevent him from lasting for three thousand years in this atmosphere, I should like to know?" asked Good. "If only the temperature is sufficiently low, flesh and blood will keep fresh as New Zealand mutton for ever, and Heaven knows it is cold enough here. The sun never gets in here; no animal comes here to tear or destroy. No doubt his slave, of whom he speaks on the writing, took off his clothes and left him. He could not have buried him alone. Look!" he went on, stooping down to pick up a queerly-shaped bone scraped at the end into a sharp point, "here is the 'cleft bone' that Silvestra used to draw the map with."

We gazed for a moment astonished, forgetting our own miseries in this extraordinary and, as it seemed to us, semi-miraculous sight.

"Ay," said Sir Henry, "and this is where he got his ink from," and he pointed to a small wound on the Dom's left arm. "Did ever man see such a thing before?"

There was no longer any doubt about the matter, which for my own part I confess perfectly appalled me. There he sat, the dead man, whose directions, written some ten generations ago, had led us to this spot. Here in my own hand was the rude pen with which he had written them, and about his neck hung the crucifix that his dying lips had kissed. Gazing at him, my imagination could reconstruct the last scene of the drama, the traveller dying of cold and starvation, yet striving to convey to the world the great secret which he had discovered:—the awful loneliness of his death, of which the evidence sat before us. It even seemed to me that I could trace in his strongly-marked features a likeness to those of my poor friend Silvestre his descendant, who had died twenty years before in my arms, but perhaps that was fancy. At any rate, there he sat, a sad memento of the fate that so often overtakes those who would penetrate into the unknown; and there doubtless he will still sit, crowned with the dread majesty of death, for centuries yet unborn, to startle the eyes of wanderers like ourselves, if ever any such should come again to invade his loneliness. The thing overpowered us, already almost perished as we were with cold and hunger.

"Let us go," said Sir Henry in a low voice; "stay, we will give him a companion," and lifting up the dead body of the Hottentot Ventvögel, he placed it near to that of the old Dom. Then he stooped, and with a jerk broke the rotten string of the crucifix which hung round da Silvestra's neck, for his fingers were too cold to attempt to unfasten it. I believe that he has it still. I took the bone pen, and it is before me as I write—sometimes I use it to sign my name.

Then leaving these two, the proud white man of a past age, and the poor Hottentot, to keep their eternal vigil in the midst of the eternal snows, we crept out of the cave into the welcome sunshine and resumed our path, wondering in our hearts how many hours it would be before we were even as they are.

When we had walked about half a mile we came to the edge of the plateau, for the nipple of the mountain does not rise out of its exact centre, though from the desert side it had seemed to do so. What lay below us we could not see, for the landscape was wreathed in billows of morning fog. Presently, however, the higher layers of mist cleared a little, and revealed, at the end of a long slope of snow, a patch of green grass, some five hundred yards beneath us, through which a stream was running. Nor was this all. By the stream, basking in the bright sun, stood and lay a group of from ten to fifteen *large antelopes*—at that distance we could not see of what species.

The sight filled us with an unreasoning joy. If only we could get it, there was food in plenty. But the question was how to do so. The beasts were fully six hundred yards off, a very long shot, and one not to be depended on when our lives hung on the results.

Rapidly we discussed the advisability of trying to stalk the game, but in the end dismissed it reluctantly. To begin with, the wind was not favourable, and further, we must certainly be perceived, however careful we were, against the blinding background of snow, which we should be obliged to traverse.

"Well, we must have a try from where we are," said Sir Henry. "Which shall it be, Quatermain, the repeating rifles or the expresses?"

Here again was a question. The Winchester repeaters—of which we had two, Umbopa carrying poor Ventvögel's as well as his own—were sighted up to a thousand yards, whereas the expresses were only sighted to three hundred and fifty, beyond which distance shooting with them was more or less guess-work. On the other hand, if they did hit, the express bullets, being "expanding," were much more likely to bring the game down. It was a knotty point, but I made up my mind that we must risk it and use the expresses.

"Let each of us take the buck opposite to him. Aim well at the point of the shoulder and high up," said I; "and Umbopa, do you give the word, so that we may all fire together."

Then came a pause, each of us aiming his level best, as indeed a man is likely to do when he knows that life itself depends upon the shot.

"Fire," said Umbopa in Zulu, and at almost the same instant the three rifles rang out loudly; three clouds of smoke hung for a moment before us, and a hundred echoes went flying over the silent snow. Presently the smoke cleared, and revealed—oh, joy!—a great buck lying on its back and kicking furiously in its death agony. We gave a yell of triumph—we were saved—we should not starve. Weak as we were, we rushed down the intervening slope of snow, and in ten minutes from the time of shooting, that animal's heart and liver were lying before us. But now a new difficulty arose, we had no fuel, and therefore could make no fire to cook them. We gazed at each other in dismay.

"Starving men should not be fanciful," said Good; "we must eat raw meat."

There was no other way out of the dilemma, and our gnawing hunger made the proposition less distasteful than it would otherwise have been. So we took the heart and liver and buried them for a few minutes in a patch of snow to cool them. Then we washed them in the ice-cold water of the stream, and lastly ate them greedily. It sounds horrible enough, but honestly, I never tasted anything so good as that raw meat. In a quarter of an hour we were changed men. Our life and vigour came back to us, our feeble pulses grew strong again, and the blood went coursing through our veins. But

mindful of the results of over-feeding on starved stomachs, we were careful not to eat too much, stopping whilst we were still hungry.

"Thank Heaven!" said Sir Henry; "that brute has saved our lives. What is it, Quatermain?"

I rose and went to look at the antelope, for I was not certain. It was about the size of a donkey, with large curved horns. I had never seen one like it before; the species was new to me. It was brown in colour, with faint red stripes, and grew a thick coat. I afterwards discovered that the natives of that wonderful country call these bucks "*inco*." They are very rare, and only found at a great altitude where no other game will live. This animal was fairly hit high up in the shoulder, though whose bullet brought it down we could not, of course, discover. I believe that Good, mindful of his marvellous shot at the giraffe, secretly set it down to his own prowess, and we did not contradict him.

We had been so busy satisfying our hunger that hitherto we had not found time to look about us. But now, having set Umbopa to cut off as much of the best meat as we were likely to be able to carry, we began to inspect our surroundings. The mist had cleared away, for it was eight o'clock, and the sun had sucked it up, so we were able to take in all the country before us at a glance. I know not how to describe the glorious panorama which unfolded itself to our gaze. I have never seen anything like it before, nor shall, I suppose, again.

Behind and over us towered Sheba's snowy Breasts, and below, some five thousand feet beneath where we stood, lay league on league of the most lovely champaign country. Here were dense patches of lofty forest, there a great river wound its silvery way. To the left stretched a vast expanse of rich, undulating veld or grass land, whereon we could just make out countless herds of game or cattle, at that distance we could not tell which. This expanse appeared to be ringed in by a wall of distant mountains. To the right the country was more or less mountainous; that is, solitary hills stood up from its level, with stretches of cultivated land between, amongst which we could see groups of dome-shaped huts. The landscape lay before us as a map, wherein rivers flashed like silver snakes, and Alp-like peaks crowned

with wildly twisted snow wreaths rose in grandeur, whilst over all was the glad sunlight and the breath of Nature's happy life.

Two curious things struck us as we gazed. First, that the country before us must lie at least three thousand feet higher than the desert we had crossed, and secondly, that all the rivers flowed from south to north. As we had painful reason to know, there was no water upon the southern side of the vast range on which we stood, but on the northern face were many streams, most of which appeared to unite with the great river we could see winding away farther than our eyes could follow.

We sat down for a while and gazed in silence at this wonderful view. Presently Sir Henry spoke.

"Isn't there something on the map about Solomon's Great Road?" he said.

I nodded, for I was still gazing out over the far country.

"Well, look; there it is!" and he pointed a little to our right.

Good and I looked accordingly, and there, winding away towards the plain, was what appeared to be a wide turnpike road. We had not seen it at first because, on reaching the plain, it turned behind some broken country. We did not say anything, at least, not much; we were beginning to lose the sense of wonder. Somehow it did not seem particularly unnatural that we should find a sort of Roman road in this strange land. We accepted the fact, that was all.

"Well," said Good, "it must be quite near us if we cut off to the right. Hadn't we better be making a start?"

This was sound advice, and so soon as we had washed our faces and hands in the stream we acted on it. For a mile or more we made our way over boulders and across patches of snow, till suddenly, on reaching the top of the little rise, we found the road at our feet. It was a splendid road cut out of the solid rock, at least fifty feet wide, and apparently well kept; though the odd thing was that it seemed to begin there. We walked down and stood

on it, but one single hundred paces behind us, in the direction of Sheba's Breasts, it vanished, the entire surface of the mountain being strewn with boulders interspersed with patches of snow.

"What do you make of this, Quatermain?" asked Sir Henry.

I shook my head, I could make nothing of the thing.

"I have it!" said Good; "the road no doubt ran right over the range and across the desert on the other side, but the sand there has covered it up, and above us it has been obliterated by some volcanic eruption of molten lava."

This seemed a good suggestion; at any rate, we accepted it, and proceeded down the mountain. It proved a very different business travelling along down hill on that magnificent pathway with full stomachs from what it was travelling uphill over the snow quite starved and almost frozen. Indeed, had it not been for melancholy recollections of poor Ventvögel's sad fate, and of that grim cave where he kept company with the old Dom, we should have felt positively cheerful, notwithstanding the sense of unknown dangers before us. Every mile we walked the atmosphere grew softer and balmier, and the country before us shone with a yet more luminous beauty. As for the road itself, I never saw such an engineering work, though Sir Henry said that the great road over the St. Gothard in Switzerland is very similar. No difficulty had been too great for the Old World engineer who laid it out. At one place we came to a ravine three hundred feet broad and at least a hundred feet deep. This vast gulf was actually filled in with huge blocks of dressed stone, having arches pierced through them at the bottom for a waterway, over which the road went on sublimely. At another place it was cut in zigzags out of the side of a precipice five hundred feet deep, and in a third it tunnelled through the base of an intervening ridge, a space of thirty yards or more.

Here we noticed that the sides of the tunnel were covered with quaint sculptures, mostly of mailed figures driving in chariots. One, which was exceedingly beautiful, represented a whole battle scene with a convoy of captives being marched off in the distance.

"Well," said Sir Henry, after inspecting this ancient work of art, "it is very well to call this Solomon's Road, but my humble opinion is that the Egyptians had been here before Solomon's people ever set a foot on it. If this isn't Egyptian or Phoenician handiwork, I must say that it is very like it."

By midday we had advanced sufficiently down the mountain to search the region where wood was to be met with. First we came to scattered bushes which grew more and more frequent, till at last we found the road winding through a vast grove of silver trees similar to those which are to be seen on the slopes of Table Mountain at Cape Town. I had never before met with them in all my wanderings, except at the Cape, and their appearance here astonished me greatly.

"Ah!" said Good, surveying these shining-leaved trees with evident enthusiasm, "here is lots of wood, let us stop and cook some dinner; I have about digested that raw heart."

Nobody objected to this, so leaving the road we made our way to a stream which was babbling away not far off, and soon had a goodly fire of dry boughs blazing. Cutting off some substantial hunks from the flesh of the *inco* which we had brought with us, we proceeded to toast them on the end of sharp sticks, as one sees the Kafirs do, and ate them with relish. After filling ourselves, we lit our pipes and gave ourselves up to enjoyment that, compared with the hardships we had recently undergone, seemed almost heavenly.

The brook, of which the banks were clothed with dense masses of a gigantic species of maidenhair fern interspersed with feathery tufts of wild asparagus, sung merrily at our side, the soft air murmured through the leaves of the silver trees, doves cooed around, and bright-winged birds flashed like living gems from bough to bough. It was a Paradise.

The magic of the place combined with an overwhelming sense of dangers left behind, and of the promised land reached at last, seemed to charm us into silence. Sir Henry and Umbopa sat conversing in a mixture of broken English and Kitchen Zulu in a low voice, but earnestly enough, and

I lay, with my eyes half shut, upon that fragrant bed of fern and watched them.

Presently I missed Good, and I looked to see what had become of him. Soon I observed him sitting by the bank of the stream, in which he had been bathing. He had nothing on but his flannel shirt, and his natural habits of extreme neatness having reasserted themselves, he was actively employed in making a most elaborate toilet. He had washed his gutta-percha collar, had thoroughly shaken out his trousers, coat and waistcoat, and was now folding them up neatly till he was ready to put them on, shaking his head sadly as he scanned the numerous rents and tears in them, which naturally had resulted from our frightful journey. Then he took his boots, scrubbed them with a handful of fern, and finally rubbed them over with a piece of fat, which he had carefully saved from the *inco* meat, till they looked, comparatively speaking, respectable. Having inspected them judiciously through his eye-glass, he put the boots on and began a fresh operation. From a little bag that he carried he produced a pocket-comb in which was fixed a tiny looking-glass, and in this he surveyed himself. Apparently he was not satisfied, for he proceeded to do his hair with great care. Then came a pause whilst he again contemplated the effect; still it was not satisfactory. He felt his chin, on which the accumulated scrub of a ten days' beard was flourishing.

"Surely," thought I, "he is not going to try to shave." But so it was. Taking the piece of fat with which he had greased his boots, Good washed it thoroughly in the stream. Then diving again into the bag he brought out a little pocket razor with a guard to it, such as are bought by people who are afraid of cutting themselves, or by those about to undertake a sea voyage. Then he rubbed his face and chin vigorously with the fat and began. Evidently it proved a painful process, for he groaned very much over it, and I was convulsed with inward laughter as I watched him struggling with that stubbly beard. It seemed so very odd that a man should take the trouble to shave himself with a piece of fat in such a place and in our circumstances. At last he succeeded in getting the hair off the right side of his face and chin, when suddenly I, who was watching, became conscious of a flash of light that passed just by his head.

Good sprang up with a profane exclamation (if it had not been a safety razor he would certainly have cut his throat), and so did I, without the exclamation, and this was what I saw. Standing not more than twenty paces from where I was, and ten from Good, were a group of men. They were very tall and copper-coloured, and some of them wore great plumes of black feathers and short cloaks of leopard skins; this was all I noticed at the moment. In front of them stood a youth of about seventeen, his hand still raised and his body bent forward in the attitude of a Grecian statue of a spear-thrower. Evidently the flash of light had been caused by a weapon which he had hurled.

As I looked an old soldier-like man stepped forward out of the group, and catching the youth by the arm said something to him. Then they advanced upon us.

Sir Henry, Good, and Umbopa by this time had seized their rifles and lifted them threateningly. The party of natives still came on. It struck me that they could not know what rifles were, or they would not have treated them with such contempt.

"Put down your guns!" I halloed to the others, seeing that our only chance of safety lay in conciliation. They obeyed, and walking to the front I addressed the elderly man who had checked the youth.

"Greeting," I said in Zulu, not knowing what language to use. To my surprise I was understood.

"Greeting," answered the old man, not, indeed, in the same tongue, but in a dialect so closely allied to it that neither Umbopa nor myself had any difficulty in understanding him. Indeed, as we afterwards found out, the language spoken by this people is an old-fashioned form of the Zulu tongue, bearing about the same relationship to it that the English of Chaucer does to the English of the nineteenth century.

"Whence come you?" he went on, "who are you? and why are the faces of three of you white, and the face of the fourth as the face of our mother's sons?" and he pointed to Umbopa. I looked at Umbopa as he said it, and it flashed across me that he was right. The face of Umbopa was like the faces

of the men before me, and so was his great form like their forms. But I had not time to reflect on this coincidence.

"We are strangers, and come in peace," I answered, speaking very slowly, so that he might understand me, "and this man is our servant."

"You lie," he answered; "no strangers can cross the mountains where all things perish. But what do your lies matter?—if ye are strangers then ye must die, for no strangers may live in the land of the Kukuanas. It is the king's law. Prepare then to die, O strangers!"

I was slightly staggered at this, more especially as I saw the hands of some of the men steal down to their sides, where hung on each what looked to me like a large and heavy knife.

"What does that beggar say?" asked Good.

"He says we are going to be killed," I answered grimly.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Good; and, as was his way when perplexed, he put his hand to his false teeth, dragging the top set down and allowing them to fly back to his jaw with a snap. It was a most fortunate move, for next second the dignified crowd of Kukuanas uttered a simultaneous yell of horror, and bolted back some yards.

"What's up?" said I.

"It's his teeth," whispered Sir Henry excitedly. "He moved them. Take them out, Good, take them out!"

He obeyed, slipping the set into the sleeve of his flannel shirt.

In another second curiosity had overcome fear, and the men advanced slowly. Apparently they had now forgotten their amiable intention of killing us.

"How is it, O strangers," asked the old man solemnly, "that this fat man (pointing to Good, who was clad in nothing but boots and a flannel shirt, and had only half finished his shaving), whose body is clothed, and whose

legs are bare, who grows hair on one side of his sickly face and not on the other, and who wears one shining and transparent eye—how is it, I ask, that he has teeth which move of themselves, coming away from the jaws and returning of their own will?"

"Open your mouth," I said to Good, who promptly curled up his lips and grinned at the old gentleman like an angry dog, revealing to his astonished gaze two thin red lines of gum as utterly innocent of ivories as a new-born elephant. The audience gasped.

"Where are his teeth?" they shouted; "with our eyes we saw them."

Turning his head slowly and with a gesture of ineffable contempt, Good swept his hand across his mouth. Then he grinned again, and lo, there were two rows of lovely teeth.

Now the young man who had flung the knife threw himself down on the grass and gave vent to a prolonged howl of terror; and as for the old gentleman, his knees knocked together with fear.

"I see that ye are spirits," he said falteringly; "did ever man born of woman have hair on one side of his face and not on the other, or a round and transparent eye, or teeth which moved and melted away and grew again? Pardon us, O my lords."

Here was luck indeed, and, needless to say, I jumped at the chance.

"It is granted," I said with an imperial smile. "Nay, ye shall know the truth. We come from another world, though we are men such as ye; we come," I went on, "from the biggest star that shines at night."

"Oh! oh!" groaned the chorus of astonished aborigines.

"Yes," I went on, "we do, indeed"; and again I smiled benignly, as I uttered that amazing lie. "We come to stay with you a little while, and to bless you by our sojourn. Ye will see, O friends, that I have prepared myself for this visit by the learning of your language."

"It is so, it is so," said the chorus.

"Only, my lord," put in the old gentleman, "thou hast learnt it very badly."

I cast an indignant glance at him, and he quailed.

"Now friends," I continued, "ye might think that after so long a journey we should find it in our hearts to avenge such a reception, mayhap to strike cold in death the imperious hand that—that, in short—threw a knife at the head of him whose teeth come and go."

"Spare him, my lords," said the old man in supplication; "he is the king's son, and I am his uncle. If anything befalls him his blood will be required at my hands."

"Yes, that is certainly so," put in the young man with great emphasis.

"Ye may perhaps doubt our power to avenge," I went on, heedless of this by-play. "Stay, I will show you. Here, thou dog and slave (addressing Umbopa in a savage tone), give me the magic tube that speaks"; and I tipped a wink towards my express rifle.

Umbopa rose to the occasion, and with something as nearly resembling a grin as I have ever seen on his dignified face he handed me the gun.

"It is here, O Lord of Lords," he said with a deep obeisance.

Now just before I had asked for the rifle I had perceived a little *klipspringer* antelope standing on a mass of rock about seventy yards away, and determined to risk the shot.

"Ye see that buck," I said, pointing the animal out to the party before me. "Tell me, is it possible for man born of woman to kill it from here with a noise?"

"It is not possible, my lord," answered the old man.

"Yet shall I kill it," I said quietly.

The old man smiled. "That my lord cannot do," he answered.

I raised the rifle and covered the buck. It was a small animal, and one which a man might well be excused for missing, but I knew that it would not do to miss.

I drew a deep breath, and slowly pressed on the trigger. The buck stood still as a stone.

"Bang! thud!" The antelope sprang into the air and fell on the rock dead as a door nail.

A groan of simultaneous terror burst from the group before us.

"If you want meat," I remarked coolly, "go fetch that buck."

The old man made a sign, and one of his followers departed, and presently returned bearing the *klipspringer*. I noticed with satisfaction that I had hit it fairly behind the shoulder. They gathered round the poor creature's body, gazing at the bullet-hole in consternation.

"Ye see," I said, "I do not speak empty words."

There was no answer.

"If ye yet doubt our power," I went on, "let one of you go stand upon that rock that I may make him as this buck."

None of them seemed at all inclined to take the hint, till at last the king's son spoke.

"It is well said. Do thou, my uncle, go stand upon the rock. It is but a buck that the magic has killed. Surely it cannot kill a man."

The old gentleman did not take the suggestion in good part. Indeed, he seemed hurt.

"No! no!" he ejaculated hastily, "my old eyes have seen enough. These are wizards, indeed. Let us bring them to the king. Yet if any should wish a

further proof, let *him* stand upon the rock, that the magic tube may speak with him."

There was a most general and hasty expression of dissent.

"Let not good magic be wasted on our poor bodies," said one; "we are satisfied. All the witchcraft of our people cannot show the like of this."

"It is so," remarked the old gentleman, in a tone of intense relief; "without any doubt it is so. Listen, children of the Stars, children of the shining Eye and the movable Teeth, who roar out in thunder, and slay from afar. I am Infadoos, son of Kafa, once king of the Kukuana people. This youth is Scragga."

"He nearly scragged me," murmured Good.

"Scragga, son of Twala, the great king—Twala, husband of a thousand wives, chief and lord paramount of the Kukuanas, keeper of the great Road, terror of his enemies, student of the Black Arts, leader of a hundred thousand warriors, Twala the One-eyed, the Black, the Terrible."

"So," said I superciliously, "lead us then to Twala. We do not talk with low people and underlings."

"It is well, my lords, we will lead you; but the way is long. We are hunting three days' journey from the place of the king. But let my lords have patience, and we will lead them."

"So be it," I said carelessly; "all time is before us, for we do not die. We are ready, lead on. But Infadoos, and thou Scragga, beware! Play us no monkey tricks, set for us no foxes' snares, for before your brains of mud have thought of them we shall know and avenge. The light of the transparent eye of him with the bare legs and the half-haired face shall destroy you, and go through your land; his vanishing teeth shall affix themselves fast in you and eat you up, you and your wives and children; the magic tubes shall argue with you loudly, and make you as sieves. Beware!"

This magnificent address did not fail of its effect; indeed, it might almost have been spared, so deeply were our friends already impressed with our powers.

The old man made a deep obeisance, and murmured the words, "*Koom Koom*," which I afterwards discovered was their royal salute, corresponding to the *Bayéte* of the Zulus, and turning, addressed his followers. These at once proceeded to lay hold of all our goods and chattels, in order to bear them for us, excepting only the guns, which they would on no account touch. They even seized Good's clothes, that, as the reader may remember, were neatly folded up beside him.

He saw and made a dive for them, and a loud altercation ensued.

"Let not my lord of the transparent Eye and the melting Teeth touch them," said the old man. "Surely his slave shall carry the things."

"But I want to put 'em on!" roared Good, in nervous English.

Umbopa translated.

"Nay, my lord," answered Infadoos, "would my lord cover up his beautiful white legs (although he is so dark Good has a singularly white skin) from the eyes of his servants? Have we offended my lord that he should do such a thing?"

Here I nearly exploded with laughing; and meanwhile one of the men started on with the garments.

"Damn it!" roared Good, "that black villain has got my trousers."

"Look here, Good," said Sir Henry; "you have appeared in this country in a certain character, and you must live up to it. It will never do for you to put on trousers again. Henceforth you must exist in a flannel shirt, a pair of boots, and an eye-glass."

"Yes," I said, "and with whiskers on one side of your face and not on the other. If you change any of these things the people will think that we are

impostors. I am very sorry for you, but, seriously, you must. If once they begin to suspect us our lives will not be worth a brass farthing."

"Do you really think so?" said Good gloomily.

"I do, indeed. Your 'beautiful white legs' and your eye-glass are now *the* features of our party, and as Sir Henry says, you must live up to them. Be thankful that you have got your boots on, and that the air is warm."

Good sighed, and said no more, but it took him a fortnight to become accustomed to his new and scant attire.

CHAPTER VIII

WE ENTER KUKUANALAND

All that afternoon we travelled along the magnificent roadway, which trended steadily in a north-westerly direction. Infadoos and Scragga walked with us, but their followers marched about one hundred paces ahead.

"Infadoos," I said at length, "who made this road?"

"It was made, my lord, of old time, none know how or when, not even the wise woman Gagool, who has lived for generations. We are not old enough to remember its making. None can fashion such roads now, but the king suffers no grass to grow upon it."

"And whose are the writings on the wall of the caves through which we have passed on the road?" I asked, referring to the Egyptian-like sculptures that we had seen.

"My lord, the hands that made the road wrote the wonderful writings. We know not who wrote them."

"When did the Kukuana people come into this country?"

"My lord, the race came down here like the breath of a storm ten thousand thousand moons ago, from the great lands which lie there beyond," and he pointed to the north. "They could travel no further because of the high mountains which ring in the land, so say the old voices of our fathers that have descended to us the children, and so says Gagool, the wise woman, the smeller out of witches," and again he pointed to the snow-clad peaks. "The country, too, was good, so they settled here and grew strong and powerful, and now our numbers are like the sea sand, and when Twala the king calls up his regiments their plumes cover the plain so far as the eye of man can reach."

"And if the land is walled in with mountains, who is there for the regiments to fight with?"

"Nay, my lord, the country is open there towards the north, and now and again warriors sweep down upon us in clouds from a land we know not, and we slay them. It is the third part of the life of a man since there was a war. Many thousands died in it, but we destroyed those who came to eat us up. So since then there has been no war."

"Your warriors must grow weary of resting on their spears, Infadoos."

"My lord, there was one war, just after we destroyed the people that came down upon us, but it was a civil war; dog ate dog."

"How was that?"

"My lord the king, my half-brother, had a brother born at the same birth, and of the same woman. It is not our custom, my lord, to suffer twins to live; the weaker must always die. But the mother of the king hid away the feebler child, which was born the last, for her heart yearned over it, and that child is Twala the king. I am his younger brother, born of another wife."

"Well?"

"My lord, Kafa, our father, died when we came to manhood, and my brother Imotu was made king in his place, and for a space reigned and had a son by his favourite wife. When the babe was three years old, just after the great war, during which no man could sow or reap, a famine came upon the land, and the people murmured because of the famine, and looked round like a starved lion for something to rend. Then it was that Gagool, the wise and terrible woman, who does not die, made a proclamation to the people, saying, 'The king Imotu is no king.' And at the time Imotu was sick with a wound, and lay in his kraal not able to move.

"Then Gagool went into a hut and led out Twala, my half-brother, and twin brother to the king, whom she had hidden among the caves and rocks since he was born, and stripping the '*moocha*' (waist-cloth) off his loins, showed the people of the Kukuanas the mark of the sacred snake coiled round his middle, wherewith the eldest son of the king is marked at birth, and cried out loud, 'Behold your king whom I have saved for you even to this day!'

"Now the people being mad with hunger, and altogether bereft of reason and the knowledge of truth, cried out—'*The king! The king!*' but I knew that it was not so, for Imotu my brother was the elder of the twins, and our lawful king. Then just as the tumult was at its height Imotu the king, though he was very sick, crawled from his hut holding his wife by the hand, and followed by his little son Ignosi—that is, by interpretation, the Lightning.

"'What is this noise?' he asked. 'Why cry ye *The king! The king!*'"

"Then Twala, his twin brother, born of the same woman, and in the same hour, ran to him, and taking him by the hair, stabbed him through the heart with his knife. And the people being fickle, and ever ready to worship the rising sun, clapped their hands and cried, '*Twala is king!* Now we know that Twala is king!'"

"And what became of Imotu's wife and her son Ignosi? Did Twala kill them too?"

"Nay, my lord. When she saw that her lord was dead the queen seized the child with a cry and ran away. Two days afterward she came to a kraal

very hungry, and none would give her milk or food, now that her lord the king was dead, for all men hate the unfortunate. But at nightfall a little child, a girl, crept out and brought her corn to eat, and she blessed the child, and went on towards the mountains with her boy before the sun rose again, and there she must have perished, for none have seen her since, nor the child Ignosi."

"Then if this child Ignosi had lived he would be the true king of the Kukuana people?"

"That is so, my lord; the sacred snake is round his middle. If he lives he is king; but, alas! he is long dead."

"See, my lord," and Infadoos pointed to a vast collection of huts surrounded by a fence, which was in its turn encircled by a great ditch, that lay on the plain beneath us. "That is the kraal where the wife of Imotu was last seen with the child Ignosi. It is there that we shall sleep to-night, if, indeed," he added doubtfully, "my lords sleep at all upon this earth."

"When we are among the Kukuanas, my good friend Infadoos, we do as the Kukuanas do," I said majestically, and turned round quickly to address Good, who was tramping along sullenly behind, his mind fully occupied with unsatisfactory attempts to prevent his flannel shirt from flapping in the evening breeze. To my astonishment I butted into Umbopa, who was walking along immediately behind me, and very evidently had been listening with the greatest interest to my conversation with Infadoos. The expression on his face was most curious, and gave me the idea of a man who was struggling with partial success to bring something long ago forgotten back into his mind.

All this while we had been pressing on at a good rate towards the undulating plain beneath us. The mountains we had crossed now loomed high above our heads, and Sheba's Breasts were veiled modestly in diaphanous wreaths of mist. As we went the country grew more and more lovely. The vegetation was luxuriant, without being tropical; the sun was bright and warm, but not burning; and a gracious breeze blew softly along the odorous slopes of the mountains. Indeed, this new land was little less than an earthly paradise; in beauty, in natural wealth, and in climate I have

never seen its like. The Transvaal is a fine country, but it is nothing to Kukuanaland.

So soon as we started Infadoos had despatched a runner to warn the people of the kraal, which, by the way, was in his military command, of our arrival. This man had departed at an extraordinary speed, which Infadoos informed me he would keep up all the way, as running was an exercise much practised among his people.

The result of this message now became apparent. When we arrived within two miles of the kraal we could see that company after company of men were issuing from its gates and marching towards us.

Sir Henry laid his hand upon my arm, and remarked that it looked as though we were going to meet with a warm reception. Something in his tone attracted Infadoos' attention.

"Let not my lords be afraid," he said hastily, "for in my breast there dwells no guile. This regiment is one under my command, and comes out by my orders to greet you."

I nodded easily, though I was not quite easy in my mind.

About half a mile from the gates of this kraal is a long stretch of rising ground sloping gently upwards from the road, and here the companies formed. It was a splendid sight to see them, each company about three hundred strong, charging swiftly up the rise, with flashing spears and waving plumes, to take their appointed place. By the time we reached the slope twelve such companies, or in all three thousand six hundred men, had passed out and taken up their positions along the road.

Presently we came to the first company, and were able to gaze in astonishment on the most magnificent set of warriors that I have ever seen. They were all men of mature age, mostly veterans of about forty, and not one of them was under six feet in height, whilst many stood six feet three or four. They wore upon their heads heavy black plumes of Sakaboola feathers, like those which adorned our guides. About their waists and beneath the right knees were bound circlets of white ox tails, while in their

left hands they carried round shields measuring about twenty inches across. These shields are very curious. The framework is made of an iron plate beaten out thin, over which is stretched milk-white ox-hide.

The weapons that each man bore were simple, but most effective, consisting of a short and very heavy two-edged spear with a wooden shaft, the blade being about six inches across at the widest part. These spears are not used for throwing but like the Zulu "*bangwan*," or stabbing assegai, are for close quarters only, when the wound inflicted by them is terrible. In addition to his *bangwan* every man carried three large and heavy knives, each knife weighing about two pounds. One knife was fixed in the ox-tail girdle, and the other two at the back of the round shield. These knives, which are called "*tollas*" by the Kukuanas, take the place of the throwing assegai of the Zulus. The Kukuana warriors can cast them with great accuracy to a distance of fifty yards, and it is their custom on charging to hurl a volley of them at the enemy as they come to close quarters.

Each company remained still as a collection of bronze statues till we were opposite to it, when at a signal given by its commanding officer, who, distinguished by a leopard skin cloak, stood some paces in front, every spear was raised into the air, and from three hundred throats sprang forth with a sudden roar the royal salute of "*Koom*." Then, so soon as we had passed, the company formed up behind us and followed us towards the kraal, till at last the whole regiment of the "Greys"—so called from their white shields—the crack corps of the Kukuana people, was marching in our rear with a tread that shook the ground.

At length, branching off from Solomon's Great Road, we came to the wide fosse surrounding the kraal, which is at least a mile round, and fenced with a strong palisade of piles formed of the trunks of trees. At the gateway this fosse is spanned by a primitive drawbridge, which was let down by the guard to allow us to pass in. The kraal is exceedingly well laid out. Through the centre runs a wide pathway intersected at right angles by other pathways so arranged as to cut the huts into square blocks, each block being the quarters of a company. The huts are dome-shaped, and built, like those of the Zulus, of a framework of wattle, beautifully thatched with grass; but, unlike the Zulu huts, they have doorways through which men could walk.

Also they are much larger, and surrounded by a verandah about six feet wide, beautifully paved with powdered lime trodden hard.

All along each side of this wide pathway that pierces the kraal were ranged hundreds of women, brought out by curiosity to look at us. These women, for a native race, are exceedingly handsome. They are tall and graceful, and their figures are wonderfully fine. The hair, though short, is rather curly than woolly, the features are frequently aquiline, and the lips are not unpleasantly thick, as is the case among most African races. But what struck us most was their exceedingly quiet and dignified air. They were as well-bred in their way as the *habituées* of a fashionable drawing-room, and in this respect they differ from Zulu women and their cousins the Masai who inhabit the district beyond Zanzibar. Their curiosity had brought them out to see us, but they allowed no rude expressions of astonishment or savage criticism to pass their lips as we trudged wearily in front of them. Not even when old Infadoos with a surreptitious motion of the hand pointed out the crowning wonder of poor Good's "beautiful white legs," did they suffer the feeling of intense admiration which evidently mastered their minds to find expression. They fixed their dark eyes upon this new and snowy loveliness, for, as I think I have said, Good's skin is exceedingly white, and that was all. But it was quite enough for Good, who is modest by nature.

When we reached the centre of the kraal, Infadoos halted at the door of a large hut, which was surrounded at a distance by a circle of smaller ones.

"Enter, Sons of the Stars," he said, in a magniloquent voice, "and deign to rest awhile in our humble habitations. A little food shall be brought to you, so that ye may have no need to draw your belts tight from hunger; some honey and some milk, and an ox or two, and a few sheep; not much, my lords, but still a little food."

"It is good," said I. "Infadoos; we are weary with travelling through realms of air; now let us rest."

Accordingly we entered the hut, which we found amply prepared for our comfort. Couches of tanned skins were spread for us to lie on, and water was placed for us to wash in.

Presently we heard a shouting outside, and stepping to the door, saw a line of damsels bearing milk and roasted mealies, and honey in a pot. Behind these were some youths driving a fat young ox. We received the gifts, and then one of the young men drew the knife from his girdle and dexterously cut the ox's throat. In ten minutes it was dead, skinned, and jointed. The best of the meat was then cut off for us, and the rest, in the name of our party, I presented to the warriors round us, who took it and distributed the "white lords' gift."

Umbopa set to work, with the assistance of an extremely prepossessing young woman, to boil our portion in a large earthenware pot over a fire which was built outside the hut, and when it was nearly ready we sent a message to Infadoos, and asked him and Scragga, the king's son, to join us.

Presently they came, and sitting down upon little stools, of which there were several about the hut, for the Kukuanas do not in general squat upon their haunches like the Zulus, they helped us to get through our dinner. The old gentleman was most affable and polite, but it struck me that the young one regarded us with doubt. Together with the rest of the party, he had been overawed by our white appearance and by our magic properties; but it seemed to me that, on discovering that we ate, drank, and slept like other mortals, his awe was beginning to wear off, and to be replaced by a sullen suspicion—which made me feel rather uncomfortable.

In the course of our meal Sir Henry suggested to me that it might be well to try to discover if our hosts knew anything of his brother's fate, or if they had ever seen or heard of him; but, on the whole, I thought that it would be wiser to say nothing of the matter at this time. It was difficult to explain a relative lost from "the Stars."

After supper we produced our pipes and lit them; a proceeding which filled Infadoos and Scragga with astonishment. The Kukuanas were evidently unacquainted with the divine delights of tobacco-smoke. The herb is grown among them extensively; but, like the Zulus, they use it for snuff only, and quite failed to identify it in its new form.

Presently I asked Infadoos when we were to proceed on our journey, and was delighted to learn that preparations had been made for us to leave on

the following morning, messengers having already departed to inform Twala the king of our coming.

It appeared that Twala was at his principal place, known as Loo, making ready for the great annual feast which was to be held in the first week of June. At this gathering all the regiments, with the exception of certain detachments left behind for garrison purposes, are brought up and paraded before the king; and the great annual witch-hunt, of which more by-and-by, is held.

We were to start at dawn; and Infadoos, who was to accompany us, expected that we should reach Loo on the night of the second day, unless we were detained by accident or by swollen rivers.

When they had given us this information our visitors bade us good-night; and, having arranged to watch turn and turn about, three of us flung ourselves down and slept the sweet sleep of the weary, whilst the fourth sat up on the look-out for possible treachery.

CHAPTER IX

TWALA THE KING

It will not be necessary for me to detail at length the incidents of our journey to Loo. It took two full days' travelling along Solomon's Great Road, which pursued its even course right into the heart of Kukuanaland. Suffice it to say that as we went the country seemed to grow richer and richer, and the kraals, with their wide surrounding belts of cultivation, more and more numerous. They were all built upon the same principles as the first camp which we had reached, and were guarded by ample garrisons of troops. Indeed, in Kukuanaland, as among the Germans, the Zulus, and the Masai, every able-bodied man is a soldier, so that the whole force of the nation is available for its wars, offensive or defensive. As we travelled we

were overtaken by thousands of warriors hurrying up to Loo to be present at the great annual review and festival, and more splendid troops I never saw.

At sunset on the second day, we stopped to rest awhile upon the summit of some heights over which the road ran, and there on a beautiful and fertile plain before us lay Loo itself. For a native town it is an enormous place, quite five miles round, I should say, with outlying kraals projecting from it, that serve on grand occasions as cantonments for the regiments, and a curious horseshoe-shaped hill, with which we were destined to become better acquainted, about two miles to the north. It is beautifully situated, and through the centre of the kraal, dividing it into two portions, runs a river, which appeared to be bridged in several places, the same indeed that we had seen from the slopes of Sheba's Breasts. Sixty or seventy miles away three great snow-capped mountains, placed at the points of a triangle, started out of the level plain. The conformation of these mountains is unlike that of Sheba's Breasts, being sheer and precipitous, instead of smooth and rounded.

Infadoos saw us looking at them, and volunteered a remark.

"The road ends there," he said, pointing to the mountains known among the Kukuanas as the "Three Witches."

"Why does it end?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he answered with a shrug; "the mountains are full of caves, and there is a great pit between them. It is there that the wise men of old time used to go to get whatever it was they came for to this country, and it is there now that our kings are buried in the Place of Death."

"What was it they came for?" I asked eagerly.

"Nay, I know not. My lords who have dropped from the Stars should know," he answered with a quick look. Evidently he knew more than he chose to say.

"Yes," I went on, "you are right, in the Stars we learn many things. I have heard, for instance, that the wise men of old came to these mountains

to find bright stones, pretty playthings, and yellow iron."

"My lord is wise," he answered coldly; "I am but a child and cannot talk with my lord on such matters. My lord must speak with Gagool the old, at the king's place, who is wise even as my lord," and he went away.

So soon as he was gone I turned to the others, and pointed out the mountains. "There are Solomon's diamond mines," I said.

Umbopa was standing with them, apparently plunged in one of the fits of abstraction which were common to him, and caught my words.

"Yes, Macumazahn," he put in, in Zulu, "the diamonds are surely there, and you shall have them, since you white men are so fond of toys and money."

"How dost thou know that, Umbopa?" I asked sharply, for I did not like his mysterious ways.

He laughed. "I dreamed it in the night, white men;" then he too turned on his heel and went.

"Now what," said Sir Henry, "is our black friend driving at? He knows more than he chooses to say, that is clear. By the way, Quatermain, has he heard anything of—of my brother?"

"Nothing; he has asked everyone he has become friendly with, but they all declare that no white man has ever been seen in the country before."

"Do you suppose that he got here at all?" suggested Good; "we have only reached the place by a miracle; is it likely he could have reached it without the map?"

"I don't know," said Sir Henry gloomily, "but somehow I think that I shall find him."

Slowly the sun sank, then suddenly darkness rushed down on the land like a tangible thing. There was no breathing-space between the day and night, no soft transformation scene, for in these latitudes twilight does not

exist. The change from day to night is as quick and as absolute as the change from life to death. The sun sank and the world was wreathed in shadows. But not for long, for see in the west there is a glow, then come rays of silver light, and at last the full and glorious moon lights up the plain and shoots its gleaming arrows far and wide, filling the earth with a faint refulgence.

We stood and watched the lovely sight, whilst the stars grew pale before this chastened majesty, and felt our hearts lifted up in the presence of a beauty that I cannot describe. Mine has been a rough life, but there are a few things I am thankful to have lived for, and one of them is to have seen that moon shine over Kukuanaland.

Presently our meditations were broken in upon by our polite friend Infadoos.

"If my lords are rested we will journey on to Loo, where a hut is made ready for my lords to-night. The moon is now bright, so that we shall not fall by the way."

We assented, and in an hour's time were at the outskirts of the town, of which the extent, mapped out as it was by thousands of camp fires, appeared absolutely endless. Indeed, Good, who is always fond of a bad joke, christened it "Unlimited Loo." Soon we came to a moat with a drawbridge, where we were met by the rattling of arms and the hoarse challenge of a sentry. Infadoos gave some password that I could not catch, which was met with a salute, and we passed on through the central street of the great grass city. After nearly half an hour's tramp, past endless lines of huts, Infadoos halted at last by the gate of a little group of huts which surrounded a small courtyard of powdered limestone, and informed us that these were to be our "poor" quarters.

We entered, and found that a hut had been assigned to each of us. These huts were superior to any that we had yet seen, and in each was a most comfortable bed made of tanned skins, spread upon mattresses of aromatic grass. Food too was ready for us, and so soon as we had washed ourselves with water, which stood ready in earthenware jars, some young women of

handsome appearance brought us roasted meats, and mealie cobs daintily served on wooden platters, and presented them to us with deep obeisances.

We ate and drank, and then, the beds having been all moved into one hut by our request, a precaution at which the amiable young ladies smiled, we flung ourselves down to sleep, thoroughly wearied with our long journey.

When we woke it was to find the sun high in the heavens, and the female attendants, who did not seem to be troubled by any false shame, already standing inside the hut, having been ordered to attend and help us to "make ready."

"Make ready, indeed," growled Good; "when one has only a flannel shirt and a pair of boots, that does not take long. I wish you would ask them for my trousers, Quatermain."

I asked accordingly, but was informed that these sacred relics had already been taken to the king, who would see us in the forenoon.

Somewhat to their astonishment and disappointment, having requested the young ladies to step outside, we proceeded to make the best toilet of which the circumstances admitted. Good even went the length of again shaving the right side of his face; the left, on which now appeared a very fair crop of whiskers, we impressed upon him he must on no account touch. As for ourselves, we were contented with a good wash and combing our hair. Sir Henry's yellow locks were now almost upon his shoulders, and he looked more like an ancient Dane than ever, while my grizzled scrub was fully an inch long, instead of half an inch, which in a general way I considered my maximum length.

By the time that we had eaten our breakfast, and smoked a pipe, a message was brought to us by no less a personage than Infadoos himself that Twala the king was ready to see us, if we would be pleased to come.

We remarked in reply that we should prefer to wait till the sun was a little higher, we were yet weary with our journey, &c., &c. It is always well, when dealing with uncivilised people, not to be in too great a hurry. They are apt to mistake politeness for awe or servility. So, although we were

quite as anxious to see Twala as Twala could be to see us, we sat down and waited for an hour, employing the interval in preparing such presents as our slender stock of goods permitted—namely, the Winchester rifle which had been used by poor Ventvögel, and some beads. The rifle and ammunition we determined to present to his royal highness, and the beads were for his wives and courtiers. We had already given a few to Infadoos and Scragga, and found that they were delighted with them, never having seen such things before. At length we declared that we were ready, and guided by Infadoos, started off to the audience, Umbopa carrying the rifle and beads.

After walking a few hundred yards we came to an enclosure, something like that surrounding the huts which had been allotted to us, only fifty times as big, for it could not have covered less than six or seven acres of ground. All round the outside fence stood a row of huts, which were the habitations of the king's wives. Exactly opposite the gateway, on the further side of the open space, was a very large hut, built by itself, in which his majesty resided. All the rest was open ground; that is to say, it would have been open had it not been filled by company after company of warriors, who were mustered there to the number of seven or eight thousand. These men stood still as statues as we advanced through them, and it would be impossible to give an adequate idea of the grandeur of the spectacle which they presented, with their waving plumes, their glancing spears, and iron-backed ox-hide shields.

The space in front of the large hut was empty, but before it were placed several stools. On three of these, at a sign from Infadoos, we seated ourselves, Umbopa standing behind us. As for Infadoos, he took up a position by the door of the hut. So we waited for ten minutes or more in the midst of a dead silence, but conscious that we were the object of the concentrated gaze of some eight thousand pairs of eyes. It was a somewhat trying ordeal, but we carried it off as best we could. At length the door of the hut opened, and a gigantic figure, with a splendid tiger-skin karross flung over its shoulders, stepped out, followed by the boy Scragga, and what appeared to us to be a withered-up monkey, wrapped in a fur cloak. The figure seated itself upon a stool, Scragga took his stand behind it, and the withered-up monkey crept on all fours into the shade of the hut and squatted down.

Still there was silence.

Then the gigantic figure slipped off the karross and stood up before us, a truly alarming spectacle. It was that of an enormous man with the most entirely repulsive countenance we had ever beheld. This man's lips were as thick as a Negro's, the nose was flat, he had but one gleaming black eye, for the other was represented by a hollow in the face, and his whole expression was cruel and sensual to a degree. From the large head rose a magnificent plume of white ostrich feathers, his body was clad in a shirt of shining chain armour, whilst round the waist and right knee were the usual garnishes of white ox-tail. In his right hand was a huge spear, about the neck a thick torque of gold, and bound on the forehead shone dully a single and enormous uncut diamond.

Still there was silence; but not for long. Presently the man, whom we rightly guessed to be the king, raised the great javelin in his hand. Instantly eight thousand spears were lifted in answer, and from eight thousand throats rang out the royal salute of "*Koom*." Three times this was repeated, and each time the earth shook with the noise, that can only be compared to the deepest notes of thunder.

"Be humble, O people," piped out a thin voice which seemed to come from the monkey in the shade, "it is the king."

"*It is the king*," boomed out the eight thousand throats in answer. "*Be humble, O people, it is the king*."

Then there was silence again—dead silence. Presently, however, it was broken. A soldier on our left dropped his shield, which fell with a clatter on to the limestone flooring.

Twala turned his one cold eye in the direction of the noise.

"Come hither, thou," he said, in a cold voice.

A fine young man stepped out of the ranks, and stood before him.

"It was thy shield that fell, thou awkward dog. Wilt thou make me a reproach in the eyes of these strangers from the Stars? What hast thou to say for thyself?"

We saw the poor fellow turn pale under his dusky skin.

"It was by chance, O Calf of the Black Cow," he murmured.

"Then it is a chance for which thou must pay. Thou hast made me foolish; prepare for death."

"I am the king's ox," was the low answer.

"Scragga," roared the king, "let me see how thou canst use thy spear. Kill me this blundering fool."

Scragga stepped forward with an ill-favoured grin, and lifted his spear. The poor victim covered his eyes with his hand and stood still. As for us, we were petrified with horror.

"Once, twice," he waved the spear, and then struck, ah! right home—the spear stood out a foot behind the soldier's back. He flung up his hands and dropped dead. From the multitude about us rose something like a murmur, it rolled round and round, and died away. The tragedy was finished; there lay the corpse, and we had not yet realised that it had been enacted. Sir Henry sprang up and swore a great oath, then, overpowered by the sense of silence, sat down again.

"The thrust was a good one," said the king; "take him away."

Four men stepped out of the ranks, and lifting the body of the murdered man, carried it thence.

"Cover up the blood-stains, cover them up," piped out the thin voice that proceeded from the monkey-like figure; "the king's word is spoken, the king's doom is done!"

Thereupon a girl came forward from behind the hut, bearing a jar filled with powdered lime, which she scattered over the red mark, blotting it from

sight.

Sir Henry meanwhile was boiling with rage at what had happened; indeed, it was with difficulty that we could keep him still.

"Sit down, for heaven's sake," I whispered; "our lives depend on it."

He yielded and remained quiet.

Twala sat silent until the traces of the tragedy had been removed, then he addressed us.

"White people," he said, "who come hither, whence I know not, and why I know not, greeting."

"Greeting, Twala, King of the Kukuanas," I answered.

"White people, whence come ye, and what seek ye?"

"We come from the Stars, ask us not how. We come to see this land."

"Ye journey from far to see a little thing. And that man with you," pointing to Umbopa, "does he also come from the Stars?"

"Even so; there are people of thy colour in the heavens above; but ask not of matters too high for thee, Twala the king."

"Ye speak with a loud voice, people of the Stars," Twala answered in a tone which I scarcely liked. "Remember that the Stars are far off, and ye are here. How if I make you as him whom they bore away?"

I laughed out loud, though there was little laughter in my heart.

"O king," I said, "be careful, walk warily over hot stones, lest thou shouldst burn thy feet; hold the spear by the handle, lest thou should cut thy hands. Touch but one hair of our heads, and destruction shall come upon thee. What, have not these"—pointing to Infadoos and Scragga, who, young villain that he was, was employed in cleaning the blood of the soldier off his spear—"told thee what manner of men we are? Hast thou seen the like

of us?" and I pointed to Good, feeling quite sure that he had never seen anybody before who looked in the least like *him* as he then appeared.

"It is true, I have not," said the king, surveying Good with interest.

"Have they not told thee how we strike with death from afar?" I went on.

"They have told me, but I believe them not. Let me see you kill. Kill me a man among those who stand yonder"—and he pointed to the opposite side of the kraal—"and I will believe."

"Nay," I answered; "we shed no blood of men except in just punishment; but if thou wilt see, bid thy servants drive in an ox through the kraal gates, and before he has run twenty paces I will strike him dead."

"Nay," laughed the king, "kill me a man and I will believe."

"Good, O king, so be it," I answered coolly; "do thou walk across the open space, and before thy feet reach the gate thou shalt be dead; or if thou wilt not, send thy son Scragga" (whom at that moment it would have given me much pleasure to shoot).

On hearing this suggestion Scragga uttered a sort of howl, and bolted into the hut.

Twala frowned majestically; the suggestion did not please him.

"Let a young ox be driven in," he said.

Two men at once departed, running swiftly.

"Now, Sir Henry," said I, "do you shoot. I want to show this ruffian that I am not the only magician of the party."

Sir Henry accordingly took his "express," and made ready.

"I hope I shall make a good shot," he groaned.

"You must," I answered. "If you miss with the first barrel, let him have the second. Sight for 150 yards, and wait till the beast turns broadside on."

Then came a pause, until presently we caught sight of an ox running straight for the kraal gate. It came on through the gate, then, catching sight of the vast concourse of people, stopped stupidly, turned round, and bellowed.

"Now's your time," I whispered.

Up went the rifle.

Bang! *thud!* and the ox was kicking on his back, shot in the ribs. The semi-hollow bullet had done its work well, and a sigh of astonishment went up from the assembled thousands.

I turned round coolly—

"Have I lied, O king?"

"Nay, white man, it is the truth," was the somewhat awed answer.

"Listen, Twala," I went on. "Thou hast seen. Now know we come in peace, not in war. See," and I held up the Winchester repeater; "here is a hollow staff that shall enable thee to kill even as we kill, only I lay this charm upon it, thou shalt kill no man with it. If thou liftest it against a man, it shall kill thee. Stay, I will show thee. Bid a soldier step forty paces and place the shaft of a spear in the ground so that the flat blade looks towards us."

In a few seconds it was done.

"Now, see, I will break yonder spear."

Taking a careful sight I fired. The bullet struck the flat of the spear, and shattered the blade into fragments.

Again the sigh of astonishment went up.

"Now, Twala, we give this magic tube to thee, and by-and-by I will show thee how to use it; but beware how thou turnest the magic of the Stars against a man of earth," and I handed him the rifle.

The king took it very gingerly, and laid it down at his feet. As he did so I observed the wizened monkey-like figure creeping from the shadow of the hut. It crept on all fours, but when it reached the place where the king sat it rose upon its feet, and throwing the furry covering from its face, revealed a most extraordinary and weird countenance. Apparently it was that of a woman of great age so shrunk that in size it seemed no larger than the face of a year-old child, although made up of a number of deep and yellow wrinkles. Set in these wrinkles was a sunken slit, that represented the mouth, beneath which the chin curved outwards to a point. There was no nose to speak of; indeed, the visage might have been taken for that of a sun-dried corpse had it not been for a pair of large black eyes, still full of fire and intelligence, which gleamed and played under the snow-white eyebrows, and the projecting parchment-coloured skull, like jewels in a charnel-house. As for the head itself, it was perfectly bare, and yellow in hue, while its wrinkled scalp moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra.

The figure to which this fearful countenance belonged, a countenance so fearful indeed that it caused a shiver of fear to pass through us as we gazed on it, stood still for a moment. Then suddenly it projected a skinny claw armed with nails nearly an inch long, and laying it on the shoulder of Twala the king, began to speak in a thin and piercing voice—

"Listen, O king! Listen, O warriors! Listen, O mountains and plains and rivers, home of the Kukuana race! Listen, O skies and sun, O rain and storm and mist! Listen, O men and women, O youths and maidens, and O ye babes unborn! Listen, all things that live and must die! Listen, all dead things that shall live again—again to die! Listen, the spirit of life is in me and I prophesy. I prophesy! I prophesy!"

The words died away in a faint wail, and dread seemed to seize upon the hearts of all who heard them, including our own. This old woman was very terrible.

"*Blood! blood! blood!* rivers of blood; blood everywhere. I see it, I smell it, I taste it—it is salt! it runs red upon the ground, it rains down from the skies.

"*Footsteps! footsteps! footsteps!* the tread of the white man coming from afar. It shakes the earth; the earth trembles before her master.

"Blood is good, the red blood is bright; there is no smell like the smell of new-shed blood. The lions shall lap it and roar, the vultures shall wash their wings in it and shriek with joy.

"I am old! I am old! I have seen much blood; *ha, ha!* but I shall see more ere I die, and be merry. How old am I, think ye? Your fathers knew me, and *their* fathers knew me, and *their* fathers' fathers' fathers. I have seen the white man and know his desires. I am old, but the mountains are older than I. Who made the great road, tell me? Who wrote the pictures on the rocks, tell me? Who reared up the three Silent Ones yonder, that gaze across the pit, tell me?" and she pointed towards the three precipitous mountains which we had noticed on the previous night.

"Ye know not, but I know. It was a white people who were before ye are, who shall be when ye are not, who shall eat you up and destroy you. *Yea! yea! yea!*

"And what came they for, the White Ones, the Terrible Ones, the skilled in magic and all learning, the strong, the unswerving? What is that bright stone upon thy forehead, O king? Whose hands made the iron garments upon thy breast, O king? Ye know not, but I know. I the Old One, I the Wise One, I the *Isanusi*, the witch doctress!"

Then she turned her bald vulture-head towards us.

"What seek ye, white men of the Stars—ah, yes, of the Stars? Do ye seek a lost one? Ye shall not find him here. He is not here. Never for ages upon ages has a white foot pressed this land; never except once, and I remember that he left it but to die. Ye come for bright stones; I know it—I know it; ye shall find them when the blood is dry; but shall ye return whence ye came, or shall ye stop with me? *Ha! ha! ha!*

"And thou, thou with the dark skin and the proud bearing," and she pointed her skinny finger at Umbopa, "who art *thou*, and what seekest *thou*? Not stones that shine, not yellow metal that gleams, these thou leavest to 'white men from the Stars.' Methinks I know thee; methinks I can smell the smell of the blood in thy heart. Strip off the girdle—"

Here the features of this extraordinary creature became convulsed, and she fell to the ground foaming in an epileptic fit, and was carried into the hut.

The king rose up trembling, and waved his hand. Instantly the regiments began to file off, and in ten minutes, save for ourselves, the king, and a few attendants, the great space was left empty.

"White people," he said, "it passes in my mind to kill you. Gagool has spoken strange words. What say ye?"

I laughed. "Be careful, O king, we are not easy to slay. Thou hast seen the fate of the ox; wouldst thou be as the ox is?"

The king frowned. "It is not well to threaten a king."

"We threaten not, we speak what is true. Try to kill us, O king, and learn."

The great savage put his hand to his forehead and thought.

"Go in peace," he said at length. "To-night is the great dance. Ye shall see it. Fear not that I shall set a snare for you. To-morrow I will think."

"It is well, O king," I answered unconcernedly, and then, accompanied by Infadoos, we rose and went back to our kraal.

CHAPTER X

THE WITCH-HUNT

On reaching our hut I motioned to Infadoos to enter with us.

"Now, Infadoos," I said, "we would speak with thee."

"Let my lords say on."

"It seems to us, Infadoos, that Twala the king is a cruel man."

"It is so, my lords. Alas! the land cries out because of his cruelties. To-night ye shall see. It is the great witch-hunt, and many will be smelt out as wizards and slain. No man's life is safe. If the king covets a man's cattle, or a man's wife, or if he fears a man that he should excite a rebellion against him, then Gagool, whom ye saw, or some of the witch-finding women whom she has taught, will smell that man out as a wizard, and he will be killed. Many must die before the moon grows pale to-night. It is ever so. Perhaps I too shall be killed. As yet I have been spared because I am skilled in war, and am beloved by the soldiers; but I know not how long I have to live. The land groans at the cruelties of Twala the king; it is wearied of him and his red ways."

"Then why is it, Infadoos, that the people do not cast him down?"

"Nay, my lords, he is the king, and if he were killed Scragga would reign in his place, and the heart of Scragga is blacker than the heart of Twala his father. If Scragga were king his yoke upon our neck would be heavier than the yoke of Twala. If Imotu had never been slain, or if Ignosi his son had lived, it might have been otherwise; but they are both dead."

"How knowest thou that Ignosi is dead?" said a voice behind us. We looked round astonished to see who spoke. It was Umbopa.

"What meanest thou, boy?" asked Infadoos; "who told thee to speak?"

"Listen, Infadoos," was the answer, "and I will tell thee a story. Years ago the king Imotu was killed in this country and his wife fled with the boy Ignosi. Is it not so?"

"It is so."

"It was said that the woman and her son died upon the mountains. Is it not so?"

"It is even so."

"Well, it came to pass that the mother and the boy Ignosi did not die. They crossed the mountains and were led by a tribe of wandering desert men across the sands beyond, till at last they came to water and grass and trees again."

"How knowest thou this?"

"Listen. They travelled on and on, many months' journey, till they reached a land where a people called the Amazulu, who also are of the Kukuana stock, live by war, and with them they tarried many years, till at length the mother died. Then the son Ignosi became a wanderer again, and journeyed into a land of wonders, where white people live, and for many more years he learned the wisdom of the white people."

"It is a pretty story," said Infadoos incredulously.

"For years he lived there working as a servant and a soldier, but holding in his heart all that his mother had told him of his own place, and casting about in his mind to find how he might journey thither to see his people and his father's house before he died. For long years he lived and waited, and at last the time came, as it ever comes to him who can wait for it, and he met some white men who would seek this unknown land, and joined himself to

them. The white men started and travelled on and on, seeking for one who is lost. They crossed the burning desert, they crossed the snow-clad mountains, and at last reached the land of the Kukuanas, and there they found *thee*, O Infadoos."

"Surely thou art mad to talk thus," said the astonished old soldier.

"Thou thinkest so; see, I will show thee, O my uncle.

"I am Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas!"

Then with a single movement Umbopa slipped off his "moocha" or girdle, and stood naked before us.

"Look," he said; "what is this?" and he pointed to the picture of a great snake tattooed in blue round his middle, its tail disappearing into its open mouth just above where the thighs are set into the body.

Infadoos looked, his eyes starting nearly out of his head. Then he fell upon his knees.

"*Koom! Koom!*" he ejaculated; "it is my brother's son; it is the king."

"Did I not tell thee so, my uncle? Rise; I am not yet the king, but with thy help, and with the help of these brave white men, who are my friends, I shall be. Yet the old witch Gagool was right, the land shall run with blood first, and hers shall run with it, if she has any and can die, for she killed my father with her words, and drove my mother forth. And now, Infadoos, choose thou. Wilt thou put thy hands between my hands and be my man? Wilt thou share the dangers that lie before me, and help me to overthrow this tyrant and murderer, or wilt thou not? Choose thou."

The old man put his hand to his head and thought. Then he rose, and advancing to where Umbopa, or rather Ignosi, stood, he knelt before him, and took his hand.

"Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas, I put my hand between thy hands, and am thy man till death. When thou wast a babe I dandled thee upon my

knees, now shall my old arm strike for thee and freedom."

"It is well, Infadoos; if I conquer, thou shalt be the greatest man in the kingdom after its king. If I fail, thou canst only die, and death is not far off from thee. Rise, my uncle."

"And ye, white men, will ye help me? What have I to offer you! The white stones! If I conquer and can find them, ye shall have as many as ye can carry hence. Will that suffice you?"

I translated this remark.

"Tell him," answered Sir Henry, "that he mistakes an Englishman. Wealth is good, and if it comes in our way we will take it; but a gentleman does not sell himself for wealth. Still, speaking for myself, I say this. I have always liked Umbopa, and so far as lies in me I will stand by him in this business. It will be very pleasant to me to try to square matters with that cruel devil Twala. What do you say, Good, and you, Quatermain?"

"Well," said Good, "to adopt the language of hyperbole, in which all these people seem to indulge, you can tell him that a row is surely good, and warms the cockles of the heart, and that so far as I am concerned I'm his boy. My only stipulation is that he allows me to wear trousers."

I translated the substance of these answers.

"It is well, my friends," said Ignosi, late Umbopa; "and what sayest thou, Macumazahn, art thou also with me, old hunter, cleverer than a wounded buffalo?"

I thought awhile and scratched my head.

"Umbopa, or Ignosi," I said, "I don't like revolutions. I am a man of peace and a bit of a coward"—here Umbopa smiled—"but, on the other hand, I stick up for my friends, Ignosi. You have stuck to us and played the part of a man, and I will stick by you. But mind you, I am a trader, and have to make my living, so I accept your offer about those diamonds in case we should ever be in a position to avail ourselves of it. Another thing: we

came, as you know, to look for Incubu's (Sir Henry's) lost brother. You must help us to find him."

"That I will do," answered Ignosi. "Stay, Infadoos, by the sign of the snake about my middle, tell me the truth. Has any white man to thy knowledge set his foot within the land?"

"None, O Ignosi."

"If any white man had been seen or heard of, wouldst thou have known?"

"I should certainly have known."

"Thou hearest, Incubu," said Ignosi to Sir Henry; "he has not been here."

"Well, well," said Sir Henry, with a sigh; "there it is; I suppose that he never got so far. Poor fellow, poor fellow! So it has all been for nothing. God's will be done."

"Now for business," I put in, anxious to escape from a painful subject. "It is very well to be a king by right divine, Ignosi, but how dost thou propose to become a king indeed?"

"Nay, I know not. Infadoos, hast thou a plan?"

"Ignosi, Son of the Lightning," answered his uncle, "to-night is the great dance and witch-hunt. Many shall be smelt out and perish, and in the hearts of many others there will be grief and anguish and fury against the king Twala. When the dance is over, then I will speak to some of the great chiefs, who in turn, if I can win them over, will speak to their regiments. I shall speak to the chiefs softly at first, and bring them to see that thou art indeed the king, and I think that by to-morrow's light thou shalt have twenty thousand spears at thy command. And now I must go and think, and hear, and make ready. After the dance is done, if I am yet alive, and we are all alive, I will meet thee here, and we can talk. At the best there must be war."

At this moment our conference was interrupted by the cry that messengers had come from the king. Advancing to the door of the hut we ordered that they should be admitted, and presently three men entered, each bearing a shining shirt of chain armour, and a magnificent battle-axe.

"The gifts of my lord the king to the white men from the Stars!" said a herald who came with them.

"We thank the king," I answered; "withdraw."

The men went, and we examined the armour with great interest. It was the most wonderful chain work that either of us had ever seen. A whole coat fell together so closely that it formed a mass of links scarcely too big to be covered with both hands.

"Do you make these things in this country, Infadoos?" I asked; "they are very beautiful."

"Nay, my lord, they came down to us from our forefathers. We know not who made them, and there are but few left.[1] None but those of royal blood may be clad in them. They are magic coats through which no spear can pass, and those who wear them are well-nigh safe in the battle. The king is well pleased or much afraid, or he would not have sent these garments of steel. Clothe yourselves in them to-night, my lords."

The remainder of that day we spent quietly, resting and talking over the situation, which was sufficiently exciting. At last the sun went down, the thousand watch fires glowed out, and through the darkness we heard the tramp of many feet and the clashing of hundreds of spears, as the regiments passed to their appointed places to be ready for the great dance. Then the full moon shone out in splendour, and as we stood watching her rays, Infadoos arrived, clad in his war dress, and accompanied by a guard of twenty men to escort us to the dance. As he recommended, we had already donned the shirts of chain armour which the king had sent us, putting them on under our ordinary clothing, and finding to our surprise that they were neither very heavy nor uncomfortable. These steel shirts, which evidently had been made for men of a very large stature, hung somewhat loosely upon Good and myself, but Sir Henry's fitted his magnificent frame like a glove.

Then strapping our revolvers round our waists, and taking in our hands the battle-axes which the king had sent with the armour, we started.

On arriving at the great kraal, where we had that morning been received by the king, we found that it was closely packed with some twenty thousand men arranged round it in regiments. These regiments were in turn divided into companies, and between each company ran a little path to allow space for the witch-finders to pass up and down. Anything more imposing than the sight that was presented by this vast and orderly concourse of armed men it is impossible to conceive. There they stood perfectly silent, and the moon poured her light upon the forest of their raised spears, upon their majestic forms, waving plumes, and the harmonious shading of their various-coloured shields. Wherever we looked were line upon line of dim faces surmounted by range upon range of shimmering spears.

"Surely," I said to Infadoos, "the whole army is here?"

"Nay, Macumazahn," he answered, "but a third of it. One third is present at this dance each year, another third is mustered outside in case there should be trouble when the killing begins, ten thousand more garrison the outposts round Loo, and the rest watch at the kraals in the country. Thou seest it is a great people."

"They are very silent," said Good; and indeed the intense stillness among such a vast concourse of living men was almost overpowering.

"What says Bougwan?" asked Infadoos.

I translated.

"Those over whom the shadow of Death is hovering are silent," he answered grimly.

"Will many be killed?"

"Very many."

"It seems," I said to the others, "that we are going to assist at a gladiatorial show arranged regardless of expense."

Sir Henry shivered, and Good said he wished that we could get out of it.

"Tell me," I asked Infadoos, "are we in danger?"

"I know not, my lords, I trust not; but do not seem afraid. If ye live through the night all may go well with you. The soldiers murmur against the king."

All this while we had been advancing steadily towards the centre of the open space, in the midst of which were placed some stools. As we proceeded we perceived another small party coming from the direction of the royal hut.

"It is the king Twala, Scragga his son, and Gagool the old; and see, with them are those who slay," said Infadoos, pointing to a little group of about a dozen gigantic and savage-looking men, armed with spears in one hand and heavy kerries in the other.

The king seated himself upon the centre stool, Gagool crouched at his feet, and the others stood behind him.

"Greeting, white lords," Twala cried, as we came up; "be seated, waste not precious time—the night is all too short for the deeds that must be done. Ye come in a good hour, and shall see a glorious show. Look round, white lords; look round," and he rolled his one wicked eye from regiment to regiment. "Can the Stars show you such a sight as this? See how they shake in their wickedness, all those who have evil in their hearts and fear the judgment of 'Heaven above.'"

"*Begin! begin!*" piped Gagool, in her thin piercing voice; "the hyænas are hungry, they howl for food. *Begin! begin!*"

Then for a moment there was intense stillness, made horrible by a presage of what was to come.

The king lifted his spear, and suddenly twenty thousand feet were raised, as though they belonged to one man, and brought down with a stamp upon the earth. This was repeated three times, causing the solid ground to shake and tremble. Then from a far point of the circle a solitary voice began a wailing song, of which the refrain ran something as follows:—

"What is the lot of man born of woman?"

Back came the answer rolling out from every throat in that vast company

"Death!"

Gradually, however, the song was taken up by company after company, till the whole armed multitude were singing it, and I could no longer follow the words, except in so far as they appeared to represent various phases of human passions, fears, and joys. Now it seemed to be a love song, now a majestic swelling war chant, and last of all a death dirge ending suddenly in one heart-breaking wail that went echoing and rolling away in a volume of blood-curdling sound.

Again silence fell upon the place, and again it was broken by the king lifting his hand. Instantly we heard a pattering of feet, and from out of the masses of warriors strange and awful figures appeared running towards us. As they drew near we saw that these were women, most of them aged, for their white hair, ornamented with small bladders taken from fish, streamed out behind them. Their faces were painted in stripes of white and yellow; down their backs hung snake-skins, and round their waists rattled circlets of human bones, while each held a small forked wand in her shrivelled hand. In all there were ten of them. When they arrived in front of us they halted, and one of them, pointing with her wand towards the crouching figure of Gagool, cried out—

"Mother, old mother, we are here."

"Good! good! good!" answered that aged Iniquity. "Are your eyes keen, *Isanusis* [witch doctresses], ye seers in dark places?"

"Mother, they are keen."

"*Good! good! good!* Are your ears open, *Isanusi*, ye who hear words that come not from the tongue?"

"Mother, they are open."

"*Good! good! good!* Are your senses awake, *Isanusi*—can ye smell blood, can ye purge the land of the wicked ones who compass evil against the king and against their neighbours? Are ye ready to do the justice of 'Heaven above,' ye whom I have taught, who have eaten of the bread of my wisdom, and drunk of the water of my magic?"

"Mother, we can."

"Then go! Tarry not, ye vultures; see, the slayers"—pointing to the ominous group of executioners behind—"make sharp their spears; the white men from afar are hungry to see. *Go!*"

With a wild yell Gagool's horrid ministers broke away in every direction, like fragments from a shell, the dry bones round their waists rattling as they ran, and headed for various points of the dense human circle. We could not watch them all, so we fixed our eyes upon the *Isanusi* nearest to us. When she came to within a few paces of the warriors she halted and began to dance wildly, turning round and round with an almost incredible rapidity, and shrieking out sentences such as "I smell him, the evil-doer!" "He is near, he who poisoned his mother!" "I hear the thoughts of him who thought evil of the king!"

Quicker and quicker she danced, till she lashed herself into such a frenzy of excitement that the foam flew in specks from her gnashing jaws, till her eyes seemed to start from her head, and her flesh to quiver visibly. Suddenly she stopped dead and stiffened all over, like a pointer dog when he scents game, and then with outstretched wand she began to creep stealthily towards the soldiers before her. It seemed to us that as she came their stoicism gave way, and that they shrank from her. As for ourselves, we followed her movements with a horrible fascination. Presently, still

creeping and crouching like a dog, the *Isanusi* was before them. Then she halted and pointed, and again crept on a pace or two.

Suddenly the end came. With a shriek she sprang in and touched a tall warrior with her forked wand. Instantly two of his comrades, those standing immediately next to him, seized the doomed man, each by one arm, and advanced with him towards the king.

He did not resist, but we saw that he dragged his limbs as though they were paralysed, and that his fingers, from which the spear had fallen, were limp like those of a man newly dead.

As he came, two of the villainous executioners stepped forward to meet him. Presently they met, and the executioners turned round, looking towards the king as though for orders.

"*Kill!*" said the king.

"*Kill!*" squeaked Gagool.

"*Kill!*" re-echoed Scragga, with a hollow chuckle.

Almost before the words were uttered the horrible deed was done. One man had driven his spear into the victim's heart, and to make assurance double sure, the other had dashed out his brains with a great club.

"*One,*" counted Twala the king, just like a black Madame Defarge, as Good said, and the body was dragged a few paces away and stretched out.

Hardly was the thing done before another poor wretch was brought up, like an ox to the slaughter. This time we could see, from the leopard-skin cloak which he wore, that the man was a person of rank. Again the awful syllables were spoken, and the victim fell dead.

"*Two,*" counted the king.

And so the deadly game went on, till about a hundred bodies were stretched in rows behind us. I have heard of the gladiatorial shows of the Cæsars, and of the Spanish bull-fights, but I take the liberty of doubting if

either of them could be half so horrible as this Kukuana witch-hunt. Gladiatorial shows and Spanish bull-fights at any rate contributed to the public amusement, which certainly was not the case here. The most confirmed sensation-monger would fight shy of sensation if he knew that it was well on the cards that he would, in his own proper person, be the subject of the next "event."

Once we rose and tried to remonstrate, but were sternly repressed by Twala.

"Let the law take its course, white men. These dogs are magicians and evil-doers; it is well that they should die," was the only answer vouchsafed to us.

About half-past ten there was a pause. The witch-finders gathered themselves together, apparently exhausted with their bloody work, and we thought that the performance was done with. But it was not so, for presently, to our surprise, the ancient woman, Gagool, rose from her crouching position, and supporting herself with a stick, staggered off into the open space. It was an extraordinary sight to see this frightful vulture-headed old creature, bent nearly double with extreme age, gather strength by degrees, until at last she rushed about almost as actively as her ill-omened pupils. To and fro she ran, chanting to herself, till suddenly she made a dash at a tall man standing in front of one of the regiments, and touched him. As she did this a sort of groan went up from the regiment which evidently he commanded. But two of its officers seized him all the same, and brought him up for execution. We learned afterwards that he was a man of great wealth and importance, being indeed a cousin of the king.

He was slain, and Twala counted one hundred and three. Then Gagool again sprang to and fro, gradually drawing nearer and nearer to ourselves.

"Hang me if I don't believe she is going to try her games on us," ejaculated Good in horror.

"Nonsense!" said Sir Henry.

As for myself, when I saw that old fiend dancing nearer and nearer, my heart positively sank into my boots. I glanced behind us at the long rows of corpses, and shivered.

Nearer and nearer waltzed Gagool, looking for all the world like an animated crooked stick or comma, her horrid eyes gleaming and glowing with a most unholy lustre.

Nearer she came, and yet nearer, every creature in that vast assemblage watching her movements with intense anxiety. At last she stood still and pointed.

"Which is it to be?" asked Sir Henry to himself.

In a moment all doubts were at rest, for the old hag had rushed in and touched Umbopa, alias Ignosi, on the shoulder.

"I smell him out," she shrieked. "Kill him, kill him, he is full of evil; kill him, the stranger, before blood flows from him. Slay him, O king."

There was a pause, of which I instantly took advantage.

"O king," I called out, rising from my seat, "this man is the servant of thy guests, he is their dog; whosoever sheds the blood of our dog sheds our blood. By the sacred law of hospitality I claim protection for him."

"Gagool, mother of the witch-finders, has smelt him out; he must die, white men," was the sullen answer.

"Nay, he shall not die," I replied; "he who tries to touch him shall die indeed."

"Seize him!" roared Twala to the executioners; who stood round red to the eyes with the blood of their victims.

They advanced towards us, and then hesitated. As for Ignosi, he clutched his spear, and raised it as though determined to sell his life dearly.

"Stand back, ye dogs!" I shouted, "if ye would see to-morrow's light. Touch one hair of his head and your king dies," and I covered Twala with my revolver. Sir Henry and Good also drew their pistols, Sir Henry pointing his at the leading executioner, who was advancing to carry out the sentence, and Good taking a deliberate aim at Gagool.

Twala winced perceptibly as my barrel came in a line with his broad chest.

"Well," I said, "what is it to be, Twala?"

Then he spoke.

"Put away your magic tubes," he said; "ye have adjured me in the name of hospitality, and for that reason, but not from fear of what ye can do, I spare him. Go in peace."

"It is well," I answered unconcernedly; "we are weary of slaughter, and would sleep. Is the dance ended?"

"It is ended," Twala answered sulkily. "Let these dead dogs," pointing to the long rows of corpses, "be flung out to the hyænas and the vultures," and he lifted his spear.

Instantly the regiments began to defile through the kraal gateway in perfect silence, a fatigue party only remaining behind to drag away the corpses of those who had been sacrificed.

Then we rose also, and making our salaam to his majesty, which he hardly deigned to acknowledge, we departed to our huts.

"Well," said Sir Henry, as we sat down, having first lit a lamp of the sort used by the Kukuanas, of which the wick is made from the fibre of a species of palm leaf, and the oil from clarified hippopotamus fat, "well, I feel uncommonly inclined to be sick."

"If I had any doubts about helping Umbopa to rebel against that infernal blackguard," put in Good, "they are gone now. It was as much as I could do

to sit still while that slaughter was going on. I tried to keep my eyes shut, but they would open just at the wrong time. I wonder where Infadoos is. Umbopa, my friend, you ought to be grateful to us; your skin came near to having an air-hole made in it."

"I am grateful, Bougwan," was Umbopa's answer, when I had translated, "and I shall not forget. As for Infadoos, he will be here by-and-by. We must wait."

So we lit our pipes and waited.

[1] In the Soudan swords and coats of mail are still worn by Arabs, whose ancestors must have stripped them from the bodies of Crusaders.—Editor.

CHAPTER XI

WE GIVE A SIGN

For a long while—two hours, I should think—we sat there in silence, being too much overwhelmed by the recollection of the horrors we had seen to talk. At last, just as we were thinking of turning in—for the night drew nigh to dawn—we heard a sound of steps. Then came the challenge of a sentry posted at the kraal gate, which apparently was answered, though not in an audible tone, for the steps still advanced; and in another second Infadoos had entered the hut, followed by some half-dozen stately-looking chiefs.

"My lords," he said, "I have come according to my word. My lords and Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas, I have brought with me these men," pointing to the row of chiefs, "who are great men among us, having each one of them the command of three thousand soldiers, that live but to do their bidding, under the king's. I have told them of what I have seen, and

what my ears have heard. Now let them also behold the sacred snake around thee, and hear thy story, Ignosi, that they may say whether or no they will make cause with thee against Twala the king."

By way of answer Ignosi again stripped off his girdle, and exhibited the snake tattooed about him. Each chief in turn drew near and examined the sign by the dim light of the lamp, and without saying a word passed on to the other side.

Then Ignosi resumed his moocha, and addressing them, repeated the history he had detailed in the morning.

"Now ye have heard, chiefs," said Infadoos, when he had done, "what say ye: will ye stand by this man and help him to his father's throne, or will ye not? The land cries out against Twala, and the blood of the people flows like the waters in spring. Ye have seen to-night. Two other chiefs there were with whom I had it in my mind to speak, and where are they now? The hyænas howl over their corpses. Soon shall ye be as they are if ye strike not. Choose then, my brothers."

The eldest of the six men, a short, thick-set warrior, with white hair, stepped forward a pace and answered—

"Thy words are true, Infadoos; the land cries out. My own brother is among those who died to-night; but this is a great matter, and the thing is hard to believe. How know we that if we lift our spears it may not be for a thief and a liar? It is a great matter, I say, of which none can see the end. For of this be sure, blood will flow in rivers before the deed is done; many will still cleave to the king, for men worship the sun that still shines bright in the heavens, rather than that which has not risen. These white men from the Stars, their magic is great, and Ignosi is under the cover of their wing. If he be indeed the rightful king, let them give us a sign, and let the people have a sign, that all may see. So shall men cleave to us, knowing of a truth that the white man's magic is with them."

"Ye have the sign of the snake," I answered.

"My lord, it is not enough. The snake may have been placed there since the man's childhood. Show us a sign, and it will suffice. But we will not move without a sign."

The others gave a decided assent, and I turned in perplexity to Sir Henry and Good, and explained the situation.

"I think that I have it," said Good exultingly; "ask them to give us a moment to think."

I did so, and the chiefs withdrew. So soon as they had gone Good went to the little box where he kept his medicines, unlocked it, and took out a note-book, in the fly-leaves of which was an almanack. "Now look here, you fellows, isn't to-morrow the 4th of June?" he said.

We had kept a careful note of the days, so were able to answer that it was.

"Very good; then here we have it—'4 June, total eclipse of the moon commences at 8.15 Greenwich time, visible in Teneriffe—*South Africa, &c.*' There's a sign for you. Tell them we will darken the moon to-morrow night."

The idea was a splendid one; indeed, the only weak spot about it was a fear lest Good's almanack might be incorrect. If we made a false prophecy on such a subject, our prestige would be gone for ever, and so would Ignosi's chance of the throne of the Kukuanas.

"Suppose that the almanack is wrong," suggested Sir Henry to Good, who was busily employed in working out something on a blank page of the book.

"I see no reason to suppose anything of the sort," was his answer. "Eclipses always come up to time; at least that is my experience of them, and it especially states that this one will be visible in South Africa. I have worked out the reckonings as well as I can, without knowing our exact position; and I make out that the eclipse should begin here about ten o'clock

tomorrow night, and last till half-past twelve. For an hour and a half or so there should be almost total darkness."

"Well," said Sir Henry, "I suppose we had better risk it."

I acquiesced, though doubtfully, for eclipses are queer cattle to deal with—it might be a cloudy night, for instance, or our dates might be wrong—and sent Umbopa to summon the chiefs back. Presently they came, and I addressed them thus—

"Great men of the Kukuanas, and thou, Infadoos, listen. We love not to show our powers, for to do so is to interfere with the course of nature, and to plunge the world into fear and confusion. But since this matter is a great one, and as we are angered against the king because of the slaughter we have seen, and because of the act of the *Isanusi* Gagool, who would have put our friend Ignosi to death, we have determined to break a rule, and to give such a sign as all men may see. Come hither"; and I led them to the door of the hut and pointed to the red ball of the moon. "What see ye there?"

"We see the sinking moon," answered the spokesman of the party.

"It is so. Now tell me, can any mortal man put out that moon before her hour of setting, and bring the curtain of black night down upon the land?"

The chief laughed a little at the question. "No, my lord, that no man can do. The moon is stronger than man who looks on her, nor can she vary in her courses."

"Ye say so. Yet I tell you that to-morrow night, about two hours before midnight, we will cause the moon to be eaten up for a space of an hour and half an hour. Yes, deep darkness shall cover the earth, and it shall be for a sign that Ignosi is indeed king of the Kukuanas. If we do this thing, will ye be satisfied?"

"Yea, my lords," answered the old chief with a smile, which was reflected on the faces of his companions; "*if* ye do this thing, we will be satisfied indeed."

"It shall be done; we three, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn, have said it, and it shall be done. Dost thou hear, Infadoos?"

"I hear, my lord, but it is a wonderful thing that ye promise, to put out the moon, the mother of the world, when she is at her full."

"Yet shall we do it, Infadoos."

"It is well, my lords. To-day, two hours after sunset, Twala will send for my lords to witness the girls dance, and one hour after the dance begins the girl whom Twala thinks the fairest shall be killed by Scragga, the king's son, as a sacrifice to the Silent Ones, who sit and keep watch by the mountains yonder," and he pointed towards the three strange-looking peaks where Solomon's road was supposed to end. "Then let my lords darken the moon, and save the maiden's life, and the people will believe indeed."

"Ay," said the old chief, still smiling a little, "the people will believe indeed."

"Two miles from Loo," went on Infadoos, "there is a hill curved like a new moon, a stronghold, where my regiment, and three other regiments which these chiefs command, are stationed. This morning we will make a plan whereby two or three other regiments may be moved there also. Then, if in truth my lords can darken the moon, in the darkness I will take my lords by the hand and lead them out of Loo to this place, where they shall be safe, and thence we can make war upon Twala the king."

"It is good," said I. "Let leave us to sleep awhile and to make ready our magic."

Infadoos rose, and, having saluted us, departed with the chiefs.

"My friends," said Ignosi, so soon as they were gone, "can ye do this wonderful thing, or were ye speaking empty words to the captains?"

"We believe that we can do it, Umbopa—Ignosi, I mean."

"It is strange," he answered, "and had ye not been Englishmen I would not have believed it; but I have learned that English 'gentlemen' tell no lies. If we live through the matter, be sure that I will repay you."

"Ignosi," said Sir Henry, "promise me one thing."

"I will promise, Incubu, my friend, even before I hear it," answered the big man with a smile. "What is it?"

"This: that if ever you come to be king of this people you will do away with the smelling out of wizards such as we saw last night; and that the killing of men without trial shall no longer take place in the land."

Ignosi thought for a moment after I had translated this request, and then answered—

"The ways of black people are not as the ways of white men, Incubu, nor do we value life so highly. Yet I will promise. If it be in my power to hold them back, the witch-finders shall hunt no more, nor shall any man die the death without trial or judgment."

"That's a bargain, then," said Sir Henry; "and now let us get a little rest."

Thoroughly wearied out, we were soon sound asleep, and slept till Ignosi woke us about eleven o'clock. Then we rose, washed, and ate a hearty breakfast. After that we went outside the hut and walked about, amusing ourselves with examining the structure of the Kukuana huts and observing the customs of the women.

"I hope that eclipse will come off," said Sir Henry presently.

"If it does not it will soon be all up with us," I answered mournfully; "for so sure as we are living men some of those chiefs will tell the whole story to the king, and then there will be another sort of eclipse, and one that we shall certainly not like."

Returning to the hut we ate some dinner, and passed the rest of the day in receiving visits of ceremony and curiosity. At length the sun set, and we

enjoyed a couple of hours of such quiet as our melancholy forebodings would allow to us. Finally, about half-past eight, a messenger came from Twala to bid us to the great annual "dance of girls" which was about to be celebrated.

Hastily we put on the chain shirts that the king had sent us, and taking our rifles and ammunition with us, so as to have them handy in case we had to fly, as suggested by Infadoos, we started boldly enough, though with inward fear and trembling. The great space in front of the king's kraal bore a very different appearance from that which it had presented on the previous evening. In place of the grim ranks of serried warriors were company after company of Kukuana girls, not over-dressed, so far as clothing went, but each crowned with a wreath of flowers, and holding a palm leaf in one hand and a white arum lily in the other. In the centre of the open moonlit space sat Twala the king, with old Gagool at his feet, attended by Infadoos, the boy Scragga, and twelve guards. There were also present about a score of chiefs, amongst whom I recognised most of our friends of the night before.

Twala greeted us with much apparent cordiality, though I saw him fix his one eye viciously on Umbopa.

"Welcome, white men from the Stars," he said; "this is another sight from that which your eyes gazed on by the light of last night's moon, but it is not so good a sight. Girls are pleasant, and were it not for such as these," and he pointed round him, "we should none of us be here this day; but men are better. Kisses and the tender words of women are sweet, but the sound of the clashing of the spears of warriors, and the smell of men's blood, are sweeter far! Would ye have wives from among our people, white men? If so, choose the fairest here, and ye shall have them, as many as ye will," and he paused for an answer.

As the prospect did not seem to be without attractions for Good, who, like most sailors, is of a susceptible nature,—being elderly and wise, foreseeing the endless complications that anything of the sort would involve, for women bring trouble so surely as the night follows the day, I put in a hasty answer—

"Thanks to thee, O king, but we white men wed only with white women like ourselves. Your maidens are fair, but they are not for us!"

The king laughed. "It is well. In our land there is a proverb which runs, 'Women's eyes are always bright, whatever the colour,' and another that says, 'Love her who is present, for be sure she who is absent is false to thee;' but perhaps these things are not so in the Stars. In a land where men are white all things are possible. So be it, white men; the girls will not go begging! Welcome again; and welcome, too, thou black one; if Gagool here had won her way, thou wouldst have been stiff and cold by now. It is lucky for thee that thou too camest from the Stars; ha! ha!"

"I can kill thee before thou killest me, O king," was Ignosi's calm answer, "and thou shalt be stiff before my limbs cease to bend."

Twala started. "Thou speakest boldly, boy," he replied angrily; "presume not too far."

"He may well be bold in whose lips are truth. The truth is a sharp spear which flies home and misses not. It is a message from 'the Stars,' O king."

Twala scowled, and his one eye gleamed fiercely, but he said nothing more.

"Let the dance begin," he cried, and then the flower-crowned girls sprang forward in companies, singing a sweet song and waving the delicate palms and white lilies. On they danced, looking faint and spiritual in the soft, sad light of the risen moon; now whirling round and round, now meeting in mimic warfare, swaying, eddying here and there, coming forward, falling back in an ordered confusion delightful to witness. At last they paused, and a beautiful young woman sprang out of the ranks and began to pirouette in front of us with a grace and vigour which would have put most ballet girls to shame. At length she retired exhausted, and another took her place, then another and another, but none of them, either in grace, skill, or personal attractions, came up to the first.

When the chosen girls had all danced, the king lifted his hand.

"Which deem ye the fairest, white men?" he asked.

"The first," said I unthinkingly. Next second I regretted it, for I remembered that Infadoos had told us that the fairest woman must be offered up as a sacrifice.

"Then is my mind as your minds, and my eyes as your eyes. She is the fairest! and a sorry thing it is for her, for she must die!"

"*Ay, must die!*" piped out Gagool, casting a glance of her quick eyes in the direction of the poor girl, who, as yet ignorant of the awful fate in store for her, was standing some ten yards off in front of a company of maidens, engaged in nervously picking a flower from her wreath to pieces, petal by petal.

"Why, O king?" said I, restraining my indignation with difficulty; "the girl has danced well, and pleased us; she is fair too; it would be hard to reward her with death."

Twala laughed as he answered—

"It is our custom, and the figures who sit in stone yonder," and he pointed towards the three distant peaks, "must have their due. Did I fail to put the fairest girl to death to-day, misfortune would fall upon me and my house. Thus runs the prophecy of my people: 'If the king offer not a sacrifice of a fair girl, on the day of the dance of maidens, to the Old Ones who sit and watch on the mountains, then shall he fall, and his house.' Look ye, white men, my brother who reigned before me offered not the sacrifice, because of the tears of the woman, and he fell, and his house, and I reign in his stead. It is finished; she must die!" Then turning to the guards—"Bring her hither; Scragga, make sharp thy spear."

Two of the men stepped forward, and as they advanced, the girl, for the first time realising her impending fate, screamed aloud and turned to fly. But the strong hands caught her fast, and brought her, struggling and weeping, before us.

"What is thy name, girl?" piped Gagool. "What! wilt thou not answer? Shall the king's son do his work at once?"

At this hint, Scragga, looking more evil than ever, advanced a step and lifted his great spear, and at that moment I saw Good's hand creep to his revolver. The poor girl caught the faint glint of steel through her tears, and it sobered her anguish. She ceased struggling, and clasping her hands convulsively, stood shuddering from head to foot.

"See," cried Scragga in high glee, "she shrinks from the sight of my little plaything even before she has tasted it," and he tapped the broad blade of his spear.

"If ever I get the chance you shall pay for that, you young hound!" I heard Good mutter beneath his breath.

"Now that thou art quiet, give us thy name, my dear. Come, speak out, and fear not," said Gagool in mockery.

"Oh, mother," answered the girl, in trembling accents, "my name is Foulata, of the house of Suko. Oh, mother, why must I die? I have done no wrong!"

"Be comforted," went on the old woman in her hateful tone of mockery. "Thou must die, indeed, as a sacrifice to the Old Ones who sit yonder," and she pointed to the peaks; "but it is better to sleep in the night than to toil in the daytime; it is better to die than to live, and thou shalt die by the royal hand of the king's own son."

The girl Foulata wrung her hands in anguish, and cried out aloud, "Oh, cruel! and I so young! What have I done that I should never again see the sun rise out of the night, or the stars come following on his track in the evening, that I may no more gather the flowers when the dew is heavy, or listen to the laughing of the waters? Woe is me, that I shall never see my father's hut again, nor feel my mother's kiss, nor tend the lamb that is sick! Woe is me, that no lover shall put his arm around me and look into my eyes, nor shall men children be born of me! Oh, cruel, cruel!"

And again she wrung her hands and turned her tear-stained flower-crowned face to Heaven, looking so lovely in her despair—for she was indeed a beautiful woman—that assuredly the sight of her would have melted the hearts of any less cruel than were the three fiends before us. Prince Arthur's appeal to the ruffians who came to blind him was not more touching than that of this savage girl.

But it did not move Gagool or Gagool's master, though I saw signs of pity among the guards behind, and on the faces of the chiefs; and as for Good, he gave a fierce snort of indignation, and made a motion as though to go to her assistance. With all a woman's quickness, the doomed girl interpreted what was passing in his mind, and by a sudden movement flung herself before him, and clasped his "beautiful white legs" with her hands.

"Oh, white father from the Stars!" she cried, "throw over me the mantle of thy protection; let me creep into the shadow of thy strength, that I may be saved. Oh, keep me from these cruel men and from the mercies of Gagool!"

"All right, my hearty, I'll look after you," sang out Good in nervous Saxon. "Come, get up, there's a good girl," and he stooped and caught her hand.

Twala turned and motioned to his son, who advanced with his spear lifted.

"Now's your time," whispered Sir Henry to me; "what are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for that eclipse," I answered; "I have had my eye on the moon for the last half-hour, and I never saw it look healthier."

"Well, you must risk it now, or the girl will be killed. Twala is losing patience."

Recognising the force of the argument, and having cast one more despairing look at the bright face of the moon, for never did the most ardent astronomer with a theory to prove await a celestial event with such anxiety,

I stepped with all the dignity that I could command between the prostrate girl and the advancing spear of Scragga.

"King," I said, "it shall not be; we will not endure this thing; let the girl go in safety."

Twala rose from his seat in wrath and astonishment, and from the chiefs and serried ranks of maidens who had closed in slowly upon us in anticipation of the tragedy came a murmur of amazement.

"*Shall not be!* thou white dog, that yapest at the lion in his cave; *shall not be!* art thou mad? Be careful, lest this chicken's fate overtake thee, and those with thee. How canst thou save her or thyself? Who art thou that thou settest thyself between me and my will? Back, I say. Scragga, kill her! Ho, guards! seize these men."

At his cry armed men ran swiftly from behind the hut, where they had evidently been placed beforehand.

Sir Henry, Good, and Umbopa ranged themselves alongside of me, and lifted their rifles.

"Stop!" I shouted boldly, though at the moment my heart was in my boots. "Stop! we, the white men from the Stars, say that it shall not be. Come but one pace nearer, and we will put out the moon like a wind-blown lamp, as we who dwell in her House can do, and plunge the land in darkness. Dare to disobey, and ye shall taste of our magic."

My threat produced an effect; the men halted, and Scragga stood still before us, his spear lifted.

"Hear him! hear him!" piped Gagool; "hear the liar who says that he will put out the moon like a lamp. Let him do it, and the girl shall be speared. Yes, let him do it, or die by the girl, he and those with him."

I glanced up at the moon despairingly, and now to my intense joy and relief saw that we—or rather the almanack—had made no mistake. On the edge of the great orb lay a faint rim of shadow, while a smoky hue grew and

gathered upon its bright surface. Never shall I forget that supreme, that superb moment of relief.

Then I lifted my hand solemnly towards the sky, an example which Sir Henry and Good followed, and quoted a line or two from the "Ingoldsby Legends" at it in the most impressive tones that I could command. Sir Henry followed suit with a verse out of the Old Testament, and something about Balbus building a wall, in Latin, whilst Good addressed the Queen of Night in a volume of the most classical bad language which he could think of.

Slowly the penumbra, the shadow of a shadow, crept on over the bright surface, and as it crept I heard deep gasps of fear rising from the multitude around.

"Look, O king!" I cried; "look, Gagool! Look, chiefs and people and women, and see if the white men from the Stars keep their word, or if they be but empty liars!

"The moon grows black before your eyes; soon there will be darkness—ay, darkness in the hour of the full moon. Ye have asked for a sign; it is given to you. Grow dark, O Moon! withdraw thy light, thou pure and holy One; bring the proud heart of usurping murderers to the dust, and eat up the world with shadows."

A groan of terror burst from the onlookers. Some stood petrified with dread, others threw themselves upon their knees and cried aloud. As for the king, he sat still and turned pale beneath his dusky skin. Only Gagool kept her courage.

"It will pass," she cried; "I have often seen the like before; no man can put out the moon; lose not heart; sit still—the shadow will pass."

"Wait, and ye shall see," I replied, hopping with excitement. "O Moon! Moon! Moon! wherefore art thou so cold and fickle?" This appropriate quotation was from the pages of a popular romance that I chanced to have read recently, though now I come to think of it, it was ungrateful of me to abuse the Lady of the Heavens, who was showing herself to be the truest of

friends to us, however she may have behaved to the impassioned lover in the novel. Then I added: "Keep it up, Good, I can't remember any more poetry. Curse away, there's a good fellow."

Good responded nobly to this tax upon his inventive faculties. Never before had I the faintest conception of the breadth and depth and height of a naval officer's objurgatory powers. For ten minutes he went on in several languages without stopping, and he scarcely ever repeated himself.

Meanwhile the dark ring crept on, while all that great assembly fixed their eyes upon the sky and stared and stared in fascinated silence. Strange and unholy shadows encroached upon the moonlight, an ominous quiet filled the place. Everything grew still as death. Slowly and in the midst of this most solemn silence the minutes sped away, and while they sped the full moon passed deeper and deeper into the shadow of the earth, as the inky segment of its circle slid in awful majesty across the lunar craters. The great pale orb seemed to draw near and to grow in size. She turned a coppery hue, then that portion of her surface which was unobscured as yet grew grey and ashen, and at length, as totality approached, her mountains and her plains were to be seen glowing luridly through a crimson gloom.

On, yet on, crept the ring of darkness; it was now more than half across the blood-red orb. The air grew thick, and still more deeply tinged with dusky crimson. On, yet on, till we could scarcely see the fierce faces of the group before us. No sound rose now from the spectators, and at last Good stopped swearing.

"The moon is dying—the white wizards have killed the moon," yelled the prince Scragga at last. "We shall all perish in the dark," and animated by fear or fury, or by both, he lifted his spear and drove it with all his force at Sir Henry's breast. But he forgot the mail shirts that the king had given us, and which we wore beneath our clothing. The steel rebounded harmless, and before he could repeat the blow Curtis had snatched the spear from his hand and sent it straight through him.

Scragga dropped dead.

At the sight, and driven mad with fear of the gathering darkness, and of the unholy shadow which, as they believed, was swallowing the moon, the companies of girls broke up in wild confusion, and ran screeching for the gateways. Nor did the panic stop there. The king himself, followed by his guards, some of the chiefs, and Gagool, who hobbled away after them with marvellous alacrity, fled for the huts, so that in another minute we ourselves, the would-be victim Foulata, Infadoos, and most of the chiefs who had interviewed us on the previous night, were left alone upon the scene, together with the dead body of Scragga, Twala's son.

"Chiefs," I said, "we have given you the sign. If ye are satisfied, let us fly swiftly to the place of which ye spoke. The charm cannot now be stopped. It will work for an hour and the half of an hour. Let us cover ourselves in the darkness."

"Come," said Infadoos, turning to go, an example which was followed by the awed captains, ourselves, and the girl Foulata, whom Good took by the arm.

Before we reached the gate of the kraal the moon went out utterly, and from every quarter of the firmament the stars rushed forth into the inky sky.

Holding each other by the hand we stumbled on through the darkness.

CHAPTER XII

BEFORE THE BATTLE

Luckily for us, Infadoos and the chiefs knew all the paths of the great town perfectly, so that we passed by side-ways unmolested, and notwithstanding the gloom we made fair progress.

For an hour or more we journeyed on, till at length the eclipse began to pass, and that edge of the moon which had disappeared the first became

again visible. Suddenly, as we watched, there burst from it a silver streak of light, accompanied by a wondrous ruddy glow, which hung upon the blackness of the sky like a celestial lamp, and a wild and lovely sight it was. In another five minutes the stars began to fade, and there was sufficient light to see our whereabouts. We then discovered that we were clear of the town of Loo, and approaching a large flat-topped hill, measuring some two miles in circumference. This hill, which is of a formation common in South Africa, is not very high; indeed, its greatest elevation is scarcely more than 200 feet, but it is shaped like a horseshoe, and its sides are rather precipitous and strewn with boulders. On the grass table-land at its summit is ample camping-ground, which had been utilised as a military cantonment of no mean strength. Its ordinary garrison was one regiment of three thousand men, but as we toiled up the steep side of the mountain in the returning moonlight we perceived that there were several of such regiments encamped there.

Reaching the table-land at last, we found crowds of men roused from their sleep, shivering with fear and huddled up together in the utmost consternation at the natural phenomenon which they were witnessing. Passing through these without a word, we gained a hut in the centre of the ground, where we were astonished to find two men waiting, laden with our few goods and chattels, which of course we had been obliged to leave behind in our hasty flight.

"I sent for them," explained Infadoos; "and also for these," and he lifted up Good's long-lost trousers.

With an exclamation of rapturous delight Good sprang at them, and instantly proceeded to put them on.

"Surely my lord will not hide his beautiful white legs!" exclaimed Infadoos regretfully.

But Good persisted, and once only did the Kukuana people get the chance of seeing his beautiful legs again. Good is a very modest man. Henceforward they had to satisfy their æsthetic longings with his one whisker, his transparent eye, and his movable teeth.

Still gazing with fond remembrance at Good's trousers, Infadoos next informed us that he had commanded the regiments to muster so soon as the day broke, in order to explain to them fully the origin and circumstances of the rebellion which was decided on by the chiefs, and to introduce to them the rightful heir to the throne, Ignosi.

Accordingly, when the sun was up, the troops—in all some twenty thousand men, and the flower of the Kukuana army—were mustered on a large open space, to which we went. The men were drawn up in three sides of a dense square, and presented a magnificent spectacle. We took our station on the open side of the square, and were speedily surrounded by all the principal chiefs and officers.

These, after silence had been proclaimed, Infadoos proceeded to address. He narrated to them in vigorous and graceful language—for, like most Kukuanas of high rank, he was a born orator—the history of Ignosi's father, and of how he had been basely murdered by Twala the king, and his wife and child driven out to starve. Then he pointed out that the people suffered and groaned under Twala's cruel rule, instancing the proceedings of the previous night, when, under pretence of their being evil-doers, many of the noblest in the land had been dragged forth and wickedly done to death. Next he went on to say that the white lords from the Stars, looking down upon their country, had perceived its trouble, and determined, at great personal inconvenience, to alleviate its lot: That they had accordingly taken the real king of the Kukuanas, Ignosi, who was languishing in exile, by the hand, and led him over the mountains: That they had seen the wickedness of Twala's doings, and for a sign to the wavering, and to save the life of the girl Foulata, actually, by the exercise of their high magic, had put out the moon and slain the young fiend Scragga; and that they were prepared to stand by them, and assist them to overthrow Twala, and set up the rightful king, Ignosi, in his place.

He finished his discourse amidst a murmur of approbation. Then Ignosi stepped forward and began to speak. Having reiterated all that Infadoos his uncle had said, he concluded a powerful speech in these words:—

"O chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people, ye have heard my words. Now must ye make choice between me and him who sits upon my throne, the

uncle who killed his brother, and hunted his brother's child forth to die in the cold and the night. That I am indeed the king these"—pointing to the chiefs—"can tell you, for they have seen the snake about my middle. If I were not the king, would these white men be on my side with all their magic? Tremble, chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people! Is not the darkness they have brought upon the land to confound Twala and cover our flight, darkness even in the hour of the full moon, yet before your eyes?"

"It is," answered the soldiers.

"I am the king; I say to you, I am the king," went on Ignosi, drawing up his great stature to its full, and lifting his broad-bladed battle-axe above his head. "If there be any man among you who says that it is not so, let him stand forth and I will fight him now, and his blood shall be a red token that I tell you true. Let him stand forth, I say;" and he shook the great axe till it flashed in the sunlight.

As nobody seemed inclined to respond to this heroic version of "Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed," our late henchman proceeded with his address.

"I am indeed the king, and should ye stand by my side in the battle, if I win the day ye shall go with me to victory and honour. I will give you oxen and wives, and ye shall take place of all the regiments; and if ye fall, I will fall with you.

"And behold, I give you this promise, that when I sit upon the seat of my fathers, bloodshed shall cease in the land. No longer shall ye cry for justice to find slaughter, no longer shall the witch-finder hunt you out so that ye may be slain without a cause. No man shall die save he who offends against the laws. The 'eating up' of your kraals shall cease; each one of you shall sleep secure in his own hut and fear naught, and justice shall walk blindfold throughout the land. Have ye chosen, chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people?"

"We have chosen, O king," came back the answer.

"It is well. Turn your heads and see how Twala's messengers go forth from the great town, east and west, and north and south, to gather a mighty

army to slay me and you, and these my friends and protectors. To-morrow, or perchance the next day, he will come against us with all who are faithful to him. Then I shall see the man who is indeed my man, the man who fears not to die for his cause; and I tell you that he shall not be forgotten in the time of spoil. I have spoken, O chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people. Now go to your huts and make you ready for war."

There was a pause, till presently one of the chiefs lifted his hand, and out rolled the royal salute, "*Koom*." It was a sign that the soldiers accepted Ignosi as their king. Then they marched off in battalions.

Half an hour afterwards we held a council of war, at which all the commanders of regiments were present. It was evident to us that before very long we should be attacked in overwhelming force. Indeed, from our point of vantage on the hill we could see troops mustering, and runners going forth from Loo in every direction, doubtless to summon soldiers to the king's assistance. We had on our side about twenty thousand men, composed of seven of the best regiments in the country. Twala, so Infadoos and the chiefs calculated, had at least thirty to thirty-five thousand on whom he could rely at present assembled in Loo, and they thought that by midday on the morrow he would be able to gather another five thousand or more to his aid. It was, of course, possible that some of his troops would desert and come over to us, but it was not a contingency which could be reckoned on. Meanwhile, it was clear that active preparations were being made by Twala to subdue us. Already strong bodies of armed men were patrolling round and round the foot of the hill, and there were other signs also of coming assault.

Infadoos and the chiefs, however, were of opinion that no attack would take place that day, which would be devoted to preparation and to the removal of every available means of the moral effect produced upon the minds of the soldiery by the supposed magical darkening of the moon. The onslaught would be on the morrow, they said, and they proved to be right.

Meanwhile, we set to work to strengthen the position in all ways possible. Almost every man was turned out, and in the course of the day, which seemed far too short, much was done. The paths up the hill—that was rather a sanatorium than a fortress, being used generally as the camping

place of regiments suffering from recent service in unhealthy portions of the country—were carefully blocked with masses of stones, and every other approach was made as impregnable as time would allow. Piles of boulders were collected at various spots to be rolled down upon an advancing enemy, stations were appointed to the different regiments, and all preparation was made which our joint ingenuity could suggest.

Just before sundown, as we rested after our toil, we perceived a small company of men advancing towards us from the direction of Loo, one of whom bore a palm leaf in his hand for a sign that he came as a herald.

As he drew near, Ignosi, Infadoos, one or two chiefs and ourselves, went down to the foot of the mountain to meet him. He was a gallant-looking fellow, wearing the regulation leopard-skin cloak.

"Greeting!" he cried, as he came; "the king's greeting to those who make unholy war against the king; the lion's greeting to the jackals that snarl around his heels."

"Speak," I said.

"These are the king's words. Surrender to the king's mercy ere a worse thing befall you. Already the shoulder has been torn from the black bull, and the king drives him bleeding about the camp." [1]

"What are Twala's terms?" I asked from curiosity.

"His terms are merciful, worthy of a great king. These are the words of Twala, the one-eyed, the mighty, the husband of a thousand wives, lord of the Kukuanas, keeper of the Great Road (Solomon's Road), beloved of the Strange Ones who sit in silence at the mountains yonder (the Three Witches), Calf of the Black Cow, Elephant whose tread shakes the earth, Terror of the evil-doer, Ostrich whose feet devour the desert, huge One, black One, wise One, king from generation to generation! these are the words of Twala: 'I will have mercy and be satisfied with a little blood. One in every ten shall die, the rest shall go free; but the white man Incubu, who slew Scragga my son, and the black man his servant, who pretends to my throne, and Infadoos my brother, who brews rebellion against me, these

shall die by torture as an offering to the Silent Ones.' Such are the merciful words of Twala."

After consulting with the others a little, I answered him in a loud voice, so that the soldiers might hear, thus—

"Go back, thou dog, to Twala, who sent thee, and say that we, Ignosi, veritable king of the Kukuanas, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn, the wise ones from the Stars, who make dark the moon, Infadoos, of the royal house, and the chiefs, captains, and people here gathered, make answer and say, 'That we will not surrender; that before the sun has gone down twice, Twala's corpse shall stiffen at Twala's gate, and Ignosi, whose father Twala slew, shall reign in his stead.' Now go, ere we whip thee away, and beware how thou dost lift a hand against such as we are."

The herald laughed loudly. "Ye frighten not men with such swelling words," he cried out. "Show yourselves as bold to-morrow, O ye who darken the moon. Be bold, fight, and be merry, before the crows pick your bones till they are whiter than your faces. Farewell; perhaps we may meet in the fight; fly not to the Stars, but wait for me, I pray, white men." With this shaft of sarcasm he retired, and almost immediately the sun sank.

That night was a busy one, for weary as we were, so far as was possible by the moonlight all preparations for the morrow's fight were continued, and messengers were constantly coming and going from the place where we sat in council. At last, about an hour after midnight, everything that could be done was done, and the camp, save for the occasional challenge of a sentry, sank into silence. Sir Henry and I, accompanied by Ignosi and one of the chiefs, descended the hill and made a round of the pickets. As we went, suddenly, from all sorts of unexpected places, spears gleamed out in the moonlight, only to vanish again when we uttered the password. It was clear to us that none were sleeping at their posts. Then we returned, picking our way warily through thousands of sleeping warriors, many of whom were taking their last earthly rest.

The moonlight flickering along their spears, played upon their features and made them ghastly; the chilly night wind tossed their tall and hearse-like plumes. There they lay in wild confusion, with arms outstretched and twisted limbs; their stern, stalwart forms looking weird and unhuman in the moonlight.

"How many of these do you suppose will be alive at this time to-morrow?" asked Sir Henry.

I shook my head and looked again at the sleeping men, and to my tired and yet excited imagination it seemed as though Death had already touched them. My mind's eye singled out those who were sealed to slaughter, and there rushed in upon my heart a great sense of the mystery of human life, and an overwhelming sorrow at its futility and sadness. To-night these thousands slept their healthy sleep, to-morrow they, and many others with them, ourselves perhaps among them, would be stiffening in the cold; their wives would be widows, their children fatherless, and their place know them no more for ever. Only the old moon would shine on serenely, the night wind would stir the grasses, and the wide earth would take its rest, even as it did æons before we were, and will do æons after we have been forgotten.

Yet man dies not whilst the world, at once his mother and his monument, remains. His name is lost, indeed, but the breath he breathed still stirs the

pine-tops on the mountains, the sound of the words he spoke yet echoes on through space; the thoughts his brain gave birth to we have inherited to-day; his passions are our cause of life; the joys and sorrows that he knew are our familiar friends—the end from which he fled aghast will surely overtake us also!

Truly the universe is full of ghosts, not sheeted churchyard spectres, but the inextinguishable elements of individual life, which having once been, can never *die*, though they blend and change, and change again for ever.

All sorts of reflections of this nature passed through my mind—for as I grow older I regret to say that a detestable habit of thinking seems to be getting a hold of me—while I stood and stared at those grim yet fantastic lines of warriors, sleeping, as their saying goes, "upon their spears."

"Curtis," I said, "I am in a condition of pitiable fear."

Sir Henry stroked his yellow beard and laughed, as he answered—

"I have heard you make that sort of remark before, Quatermain."

"Well, I mean it now. Do you know, I very much doubt if one of us will be alive to-morrow night. We shall be attacked in overwhelming force, and it is quite a chance if we can hold this place."

"We'll give a good account of some of them, at any rate. Look here, Quatermain, this business is nasty, and one with which, properly speaking, we ought not to be mixed up, but we are in for it, so we must make the best of our job. Speaking personally, I had rather be killed fighting than any other way, and now that there seems little chance of our finding my poor brother, it makes the idea easier to me. But fortune favours the brave, and we may succeed. Anyway, the battle will be awful, and having a reputation to keep up, we shall need to be in the thick of the thing."

He made this last remark in a mournful voice, but there was a gleam in his eye which belied its melancholy. I have an idea Sir Henry Curtis

actually likes fighting.

After this we went to sleep for a couple of hours or so.

Just about dawn we were awakened by Infadoos, who came to say that great activity was to be observed in Loo, and that parties of the king's skirmishers were driving in our outposts.

We rose and dressed ourselves for the fray, each putting on his chain armour shirt, for which garments at the present juncture we felt exceedingly thankful. Sir Henry went the whole length about the matter, and dressed himself like a native warrior. "When you are in Kukuanaland, do as the Kukuanas do," he remarked, as he drew the shining steel over his broad breast, which it fitted like a glove. Nor did he stop there. At his request Infadoos had provided him with a complete set of native war uniform. Round his throat he fastened the leopard-skin cloak of a commanding officer, on his brows he bound the plume of black ostrich feathers worn only by generals of high rank, and about his middle a magnificent moocha of white ox-tails. A pair of sandals, a leglet of goat's hair, a heavy battle-axe with a rhinoceros-horn handle, a round iron shield covered with white ox-hide, and the regulation number of *tollas*, or throwing-knives, made up his equipment, to which, however, he added his revolver. The dress was, no doubt, a savage one, but I am bound to say that I seldom saw a finer sight than Sir Henry Curtis presented in this guise. It showed off his magnificent physique to the greatest advantage, and when Ignosi arrived presently, arrayed in a similar costume, I thought to myself that I had never before seen two such splendid men.

As for Good and myself, the armour did not suit us nearly so well. To begin with, Good insisted upon keeping on his new-found trousers, and a stout, short gentleman with an eye-glass, and one half of his face shaved, arrayed in a mail shirt, carefully tucked into a very seedy pair of corduroys, looks more remarkable than imposing. In my case, the chain shirt being too big for me, I put it on over all my clothes, which caused it to bulge in a somewhat ungainly fashion. I discarded my trousers, however, retaining only my veldtschoons, having determined to go into battle with bare legs, in order to be the lighter for running, in case it became necessary to retire quickly. The mail coat, a spear, a shield, that I did not know how to use, a

couple of *tollas*, a revolver, and a huge plume, which I pinned into the top of my shooting hat, in order to give a bloodthirsty finish to my appearance, completed my modest equipment. In addition to all these articles, of course we had our rifles, but as ammunition was scarce, and as they would be useless in case of a charge, we arranged that they should be carried behind us by bearers.

When at length we had equipped ourselves, we swallowed some food hastily, and then started out to see how things were going on. At one point in the table-land of the mountain, there was a little koppie of brown stone, which served the double purpose of head-quarters and of a conning tower. Here we found Infadoos surrounded by his own regiment, the Greys, which was undoubtedly the finest in the Kukuana army, and the same that we had first seen at the outlying kraal. This regiment, now three thousand five hundred strong, was being held in reserve, and the men were lying down on the grass in companies, and watching the king's forces creep out of Loo in long ant-like columns. There seemed to be no end to the length of these columns—three in all, and each of them numbering, as we judged, at least eleven or twelve thousand men.

As soon as they were clear of the town the regiments formed up. Then one body marched off to the right, one to the left, and the third came on slowly towards us.

"Ah," said Infadoos, "they are going to attack us on three sides at once."

This seemed rather serious news, for our position on the top of the mountain, which measured a mile and a half in circumference, being an extended one, it was important to us to concentrate our comparatively small defending force as much as possible. But since it was impossible for us to dictate in what way we should be assailed, we had to make the best of it, and accordingly sent orders to the various regiments to prepare to receive the separate onslaughts.

[1] This cruel custom is not confined to the Kukuanas, but is by no means uncommon amongst African tribes on the occasion of the outbreak of war or any other important public event.—A.Q.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ATTACK

Slowly, and without the slightest appearance of haste or excitement, the three columns crept on. When within about five hundred yards of us, the main or centre column halted at the root of a tongue of open plain which ran up into the hill, to give time to the other divisions to circumvent our position, which was shaped more or less in the form of a horse-shoe, with its two points facing towards the town of Loo. The object of this manoeuvre was that the threefold assault should be delivered simultaneously.

"Oh, for a gatling!" groaned Good, as he contemplated the serried phalanxes beneath us. "I would clear that plain in twenty minutes."

"We have not got one, so it is no use yearning for it; but suppose you try a shot, Quatermain," said Sir Henry. "See how near you can go to that tall fellow who appears to be in command. Two to one you miss him, and an even sovereign, to be honestly paid if ever we get out of this, that you don't drop the bullet within five yards."

This piqued me, so, loading the express with solid ball, I waited till my friend walked some ten yards out from his force, in order to get a better view of our position, accompanied only by an orderly; then, lying down and resting the express on a rock, I covered him. The rifle, like all expresses, was only sighted to three hundred and fifty yards, so to allow for the drop in trajectory I took him half-way down the neck, which ought, I calculated, to find him in the chest. He stood quite still and gave me every opportunity, but whether it was the excitement or the wind, or the fact of the man being a long shot, I don't know, but this was what happened. Getting dead on, as I thought, a fine sight, I pressed, and when the puff of smoke had cleared

away, to my disgust, I saw my man standing there unharmed, whilst his orderly, who was at least three paces to the left, was stretched upon the ground apparently dead. Turning swiftly, the officer I had aimed at began to run towards his men in evident alarm.

"Bravo, Quatermain!" sang out Good; "you've frightened him."

This made me very angry, for, if possible to avoid it, I hate to miss in public. When a man is master of only one art he likes to keep up his reputation in that art. Moved quite out of myself at my failure, I did a rash thing. Rapidly covering the general as he ran, I let drive with the second barrel. Instantly the poor man threw up his arms, and fell forward on to his face. This time I had made no mistake; and—I say it as a proof of how little we think of others when our own safety, pride, or reputation is in question—I was brute enough to feel delighted at the sight.

The regiments who had seen the feat cheered wildly at this exhibition of the white man's magic, which they took as an omen of success, while the force the general had belonged to—which, indeed, as we ascertained afterwards, he had commanded—fell back in confusion. Sir Henry and Good now took up their rifles and began to fire, the latter industriously "browning" the dense mass before him with another Winchester repeater, and I also had another shot or two, with the result, so far as we could judge, that we put some six or eight men *hors de combat* before they were out of range.

Just as we stopped firing there came an ominous roar from our far right, then a similar roar rose on our left. The two other divisions were engaging us.

At the sound, the mass of men before us opened out a little, and advanced towards the hill and up the spit of bare grass land at a slow trot, singing a deep-throated song as they ran. We kept up a steady fire from our rifles as they came, Ignosi joining in occasionally, and accounted for several men, but of course we produced no more effect upon that mighty rush of armed humanity than he who throws pebbles does on the breaking wave.

On they came, with a shout and the clashing of spears; now they were driving in the pickets we had placed among the rocks at the foot of the hill. After that the advance was a little slower, for though as yet we had offered no serious opposition, the attacking forces must climb up hill, and they came slowly to save their breath. Our first line of defence was about half-way down the side of the slope, our second fifty yards further back, while our third occupied the edge of the plateau.

On they stormed, shouting their war-cry, "*Twala! Twala! Chiele! Chiele!*" (Twala! Twala! Smite! Smite!) "*Ignosi! Ignosi! Chiele! Chiele!*" answered our people. They were quite close now, and the *tollas*, or throwing-knives, began to flash backwards and forwards, and now with an awful yell the battle closed in.

To and fro swayed the mass of struggling warriors, men falling fast as leaves in an autumn wind; but before long the superior weight of the attacking force began to tell, and our first line of defence was slowly pressed back till it merged into the second. Here the struggle was very fierce, but again our people were driven back and up, till at length, within twenty minutes of the commencement of the fight, our third line came into action.

But by this time the assailants were much exhausted, and besides had lost many men killed and wounded, and to break through that third impenetrable hedge of spears proved beyond their powers. For a while the seething lines of savages swung backwards and forwards, in the fierce ebb and flow of battle, and the issue was doubtful. Sir Henry watched the desperate struggle with a kindling eye, and then without a word he rushed off, followed by Good, and flung himself into the hottest of the fray. As for myself, I stopped where I was.

The soldiers caught sight of his tall form as he plunged into battle, and there rose a cry of—

"*Nanzia Incubu! Nanzia Unkungunklovo!*" (Here is the Elephant!) "*Chiele! Chiele!*"

From that moment the end was no longer in doubt. Inch by inch, fighting with splendid gallantry, the attacking force was pressed back down the hillside, till at last it retreated upon its reserves in something like confusion. At that instant, too, a messenger arrived to say that the left attack had been repulsed; and I was just beginning to congratulate myself, believing that the affair was over for the present, when, to our horror, we perceived our men who had been engaged in the right defence being driven towards us across the plain, followed by swarms of the enemy, who had evidently succeeded at this point.

Ignosi, who was standing by me, took in the situation at a glance, and issued a rapid order. Instantly the reserve regiment around us, the Greys, extended itself.

Again Ignosi gave a word of command, which was taken up and repeated by the captains, and in another second, to my intense disgust, I found myself involved in a furious onslaught upon the advancing foe. Getting as much as I could behind Ignosi's huge frame, I made the best of a bad job, and toddled along to be killed as though I liked it. In a minute or two—we were plunging through the flying groups of our men, who at once began to re-form behind us, and then I am sure I do not know what happened. All I can remember is a dreadful rolling noise of the meeting of shields, and the sudden apparition of a huge ruffian, whose eyes seemed literally to be starting out of his head, making straight at me with a bloody spear. But—I say it with pride—I rose—or rather sank—to the occasion. It was one before which most people would have collapsed once and for all. Seeing that if I stood where I was I must be killed, as the horrid apparition came I flung myself down in front of him so cleverly that, being unable to stop himself, he took a header right over my prostrate form. Before he could rise again, *I* had risen and settled the matter from behind with my revolver.

Shortly after this somebody knocked me down, and I remember no more of that charge.

When I came to I found myself back at the koppie, with Good bending over me holding some water in a gourd.

"How do you feel, old fellow?" he asked anxiously.

I got up and shook myself before replying.

"Pretty well, thank you," I answered.

"Thank Heaven! When I saw them carry you in, I felt quite sick; I thought you were done for."

"Not this time, my boy. I fancy I only got a rap on the head, which knocked me stupid. How has it ended?"

"They are repulsed at every point for a while. The loss is dreadfully heavy; we have quite two thousand killed and wounded, and they must have lost three. Look, there's a sight!" and he pointed to long lines of men advancing by fours.

In the centre of every group of four, and being borne by it, was a kind of hide tray, of which a Kukuana force always carries a quantity, with a loop for a handle at each corner. On these trays—and their number seemed endless—lay wounded men, who as they arrived were hastily examined by the medicine men, of whom ten were attached to a regiment. If the wound was not of a fatal character the sufferer was taken away and attended to as carefully as circumstances would allow. But if, on the other hand, the injured man's condition proved hopeless, what followed was very dreadful, though doubtless it may have been the truest mercy. One of the doctors, under pretence of carrying out an examination, swiftly opened an artery with a sharp knife, and in a minute or two the sufferer expired painlessly. There were many cases that day in which this was done. In fact, it was done in the majority of cases when the wound was in the body, for the gash made by the entry of the enormously broad spears used by the Kukuanas generally rendered recovery impossible. In most instances the poor sufferers were already unconscious, and in others the fatal "nick" of the artery was inflicted so swiftly and painlessly that they did not seem to notice it. Still it was a ghastly sight, and one from which we were glad to escape; indeed, I never remember anything of the kind that affected me more than seeing those gallant soldiers thus put out of pain by the red-handed medicine men, except, indeed, on one occasion when, after an attack, I saw a force of Swazis burying their hopelessly wounded *alive*.

Hurrying from this dreadful scene to the further side of the koppie, we found Sir Henry, who still held a battle-axe in his hand, Ignosi, Infadoos, and one or two of the chiefs in deep consultation.

"Thank Heaven, here you are, Quatermain! I can't quite make out what Ignosi wants to do. It seems that though we have beaten off the attack, Twala is now receiving large reinforcements, and is showing a disposition to invest us, with the view of starving us out."

"That's awkward."

"Yes; especially as Infadoos says that the water supply has given out."

"My lord, that is so," said Infadoos; "the spring cannot supply the wants of so great a multitude, and it is failing rapidly. Before night we shall all be thirsty. Listen, Macumazahn. Thou art wise, and hast doubtless seen many wars in the lands from whence thou camest—that is if indeed they make wars in the Stars. Now tell us, what shall we do? Twala has brought up many fresh men to take the place of those who have fallen. Yet Twala has learnt his lesson; the hawk did not think to find the heron ready; but our beak has pierced his breast; he fears to strike at us again. We too are wounded, and he will wait for us to die; he will wind himself round us like a snake round a buck, and fight the fight of 'sit down.'"

"I hear thee," I said.

"So, Macumazahn, thou seest we have no water here, and but a little food, and we must choose between these three things—to languish like a starving lion in his den, or to strive to break away towards the north, or"—and here he rose and pointed towards the dense mass of our foes—"to launch ourselves straight at Twala's throat. Incubu, the great warrior—for to-day he fought like a buffalo in a net, and Twala's soldiers went down before his axe like young corn before the hail; with these eyes I saw it—Incubu says 'Charge'; but the Elephant is ever prone to charge. Now what says Macumazahn, the wily old fox, who has seen much, and loves to bite his enemy from behind? The last word is in Ignosi the king, for it is a king's right to speak of war; but let us hear thy voice, O Macumazahn, who watchest by night, and the voice too of him of the transparent eye."

"What sayest thou, Ignosi," I asked.

"Nay, my father," answered our quondam servant, who now, clad as he was in the full panoply of savage war, looked every inch a warrior king, "do thou speak, and let me, who am but a child in wisdom beside thee, hearken to thy words."

Thus adjured, after taking hasty counsel with Good and Sir Henry, I delivered my opinion briefly to the effect that, being trapped, our best chance, especially in view of the failure of our water supply, was to initiate an attack upon Twala's forces. Then I recommended that the attack should be delivered at once, "before our wounds grew stiff," and also before the sight of Twala's overpowering force caused the hearts of our soldiers "to wax small like fat before a fire." Otherwise, I pointed out, some of the captains might change their minds, and, making peace with Twala, desert to him, or even betray us into his hands.

This expression of opinion seemed, on the whole, to be favourably received; indeed, among the Kukuanas my utterances met with a respect which has never been accorded to them before or since. But the real decision as to our plans lay with Ignosi, who, since he had been recognised as rightful king, could exercise the almost unbounded rights of sovereignty, including, of course, the final decision on matters of generalship, and it was to him that all eyes were now turned.

At length, after a pause, during which he appeared to be thinking deeply, he spoke.

"Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, brave white men, and my friends; Infadoos, my uncle, and chiefs; my heart is fixed. I will strike at Twala this day, and set my fortunes on the blow, ay, and my life—my life and your lives also. Listen; thus will I strike. Ye see how the hill curves round like the half-moon, and how the plain runs like a green tongue towards us within the curve?"

"We see," I answered.

"Good; it is now mid-day, and the men eat and rest after the toil of battle. When the sun has turned and travelled a little way towards the darkness, let thy regiment, my uncle, advance with one other down to the green tongue, and it shall be that when Twala sees it he will hurl his force at it to crush it. But the spot is narrow, and the regiments can come against thee one at a time only; so may they be destroyed one by one, and the eyes of all Twala's army shall be fixed upon a struggle the like of which has not been seen by living man. And with thee, my uncle, shall go Incubu my friend, that when Twala sees his battle-axe flashing in the first rank of the Greys his heart may grow faint. And I will come with the second regiment, that which follows thee, so that if ye are destroyed, as it might happen, there may yet be a king left to fight for; and with me shall come Macumazahn the wise."

"It is well, O king," said Infadoos, apparently contemplating the certainty of the complete annihilation of his regiment with perfect calmness. Truly, these Kukuanas are a wonderful people. Death has no terrors for them when it is incurred in the course of duty.

"And whilst the eyes of the multitude of Twala's soldiers are thus fixed upon the fight," went on Ignosi, "behold, one-third of the men who are left alive to us (i.e. about 6,000) shall creep along the right horn of the hill and fall upon the left flank of Twala's force, and one-third shall creep along the left horn and fall upon Twala's right flank. And when I see that the horns are ready to toss Twala, then will I, with the men who remain to me, charge home in Twala's face, and if fortune goes with us the day will be ours, and before Night drives her black oxen from the mountains to the mountains we shall sit in peace at Loo. And now let us eat and make ready; and, Infadoos, do thou prepare, that the plan be carried out without fail; and stay, let my white father Bougwan go with the right horn, that his shining eye may give courage to the captains."

The arrangements for attack thus briefly indicated were set in motion with a rapidity that spoke well for the perfection of the Kukuana military system. Within little more than an hour rations had been served out and devoured, the divisions were formed, the scheme of onslaught was explained to the leaders, and the whole force, numbering about 18,000 men,

was ready to move, with the exception of a guard left in charge of the wounded.

Presently Good came up to Sir Henry and myself.

"Good-bye, you fellows," he said; "I am off with the right wing according to orders; and so I have come to shake hands, in case we should not meet again, you know," he added significantly.

We shook hands in silence, and not without the exhibition of as much emotion as Anglo-Saxons are wont to show.

"It is a queer business," said Sir Henry, his deep voice shaking a little, "and I confess I never expect to see to-morrow's sun. So far as I can make out, the Greys, with whom I am to go, are to fight until they are wiped out in order to enable the wings to slip round unawares and outflank Twala. Well, so be it; at any rate, it will be a man's death. Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you! I hope you will pull through and live to collar the diamonds; but if you do, take my advice and don't have anything more to do with Pretenders!"

In another second Good had wrung us both by the hand and gone; and then Infadoos came up and led off Sir Henry to his place in the forefront of the Greys, whilst, with many misgivings, I departed with Ignosi to my station in the second attacking regiment.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST STAND OF THE GREYS

In a few more minutes the regiments destined to carry out the flanking movements had tramped off in silence, keeping carefully to the lee of the rising ground in order to conceal their advance from the keen eyes of Twala's scouts.

Half an hour or more was allowed to elapse between the setting out of the horns or wings of the army before any stir was made by the Greys and their supporting regiment, known as the Buffaloes, which formed its chest, and were destined to bear the brunt of the battle.

Both of these regiments were almost perfectly fresh, and of full strength, the Greys having been in reserve in the morning, and having lost but a small number of men in sweeping back that part of the attack which had proved successful in breaking the line of defence, on the occasion when I charged with them and was stunned for my pains. As for the Buffaloes, they had formed the third line of defence on the left, and since the attacking force at that point had not succeeded in breaking through the second, they had scarcely come into action at all.

Infadoos, who was a wary old general, and knew the absolute importance of keeping up the spirits of his men on the eve of such a desperate encounter, employed the pause in addressing his own regiment, the Greys, in poetical language: explaining to them the honour that they were receiving in being put thus in the forefront of the battle, and in having the great white warrior from the Stars to fight with them in their ranks; and promising large rewards of cattle and promotion to all who survived in the event of Ignosi's arms being successful.

I looked down the long lines of waving black plumes and stern faces beneath them, and sighed to think that within one short hour most, if not all, of those magnificent veteran warriors, not a man of whom was under forty years of age, would be laid dead or dying in the dust. It could not be otherwise; they were being condemned, with that wise recklessness of human life which marks the great general, and often saves his forces and attains his ends, to certain slaughter, in order to give their cause and the remainder of the army a chance of success. They were foredoomed to die, and they knew the truth. It was to be their task to engage regiment after regiment of Twala's army on the narrow strip of green beneath us, till they were exterminated or till the wings found a favourable opportunity for their onslaught. And yet they never hesitated, nor could I detect a sign of fear upon the face of a single warrior. There they were—going to certain death, about to quit the blessed light of day for ever, and yet able to contemplate

their doom without a tremor. Even at that moment I could not help contrasting their state of mind with my own, which was far from comfortable, and breathing a sigh of envy and admiration. Never before had I seen such an absolute devotion to the idea of duty, and such a complete indifference to its bitter fruits.

"Behold your king!" ended old Infadoos, pointing to Ignosi; "go fight and fall for him, as is the duty of brave men, and cursed and shameful for ever be the name of him who shrinks from death for his king, or who turns his back to the foe. Behold your king, chiefs, captains, and soldiers! Now do your homage to the sacred Snake, and then follow on, that Incubu and I may show you a road to the heart of Twala's host."

There was a moment's pause, then suddenly a murmur arose from the serried phalanxes before us, a sound like the distant whisper of the sea, caused by the gentle tapping of the handles of six thousand spears against their holders' shields. Slowly it swelled, till its growing volume deepened and widened into a roar of rolling noise, that echoed like thunder against the mountains, and filled the air with heavy waves of sound. Then it decreased, and by faint degrees died away into nothing, and suddenly out crashed the royal salute.

Ignosi, I thought to myself, might well be a proud man that day, for no Roman emperor ever had such a salutation from gladiators "about to die."

Ignosi acknowledged this magnificent act of homage by lifting his battle-axe, and then the Greys filed off in a triple-line formation, each line containing about one thousand fighting men, exclusive of officers. When the last companies had advanced some five hundred yards, Ignosi put himself at the head of the Buffaloes, which regiment was drawn up in a similar three-fold formation, and gave the word to march, and off we went, I, needless to say, uttering the most heartfelt prayers that I might emerge from that entertainment with a whole skin. Many a queer position have I found myself in, but never before in one quite so unpleasant as the present, or one in which my chance of coming off safe was smaller.

By the time that we reached the edge of the plateau the Greys were already half-way down the slope ending in the tongue of grass land that ran

up into the bend of the mountain, something as the frog of a horse's foot runs up into the shoe. The excitement in Twala's camp on the plain beyond was very great, and regiment after regiment was starting forward at a long swinging trot in order to reach the root of the tongue of land before the attacking force could emerge into the plain of Loo.

This tongue, which was some four hundred yards in depth, even at its root or widest part was not more than six hundred and fifty paces across, while at its tip it scarcely measured ninety. The Greys, who, in passing down the side of the hill and on to the tip of the tongue, had formed into a column, on reaching the spot where it broadened out again, reassumed their triple-line formation, and halted dead.

Then we—that is, the Buffaloes—moved down the tip of the tongue and took our stand in reserve, about one hundred yards behind the last line of the Greys, and on slightly higher ground. Meanwhile we had leisure to observe Twala's entire force, which evidently had been reinforced since the morning attack, and could not now, notwithstanding their losses, number less than forty thousand, moving swiftly up towards us. But as they drew near the root of the tongue they hesitated, having discovered that only one regiment could advance into the gorge at a time, and that there, some seventy yards from the mouth of it, unassailable except in front, on account of the high walls of boulder-strewn ground on each side, stood the famous regiment of Greys, the pride and glory of the Kukuana army, ready to hold the way against their power as the three Romans once held the bridge against thousands.

They hesitated, and finally stopped their advance; there was no eagerness to cross spears with these three grim ranks of warriors who stood so firm and ready. Presently, however, a tall general, wearing the customary head-dress of nodding ostrich plumes, appeared, attended by a group of chiefs and orderlies, being, I thought, none other than Twala himself. He gave an order, and the first regiment, raising a shout, charged up towards the Greys, who remained perfectly still and silent till the attacking troops were within forty yards, and a volley of *tollas*, or throwing-knives, came rattling among their ranks.

Then suddenly with a bound and a roar, they sprang forward with uplifted spears, and the regiment met in deadly strife. Next second the roll of the meeting shields came to our ears like the sound of thunder, and the plain seemed to be alive with flashes of light reflected from the shimmering spears. To and fro swung the surging mass of struggling, stabbing humanity, but not for long. Suddenly the attacking lines began to grow thinner, and then with a slow, long heave the Greys passed over them, just as a great wave heaves up its bulk and passes over a sunken ridge. It was done; that regiment was completely destroyed, but the Greys had but two lines left now; a third of their number were dead.

Closing up shoulder to shoulder, once more they halted in silence and awaited attack; and I was rejoiced to catch sight of Sir Henry's yellow beard as he moved to and fro arranging the ranks. So he was yet alive!

Meanwhile we moved on to the ground of the encounter, which was cumbered by about four thousand prostrate human beings, dead, dying, and wounded, and literally stained red with blood. Ignosi issued an order, which was rapidly passed down the ranks, to the effect that none of the enemy's wounded were to be killed, and so far as we could see this command was scrupulously carried out. It would have been a shocking sight, if we had found time to think of such things.

But now a second regiment, distinguished by white plumes, kilts, and shields, was moving to the attack of the two thousand remaining Greys, who stood waiting in the same ominous silence as before, till the foe was within forty yards or so, when they hurled themselves with irresistible force upon them. Again there came the awful roll of the meeting shields, and as we watched the tragedy repeated itself.

But this time the issue was left longer in doubt; indeed, it seemed for awhile almost impossible that the Greys should again prevail. The attacking regiment, which was formed of young men, fought with the utmost fury, and at first seemed by sheer weight to be driving the veterans back. The slaughter was truly awful, hundreds falling every minute; and from among the shouts of the warriors and the groans of the dying, set to the music of clashing spears, came a continuous hissing undertone of "*S'gee, s'gee,*" the

note of triumph of each victor as he passed his assegai through and through the body of his fallen foe.

But perfect discipline and steady and unchanging valour can do wonders, and one veteran soldier is worth two young ones, as soon became apparent in the present case. For just when we thought that it was all over with the Greys, and were preparing to take their place so soon as they made room by being destroyed, I heard Sir Henry's deep voice ringing out through the din, and caught a glimpse of his circling battle-axe as he waved it high above his plumes. Then came a change; the Greys ceased to give; they stood still as a rock, against which the furious waves of spearmen broke again and again, only to recoil. Presently they began to move once more—forward this time; as they had no firearms there was no smoke, so we could see it all. Another minute and the onslaught grew fainter.

"Ah, these are *men*, indeed; they will conquer again," called out Ignosi, who was grinding his teeth with excitement at my side. "See, it is done!"

Suddenly, like puffs of smoke from the mouth of a cannon, the attacking regiment broke away in flying groups, their white head-dresses streaming behind them in the wind, and left their opponents victors, indeed, but, alas! no more a regiment. Of the gallant triple line, which forty minutes before had gone into action three thousand strong, there remained at most some six hundred blood-spattered men; the rest were under foot. And yet they cheered and waved their spears in triumph, and then, instead of falling back upon us as we expected, they ran forward, for a hundred yards or so, after the flying groups of foemen, took possession of a rising knoll of ground, and, resuming their triple formation, formed a threefold ring around its base. And there, thanks be to Heaven, standing on the top of the mound for a minute, I saw Sir Henry, apparently unharmed, and with him our old friend Infadoos. Then Twala's regiments rolled down upon the doomed band, and once more the battle closed in.

As those who read this history will probably long ago have gathered, I am, to be honest, a bit of a coward, and certainly in no way given to fighting, though somehow it has often been my lot to get into unpleasant positions, and to be obliged to shed man's blood. But I have always hated it, and kept my own blood as undiminished in quantity as possible, sometimes

by a judicious use of my heels. At this moment, however, for the first time in my life, I felt my bosom burn with martial ardour. Warlike fragments from the "Ingoldsby Legends," together with numbers of sanguinary verses in the Old Testament, sprang up in my brain like mushrooms in the dark; my blood, which hitherto had been half-frozen with horror, went beating through my veins, and there came upon me a savage desire to kill and spare not. I glanced round at the serried ranks of warriors behind us, and somehow, all in an instant, I began to wonder if my face looked like theirs. There they stood, the hands twitching, the lips apart, the fierce features instinct with the hungry lust of battle, and in the eyes a look like the glare of a bloodhound when after long pursuit he sights his quarry.

Only Ignosi's heart, to judge from his comparative self-possession, seemed, to all appearances, to beat as calmly as ever beneath his leopard-skin cloak, though even *he* still ground his teeth. I could bear it no longer.

"Are we to stand here till we put out roots, Umbopa—Ignosi, I mean—while Twala swallows our brothers yonder?" I asked.

"Nay, Macumazahn," was the answer; "see, now is the ripe moment: let us pluck it."

As he spoke a fresh regiment rushed past the ring upon the little mound, and wheeling round, attacked it from the hither side.

Then, lifting his battle-axe, Ignosi gave the signal to advance, and, screaming the wild Kukuana war-cry, the Buffaloes charged home with a rush like the rush of the sea.

What followed immediately on this it is out of my power to tell. All I can remember is an irregular yet ordered advance, that seemed to shake the ground; a sudden change of front and forming up on the part of the regiment against which the charge was directed; then an awful shock, a dull roar of voices, and a continuous flashing of spears, seen through a red mist of blood.

When my mind cleared I found myself standing inside the remnant of the Greys near the top of the mound, and just behind no less a person than

Sir Henry himself. How I got there I had at the moment no idea, but Sir Henry afterwards told me that I was borne up by the first furious charge of the Buffaloes almost to his feet, and then left, as they in turn were pressed back. Thereon he dashed out of the circle and dragged me into shelter.

As for the fight that followed, who can describe it? Again and again the multitudes surged against our momentarily lessening circle, and again and again we beat them back.

"The stubborn spearmen still made good
The dark impenetrable wood,
Each stepping where his comrade stood
The instant that he fell,"

as someone or other beautifully says.

It was a splendid thing to see those brave battalions come on time after time over the barriers of their dead, sometimes lifting corpses before them to receive our spear-thrusts, only to leave their own corpses to swell the rising piles. It was a gallant sight to see that old warrior, Infadoos, as cool as though he were on parade, shouting out orders, taunts, and even jests, to keep up the spirit of his few remaining men, and then, as each charge rolled on, stepping forward to wherever the fighting was thickest, to bear his share in its repulse. And yet more gallant was the vision of Sir Henry, whose ostrich plumes had been shorn off by a spear thrust, so that his long yellow hair streamed out in the breeze behind him. There he stood, the great Dane, for he was nothing else, his hands, his axe, and his armour all red with blood, and none could live before his stroke. Time after time I saw it sweeping down, as some great warrior ventured to give him battle, and as he struck he shouted "*O-hoy! O-hoy!*" like his Berserkir forefathers, and the blow went crashing through shield and spear, through head-dress, hair, and skull, till at last none would of their own will come near the great white "*umtagati*," the wizard, who killed and failed not.

But suddenly there rose a cry of "*Twala, y' Twala*," and out of the press sprang forward none other than the gigantic one-eyed king himself, also armed with battle-axe and shield, and clad in chain armour.

"Where art thou, Incubu, thou white man, who slewest Scragga my son—see if thou canst slay me!" he shouted, and at the same time hurled a *tolla* straight at Sir Henry, who fortunately saw it coming, and caught it on his shield, which it transfixed, remaining wedged in the iron plate behind the hide.

Then, with a cry, Twala sprang forward straight at him, and with his battle-axe struck him such a blow upon the shield that the mere force and shock of it brought Sir Henry, strong man as he is, down upon his knees.

But at this time the matter went no further, for that instant there rose from the regiments pressing round us something like a shout of dismay, and on looking up I saw the cause.

To the right and to the left the plain was alive with the plumes of charging warriors. The outflanking squadrons had come to our relief. The time could not have been better chosen. All Twala's army, as Ignosi predicted would be the case, had fixed their attention on the bloody struggle which was raging round the remnant of the Greys and that of the Buffaloes, who were now carrying on a battle of their own at a little distance, which two regiments had formed the chest of our army. It was not until our horns were about to close upon them that they had dreamed of their approach, for they believed these forces to be hidden in reserve upon the crest of the moon-shaped hill. And now, before they could even assume a proper formation for defence, the outflanking *Impis* had leapt, like greyhounds, on their flanks.

In five minutes the fate of the battle was decided. Taken on both flanks, and dismayed at the awful slaughter inflicted upon them by the Greys and Buffaloes, Twala's regiments broke into flight, and soon the whole plain between us and Loo was scattered with groups of running soldiers making good their retreat. As for the hosts that had so recently surrounded us and the Buffaloes, they melted away as though by magic, and presently we were left standing there like a rock from which the sea has retreated. But what a sight it was! Around us the dead and dying lay in heaped-up masses, and of the gallant Greys there remained but ninety-five men upon their feet. More than three thousand four hundred had fallen in this one regiment, most of them never to rise again.

"Men," said Infadoos calmly, as between the intervals of binding a wound on his arm he surveyed what remained to him of his corps, "ye have kept up the reputation of your regiment, and this day's fighting will be well spoken of by your children's children." Then he turned round and shook Sir Henry Curtis by the hand. "Thou art a great captain, Incubu," he said simply; "I have lived a long life among warriors, and have known many a brave one, yet have I never seen a man like unto thee."

At this moment the Buffaloes began to march past our position on the road to Loo, and as they went a message was brought to us from Ignosi requesting Infadoos, Sir Henry, and myself to join them. Accordingly, orders having been issued to the remaining ninety men of the Greys to employ themselves in collecting the wounded, we joined Ignosi, who informed us that he was pressing on to Loo to complete the victory by capturing Twala, if that should be possible. Before we had gone far, suddenly we discovered the figure of Good sitting on an ant-heap about one hundred paces from us. Close beside him was the body of a Kukuana.

"He must be wounded," said Sir Henry anxiously. As he made the remark, an untoward thing happened. The dead body of the Kukuana soldier, or rather what had appeared to be his dead body, suddenly sprang up, knocked Good head over heels off the ant-heap, and began to spear him. We rushed forward in terror, and as we drew near we saw the brawny warrior making dig after dig at the prostrate Good, who at each prod jerked all his limbs into the air. Seeing us coming, the Kukuana gave one final and most vicious dig, and with a shout of "Take that, wizard!" bolted away. Good did not move, and we concluded that our poor comrade was done for. Sadly we came towards him, and were astonished to find him pale and faint indeed, but with a serene smile upon his face, and his eyeglass still fixed in his eye.

"Capital armour this," he murmured, on catching sight of our faces bending over him. "How sold that beggar must have been," and then he fainted. On examination we discovered that he had been seriously wounded in the leg by a *tolla* in the course of the pursuit, but that the chain armour had prevented his last assailant's spear from doing anything more than bruise him badly. It was a merciful escape. As nothing could be done for

him at the moment, he was placed on one of the wicker shields used for the wounded, and carried along with us.

On arriving before the nearest gate of Loo we found one of our regiments watching it in obedience to orders received from Ignosi. The other regiments were in the same way guarding the different exits to the town. The officer in command of this regiment saluted Ignosi as king, and informed him that Twala's army had taken refuge in the town, whither Twala himself had also escaped, but he thought that they were thoroughly demoralised, and would surrender. Thereupon Ignosi, after taking counsel with us, sent forward heralds to each gate ordering the defenders to open, and promising on his royal word life and forgiveness to every soldier who laid down his arms, but saying that if they did not do so before nightfall he would certainly burn the town and all within its gates. This message was not without its effect. Half an hour later, amid the shouts and cheers of the Buffaloes, the bridge was dropped across the fosse, and the gates upon the further side were flung open.

Taking due precautions against treachery, we marched on into the town. All along the roadways stood thousands of dejected warriors, their heads drooping, and their shields and spears at their feet, who, headed by their officers, saluted Ignosi as king as he passed. On we marched, straight to Twala's kraal. When we reached the great space, where a day or two previously we had seen the review and the witch hunt, we found it deserted. No, not quite deserted, for there, on the further side, in front of his hut, sat Twala himself, with but one attendant—Gagool.

It was a melancholy sight to see him seated, his battle-axe and shield by his side, his chin upon his mailed breast, with but one old crone for companion, and notwithstanding his crimes and misdeeds, a pang of compassion shot through me as I looked upon Twala thus "fallen from his high estate." Not a soldier of all his armies, not a courtier out of the hundreds who had cringed round him, not even a solitary wife, remained to share his fate or halve the bitterness of his fall. Poor savage! he was learning the lesson which Fate teaches to most of us who live long enough, that the eyes of mankind are blind to the discredited, and that he who is

defenceless and fallen finds few friends and little mercy. Nor, indeed, in this case did he deserve any.

Filing through the kraal gate, we marched across the open space to where the ex-king sat. When within about fifty yards of him the regiment was halted, and accompanied only by a small guard we advanced towards him, Gagool reviling us bitterly as we came. As we drew near, Twala, for the first time, lifted his plumed head, and fixed his one eye, which seemed to flash with suppressed fury almost as brightly as the great diamond bound round his forehead, upon his successful rival—Ignosi.

"Hail, O king!" he said, with bitter mockery; "thou who hast eaten of my bread, and now by the aid of the white man's magic hast seduced my regiments and defeated mine army, hail! What fate hast thou in store for me, O king?"

"The fate thou gavest to my father, whose throne thou hast sat on these many years!" was the stern answer.

"It is good. I will show thee how to die, that thou mayest remember it against thine own time. See, the sun sinks in blood," and he pointed with his battle-axe towards the setting orb; "it is well that my sun should go down in its company. And now, O king! I am ready to die, but I crave the boon of the Kukuana royal House[1] to die fighting. Thou canst not refuse it, or even those cowards who fled to-day will hold thee shamed."

"It is granted. Choose—with whom wilt thou fight? Myself I cannot fight with thee, for the king fights not except in war."

Twala's sombre eye ran up and down our ranks, and I felt, as for a moment it rested on myself, that the position had developed a new horror. What if he chose to begin by fighting *me*? What chance should I have against a desperate savage six feet five high, and broad in proportion? I might as well commit suicide at once. Hastily I made up my mind to decline the combat, even if I were hooted out of Kukuana-land as a consequence. It is, I think, better to be hooted than to be quartered with a battle-axe.

Presently Twala spoke.

"Incubu, what sayest thou, shall we end what we began to-day, or shall I call thee coward, white—even to the liver?"

"Nay," interposed Ignosi hastily; "thou shalt not fight with Incubu."

"Not if he is afraid," said Twala.

Unfortunately Sir Henry understood this remark, and the blood flamed up into his cheeks.

"I will fight him," he said; "he shall see if I am afraid."

"For Heaven's sake," I entreated, "don't risk your life against that of a desperate man. Anybody who saw you to-day will know that you are brave enough."

"I will fight him," was the sullen answer. "No living man shall call me a coward. I am ready now!" and he stepped forward and lifted his axe.

I wrung my hands over this absurd piece of Quixotism; but if he was determined on this deed, of course I could not stop him.

"Fight not, my white brother," said Ignosi, laying his hand affectionately on Sir Henry's arm; "thou hast fought enough, and if aught befell thee at his hands it would cut my heart in twain."

"I will fight, Ignosi," was Sir Henry's answer.

"It is well, Incubu; thou art a brave man. It will be a good fray. Behold, Twala, the Elephant is ready for thee."

The ex-king laughed savagely, and stepping forward faced Curtis. For a moment they stood thus, and the light of the sinking sun caught their stalwart frames and clothed them both in fire. They were a well-matched pair.

Then they began to circle round each other, their battle-axes raised.

Suddenly Sir Henry sprang forward and struck a fearful blow at Twala, who stepped to one side. So heavy was the stroke that the striker half overbalanced himself, a circumstance of which his antagonist took a prompt advantage. Circling his massive battle-axe round his head, he brought it down with tremendous force. My heart jumped into my mouth; I thought that the affair was already finished. But no; with a quick upward movement of the left arm Sir Henry interposed his shield between himself and the axe, with the result that its outer edge was shorn away, the axe falling on his left shoulder, but not heavily enough to do any serious damage. In another moment Sir Henry got in a second blow, which was also received by Twala upon his shield.

Then followed blow upon blow, that were, in turn, either received upon the shields or avoided. The excitement grew intense; the regiment which was watching the encounter forgot its discipline, and, drawing near, shouted and groaned at every stroke. Just at this time, too, Good, who had been laid upon the ground by me, recovered from his faint, and, sitting up, perceived what was going on. In an instant he was up, and catching hold of my arm, hopped about from place to place on one leg, dragging me after him, and yelling encouragements to Sir Henry—

"Go it, old fellow!" he hallooed. "That was a good one! Give it him amidships," and so on.

Presently Sir Henry, having caught a fresh stroke upon his shield, hit out with all his force. The blow cut through Twala's shield and through the tough chain armour behind it, gashing him in the shoulder. With a yell of pain and fury Twala returned the blow with interest, and, such was his strength, shore right through the rhinoceros' horn handle of his antagonists battle-axe, strengthened as it was with bands of steel, wounding Curtis in the face.

A cry of dismay rose from the Buffaloes as our hero's broad axe-head fell to the ground; and Twala, again raising his weapon, flew at him with a shout. I shut my eyes. When I opened them again it was to see Sir Henry's shield lying on the ground, and Sir Henry himself with his great arms twined round Twala's middle. To and fro they swung, hugging each other like bears, straining with all their mighty muscles for dear life, and dearer

honour. With a supreme effort Twala swung the Englishman clean off his feet, and down they came together, rolling over and over on the lime paving, Twala striking out at Curtis' head with the battle-axe, and Sir Henry trying to drive the *tolla* he had drawn from his belt through Twala's armour.

It was a mighty struggle, and an awful thing to see.

"Get his axe!" yelled Good; and perhaps our champion heard him.

At any rate, dropping the *tolla*, he snatched at the axe, which was fastened to Twala's wrist by a strip of buffalo hide, and still rolling over and over, they fought for it like wild cats, drawing their breath in heavy gasps. Suddenly the hide string burst, and then, with a great effort, Sir Henry freed himself, the weapon remaining in his hand. Another second and he was upon his feet, the red blood streaming from the wound in his face, and so was Twala. Drawing the heavy *tolla* from his belt, he reeled straight at Curtis and struck him in the breast. The stab came home true and strong, but whoever it was who made that chain armour, he understood his art, for it withstood the steel. Again Twala struck out with a savage yell, and again the sharp knife rebounded, and Sir Henry went staggering back. Once more Twala came on, and as he came our great Englishman gathered himself together, and swinging the big axe round his head with both hands, hit at him with all his force.

There was a shriek of excitement from a thousand throats, and, behold! Twala's head seemed to spring from his shoulders: then it fell and came rolling and bounding along the ground towards Ignosi, stopping just at his feet. For a second the corpse stood upright; then with a dull crash it came to the earth, and the gold torque from its neck rolled away across the pavement. As it did so Sir Henry, overpowered by faintness and loss of blood, fell heavily across the body of the dead king.

In a second he was lifted up, and eager hands were pouring water on his face. Another minute, and the grey eyes opened wide.

He was not dead.

Then I, just as the sun sank, stepping to where Twala's head lay in the dust, unloosed the diamond from the dead brows, and handed it to Ignosi.

"Take it," I said, "lawful king of the Kukuanas—king by birth and victory."

Ignosi bound the diadem upon his brows. Then advancing, he placed his foot upon the broad chest of his headless foe and broke out into a chant, or rather a pæan of triumph, so beautiful, and yet so utterly savage, that I despair of being able to give an adequate version of his words. Once I heard a scholar with a fine voice read aloud from the Greek poet Homer, and I remember that the sound of the rolling lines seemed to make my blood stand still. Ignosi's chant, uttered as it was in a language as beautiful and sonorous as the old Greek, produced exactly the same effect on me, although I was exhausted with toil and many emotions.

"Now," he began, "now our rebellion is swallowed up in victory, and our evil-doing is justified by strength.

"In the morning the oppressors arose and stretched themselves; they bound on their harness and made them ready to war.

"They rose up and tossed their spears: the soldiers called to the captains, 'Come, lead us'—and the captains cried to the king, 'Direct thou the battle.'

"They laughed in their pride, twenty thousand men, and yet a twenty thousand.

"Their plumes covered the valleys as the plumes of a bird cover her nest; they shook their shields and shouted, yea, they shook their shields in the sunlight; they lusted for battle and were glad.

"They came up against me; their strong ones ran swiftly to slay me; they cried, 'Ha! ha! he is as one already dead.'

"Then breathed I on them, and my breath was as the breath of a wind, and lo! they were not.

"My lightnings pierced them; I licked up their strength with the lightning of my spears; I shook them to the ground with the thunder of my shoutings.

"They broke—they scattered—they were gone as the mists of the morning.

"They are food for the kites and the foxes, and the place of battle is fat with their blood.

"Where are the mighty ones who rose up in the morning?

"Where are the proud ones who tossed their spears and cried, 'He is as a man already dead'?

"They bow their heads, but not in sleep; they are stretched out, but not in sleep.

"They are forgotten; they have gone into the blackness; they dwell in the dead moons; yea, others shall lead away their wives, and their children shall remember them no more.

"And I—! the king—like an eagle I have found my eyrie.

"Behold! far have I flown in the night season, yet have I returned to my young at the daybreak.

"Shelter ye under the shadow of my wings, O people, and I will comfort you, and ye shall not be dismayed.

"Now is the good time, the time of spoil.

"Mine are the cattle on the mountains, mine are the virgins in the kraals.

"The winter is overpast with storms, the summer is come with flowers.

"Now Evil shall cover up her face, now Mercy and Gladness shall dwell in the land.

"Rejoice, rejoice, my people!

"Let all the stars rejoice in that this tyranny is trodden down, in that I am the king."

Ignosi ceased his song, and out of the gathering gloom came back the deep reply—

"Thou art the king!"

Thus was my prophecy to the herald fulfilled, and within the forty-eight hours Twala's headless corpse was stiffening at Twala's gate.

[1] It is a law amongst the Kukuanas that no man of the direct royal blood can be put to death, unless by his own consent, which is, however, never refused. He is allowed to choose a succession of antagonists, to be approved by the king, with whom he fights, till one of them kills him.—A.Q.

CHAPTER XV

GOOD FALLS SICK

After the fight was ended, Sir Henry and Good were carried into Twala's hut, where I joined them. They were both utterly exhausted by exertion and

loss of blood, and, indeed, my own condition was little better. I am very wiry, and can stand more fatigue than most men, probably on account of my light weight and long training; but that night I was quite done up, and, as is always the case with me when exhausted, that old wound which the lion gave me began to pain. Also my head was aching violently from the blow I had received in the morning, when I was knocked senseless. Altogether, a more miserable trio than we were that evening it would have been difficult to discover; and our only comfort lay in the reflection that we were exceedingly fortunate to be there to feel miserable, instead of being stretched dead upon the plain, as so many thousands of brave men were that night, who had risen well and strong in the morning.

Somehow, with the assistance of the beautiful Foulata, who, since we had been the means of saving her life, had constituted herself our handmaiden, and especially Good's, we managed to get off the chain shirts, which had certainly saved the lives of two of us that day. As I expected, we found that the flesh underneath was terribly contused, for though the steel links had kept the weapons from entering, they had not prevented them from bruising. Both Sir Henry and Good were a mass of contusions, and I was by no means free. As a remedy Foulata brought us some pounded green leaves, with an aromatic odour, which, when applied as a plaster, gave us considerable relief.

But though the bruises were painful, they did not give us such anxiety as Sir Henry's and Good's wounds. Good had a hole right through the fleshy part of his "beautiful white leg," from which he had lost a great deal of blood; and Sir Henry, with other hurts, had a deep cut over the jaw, inflicted by Twala's battle-axe. Luckily Good is a very decent surgeon, and so soon as his small box of medicines was forthcoming, having thoroughly cleansed the wounds, he managed to stitch up first Sir Henry's and then his own pretty satisfactorily, considering the imperfect light given by the primitive Kukuana lamp in the hut. Afterwards he plentifully smeared the injured places with some antiseptic ointment, of which there was a pot in the little box, and we covered them with the remains of a pocket-handkerchief which we possessed.

Meanwhile Foulata had prepared us some strong broth, for we were too weary to eat. This we swallowed, and then threw ourselves down on the piles of magnificent karrosses, or fur rugs, which were scattered about the dead king's great hut. By a very strange instance of the irony of fate, it was on Twala's own couch, and wrapped in Twala's own particular karross, that Sir Henry, the man who had slain him, slept that night.

I say slept; but after that day's work, sleep was indeed difficult. To begin with, in very truth the air was full

"Of farewells to the dying
And mournings for the dead."

From every direction came the sound of the wailing of women whose husbands, sons, and brothers had perished in the battle. No wonder that they wailed, for over twelve thousand men, or nearly a fifth of the Kukuana army, had been destroyed in that awful struggle. It was heart-rending to lie and listen to their cries for those who never would return; and it made me understand the full horror of the work done that day to further man's ambition. Towards midnight, however, the ceaseless crying of the women grew less frequent, till at length the silence was only broken at intervals of a few minutes by a long piercing howl that came from a hut in our immediate rear, which, as I afterwards discovered, proceeded from Gagool "keening" over the dead king Twala.

After that I got a little fitful sleep, only to wake from time to time with a start, thinking that I was once more an actor in the terrible events of the last twenty-four hours. Now I seemed to see that warrior whom my hand had sent to his last account charging at me on the mountain-top; now I was once more in that glorious ring of Greys, which made its immortal stand against all Twala's regiments upon the little mound; and now again I saw Twala's plumed and gory head roll past my feet with gnashing teeth and glaring eye.

At last, somehow or other, the night passed away; but when dawn broke I found that my companions had slept no better than myself. Good, indeed, was in a high fever, and very soon afterwards began to grow light-headed, and also, to my alarm, to spit blood, the result, no doubt, of some internal injury, inflicted during the desperate efforts made by the Kukuana warrior

on the previous day to force his big spear through the chain armour. Sir Henry, however, seemed pretty fresh, notwithstanding his wound on the face, which made eating difficult and laughter an impossibility, though he was so sore and stiff that he could scarcely stir.

About eight o'clock we had a visit from Infadoos, who appeared but little the worse—tough old warrior that he was—for his exertions in the battle, although he informed us that he had been up all night. He was delighted to see us, but much grieved at Good's condition, and shook our hands cordially. I noticed, however, that he addressed Sir Henry with a kind of reverence, as though he were something more than man; and, indeed, as we afterwards found out, the great Englishman was looked on throughout Kukuanaland as a supernatural being. No man, the soldiers said, could have fought as he fought or, at the end of a day of such toil and bloodshed, could have slain Twala, who, in addition to being the king, was supposed to be the strongest warrior in the country, in single combat, shearing through his bull-neck at a stroke. Indeed, that stroke became proverbial in Kukuanaland, and any extraordinary blow or feat of strength was henceforth known as "Incubu's blow."

Infadoos told us also that all Twala's regiments had submitted to Ignosi, and that like submissions were beginning to arrive from chiefs in the outlying country. Twala's death at the hands of Sir Henry had put an end to all further chance of disturbance; for Scragga had been his only legitimate son, so there was no rival claimant to the throne left alive.

I remarked that Ignosi had swum to power through blood. The old chief shrugged his shoulders. "Yes," he answered; "but the Kukuana people can only be kept cool by letting their blood flow sometimes. Many are killed, indeed, but the women are left, and others must soon grow up to take the places of the fallen. After this the land would be quiet for a while."

Afterwards, in the course of the morning, we had a short visit from Ignosi, on whose brows the royal diadem was now bound. As I contemplated him advancing with kingly dignity, an obsequious guard following his steps, I could not help recalling to my mind the tall Zulu who had presented himself to us at Durban some few months back, asking to be

taken into our service, and reflecting on the strange revolutions of the wheel of fortune.

"Hail, O king!" I said, rising.

"Yes, Macumazahn. King at last, by the might of your three right hands," was the ready answer.

All was, he said, going well; and he hoped to arrange a great feast in two weeks' time in order to show himself to the people.

I asked him what he had settled to do with Gagool.

"She is the evil genius of the land," he answered, "and I shall kill her, and all the witch doctors with her! She has lived so long that none can remember when she was not very old, and she it is who has always trained the witch-hunters, and made the land wicked in the sight of the heavens above."

"Yet she knows much," I replied; "it is easier to destroy knowledge, Ignosi, than to gather it."

"That is so," he said thoughtfully. "She, and she only, knows the secret of the 'Three Witches,' yonder, whither the great road runs, where the kings are buried, and the Silent Ones sit."

"Yes, and the diamonds are. Forget not thy promise, Ignosi; thou must lead us to the mines, even if thou hast to spare Gagool alive to show the way."

"I will not forget, Macumazahn, and I will think on what thou sayest."

After Ignosi's visit I went to see Good, and found him quite delirious. The fever set up by his wound seemed to have taken a firm hold of his system, and to be complicated with an internal injury. For four or five days his condition was most critical; indeed, I believe firmly that had it not been for Foulata's indefatigable nursing he must have died.

Women are women, all the world over, whatever their colour. Yet somehow it seemed curious to watch this dusky beauty bending night and day over the fevered man's couch, and performing all the merciful errands of a sick-room swiftly, gently, and with as fine an instinct as that of a trained hospital nurse. For the first night or two I tried to help her, and so did Sir Henry as soon as his stiffness allowed him to move, but Foulata bore our interference with impatience, and finally insisted upon our leaving him to her, saying that our movements made him restless, which I think was true. Day and night she watched him and tended him, giving him his only medicine, a native cooling drink made of milk, in which was infused juice from the bulb of a species of tulip, and keeping the flies from settling on him. I can see the whole picture now as it appeared night after night by the light of our primitive lamp; Good tossing to and fro, his features emaciated, his eyes shining large and luminous, and jabbering nonsense by the yard; and seated on the ground by his side, her back resting against the wall of the hut, the soft-eyed, shapely Kukuana beauty, her face, weary as it was with her long vigil, animated by a look of infinite compassion—or was it something more than compassion?

For two days we thought that he must die, and crept about with heavy hearts.

Only Foulata would not believe it.

"He will live," she said.

For three hundred yards or more around Twala's chief hut, where the sufferer lay, there was silence; for by the king's order all who lived in the habitations behind it, except Sir Henry and myself, had been removed, lest any noise should come to the sick man's ears. One night, it was the fifth of Good's illness, as was my habit, I went across to see how he was doing before turning in for a few hours.

I entered the hut carefully. The lamp placed upon the floor showed the figure of Good tossing no more, but lying quite still.

So it had come at last! In the bitterness of my heart I gave something like a sob.

"Hush—h—h!" came from the patch of dark shadow behind Good's head.

Then, creeping closer, I saw that he was not dead, but sleeping soundly, with Foulata's taper fingers clasped tightly in his poor white hand. The crisis had passed, and he would live. He slept like that for eighteen hours; and I scarcely like to say it, for fear I should not be believed, but during the entire period did this devoted girl sit by him, fearing that if she moved and drew away her hand it would wake him. What she must have suffered from cramp and weariness, to say nothing of want of food, nobody will ever know; but it is the fact that, when at last he woke, she had to be carried away—her limbs were so stiff that she could not move them.

After the turn had once been taken, Good's recovery was rapid and complete. It was not till he was nearly well that Sir Henry told him of all he owed to Foulata; and when he came to the story of how she sat by his side for eighteen hours, fearing lest by moving she should wake him, the honest sailor's eyes filled with tears. He turned and went straight to the hut where Foulata was preparing the mid-day meal, for we were back in our old quarters now, taking me with him to interpret in case he could not make his meaning clear to her, though I am bound to say that she understood him marvellously as a rule, considering how extremely limited was his foreign vocabulary.

"Tell her," said Good, "that I owe her my life, and that I will never forget her kindness to my dying day."

I interpreted, and under her dark skin she actually seemed to blush.

Turning to him with one of those swift and graceful motions that in her always reminded me of the flight of a wild bird, Foulata answered softly, glancing at him with her large brown eyes—

"Nay, my lord; my lord forgets! Did he not save *my* life, and am I not my lord's handmaiden?"

It will be observed that the young lady appeared entirely to have forgotten the share which Sir Henry and myself had taken in her preservation from Twala's clutches. But that is the way of women! I remember my dear wife was just the same. Well, I retired from that little interview sad at heart. I did not like Miss Foulata's soft glances, for I knew the fatal amorous propensities of sailors in general, and of Good in particular.

There are two things in the world, as I have found out, which cannot be prevented: you cannot keep a Zulu from fighting, or a sailor from falling in love upon the slightest provocation!

It was a few days after this last occurrence that Ignosi held his great "indaba," or council, and was formally recognised as king by the "indunas," or head men, of Kukuanaland. The spectacle was a most imposing one, including as it did a grand review of troops. On this day the remaining fragments of the Greys were formally paraded, and in the face of the army thanked for their splendid conduct in the battle. To each man the king made a large present of cattle, promoting them one and all to the rank of officers in the new corps of Greys which was in process of formation. An order was also promulgated throughout the length and breadth of Kukuanaland that, whilst we honoured the country by our presence, we three were to be greeted with the royal salute, and to be treated with the same ceremony and respect that was by custom accorded to the king. Also the power of life and death was publicly conferred upon us. Ignosi, too, in the presence of his people, reaffirmed the promises which he had made, to the effect that no man's blood should be shed without trial, and that witch-hunting should cease in the land.

When the ceremony was over we waited upon Ignosi, and informed him that we were now anxious to investigate the mystery of the mines to which

Solomon's Road ran, asking him if he had discovered anything about them.

"My friends," he answered, "I have discovered this. It is there that the three great figures sit, who here are called the 'Silent Ones,' and to whom Twala would have offered the girl Foulata as a sacrifice. It is there, too, in a great cave deep in the mountain, that the kings of the land are buried; there ye shall find Twala's body, sitting with those who went before him. There, also, is a deep pit, which, at some time, long-dead men dug out, mayhap for the stones ye speak of, such as I have heard men in Natal tell of at Kimberley. There, too, in the Place of Death is a secret chamber, known to none but the king and Gagool. But Twala, who knew it, is dead, and I know it not, nor know I what is in it. Yet there is a legend in the land that once, many generations gone, a white man crossed the mountains, and was led by a woman to the secret chamber and shown the wealth hidden in it. But before he could take it she betrayed him, and he was driven by the king of that day back to the mountains, and since then no man has entered the place."

"The story is surely true, Ignosi, for on the mountains we found the white man," I said.

"Yes, we found him. And now I have promised you that if ye can come to that chamber, and the stones are there—"

"The gem upon thy forehead proves that they are there," I put in, pointing to the great diamond I had taken from Twala's dead brows.

"Mayhap; if they are there," he said, "ye shall have as many as ye can take hence—if indeed ye would leave me, my brothers."

"First we must find the chamber," said I.

"There is but one who can show it to thee—Gagool."

"And if she will not?"

"Then she must die," said Ignosi sternly. "I have saved her alive but for this. Stay, she shall choose," and calling to a messenger he ordered Gagool

to be brought before him.

In a few minutes she came, hurried along by two guards, whom she was cursing as she walked.

"Leave her," said the king to the guards.

So soon as their support was withdrawn, the withered old bundle—for she looked more like a bundle than anything else, out of which her two bright and wicked eyes gleamed like those of a snake—sank in a heap on to the floor.

"What will ye with me, Ignosi?" she piped. "Ye dare not touch me. If ye touch me I will slay you as ye sit. Beware of my magic."

"Thy magic could not save Twala, old she-wolf, and it cannot hurt me," was the answer. "Listen; I will this of thee, that thou reveal to us the chamber where are the shining stones."

"Ha! ha!" she piped, "none know its secret but I, and I will never tell thee. The white devils shall go hence empty-handed."

"Thou shalt tell me. I will make thee tell me."

"How, O king? Thou art great, but can thy power wring the truth from a woman?"

"It is difficult, yet will I do so."

"How, O king?"

"Nay, thus; if thou tellest not thou shalt slowly die."

"Die!" she shrieked in terror and fury; "ye dare not touch me—man, ye know not who I am. How old think ye am I? I knew your fathers, and your fathers' fathers' fathers. When the country was young I was here; when the country grows old I shall still be here. I cannot die unless I be killed by chance, for none dare slay me."

"Yet will I slay thee. See, Gagool, mother of evil, thou art so old that thou canst no longer love thy life. What can life be to such a hag as thou, who hast no shape, nor form, nor hair, nor teeth—hast naught, save wickedness and evil eyes? It will be mercy to make an end of thee, Gagool."

"Thou fool," shrieked the old fiend, "thou accursed fool, deemest thou that life is sweet only to the young? It is not so, and naught thou knowest of the heart of man to think it. To the young, indeed, death is sometimes welcome, for the young can feel. They love and suffer, and it wrings them to see their beloved pass to the land of shadows. But the old feel not, they love not, and, *ha! ha!* they laugh to see another go out into the dark; *ha! ha!* they laugh to see the evil that is done under the stars. All they love is life, the warm, warm sun, and the sweet, sweet air. They are afraid of the cold, afraid of the cold and the dark, *ha! ha! ha!*" and the old hag writhed in ghastly merriment on the ground.

"Cease thine evil talk and answer me," said Ignosi angrily. "Wilt thou show the place where the stones are, or wilt thou not? If thou wilt not thou diest, even now," and he seized a spear and held it over her.

"I will not show it; thou darest not kill me, darest not! He who slays me will be accursed for ever."

Slowly Ignosi brought down the spear till it pricked the prostrate heap of rags.

With a wild yell Gagool sprang to her feet, then fell again and rolled upon the floor.

"Nay, I will show thee. Only let me live, let me sit in the sun and have a bit of meat to suck, and I will show thee."

"It is well. I thought that I should find a way to reason with thee. Tomorrow shalt thou go with Infadoos and my white brothers to the place, and beware how thou failest, for if thou showest it not, then thou shalt slowly die. I have spoken."

"I will not fail, Ignosi. I always keep my word—*ha! ha! ha!* Once before a woman showed the chamber to a white man, and behold! evil befell him," and here her wicked eyes glinted. "Her name was Gagool also. Perchance I was that woman."

"Thou liest," I said, "that was ten generations gone."

"Mayhap, mayhap; when one lives long one forgets. Perhaps it was my mother's mother who told me; surely her name was Gagool also. But mark, ye will find in the place where the bright things are a bag of hide full of stones. The man filled that bag, but he never took it away. Evil befell him, I say, evil befell him! Perhaps it was my mother's mother who told me. It will be a merry journey—we can see the bodies of those who died in the battle as we go. Their eyes will be gone by now, and their ribs will be hollow. *Ha! ha! ha!*"

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLACE OF DEATH

It was already dark on the third day after the scene described in the previous chapter when we camped in some huts at the foot of the "Three Witches," as the triangle of mountains is called to which Solomon's Great Road runs. Our party consisted of our three selves and Foulata, who waited on us—especially on Good—Infadoos, Gagool, who was borne along in a litter, inside which she could be heard muttering and cursing all day long, and a party of guards and attendants. The mountains, or rather the three peaks of the mountain, for the mass was evidently the result of a solitary upheaval, were, as I have said, in the form of a triangle, of which the base was towards us, one peak being on our right, one on our left, and one straight in front of us. Never shall I forget the sight afforded by those three towering peaks in the early sunlight of the following morning. High, high above us, up into the blue air, soared their twisted snow-wreaths. Beneath

the snow-line the peaks were purple with heaths, and so were the wild moors that ran up the slopes towards them. Straight before us the white ribbon of Solomon's Great Road stretched away uphill to the foot of the centre peak, about five miles from us, and there stopped. It was its terminus.

I had better leave the feelings of intense excitement with which we set out on our march that morning to the imagination of those who read this history. At last we were drawing near to the wonderful mines that had been the cause of the miserable death of the old Portuguese Dom three centuries ago, of my poor friend, his ill-starred descendant, and also, as we feared, of George Curtis, Sir Henry's brother. Were we destined, after all that we had gone through, to fare any better? Evil befell them, as that old fiend Gagool said; would it also befall us? Somehow, as we were marching up that last stretch of beautiful road, I could not help feeling a little superstitious about the matter, and so I think did Good and Sir Henry.

For an hour and a half or more we tramped on up the heather-fringed way, going so fast in our excitement that the bearers of Gagool's hammock could scarcely keep pace with us, and its occupant piped out to us to stop.

"Walk more slowly, white men," she said, projecting her hideous shrivelled countenance between the grass curtains, and fixing her gleaming eyes upon us; "why will ye run to meet the evil that shall befall you, ye seekers after treasure?" and she laughed that horrible laugh which always sent a cold shiver down my back, and for a while quite took the enthusiasm out of us.

However, on we went, till we saw before us, and between ourselves and the peak, a vast circular hole with sloping sides, three hundred feet or more in depth, and quite half a mile round.

"Can't you guess what this is?" I said to Sir Henry and Good, who were staring in astonishment at the awful pit before us.

They shook their heads.

"Then it is clear that you have never seen the diamond diggings at Kimberley. You may depend on it that this is Solomon's Diamond Mine.

Look there," I said, pointing to the strata of stiff blue clay which were yet to be seen among the grass and bushes that clothed the sides of the pit, "the formation is the same. I'll be bound that if we went down there we should find 'pipes' of soapy brecciated rock. Look, too," and I pointed to a series of worn flat slabs of stone that were placed on a gentle slope below the level of a watercourse which in some past age had been cut out of the solid rock; "if those are not tables once used to wash the 'stuff,' I'm a Dutchman."

At the edge of this vast hole, which was none other than the pit marked on the old Dom's map, the Great Road branched into two and circumvented it. In many places, by the way, this surrounding road was built entirely out of blocks of stone, apparently with the object of supporting the edges of the pit and preventing falls of reef. Along this path we pressed, driven by curiosity to see what were the three towering objects which we could discern from the hither side of the great gulf. As we drew near we perceived that they were Colossi of some sort or another, and rightly conjectured that before us sat the three "Silent Ones" that are held in such awe by the Kukuana people. But it was not until we were quite close to them that we recognised the full majesty of these "Silent Ones."

There, upon huge pedestals of dark rock, sculptured with rude emblems of the Phallic worship, separated from each other by a distance of forty paces, and looking down the road which crossed some sixty miles of plain to Loo, were three colossal seated forms—two male and one female—each measuring about thirty feet from the crown of its head to the pedestal.

The female form, which was nude, was of great though severe beauty, but unfortunately the features had been injured by centuries of exposure to the weather. Rising from either side of her head were the points of a crescent. The two male Colossi, on the contrary, were draped, and presented a terrifying cast of features, especially the one to our right, which had the face of a devil. That to our left was serene in countenance, but the calm upon it seemed dreadful. It was the calm of that inhuman cruelty, Sir Henry remarked, which the ancients attributed to beings potent for good, who could yet watch the sufferings of humanity, if not without rejoicing, at least without sorrow. These three statues form a most awe-inspiring trinity, as they sit there in their solitude, and gaze out across the plain for ever.

Contemplating these "Silent Ones," as the Kukuanas call them, an intense curiosity again seized us to know whose were the hands which had shaped them, who it was that had dug the pit and made the road. Whilst I was gazing and wondering, suddenly it occurred to me—being familiar with the Old Testament—that Solomon went astray after strange gods, the names of three of whom I remembered—"Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Milcom, the god of the children of Ammon"—and I suggested to my companions that the figures before us might represent these false and exploded divinities.

"Hum," said Sir Henry, who is a scholar, having taken a high degree in classics at college, "there may be something in that; Ashtoreth of the Hebrews was the Astarte of the Phoenicians, who were the great traders of Solomon's time. Astarte, who afterwards became the Aphrodite of the Greeks, was represented with horns like the half-moon, and there on the brow of the female figure are distinct horns. Perhaps these Colossi were designed by some Phoenician official who managed the mines. Who can say?"[1]

Before we had finished examining these extraordinary relics of remote antiquity, Infadoos came up, and having saluted the "Silent Ones" by lifting his spear, asked us if we intended entering the "Place of Death" at once, or if we would wait till after we had taken food at mid-day. If we were ready to go at once, Gagool had announced her willingness to guide us. As it was not later than eleven o'clock—driven to it by a burning curiosity—we announced our intention of proceeding instantly, and I suggested that, in case we should be detained in the cave, we should take some food with us. Accordingly Gagool's litter was brought up, and that lady herself assisted out of it. Meanwhile Foulata, at my request, stored some "biltong," or dried game-flesh, together with a couple of gourds of water, in a reed basket with a hinged cover. Straight in front of us, at a distance of some fifty paces from the backs of the Colossi, rose a sheer wall of rock, eighty feet or more in height, that gradually sloped upwards till it formed the base of the lofty snow-wreathed peak, which soared into the air three thousand feet above us. As soon as she was clear of her hammock, Gagool cast one evil grin upon us, and then, leaning on a stick, hobbled off towards the face of this wall.

We followed her till we came to a narrow portal solidly arched that looked like the opening of a gallery of a mine.

Here Gagool was waiting for us, still with that evil grin upon her horrid face.

"Now, white men from the Stars," she piped; "great warriors, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn the wise, are ye ready? Behold, I am here to do the bidding of my lord the king, and to show you the store of bright stones. *Ha! ha! ha!*"

"We are ready," I said.

"Good, good! Make strong your hearts to bear what ye shall see. Comest thou too, Infadoos, thou who didst betray thy master?"

Infadoos frowned as he answered—

"Nay, I come not; it is not for me to enter there. But thou, Gagool, curb thy tongue, and beware how thou dealest with my lords. At thy hands will I require them, and if a hair of them be hurt, Gagool, be'st thou fifty times a witch, thou shalt die. Hearest thou?"

"I hear Infadoos; I know thee, thou didst ever love big words; when thou wast a babe I remember thou didst threaten thine own mother. That was but the other day. But, fear not, fear not, I live only to do the bidding of the king. I have done the bidding of many kings, Infadoos, till in the end they did mine. *Ha! ha!* I go to look upon their faces once more, and Twala's also! Come on, come on, here is the lamp," and she drew a large gourd full of oil, and fitted with a rush wick, from under her fur cloak.

"Art thou coming, Foulata?" asked Good in his villainous Kitchen Kukuana, in which he had been improving himself under that young lady's tuition.

"I fear, my lord," the girl answered timidly.

"Then give me the basket."

"Nay, my lord, whither thou goest there I go also."

"The deuce you will!" thought I to myself; "that may be rather awkward if we ever get out of this."

Without further ado Gagool plunged into the passage, which was wide enough to admit of two walking abreast, and quite dark. We followed the sound of her voice as she piped to us to come on, in some fear and trembling, which was not allayed by the flutter of a sudden rush of wings.

"Hullo! what's that?" halloed Good; "somebody hit me in the face."

"Bats," said I; "on you go."

When, so far as we could judge, we had gone some fifty paces, we perceived that the passage was growing faintly light. Another minute, and we were in perhaps the most wonderful place that the eyes of living man have beheld.

Let the reader picture to himself the hall of the vastest cathedral he ever stood in, windowless indeed, but dimly lighted from above, presumably by shafts connected with the outer air and driven in the roof, which arched away a hundred feet above our heads, and he will get some idea of the size of the enormous cave in which we found ourselves, with the difference that this cathedral designed by nature was loftier and wider than any built by man. But its stupendous size was the least of the wonders of the place, for running in rows adown its length were gigantic pillars of what looked like ice, but were, in reality, huge stalactites. It is impossible for me to convey any idea of the overpowering beauty and grandeur of these pillars of white spar, some of which were not less than twenty feet in diameter at the base, and sprang up in lofty and yet delicate beauty sheer to the distant roof. Others again were in process of formation. On the rock floor there was in these cases what looked, Sir Henry said, exactly like a broken column in an old Grecian temple, whilst high above, depending from the roof, the point of a huge icicle could be dimly seen.

Even as we gazed we could hear the process going on, for presently with a tiny splash a drop of water would fall from the far-off icicle on to the

column below. On some columns the drops only fell once in two or three minutes, and in these cases it would be an interesting calculation to discover how long, at that rate of dripping, it would take to form a pillar, say eighty feet by ten in diameter. That the process, in at least one instance, was incalculably slow, the following example will suffice to show. Cut on one of these pillars we discovered the crude likeness of a mummy, by the head of which sat what appeared to be the figure of an Egyptian god, doubtless the handiwork of some old-world labourer in the mine. This work of art was executed at the natural height at which an idle fellow, be he Phoenician workman or British cad, is in the habit of trying to immortalise himself at the expense of nature's masterpieces, namely, about five feet from the ground. Yet at the time that we saw it, which *must* have been nearly three thousand years after the date of the execution of the carving, the column was only eight feet high, and was still in process of formation, which gives a rate of growth of a foot to a thousand years, or an inch and a fraction to a century. This we knew because, as we were standing by it, we heard a drop of water fall.

Sometimes the stalagmites took strange forms, presumably where the dropping of the water had not always been on the same spot. Thus, one huge mass, which must have weighed a hundred tons or so, was in the shape of a pulpit, beautifully fretted over outside with a design that looked like lace. Others resembled strange beasts, and on the sides of the cave were fanlike ivory tracings, such as the frost leaves upon a pane.

Out of the vast main aisle there opened here and there smaller caves, exactly, Sir Henry said, as chapels open out of great cathedrals. Some were large, but one or two—and this is a wonderful instance of how nature carries out her handiwork by the same unvarying laws, utterly irrespective of size—were tiny. One little nook, for instance, was no larger than an unusually big doll's house, and yet it might have been a model for the whole place, for the water dropped, tiny icicles hung, and spar columns were forming in just the same way.

We had not, however, enough time to examine this beautiful cavern so thoroughly as we should have liked to do, since unfortunately, Gagool seemed to be indifferent as to stalactites, and only anxious to get her

business over. This annoyed me the more, as I was particularly anxious to discover, if possible, by what system the light was admitted into the cave, and whether it was by the hand of man or by that of nature that this was done; also if the place had been used in any way in ancient times, as seemed probable. However, we consoled ourselves with the idea that we would investigate it thoroughly on our way back, and followed on at the heels of our uncanny guide.

On she led us, straight to the top of the vast and silent cave, where we found another doorway, not arched as the first was, but square at the top, something like the doorways of Egyptian temples.

"Are ye prepared to enter the Place of Death, white men?" asked Gagool, evidently with a view to making us feel uncomfortable.

"Lead on, Macduff," said Good solemnly, trying to look as though he was not at all alarmed, as indeed we all did except Foulata, who caught Good by the arm for protection.

"This is getting rather ghastly," said Sir Henry, peeping into the dark passageway. "Come on, Quatermain—*seniores priores*. We mustn't keep the old lady waiting!" and he politely made way for me to lead the van, for which inwardly I did not bless him.

Tap, tap, went old Gagool's stick down the passage, as she trotted along, chuckling hideously; and still overcome by some unaccountable presentiment of evil, I hung back.

"Come, get on, old fellow," said Good, "or we shall lose our fair guide."

Thus adjured, I started down the passage, and after about twenty paces found myself in a gloomy apartment some forty feet long, by thirty broad, and thirty high, which in some past age evidently had been hollowed, by hand-labour, out of the mountain. This apartment was not nearly so well lighted as the vast stalactite ante-cave, and at the first glance all I could discern was a massive stone table running down its length, with a colossal white figure at its head, and life-sized white figures all round it. Next I discovered a brown thing, seated on the table in the centre, and in another

moment my eyes grew accustomed to the light, and I saw what all these things were, and was tailing out of the place as hard as my legs could carry me.

I am not a nervous man in a general way, and very little troubled with superstitions, of which I have lived to see the folly; but I am free to own that this sight quite upset me, and had it not been that Sir Henry caught me by the collar and held me, I do honestly believe that in another five minutes I should have been outside the stalactite cave, and that a promise of all the diamonds in Kimberley would not have induced me to enter it again. But he held me tight, so I stopped because I could not help myself. Next second, however, *his* eyes became accustomed to the light, and he let go of me, and began to mop the perspiration off his forehead. As for Good, he swore feebly, while Foulata threw her arms round his neck and shrieked.

Only Gagool chuckled loud and long.

It *was* a ghastly sight. There at the end of the long stone table, holding in his skeleton fingers a great white spear, sat *Death* himself, shaped in the form of a colossal human skeleton, fifteen feet or more in height. High above his head he held the spear, as though in the act to strike; one bony hand rested on the stone table before him, in the position a man assumes on rising from his seat, whilst his frame was bent forward so that the vertebræ of the neck and the grinning, gleaming skull projected towards us, and fixed its hollow eye-places upon us, the jaws a little open, as though it were about to speak.

"Great heavens!" said I faintly, at last, "what can it be?"

"And what are *those things*?" asked Good, pointing to the white company round the table.

"And what on earth is *that thing*?" said Sir Henry, pointing to the brown creature seated on the table.

"*Hee! hee! hee!*" laughed Gagool. "To those who enter the Hall of the Dead, evil comes. *Hee! hee! hee! ha! ha!*"

"Come, Incubu, brave in battle, come and see him thou slewest;" and the old creature caught Curtis' coat in her skinny fingers, and led him away towards the table. We followed.

Presently she stopped and pointed at the brown object seated on the table. Sir Henry looked, and started back with an exclamation; and no wonder, for there, quite naked, the head which Curtis' battle-axe had shorn from the body resting on its knees, was the gaunt corpse of Twala, the last king of the Kukuanas. Yes, there, the head perched upon the knees, it sat in all its ugliness, the vertebræ projecting a full inch above the level of the shrunken flesh of the neck, for all the world like a black double of Hamilton Tighe.[2] Over the surface of the corpse there was gathered a thin glassy film, that made its appearance yet more appalling, for which we were, at the moment, quite unable to account, till presently we observed that from the roof of the chamber the water fell steadily, *drip! drop! drip!* on to the neck of the corpse, whence it ran down over the entire surface, and finally escaped into the rock through a tiny hole in the table. Then I guessed what the film was—*Twala's body was being transformed into a stalactite.*

A look at the white forms seated on the stone bench which ran round that ghastly board confirmed this view. They were human bodies indeed, or rather they had been human; now they were *stalactites*. This was the way in which the Kukuana people had from time immemorial preserved their royal dead. They petrified them. What the exact system might be, if there was any, beyond the placing of them for a long period of years under the drip, I never discovered, but there they sat, iced over and preserved for ever by the siliceous fluid.

Anything more awe-inspiring than the spectacle of this long line of departed royalties (there were twenty-seven of them, the last being Ignosi's father), wrapped, each of them, in a shroud of ice-like spar, through which the features could be dimly discovered, and seated round that inhospitable board, with Death himself for a host, it is impossible to imagine. That the practice of thus preserving their kings must have been an ancient one is evident from the number, which, allowing for an average reign of fifteen years, supposing that every king who reigned was placed here—an improbable thing, as some are sure to have perished in battle far from home

—would fix the date of its commencement at four and a quarter centuries back.

But the colossal Death, who sits at the head of the board, is far older than that, and, unless I am much mistaken, owes his origin to the same artist who designed the three Colossi. He is hewn out of a single stalactite, and, looked at as a work of art, is most admirably conceived and executed. Good, who understands such things, declared that, so far as he could see, the anatomical design of the skeleton is perfect down to the smallest bones.

My own idea is, that this terrific object was a freak of fancy on the part of some old-world sculptor, and that its presence had suggested to the Kukuanas the idea of placing their royal dead under its awful presidency. Or perhaps it was set there to frighten away any marauders who might have designs upon the treasure chamber beyond. I cannot say. All I can do is to describe it as it is, and the reader must form his own conclusion.

Such, at any rate, was the White Death and such were the White Dead!

[1] Compare Milton, "Paradise Lost," Book i.:—

"With these in troop
Came Ashtoreth, whom the Phoenicians called
Astarté, Queen of Heaven, with crescent horns;
To whose bright image nightly by the moon
Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs."

[2] "Now haste ye, my handmaidens, haste and see
How he sits there and glowers with his head on his knee."

CHAPTER XVII

SOLOMON'S TREASURE CHAMBER

While we were engaged in recovering from our fright, and in examining the grisly wonders of the Place of Death, Gagool had been differently occupied. Somehow or other—for she was marvellously active when she chose—she had scrambled on to the great table, and made her way to where our departed friend Twala was placed, under the drip, to see, suggested Good, how he was "pickling," or for some dark purpose of her own. Then, after bending down to kiss his icy lips as though in affectionate greeting, she hobbled back, stopping now and again to address the remark, the tenor of which I could not catch, to one or other of the shrouded forms, just as you or I might welcome an old acquaintance. Having gone through this mysterious and horrible ceremony, she squatted herself down on the table immediately under the White Death, and began, so far as I could make out, to offer up prayers. The spectacle of this wicked creature pouring out supplications, evil ones no doubt, to the arch enemy of mankind, was so uncanny that it caused us to hasten our inspection.

"Now, Gagool," said I, in a low voice—somehow one did not dare to speak above a whisper in that place—"lead us to the chamber."

The old witch promptly scrambled down from the table.

"My lords are not afraid?" she said, leering up into my face.

"Lead on."

"Good, my lords," and she hobbled round to the back of the great Death. "Here is the chamber; let my lords light the lamp, and enter," and she placed the gourd full of oil upon the floor, and leaned herself against the side of the cave. I took out a match, of which we had still a few in a box, and lit a rush wick, and then looked for the doorway, but there was nothing before us except the solid rock. Gagool grinned. "The way is there, my lords. *Ha! ha! ha!*"

"Do not jest with us," I said sternly.

"I jest not, my lords. See!" and she pointed at the rock.

As she did so, on holding up the lamp we perceived that a mass of stone was rising slowly from the floor and vanishing into the rock above, where doubtless there is a cavity prepared to receive it. The mass was of the width of a good-sized door, about ten feet high and not less than five feet thick. It must have weighed at least twenty or thirty tons, and was clearly moved upon some simple balance principle of counter-weights, probably the same as that by which the opening and shutting of an ordinary modern window is arranged. How the principle was set in motion, of course none of us saw; Gagool was careful to avoid this; but I have little doubt that there was some very simple lever, which was moved ever so little by pressure at a secret spot, thereby throwing additional weight on to the hidden counter-balances, and causing the monolith to be lifted from the ground.

Very slowly and gently the great stone raised itself, till at last it had vanished altogether, and a dark hole presented itself to us in the place which the door had filled.

Our excitement was so intense, as we saw the way to Solomon's treasure chamber thrown open at last, that I for one began to tremble and shake. Would it prove a hoax after all, I wondered, or was old Da Silvestra right? Were there vast hoards of wealth hidden in that dark place, hoards which would make us the richest men in the whole world? We should know in a minute or two.

"Enter, white men from the Stars," said Gagool, advancing into the doorway; "but first hear your servant, Gagool the old. The bright stones that ye will see were dug out of the pit over which the Silent Ones are set, and stored here, I know not by whom, for that was done longer ago than even I remember. But once has this place been entered since the time that those who hid the stones departed in haste, leaving them behind. The report of the treasure went down indeed among the people who lived in the country from age to age, but none knew where the chamber was, nor the secret of the door. But it happened that a white man reached this country from over the mountains—perchance he too came 'from the Stars'—and was well received by the king of that day. He it is who sits yonder," and she pointed to the fifth king at the table of the Dead. "And it came to pass that he and a woman of the country who was with him journeyed to this place, and that

by chance the woman learnt the secret of the door—a thousand years might ye search, but ye should never find that secret. Then the white man entered with the woman, and found the stones, and filled with stones the skin of a small goat, which the woman had with her to hold food. And as he was going from the chamber he took up one more stone, a large one, and held it in his hand."

Here she paused.

"Well," I asked, breathless with interest as we all were, "what happened to Da Silvestra?"

The old hag started at the mention of the name.

"How knowest thou the dead man's name?" she asked sharply; and then, without waiting for an answer, went on—

"None can tell what happened; but it came about that the white man was frightened, for he flung down the goat-skin, with the stones, and fled out with only the one stone in his hand, and that the king took, and it is the stone which thou, Macumazahn, didst take from Twala's brow."

"Have none entered here since?" I asked, peering again down the dark passage.

"None, my lords. Only the secret of the door has been kept, and every king has opened it, though he has not entered. There is a saying, that those who enter there will die within a moon, even as the white man died in the cave upon the mountain, where ye found him, Macumazahn, and therefore the kings do not enter. *Ha! ha!* mine are true words."

Our eyes met as she said it, and I turned sick and cold. How did the old hag know all these things?

"Enter, my lords. If I speak truth, the goat-skin with the stones will lie upon the floor; and if there is truth as to whether it is death to enter here, that ye will learn afterwards. *Ha! ha! ha!*" and she hobbled through the

doorway, bearing the light with her; but I confess that once more I hesitated about following.

"Oh, confound it all!" said Good; "here goes. I am not going to be frightened by that old devil;" and followed by Foulata, who, however, evidently did not at all like the business, for she was shivering with fear, he plunged into the passage after Gagool—an example which we quickly followed.

A few yards down the passage, in the narrow way hewn out of the living rock, Gagool had paused, and was waiting for us.

"See, my lords," she said, holding the light before her, "those who stored the treasure here fled in haste, and bethought them to guard against any who should find the secret of the door, but had not the time," and she pointed to large square blocks of stone, which, to the height of two courses (about two feet three), had been placed across the passage with a view to walling it up. Along the side of the passage were similar blocks ready for use, and, most curious of all, a heap of mortar and a couple of trowels, which tools, so far as we had time to examine them, appeared to be of a similar shape and make to those used by workmen to this day.

Here Foulata, who had been in a state of great fear and agitation throughout, said that she felt faint and could go no farther, but would wait there. Accordingly we set her down on the unfinished wall, placing the basket of provisions by her side, and left her to recover.

Following the passage for about fifteen paces farther, we came suddenly to an elaborately painted wooden door. It was standing wide open. Whoever was last there had either not found the time to shut it, or had forgotten to do so.

Across the threshold of this door lay a skin bag, formed of a goat-skin, that appeared to be full of pebbles.

"*Hee! hee!* white men," sniggered Gagool, as the light from the lamp fell upon it. "What did I tell you, that the white man who came here fled in

haste, and dropped the woman's bag—behold it! Look within also and ye will find a water-gourd amongst the stones."

Good stooped down and lifted it. It was heavy and jingled.

"By Jove! I believe it's full of diamonds," he said, in an awed whisper; and, indeed, the idea of a small goat-skin full of diamonds is enough to awe anybody.

"Go on," said Sir Henry impatiently. "Here, old lady, give me the lamp," and taking it from Gagool's hand, he stepped through the doorway and held it high above his head.

We pressed in after him, forgetful for the moment of the bag of diamonds, and found ourselves in King Solomon's treasure chamber.

At first, all that the somewhat faint light given by the lamp revealed was a room hewn out of the living rock, and apparently not more than ten feet square. Next there came into sight, stored one on the other to the arch of the roof, a splendid collection of elephant-tusks. How many of them there were we did not know, for of course we could not see to what depth they went back, but there could not have been less than the ends of four or five hundred tusks of the first quality visible to our eyes. There, alone, was enough ivory to make a man wealthy for life. Perhaps, I thought, it was from this very store that Solomon drew the raw material for his "great throne of ivory," of which "there was not the like made in any kingdom."

On the opposite side of the chamber were about a score of wooden boxes, something like Martini-Henry ammunition boxes, only rather larger, and painted red.

"There are the diamonds," cried I; "bring the light."

Sir Henry did so, holding it close to the top box, of which the lid, rendered rotten by time even in that dry place, appeared to have been smashed in, probably by Da Silvestra himself. Pushing my hand through the hole in the lid I drew it out full, not of diamonds, but of gold pieces, of a

shape that none of us had seen before, and with what looked like Hebrew characters stamped upon them.

"Ah!" I said, replacing the coin, "we shan't go back empty-handed, anyhow. There must be a couple of thousand pieces in each box, and there are eighteen boxes. I suppose this was the money to pay the workmen and merchants."

"Well," put in Good, "I think that is the lot; I don't see any diamonds, unless the old Portuguese put them all into his bag."

"Let my lords look yonder where it is darkest, if they would find the stones," said Gagool, interpreting our looks. "There my lords will find a nook, and three stone chests in the nook, two sealed and one open."

Before translating this to Sir Henry, who carried the light, I could not resist asking how she knew these things, if no one had entered the place since the white man, generations ago.

"Ah, Macumazahn, the watcher by night," was the mocking answer, "ye who dwell in the stars, do ye not know that some live long, and that some have eyes which can see through rock? *Ha! ha! ha!*"

"Look in that corner, Curtis," I said, indicating the spot Gagool had pointed out.

"Hullo, you fellows," he cried, "here's a recess. Great heavens! see here."

We hurried up to where he was standing in a nook, shaped something like a small bow window. Against the wall of this recess were placed three stone chests, each about two feet square. Two were fitted with stone lids, the lid of the third rested against the side of the chest, which was open.

"*See!*" he repeated hoarsely, holding the lamp over the open chest. We looked, and for a moment could make nothing out, on account of a silvery sheen which dazzled us. When our eyes grew used to it we saw that the chest was three-parts full of uncut diamonds, most of them of considerable

size. Stooping, I picked some up. Yes, there was no doubt of it, there was the unmistakable soapy feel about them.

I fairly gasped as I dropped them.

"We are the richest men in the whole world," I said. "Monte Christo was a fool to us."

"We shall flood the market with diamonds," said Good.

"Got to get them there first," suggested Sir Henry.

We stood still with pale faces and stared at each other, the lantern in the middle and the glimmering gems below, as though we were conspirators about to commit a crime, instead of being, as we thought, the most fortunate men on earth.

"*Hee! hee! hee!*" cackled old Gagool behind us, as she flitted about like a vampire bat. "There are the bright stones ye love, white men, as many as ye will; take them, run them through your fingers, *eat* of them, *hee! hee! drink* of them, *ha! ha!*"

At that moment there was something so ridiculous to my mind at the idea of eating and drinking diamonds, that I began to laugh outrageously, an example which the others followed, without knowing why. There we stood and shrieked with laughter over the gems that were ours, which had been found for *us* thousands of years ago by the patient delvers in the great hole yonder, and stored for *us* by Solomon's long-dead overseer, whose name, perchance, was written in the characters stamped on the faded wax that yet adhered to the lids of the chest. Solomon never got them, nor David, or Da Silvestra, nor anybody else. *We* had got them: there before us were millions of pounds' worth of diamonds, and thousands of pounds' worth of gold and ivory only waiting to be taken away.

Suddenly the fit passed off, and we stopped laughing.

"Open the other chests, white men," croaked Gagool, "there are surely more therein. Take your fill, white lords! *Ha! ha!* take your fill."

Thus adjured, we set to work to pull up the stone lids on the other two, first—not without a feeling of sacrilege—breaking the seals that fastened them.

Hoorah! they were full too, full to the brim; at least, the second one was; no wretched burglarious Da Silvestra had been filling goat-skins out of that. As for the third chest, it was only about a fourth full, but the stones were all picked ones; none less than twenty carats, and some of them as large as pigeon-eggs. A good many of these bigger ones, however, we could see by holding them up to the light, were a little yellow, "off coloured," as they call it at Kimberley.

What we did *not* see, however, was the look of fearful malevolence that old Gagool favoured us with as she crept, crept like a snake, out of the treasure chamber and down the passage towards the door of solid rock.

Hark! Cry upon cry comes ringing up the vaulted path. It is Foulata's voice!

"Oh, Bougwan! help! help! the stone falls!"

"Leave go, girl! Then—"

"Help! help! she has stabbed me!"

By now we are running down the passage, and this is what the light from the lamp shows us. The door of the rock is closing down slowly; it is not three feet from the floor. Near it struggle Foulata and Gagool. The red blood of the former runs to her knee, but still the brave girl holds the old witch, who fights like a wild cat. Ah! she is free! Foulata falls, and Gagool throws herself on the ground, to twist like a snake through the crack of the closing stone. She is under—ah! god! too late! too late! The stone nips her, and she yells in agony. Down, down it comes, all the thirty tons of it, slowly pressing her old body against the rock below. Shriek upon shriek, such as we have never heard, then a long sickening *crunch*, and the door was shut just as, rushing down the passage, we hurled ourselves against it.

It was all done in four seconds.

Then we turned to Foulata. The poor girl was stabbed in the body, and I saw that she could not live long.

"Ah! Bougwan, I die!" gasped the beautiful creature. "She crept out—Gagool; I did not see her, I was faint—and the door began to fall; then she came back, and was looking up the path—I saw her come in through the slowly falling door, and caught her and held her, and she stabbed me, and *I die*, Bougwan!"

"Poor girl! poor girl!" Good cried in his distress; and then, as he could do nothing else, he fell to kissing her.

"Bougwan," she said, after a pause, "is Macumazahn there? It grows so dark, I cannot see."

"Here I am, Foulata."

"Macumazahn, be my tongue for a moment, I pray thee, for Bougwan cannot understand me, and before I go into the darkness I would speak to him a word."

"Say on, Foulata, I will render it."

"Say to my lord, Bougwan, that—I love him, and that I am glad to die because I know that he cannot cumber his life with such as I am, for the sun may not mate with the darkness, nor the white with the black.

"Say that, since I saw him, at times I have felt as though there were a bird in my bosom, which would one day fly hence and sing elsewhere. Even now, though I cannot lift my hand, and my brain grows cold, I do not feel as though my heart were dying; it is so full of love that it could live ten thousand years, and yet be young. Say that if I live again, mayhap I shall see him in the Stars, and that—I will search them all, though perchance there I should still be black and he would—still be white. Say—nay, Macumazahn, say no more, save that I love—Oh, hold me closer, Bougwan, I cannot feel thine arms—*oh! oh!*"

"She is dead—she is dead!" muttered Good, rising in grief, the tears running down his honest face.

"You need not let that trouble you, old fellow," said Sir Henry.

"Eh!" exclaimed Good; "what do you mean?"

"I mean that you will soon be in a position to join her. *Man, don't you see that we are buried alive?*"

Until Sir Henry uttered these words I do not think that the full horror of what had happened had come home to us, preoccupied as we were with the sight of poor Foulata's end. But now we understood. The ponderous mass of rock had closed, probably for ever, for the only brain which knew its secret was crushed to powder beneath its weight. This was a door that none could hope to force with anything short of dynamite in large quantities. And we were on the wrong side!

For a few minutes we stood horrified, there over the corpse of Foulata. All the manhood seemed to have gone out of us. The first shock of this idea of the slow and miserable end that awaited us was overpowering. We saw it all now; that fiend Gagool had planned this snare for us from the first.

It would have been just the jest that her evil mind would have rejoiced in, the idea of the three white men, whom, for some reason of her own, she had always hated, slowly perishing of thirst and hunger in the company of the treasure they had coveted. Now I saw the point of that sneer of hers about eating and drinking the diamonds. Probably somebody had tried to serve the poor old Dom in the same way, when he abandoned the skin full of jewels.

"This will never do," said Sir Henry hoarsely; "the lamp will soon go out. Let us see if we can't find the spring that works the rock."

We sprang forward with desperate energy, and, standing in a bloody ooze, began to feel up and down the door and the sides of the passage. But no knob or spring could we discover.

"Depend on it," I said, "it does not work from the inside; if it did Gagool would not have risked trying to crawl underneath the stone. It was the knowledge of this that made her try to escape at all hazards, curse her."

"At all events," said Sir Henry, with a hard little laugh, "retribution was swift; hers was almost as awful an end as ours is likely to be. We can do nothing with the door; let us go back to the treasure room."

We turned and went, and as we passed it I perceived by the unfinished wall across the passage the basket of food which poor Foulata had carried. I took it up, and brought it with me to the accursed treasure chamber that was to be our grave. Then we returned and reverently bore in Foulata's corpse, laying it on the floor by the boxes of coin.

Next we seated ourselves, leaning our backs against the three stone chests which contained the priceless treasure.

"Let us divide the food," said Sir Henry, "so as to make it last as long as possible." Accordingly we did so. It would, we reckoned, make four infinitesimally small meals for each of us, enough, say, to support life for a couple of days. Besides the "biltong," or dried game-flesh, there were two gourds of water, each of which held not more than a quart.

"Now," said Sir Henry grimly, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

We each ate a small portion of the "biltong," and drank a sip of water. Needless to say, we had but little appetite, though we were sadly in need of food, and felt better after swallowing it. Then we got up and made a systematic examination of the walls of our prison-house, in the faint hope of finding some means of exit, sounding them and the floor carefully.

There was none. It was not probable that there would be any to a treasure chamber.

The lamp began to burn dim. The fat was nearly exhausted.

"Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "what is the time—your watch goes?"

I drew it out, and looked at it. It was six o'clock; we had entered the cave at eleven.

"Infadoos will miss us," I suggested. "If we do not return to-night he will search for us in the morning, Curtis."

"He may search in vain. He does not know the secret of the door, nor even where it is. No living person knew it yesterday, except Gagool. To-day no one knows it. Even if he found the door he could not break it down. All the Kukuana army could not break through five feet of living rock. My friends, I see nothing for it but to bow ourselves to the will of the Almighty. The search for treasure has brought many to a bad end; we shall go to swell their number."

The lamp grew dimmer yet.

Presently it flared up and showed the whole scene in strong relief, the great mass of white tusks, the boxes of gold, the corpse of the poor Foulata stretched before them, the goat-skin full of treasure, the dim glimmer of the diamonds, and the wild, wan faces of us three white men seated there awaiting death by starvation.

Then the flame sank and expired.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE ABANDON HOPE

I can give no adequate description of the horrors of the night which followed. Mercifully they were to some extent mitigated by sleep, for even in such a position as ours wearied nature will sometimes assert itself. But I, at any rate, found it impossible to sleep much. Putting aside the terrifying

thought of our impending doom—for the bravest man on earth might well quail from such a fate as awaited us, and I never made any pretensions to be brave—the *silence* itself was too great to allow of it. Reader, you may have lain awake at night and thought the quiet oppressive, but I say with confidence that you can have no idea what a vivid, tangible thing is perfect stillness. On the surface of the earth there is always some sound or motion, and though it may in itself be imperceptible, yet it deadens the sharp edge of absolute silence. But here there was none. We were buried in the bowels of a huge snow-clad peak. Thousands of feet above us the fresh air rushed over the white snow, but no sound of it reached us. We were separated by a long tunnel and five feet of rock even from the awful chamber of the Dead; and the dead make no noise. Did we not know it who lay by poor Foulata's side? The crashing of all the artillery of earth and heaven could not have come to our ears in our living tomb. We were cut off from every echo of the world—we were as men already in the grave.

Then the irony of the situation forced itself upon me. There around us lay treasures enough to pay off a moderate national debt, or to build a fleet of ironclads, and yet we would have bartered them all gladly for the faintest chance of escape. Soon, doubtless, we should be rejoiced to exchange them for a bit of food or a cup of water, and, after that, even for the privilege of a speedy close to our sufferings. Truly wealth, which men spend their lives in acquiring, is a valueless thing at the last.

And so the night wore on.

"Good," said Sir Henry's voice at last, and it sounded awful in the intense stillness, "how many matches have you in the box?"

"Eight, Curtis."

"Strike one and let us see the time."

He did so, and in contrast to the dense darkness the flame nearly blinded us. It was five o'clock by my watch. The beautiful dawn was now blushing on the snow-wreaths far over our heads, and the breeze would be stirring the night mists in the hollows.

"We had better eat something and keep up our strength," I suggested.

"What is the good of eating?" answered Good; "the sooner we die and get it over the better."

"While there is life there is hope," said Sir Henry.

Accordingly we ate and sipped some water, and another period of time elapsed. Then Sir Henry suggested that it might be well to get as near the door as possible and halloa, on the faint chance of somebody catching a sound outside. Accordingly Good, who, from long practice at sea, has a fine piercing note, groped his way down the passage and set to work. I must say that he made a most diabolical noise. I never heard such yells; but it might have been a mosquito buzzing for all the effect they produced.

After a while he gave it up and came back very thirsty, and had to drink. Then we stopped yelling, as it encroached on the supply of water.

So we sat down once more against the chests of useless diamonds in that dreadful inaction which was one of the hardest circumstances of our fate; and I am bound to say that, for my part, I gave way in despair. Laying my head against Sir Henry's broad shoulder I burst into tears; and I think that I heard Good gulping away on the other side, and swearing hoarsely at himself for doing so.

Ah, how good and brave that great man was! Had we been two frightened children, and he our nurse, he could not have treated us more tenderly. Forgetting his own share of miseries, he did all he could to soothe our broken nerves, telling stories of men who had been in somewhat similar circumstances, and miraculously escaped; and when these failed to cheer us, pointing out how, after all, it was only anticipating an end which must come to us all, that it would soon be over, and that death from exhaustion was a merciful one (which is not true). Then, in a diffident sort of way, as once before I had heard him do, he suggested that we should throw ourselves on the mercy of a higher Power, which for my part I did with great vigour.

His is a beautiful character, very quiet, but very strong.

And so somehow the day went as the night had gone, if, indeed, one can use these terms where all was densest night, and when I lit a match to see the time it was seven o'clock.

Once more we ate and drank, and as we did so an idea occurred to me.

"How is it," said I, "that the air in this place keeps fresh? It is thick and heavy, but it is perfectly fresh."

"Great heavens!" said Good, starting up, "I never thought of that. It can't come through the stone door, for it's air-tight, if ever a door was. It must come from somewhere. If there were no current of air in the place we should have been stifled or poisoned when we first came in. Let us have a look."

It was wonderful what a change this mere spark of hope wrought in us. In a moment we were all three groping about on our hands and knees, feeling for the slightest indication of a draught. Presently my ardour received a check. I put my hand on something cold. It was dead Foulata's face.

For an hour or more we went on feeling about, till at last Sir Henry and I gave it up in despair, having been considerably hurt by constantly knocking our heads against tusks, chests, and the sides of the chamber. But Good still persevered, saying, with an approach to cheerfulness, that it was better than doing nothing.

"I say, you fellows," he said presently, in a constrained sort of voice, "come here."

Needless to say we scrambled towards him quickly enough.

"Quatermain, put your hand here where mine is. Now, do you feel anything?"

"I *think* I feel air coming up."

"Now listen." He rose and stamped upon the place, and a flame of hope shot up in our hearts. *It rang hollow.*

With trembling hands I lit a match. I had only three left, and we saw that we were in the angle of the far corner of the chamber, a fact that accounted for our not having noticed the hollow sound of the place during our former exhaustive examination. As the match burnt we scrutinised the spot. There was a join in the solid rock floor, and, great heavens! there, level with the rock, was a stone ring. We said no word, we were too excited, and our hearts beat too wildly with hope to allow us to speak. Good had a knife, at the back of which was one of those hooks that are made to extract stones from horses' hoofs. He opened it, and scratched round the ring with it. Finally he worked it under, and levered away gently for fear of breaking the hook. The ring began to move. Being of stone it had not rusted fast in all the centuries it had lain there, as would have been the case had it been of iron. Presently it was upright. Then he thrust his hands into it and tugged with all his force, but nothing budged.

"Let me try," I said impatiently, for the situation of the stone, right in the angle of the corner, was such that it was impossible for two to pull at once. I took hold and strained away, but no results.

Then Sir Henry tried and failed.

Taking the hook again, Good scratched all round the crack where we felt the air coming up.

"Now, Curtis," he said, "tackle on, and put your back into it; you are as strong as two. Stop," and he took off a stout black silk handkerchief, which, true to his habits of neatness, he still wore, and ran it through the ring. "Quatermain, get Curtis round the middle and pull for dear life when I give the word. *Now.*"

Sir Henry put out all his enormous strength, and Good and I did the same, with such power as nature had given us.

"Heave! heave! it's giving," gasped Sir Henry; and I heard the muscles of his great back cracking. Suddenly there was a grating sound, then a rush of

air, and we were all on our backs on the floor with a heavy flag-stone upon the top of us. Sir Henry's strength had done it, and never did muscular power stand a man in better stead.

"Light a match, Quatermain," he said, so soon as we had picked ourselves up and got our breath; "carefully, now."

I did so, and there before us, Heaven be praised! was the *first step of a stone stair*.

"Now what is to be done?" asked Good.

"Follow the stair, of course, and trust to Providence."

"Stop!" said Sir Henry; "Quatermain, get the bit of biltong and the water that are left; we may want them."

I went, creeping back to our place by the chests for that purpose, and as I was coming away an idea struck me. We had not thought much of the diamonds for the last twenty-four hours or so; indeed, the very idea of diamonds was nauseous, seeing what they had entailed upon us; but, reflected I, I may as well pocket some in case we ever should get out of this ghastly hole. So I just put my fist into the first chest and filled all the available pockets of my old shooting-coat and trousers, topping up—this was a happy thought—with a few handfuls of big ones from the third chest. Also, by an afterthought, I stuffed Foulata's basket, which, except for one water-gourd and a little biltong, was empty now, with great quantities of the stones.

"I say, you fellows," I sang out, "won't you take some diamonds with you? I've filled my pockets and the basket."

"Oh, come on, Quatermain! and hang the diamonds!" said Sir Henry. "I hope that I may never see another."

As for Good, he made no answer. He was, I think, taking his last farewell of all that was left of the poor girl who had loved him so well. And curious as it may seem to you, my reader, sitting at home at ease and

reflecting on the vast, indeed the immeasurable, wealth which we were thus abandoning, I can assure you that if you had passed some twenty-eight hours with next to nothing to eat and drink in that place, you would not have cared to cumber yourself with diamonds whilst plunging down into the unknown bowels of the earth, in the wild hope of escape from an agonising death. If from the habits of a lifetime, it had not become a sort of second nature with me never to leave anything worth having behind if there was the slightest chance of my being able to carry it away, I am sure that I should not have bothered to fill my pockets and that basket.

"Come on, Quatermain," repeated Sir Henry, who was already standing on the first step of the stone stair. "Steady, I will go first."

"Mind where you put your feet, there may be some awful hole underneath," I answered.

"Much more likely to be another room," said Sir Henry, while he descended slowly, counting the steps as he went.

When he got to "fifteen" he stopped. "Here's the bottom," he said. "Thank goodness! I think it's a passage. Follow me down."

Good went next, and I came last, carrying the basket, and on reaching the bottom lit one of the two remaining matches. By its light we could just see that we were standing in a narrow tunnel, which ran right and left at right angles to the staircase we had descended. Before we could make out any more, the match burnt my fingers and went out. Then arose the delicate question of which way to go. Of course, it was impossible to know what the tunnel was, or where it led to, and yet to turn one way might lead us to safety, and the other to destruction. We were utterly perplexed, till suddenly it struck Good that when I had lit the match the draught of the passage blew the flame to the left.

"Let us go against the draught," he said; "air draws inwards, not outwards."

We took this suggestion, and feeling along the wall with our hands, whilst trying the ground before us at every step, we departed from that

accursed treasure chamber on our terrible quest for life. If ever it should be entered again by living man, which I do not think probable, he will find tokens of our visit in the open chests of jewels, the empty lamp, and the white bones of poor Foulata.

When we had groped our way for about a quarter of an hour along the passage, suddenly it took a sharp turn, or else was bisected by another, which we followed, only in course of time to be led into a third. And so it went on for some hours. We seemed to be in a stone labyrinth that led nowhere. What all these passages are, of course I cannot say, but we thought that they must be the ancient workings of a mine, of which the various shafts and adits travelled hither and thither as the ore led them. This is the only way in which we could account for such a multitude of galleries.

At length we halted, thoroughly worn out with fatigue and with that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, and ate up our poor remaining piece of biltong and drank our last sup of water, for our throats were like limekilns. It seemed to us that we had escaped Death in the darkness of the treasure chamber only to meet him in the darkness of the tunnels.

As we stood, once more utterly depressed, I thought that I caught a sound, to which I called the attention of the others. It was very faint and very far off, but it *was* a sound, a faint, murmuring sound, for the others heard it too, and no words can describe the blessedness of it after all those hours of utter, awful stillness.

"By heaven! it's running water," said Good. "Come on."

Off we started again in the direction from which the faint murmur seemed to come, groping our way as before along the rocky walls. I remember that I laid down the basket full of diamonds, wishing to be rid of its weight, but on second thoughts took it up again. One might as well die rich as poor, I reflected. As we went the sound became more and more audible, till at last it seemed quite loud in the quiet. On, yet on; now we could distinctly make out the unmistakable swirl of rushing water. And yet how could there be running water in the bowels of the earth? Now we were quite near it, and Good, who was leading, swore that he could smell it.

"Go gently, Good," said Sir Henry, "we must be close." *Splash!* and a cry from Good.

He had fallen in.

"Good! Good! where are you?" we shouted, in terrified distress. To our intense relief an answer came back in a choky voice.

"All right; I've got hold of a rock. Strike a light to show me where you are."

Hastily I lit the last remaining match. Its faint gleam discovered to us a dark mass of water running at our feet. How wide it was we could not see, but there, some way out, was the dark form of our companion hanging on to a projecting rock.

"Stand clear to catch me," sung out Good. "I must swim for it."

Then we heard a splash, and a great struggle. Another minute and he had grabbed at and caught Sir Henry's outstretched hand, and we had pulled him up high and dry into the tunnel.

"My word!" he said, between his gasps, "that was touch and go. If I hadn't managed to catch that rock, and known how to swim, I should have been done. It runs like a mill-race, and I could feel no bottom."

We dared not follow the banks of the subterranean river for fear lest we should fall into it again in the darkness. So after Good had rested a while, and we had drunk our fill of the water, which was sweet and fresh, and washed our faces, that needed it sadly, as well as we could, we started from the banks of this African Styx, and began to retrace our steps along the tunnel, Good dripping unpleasantly in front of us. At length we came to another gallery leading to our right.

"We may as well take it," said Sir Henry wearily; "all roads are alike here; we can only go on till we drop."

Slowly, for a long, long while, we stumbled, utterly exhausted, along this new tunnel, Sir Henry now leading the way. Again I thought of abandoning that basket, but did not.

Suddenly he stopped, and we bumped up against him.

"Look!" he whispered, "is my brain going, or is that light?"

We stared with all our eyes, and there, yes, there, far ahead of us, was a faint, glimmering spot, no larger than a cottage window pane. It was so faint that I doubt if any eyes, except those which, like ours, had for days seen nothing but blackness, could have perceived it at all.

With a gasp of hope we pushed on. In five minutes there was no longer any doubt; it *was* a patch of faint light. A minute more and a breath of real live air was fanning us. On we struggled. All at once the tunnel narrowed. Sir Henry went on his knees. Smaller yet it grew, till it was only the size of a large fox's earth—it was *earth* now, mind you; the rock had ceased.

A squeeze, a struggle, and Sir Henry was out, and so was Good, and so was I, dragging Foulata's basket after me; and there above us were the blessed stars, and in our nostrils was the sweet air. Then suddenly something gave, and we were all rolling over and over and over through grass and bushes and soft, wet soil.

The basket caught in something and I stopped. Sitting up I halloed lustily. An answering shout came from below, where Sir Henry's wild career had been checked by some level ground. I scrambled to him, and found him unhurt, though breathless. Then we looked for Good. A little way off we discovered him also, hammed in a forked root. He was a good deal knocked about, but soon came to himself.

We sat down together, there on the grass, and the revulsion of feeling was so great that really I think we cried with joy. We had escaped from that

awful dungeon, which was so near to becoming our grave. Surely some merciful Power guided our footsteps to the jackal hole, for that is what it must have been, at the termination of the tunnel. And see, yonder on the mountains the dawn we had never thought to look upon again was blushing rosy red.

Presently the grey light stole down the slopes, and we saw that we were at the bottom, or rather, nearly at the bottom, of the vast pit in front of the entrance to the cave. Now we could make out the dim forms of the three Colossi who sat upon its verge. Doubtless those awful passages, along which we had wandered the livelong night, had been originally in some way connected with the great diamond mine. As for the subterranean river in the bowels of the mountain, Heaven only knows what it is, or whence it flows, or whither it goes. I, for one, have no anxiety to trace its course.

Lighter it grew, and lighter yet. We could see each other now, and such a spectacle as we presented I have never set eyes on before or since. Gaunt-cheeked, hollow-eyed wretches, smeared all over with dust and mud, bruised, bleeding, the long fear of imminent death yet written on our countenances, we were, indeed, a sight to frighten the daylight. And yet it is a solemn fact that Good's eye-glass was still fixed in Good's eye. I doubt whether he had ever taken it out at all. Neither the darkness, nor the plunge in the subterranean river, nor the roll down the slope, had been able to separate Good and his eye-glass.

Presently we rose, fearing that our limbs would stiffen if we stopped there longer, and commenced with slow and painful steps to struggle up the sloping sides of the great pit. For an hour or more we toiled steadfastly up the blue clay, dragging ourselves on by the help of the roots and grasses with which it was clothed. But now I had no more thought of leaving the basket; indeed, nothing but death should have parted us.

At last it was done, and we stood by the great road, on that side of the pit which is opposite to the Colossi.

At the side of the road, a hundred yards off, a fire was burning in front of some huts, and round the fire were figures. We staggered towards them,

supporting one another, and halting every few paces. Presently one of the figures rose, saw us and fell on to the ground, crying out for fear.

"Infadoos, Infadoos! it is we, thy friends."

He rose; he ran to us, staring wildly, and still shaking with fear.

"Oh, my lords, my lords, it is indeed you come back from the dead!—come back from the dead!"

And the old warrior flung himself down before us, and clasping Sir Henry's knees, he wept aloud for joy.

CHAPTER XIX

IGNOSI'S FAREWELL

Ten days from that eventful morning found us once more in our old quarters at Loo; and, strange to say, but little the worse for our terrible experience, except that my stubbly hair came out of the treasure cave about three shades greyer than it went in, and that Good never was quite the same after Foulata's death, which seemed to move him very greatly. I am bound to say, looking at the thing from the point of view of an oldish man of the world, that I consider her removal was a fortunate occurrence, since, otherwise, complications would have been sure to ensue. The poor creature was no ordinary native girl, but a person of great, I had almost said stately, beauty, and of considerable refinement of mind. But no amount of beauty or refinement could have made an entanglement between Good and herself a desirable occurrence; for, as she herself put it, "Can the sun mate with the darkness, or the white with the black?"

I need hardly state that we never again penetrated into Solomon's treasure chamber. After we had recovered from our fatigues, a process which took us forty-eight hours, we descended into the great pit in the hope

of finding the hole by which we had crept out of the mountain, but with no success. To begin with, rain had fallen, and obliterated our spoor; and what is more, the sides of the vast pit were full of ant-bear and other holes. It was impossible to say to which of these we owed our salvation. Also, on the day before we started back to Loo, we made a further examination of the wonders of the stalactite cave, and, drawn by a kind of restless feeling, even penetrated once more into the Chamber of the Dead. Passing beneath the spear of the White Death we gazed, with sensations which it would be quite impossible for me to describe, at the mass of rock that had shut us off from escape, thinking the while of priceless treasures beyond, of the mysterious old hag whose flattened fragments lay crushed beneath it, and of the fair girl of whose tomb it was the portal. I say gazed at the "rock," for, examine as we could, we could find no traces of the join of the sliding door; nor, indeed, could we hit upon the secret, now utterly lost, that worked it, though we tried for an hour or more. It is certainly a marvellous bit of mechanism, characteristic, in its massive and yet inscrutable simplicity, of the age which produced it; and I doubt if the world has such another to show.

At last we gave it up in disgust; though, if the mass had suddenly risen before our eyes, I doubt if we should have screwed up courage to step over Gagool's mangled remains, and once more enter the treasure chamber, even in the sure and certain hope of unlimited diamonds. And yet I could have cried at the idea of leaving all that treasure, the biggest treasure probably that in the world's history has ever been accumulated in one spot. But there was no help for it. Only dynamite could force its way through five feet of solid rock.

So we left it. Perhaps, in some remote unborn century, a more fortunate explorer may hit upon the "Open Sesame," and flood the world with gems. But, myself, I doubt it. Somehow, I seem to feel that the tens of millions of pounds' worth of jewels which lie in the three stone coffers will never shine round the neck of an earthly beauty. They and Foulata's bones will keep cold company till the end of all things.

With a sigh of disappointment we made our way back, and next day started for Loo. And yet it was really very ungrateful of us to be disappointed; for, as the reader will remember, by a lucky thought, I had

taken the precaution to fill the wide pockets of my old shooting coat and trousers with gems before we left our prison-house, also Foulata's basket, which held twice as many more, notwithstanding that the water bottle had occupied some of its space. A good many of these fell out in the course of our roll down the side of the pit, including several of the big ones, which I had crammed in on the top in my coat pockets. But, comparatively speaking, an enormous quantity still remained, including ninety-three large stones ranging from over two hundred to seventy carats in weight. My old shooting coat and the basket still held sufficient treasure to make us all, if not millionaires as the term is understood in America, at least exceedingly wealthy men, and yet to keep enough stones each to make the three finest sets of gems in Europe. So we had not done so badly.

On arriving at Loo we were most cordially received by Ignosi, whom we found well, and busily engaged in consolidating his power, and reorganising the regiments which had suffered most in the great struggle with Twala.

He listened with intense interest to our wonderful story; but when we told him of old Gagool's frightful end he grew thoughtful.

"Come hither," he called, to a very old Induna or councillor, who was sitting with others in a circle round the king, but out of ear-shot. The ancient man rose, approached, saluted, and seated himself.

"Thou art aged," said Ignosi.

"Ay, my lord the king! Thy father's father and I were born on the same day."

"Tell me, when thou wast little, didst thou know Gagooola the witch doctress?"

"Ay, my lord the king!"

"How was she then—young, like thee?"

"Not so, my lord the king! She was even as she is now and as she was in the days of my great grandfather before me; old and dried, very ugly, and

full of wickedness."

"She is no more; she is dead."

"So, O king! then is an ancient curse taken from the land."

"Go!"

"*Koom!* I go, Black Puppy, who tore out the old dog's throat. *Koom!*"

"Ye see, my brothers," said Ignosi, "this was a strange woman, and I rejoice that she is dead. She would have let you die in the dark place, and mayhap afterwards she had found a way to slay me, as she found a way to slay my father, and set up Twala, whom her black heart loved, in his place. Now go on with the tale; surely there never was its like!"

After I had narrated all the story of our escape, as we had agreed between ourselves that I should, I took the opportunity to address Ignosi as to our departure from Kukuanaland.

"And now, Ignosi," I said, "the time has come for us to bid thee farewell, and start to see our own land once more. Behold, Ignosi, thou camest with us a servant, and now we leave thee a mighty king. If thou art grateful to us, remember to do even as thou didst promise: to rule justly, to respect the law, and to put none to death without a cause. So shalt thou prosper. To-morrow, at break of day, Ignosi, thou wilt give us an escort who shall lead us across the mountains. Is it not so, O king?"

Ignosi covered his face with his hands for a while before answering.

"My heart is sore," he said at last; "your words split my heart in twain. What have I done to you, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, that ye should leave me desolate? Ye who stood by me in rebellion and in battle, will ye leave me in the day of peace and victory? What will ye—wives? Choose from among the maidens! A place to live in? Behold, the land is yours as far as ye can see. The white man's houses? Ye shall teach my people how to build them. Cattle for beef and milk? Every married man shall bring you an ox or a cow. Wild game to hunt? Does not the elephant

walk through my forests, and the river-horse sleep in the reeds? Would ye make war? My Impis wait your word. If there is anything more which I can give, that will I give you."

"Nay, Ignosi, we want none of these things," I answered; "we would seek our own place."

"Now do I learn," said Ignosi bitterly, and with flashing eyes, "that ye love the bright stones more than me, your friend. Ye have the stones; now ye would go to Natal and across the moving black water and sell them, and be rich, as it is the desire of a white man's heart to be. Cursed for your sake be the white stones, and cursed he who seeks them. Death shall it be to him who sets foot in the place of Death to find them. I have spoken. White men, ye can go."

I laid my hand upon his arm. "Ignosi," I said, "tell us, when thou didst wander in Zululand, and among the white people of Natal, did not thine heart turn to the land thy mother told thee of, thy native place, where thou didst see the light, and play when thou wast little, the land where thy place was?"

"It was even so, Macumazahn."

"In like manner, Ignosi, do our hearts turn to our land and to our own place."

Then came a silence. When Ignosi broke it, it was in a different voice.

"I do perceive that now as ever thy words are wise and full of reason, Macumazahn; that which flies in the air loves not to run along the ground; the white man loves not to live on the level of the black or to house among his kraals. Well, ye must go, and leave my heart sore, because ye will be as dead to me, since from where ye are no tidings can come to me.

"But listen, and let all your brothers know my words. No other white man shall cross the mountains, even if any man live to come so far. I will see no traders with their guns and gin. My people shall fight with the spear, and drink water, like their forefathers before them. I will have no praying-

men to put a fear of death into men's hearts, to stir them up against the law of the king, and make a path for the white folk who follow to run on. If a white man comes to my gates I will send him back; if a hundred come I will push them back; if armies come, I will make war on them with all my strength, and they shall not prevail against me. None shall ever seek for the shining stones: no, not an army, for if they come I will send a regiment and fill up the pit, and break down the white columns in the caves and choke them with rocks, so that none can reach even to that door of which ye speak, and whereof the way to move it is lost. But for you three, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, the path is always open; for, behold, ye are dearer to me than aught that breathes.

"And ye would go. Infadoos, my uncle, and my Induna, shall take you by the hand and guide you with a regiment. There is, as I have learned, another way across the mountains that he shall show you. Farewell, my brothers, brave white men. See me no more, for I have no heart to bear it. Behold! I make a decree, and it shall be published from the mountains to the mountains; your names, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, shall be "*hlonipa*" even as the names of dead kings, and he who speaks them shall die.[1] So shall your memory be preserved in the land for ever.

"Go now, ere my eyes rain tears like a woman's. At times as ye look back down the path of life, or when ye are old and gather yourselves together to crouch before the fire, because for you the sun has no more heat, ye will think of how we stood shoulder to shoulder, in that great battle which thy wise words planned, Macumazahn; of how thou wast the point of the horn that galled Twala's flank, Bougwan; whilst thou stood in the ring of the Greys, Incubu, and men went down before thine axe like corn before a sickle; ay, and of how thou didst break that wild bull Twala's strength, and bring his pride to dust. Fare ye well for ever, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, my lords and my friends."

Ignosi rose and looked earnestly at us for a few seconds. Then he threw the corner of his karross over his head, so as to cover his face from us.

We went in silence.

Next day at dawn we left Loo, escorted by our old friend Infadoos, who was heart-broken at our departure, and by the regiment of Buffaloes. Early as was the hour, all the main street of the town was lined with multitudes of people, who gave us the royal salute as we passed at the head of the regiment, while the women blessed us for having rid the land of Twala, throwing flowers before us as we went. It was really very affecting, and not the sort of thing one is accustomed to meet with from natives.

One ludicrous incident occurred, however, which I rather welcomed, as it gave us something to laugh at.

Just before we reached the confines of the town, a pretty young girl, with some lovely lilies in her hand, ran forward and presented them to Good—somehow they all seemed to like Good; I think his eye-glass and solitary whisker gave him a fictitious value—and then said that she had a boon to ask.

"Speak on," he answered.

"Let my lord show his servant his beautiful white legs, that his servant may look upon them, and remember them all her days, and tell of them to her children; his servant has travelled four days' journey to see them, for the fame of them has gone throughout the land."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" exclaimed Good excitedly.

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said Sir Henry, "you can't refuse to oblige a lady."

"I won't," replied Good obstinately; "it is positively indecent."

However, in the end he consented to draw up his trousers to the knee, amidst notes of rapturous admiration from all the women present, especially the gratified young lady, and in this guise he had to walk till we got clear of the town.

Good's legs, I fear, will never be so greatly admired again. Of his melting teeth, and even of his "transparent eye," the Kukuanas wearied

more or less, but of his legs never.

As we travelled, Infadoos told us that there was another pass over the mountains to the north of the one followed by Solomon's Great Road, or rather that there was a place where it was possible to climb down the wall of cliff which separates Kukuana land from the desert, and is broken by the towering shapes of Sheba's Breasts. It appeared, also, that rather more than two years previously a party of Kukuana hunters had descended this path into the desert in search of ostriches, whose plumes are much prized among them for war head-dresses, and that in the course of their hunt they had been led far from the mountains and were much troubled by thirst. Seeing trees on the horizon, however, they walked towards them, and discovered a large and fertile oasis some miles in extent, and plentifully watered. It was by way of this oasis that Infadoos suggested we should return, and the idea seemed to us a good one, for it appeared that we should thus escape the rigours of the mountain pass. Also some of the hunters were in attendance to guide us to the oasis, from which, they stated, they could perceive other fertile spots far away in the desert.[2]

Travelling easily, on the night of the fourth day's journey we found ourselves once more on the crest of the mountains that separate Kukuana land from the desert, which rolled away in sandy billows at our feet, and about twenty-five miles to the north of Sheba's Breasts.

At dawn on the following day, we were led to the edge of a very precipitous chasm, by which we were to descend the precipice, and gain the plain two thousand and more feet below.

Here we bade farewell to that true friend and sturdy old warrior, Infadoos, who solemnly wished all good upon us, and nearly wept with grief. "Never, my lords," he said, "shall mine old eyes see the like of you again. Ah! the way that Incubu cut his men down in the battle! Ah! for the sight of that stroke with which he swept off my brother Twala's head! It was beautiful—beautiful! I may never hope to see such another, except perchance in happy dreams."

We were very sorry to part from him; indeed, Good was so moved that he gave him as a souvenir—what do you think?—an *eye-glass*; afterwards

we discovered that it was a spare one. Infadoos was delighted, foreseeing that the possession of such an article would increase his prestige enormously, and after several vain attempts he actually succeeded in screwing it into his own eye. Anything more incongruous than the old warrior looked with an eye-glass I never saw. Eye-glasses do not go well with leopard-skin cloaks and black ostrich plumes.

Then, after seeing that our guides were well laden with water and provisions, and having received a thundering farewell salute from the Buffaloes, we wrung Infadoos by the hand, and began our downward climb. A very arduous business it proved to be, but somehow that evening we found ourselves at the bottom without accident.

"Do you know," said Sir Henry that night, as we sat by our fire and gazed up at the beetling cliffs above us, "I think that there are worse places than Kukuanaland in the world, and that I have known unhappier times than the last month or two, though I have never spent such queer ones. Eh! you fellows?"

"I almost wish I were back," said Good, with a sigh.

As for myself, I reflected that all's well that ends well; but in the course of a long life of shaves, I never had such shaves as those which I had recently experienced. The thought of that battle makes me feel cold all over, and as for our experience in the treasure chamber—!

Next morning we started on a toilsome trudge across the desert, having with us a good supply of water carried by our five guides, and camped that night in the open, marching again at dawn on the morrow.

By noon of the third day's journey we could see the trees of the oasis of which the guides spoke, and within an hour of sundown we were walking once more upon grass and listening to the sound of running water.

[1] This extraordinary and negative way of showing intense respect is by no means unknown among African people, and the result is that if, as is usual, the name in question has a significance, the meaning must be expressed by an idiom or other word. In this way a memory is preserved for generations, or until the new word utterly supplants the old.

[2] It often puzzled all of us to understand how it was possible that Ignosi's mother, bearing the child with her, should have survived the dangers of her journey across the mountains and the desert, dangers which so nearly proved fatal to ourselves. It has since occurred to me, and I give the idea to the reader for what it is worth, that she must have taken this second route, and wandered out like Hagar into the wilderness. If she did so, there is no longer anything inexplicable about the story, since, as Ignosi himself related, she may well have been picked up by some ostrich hunters before she or the child was exhausted, was led by them to the oasis, and thence by stages to the fertile country, and so on by slow degrees southwards to Zululand.—A.Q.

CHAPTER XX

FOUND

And now I come to perhaps the strangest adventure that happened to us in all this strange business, and one which shows how wonderfully things are brought about.

I was walking along quietly, some way in front of the other two, down the banks of the stream which runs from the oasis till it is swallowed up in the hungry desert sands, when suddenly I stopped and rubbed my eyes, as well I might. There, not twenty yards in front of me, placed in a charming situation, under the shade of a species of fig-tree, and facing to the stream, was a cosy hut, built more or less on the Kafir principle with grass and withes, but having a full-length door instead of a bee-hole.

"What the dickens," said I to myself, "can a hut be doing here?" Even as I said it the door of the hut opened, and there limped out of it a *white man* clothed in skins, and with an enormous black beard. I thought that I must have got a touch of the sun. It was impossible. No hunter ever came to such

a place as this. Certainly no hunter would ever settle in it. I stared and stared, and so did the other man, and just at that juncture Sir Henry and Good walked up.

"Look here, you fellows," I said, "is that a white man, or am I mad?"

Sir Henry looked, and Good looked, and then all of a sudden the lame white man with a black beard uttered a great cry, and began hobbling towards us. When he was close he fell down in a sort of faint.

With a spring Sir Henry was by his side.

"Great Powers!" he cried, "*it is my brother George!*"

At the sound of this disturbance, another figure, also clad in skins, emerged from the hut, a gun in his hand, and ran towards us. On seeing me he too gave a cry.

"Macumazahn," he halloed, "don't you know me, Baas? I'm Jim the hunter. I lost the note you gave me to give to the Baas, and we have been here nearly two years." And the fellow fell at my feet, and rolled over and over, weeping for joy.

"You careless scoundrel!" I said; "you ought to be well *sjambocked*"—that is, hided.

Meanwhile the man with the black beard had recovered and risen, and he and Sir Henry were pump-handling away at each other, apparently without a word to say. But whatever they had quarrelled about in the past—I suspect it was a lady, though I never asked—it was evidently forgotten now.

"My dear old fellow," burst out Sir Henry at last, "I thought you were dead. I have been over Solomon's Mountains to find you. I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again, and now I come across you perched in the desert, like an old *assvögel*." [1]

"I tried to cross Solomon's Mountains nearly two years ago," was the answer, spoken in the hesitating voice of a man who has had little recent

opportunity of using his tongue, "but when I reached here a boulder fell on my leg and crushed it, and I have been able to go neither forward nor back."

Then I came up. "How do you do, Mr. Neville?" I said; "do you remember me?"

"Why," he said, "isn't it Hunter Quatermain, eh, and Good too? Hold on a minute, you fellows, I am getting dizzy again. It is all so very strange, and, when a man has ceased to hope, so very happy!"

That evening, over the camp fire, George Curtis told us his story, which, in its way, was almost as eventful as our own, and, put shortly, amounted to this. A little less than two years before, he had started from Sitanda's Kraal, to try to reach Suliman's Berg. As for the note I had sent him by Jim, that worthy lost it, and he had never heard of it till to-day. But, acting upon information he had received from the natives, he headed not for Sheba's Breasts, but for the ladder-like descent of the mountains down which we had just come, which is clearly a better route than that marked out in old Dom Silvestra's plan. In the desert he and Jim had suffered great hardships, but finally they reached this oasis, where a terrible accident befell George Curtis. On the day of their arrival he was sitting by the stream, and Jim was extracting the honey from the nest of a stingless bee which is to be found in the desert, on the top of a bank immediately above him. In so doing he loosened a great boulder of rock, which fell upon George Curtis's right leg, crushing it frightfully. From that day he had been so lame that he found it impossible to go either forward or back, and had preferred to take the chances of dying in the oasis to the certainty of perishing in the desert.

As for food, however, they got on pretty well, for they had a good supply of ammunition, and the oasis was frequented, especially at night, by large quantities of game, which came thither for water. These they shot, or trapped in pitfalls, using the flesh for food, and, after their clothes wore out, the hides for clothing.

"And so," George Curtis ended, "we have lived for nearly two years, like a second Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday, hoping against hope that some natives might come here to help us away, but none have come. Only last night we settled that Jim should leave me, and try to reach Sitanda's

Kraal to get assistance. He was to go to-morrow, but I had little hope of ever seeing him back again. And now *you*, of all people in the world, *you*, who, as I fancied, had long ago forgotten all about me, and were living comfortably in old England, turn up in a promiscuous way and find me where you least expected. It is the most wonderful thing that I have ever heard of, and the most merciful too."

Then Sir Henry set to work, and told him the main facts of our adventures, sitting till late into the night to do it.

"By Jove!" said George Curtis, when I showed him some of the diamonds: "well, at least you have got something for your pains, besides my worthless self."

Sir Henry laughed. "They belong to Quatermain and Good. It was a part of the bargain that they should divide any spoils there might be."

This remark set me thinking, and having spoken to Good, I told Sir Henry that it was our joint wish that he should take a third portion of the diamonds, or, if he would not, that his share should be handed to his brother, who had suffered even more than ourselves on the chance of getting them. Finally, we prevailed upon him to consent to this arrangement, but George Curtis did not know of it until some time afterwards.

Here, at this point, I think that I shall end my history. Our journey across the desert back to Sitanda's Kraal was most arduous, especially as we had to support George Curtis, whose right leg was very weak indeed, and continually threw out splinters of bone. But we did accomplish it somehow, and to give its details would only be to reproduce much of what happened to us on the former occasion.

Six months from the date of our re-arrival at Sitanda's, where we found our guns and other goods quite safe, though the old rascal in charge was much disgusted at our surviving to claim them, saw us all once more safe and sound at my little place on the Berea, near Durban, where I am now

writing. Thence I bid farewell to all who have accompanied me through the strangest trip I ever made in the course of a long and varied experience.

P.S.—Just as I had written the last word, a Kafir came up my avenue of orange trees, carrying a letter in a cleft stick, which he had brought from the post. It turned out to be from Sir Henry, and as it speaks for itself I give it in full.

October 1, 1884.
Brayley Hall, Yorkshire.

My Dear Quatermain,

I send you a line a few mails back to say that the three of us, George, Good, and myself, fetched up all right in England. We got off the boat at Southampton, and went up to town. You should have seen what a swell Good turned out the very next day, beautifully shaved, frock coat fitting like a glove, brand new eye-glass, etc., etc. I went and walked in the park with him, where I met some people I know, and at once told them the story of his "beautiful white legs."

He is furious, especially as some ill-natured person has printed it in a Society paper.

To come to business, Good and I took the diamonds to Streeter's to be valued, as we arranged, and really I am afraid to tell you what they put them at, it seems so enormous. They say that of course it is more or less guess-work, as such stones have never to their knowledge been put on the market in anything like such quantities. It appears that (with the exception of one or two of the largest) they are of the finest water, and equal in every way to the best Brazilian stones. I asked them if they would buy them, but they said that it was beyond their power to do so, and recommended us to sell by degrees, over a period of years indeed, for fear lest we should flood the market. They offer, however, a hundred and eighty thousand for a very small portion of them.

You must come home, Quatermain, and see about these things, especially if you insist upon making the magnificent present of the third share, which does *not* belong to me, to my brother George. As for Good, he is *no good*. His time is too much occupied in shaving, and other matters connected with the vain adorning of the body. But I think he is still down on his luck about Foulata. He told me that since he had been home he hadn't seen a woman to touch her, either as regards her figure or the sweetness of her expression.

I want you to come home, my dear old comrade, and to buy a house near here. You have done your day's work, and have lots of money now, and there is a place for sale quite close which would suit you admirably. Do come; the sooner the better; you can finish writing the story of our adventures on board ship. We have

refused to tell the tale till it is written by you, for fear lest we shall not be believed. If you start on receipt of this you will reach here by Christmas, and I book you to stay with me for that. Good is coming, and George; and so, by the way, is your boy Harry (there's a bribe for you). I have had him down for a week's shooting, and like him. He is a cool young hand; he shot me in the leg, cut out the pellets, and then remarked upon the advantages of having a medical student with every shooting party!

Good-bye, old boy; I can't say any more, but I know that you will come, if it is only to oblige

Your sincere friend,
Henry Curtis.

P.S.—The tusks of the great bull that killed poor Khiva have now been put up in the hall here, over the pair of buffalo horns you gave me, and look magnificent; and the axe with which I chopped off Twala's head is fixed above my writing-table. I wish that we could have managed to bring away the coats of chain armour. Don't lose poor Foulata's basket in which you brought away the diamonds.

H.C.

To-day is Tuesday. There is a steamer going on Friday, and I really think that I must take Curtis at his word, and sail by her for England, if it is only to see you, Harry, my boy, and to look after the printing of this history, which is a task that I do not like to trust to anybody else.

ALLAN QUATERMAIN.

[1] Vulture.

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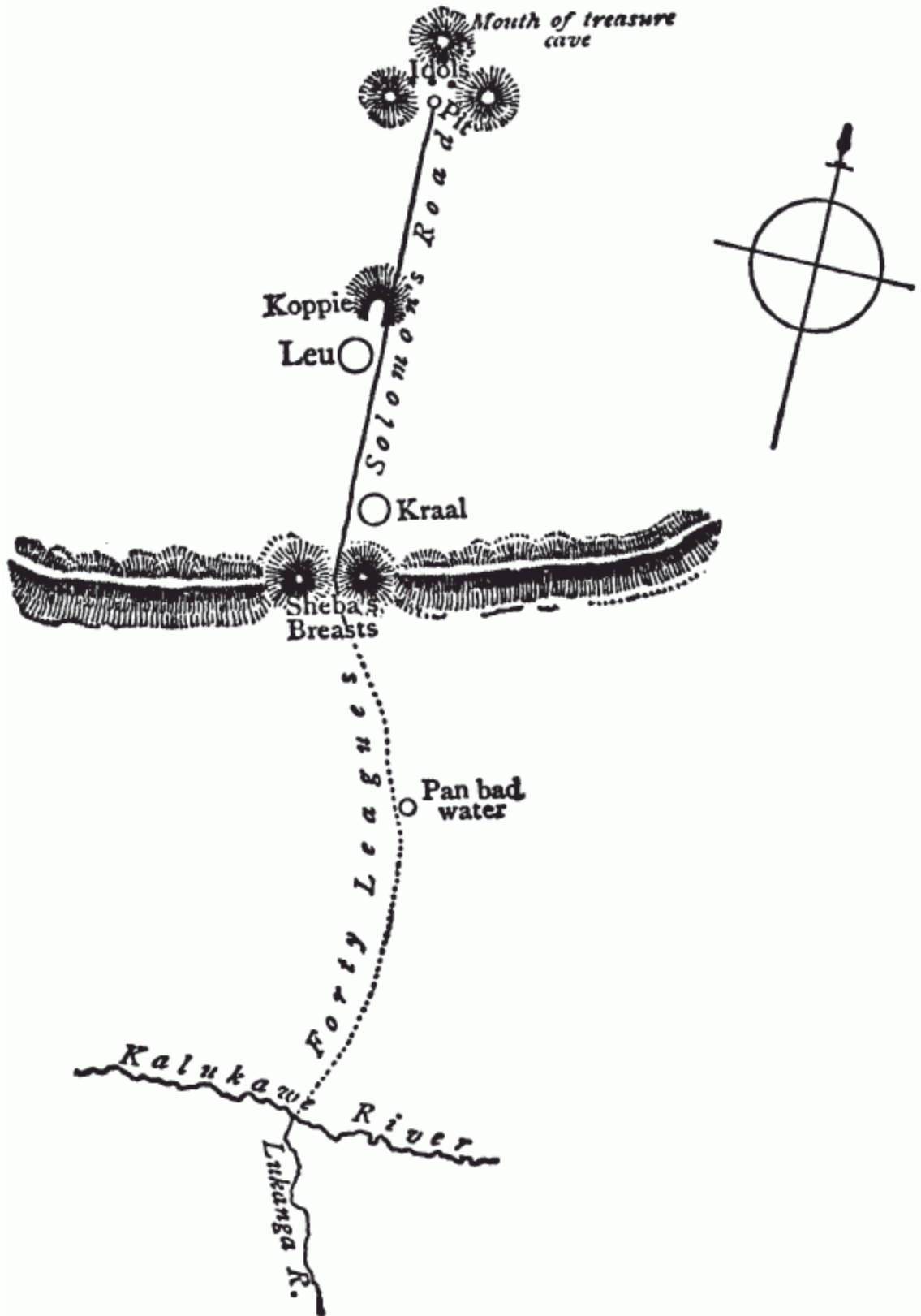
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Jude the Obscure



Thomas Hardy

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JUDE THE OBSCURE

by Thomas Hardy

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PREFACE

The history of this novel (whose birth in its present shape has been much retarded by the necessities of periodical publication) is briefly as follows. The scheme was jotted down in 1890, from notes made in 1887 and onward, some of the circumstances being suggested by the death of a woman in the former year. The scenes were revisited in October, 1892; the narrative was written in outline in 1892 and the spring of 1893, and at full length, as it now appears, from August, 1893, onward into the next year; the whole, with the exception of a few chapters, being in the hands of the publisher by the end of 1894. It was begun as a serial story in HARPER'S MAGAZINE at the end of November, 1894, and was continued in monthly parts.

But, as in the case of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the magazine version was, for various reasons, abridged and modified in some degree, the present edition being the first in which the whole appears as originally written. And in the difficulty of coming to an early decision in the matter of a title, the tale was issued under a provisional name—two such titles having, in fact, been successively adopted. The present and final title, deemed on the whole the best, was one of the earliest thought of.

For a novel addressed by a man to men and women of full age, which attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity, and to point, without a mincing of words, the tragedy of unfulfilled aims, I am not aware that there is anything in the handling to which exception can be taken.

Like former productions of this pen, *Jude the Obscure* is simply an endeavor to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment.

T.H.

August, 1895.

Part First
AT MARYGREEN

“Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women, and become servants for their sakes. Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women... O ye men, how can it be but women should be strong, seeing they do thus?”—ESDRAS.

I

The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry. The miller at Cresscombe lent him the small white tilted cart and horse to carry his goods to the city of his destination, about twenty miles off, such a vehicle proving of quite sufficient size for the departing teacher's effects. For the schoolhouse had been partly furnished by the managers, and the only cumbersome article possessed by the master, in addition to the packing-case of books, was a cottage piano that he had bought at an auction during the year in which he thought of learning instrumental music. But the enthusiasm having waned he had never acquired any skill in playing, and the purchased article had been a perpetual trouble to him ever since in moving house.

The rector had gone away for the day, being a man who disliked the sight of changes. He did not mean to return till the evening, when the new school-teacher would have arrived and settled in, and everything would be smooth again.

The blacksmith, the farm bailiff, and the schoolmaster himself were standing in perplexed attitudes in the parlour before the instrument. The master had remarked that even if he got it into the cart he should not know what to do with it on his arrival at Christminster, the city he was bound for, since he was only going into temporary lodgings just at first.

A little boy of eleven, who had been thoughtfully assisting in the packing, joined the group of men, and as they rubbed their chins he spoke up, blushing at the sound of his own voice: "Aunt have got a great fuel-house, and it could be put there, perhaps, till you've found a place to settle in, sir."

"A proper good notion," said the blacksmith.

It was decided that a deputation should wait on the boy's aunt—an old maiden resident—and ask her if she would house the piano till Mr. Phillotson should send for it. The smith and the bailiff started to see about

the practicability of the suggested shelter, and the boy and the schoolmaster were left standing alone.

“Sorry I am going, Jude?” asked the latter kindly.

Tears rose into the boy’s eyes, for he was not among the regular day scholars, who came unromantically close to the schoolmaster’s life, but one who had attended the night school only during the present teacher’s term of office. The regular scholars, if the truth must be told, stood at the present moment afar off, like certain historic disciples, indisposed to any enthusiastic volunteering of aid.

The boy awkwardly opened the book he held in his hand, which Mr. Phillotson had bestowed on him as a parting gift, and admitted that he was sorry.

“So am I,” said Mr. Phillotson.

“Why do you go, sir?” asked the boy.

“Ah—that would be a long story. You wouldn’t understand my reasons, Jude. You will, perhaps, when you are older.”

“I think I should now, sir.”

“Well—don’t speak of this everywhere. You know what a university is, and a university degree? It is the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching. My scheme, or dream, is to be a university graduate, and then to be ordained. By going to live at Christminster, or near it, I shall be at headquarters, so to speak, and if my scheme is practicable at all, I consider that being on the spot will afford me a better chance of carrying it out than I should have elsewhere.”

The smith and his companion returned. Old Miss Fawley’s fuel-house was dry, and eminently practicable; and she seemed willing to give the instrument standing-room there. It was accordingly left in the school till the evening, when more hands would be available for removing it; and the schoolmaster gave a final glance round.

The boy Jude assisted in loading some small articles, and at nine o’clock Mr. Phillotson mounted beside his box of books and other *impedimenta*, and bade his friends good-bye.

“I shan’t forget you, Jude,” he said, smiling, as the cart moved off. “Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you

can. And if ever you come to Christminster remember you hunt me out for old acquaintance' sake."

The cart creaked across the green, and disappeared round the corner by the rectory-house. The boy returned to the draw-well at the edge of the greensward, where he had left his buckets when he went to help his patron and teacher in the loading. There was a quiver in his lip now and after opening the well-cover to begin lowering the bucket he paused and leant with his forehead and arms against the framework, his face wearing the fixity of a thoughtful child's who has felt the pricks of life somewhat before his time. The well into which he was looking was as ancient as the village itself, and from his present position appeared as a long circular perspective ending in a shining disk of quivering water at a distance of a hundred feet down. There was a lining of green moss near the top, and nearer still the hart's-tongue fern.

He said to himself, in the melodramatic tones of a whimsical boy, that the schoolmaster had drawn at that well scores of times on a morning like this, and would never draw there any more. "I've seen him look down into it, when he was tired with his drawing, just as I do now, and when he rested a bit before carrying the buckets home! But he was too clever to bide here any longer—a small sleepy place like this!"

A tear rolled from his eye into the depths of the well. The morning was a little foggy, and the boy's breathing unfurled itself as a thicker fog upon the still and heavy air. His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden outcry:

"Bring on that water, will ye, you idle young harlican!"

It came from an old woman who had emerged from her door towards the garden gate of a green-thatched cottage not far off. The boy quickly waved a signal of assent, drew the water with what was a great effort for one of his stature, landed and emptied the big bucket into his own pair of smaller ones, and pausing a moment for breath, started with them across the patch of clammy greensward whereon the well stood—nearly in the centre of the little village, or rather hamlet of Marygreen.

It was as old-fashioned as it was small, and it rested in the lap of an undulating upland adjoining the North Wessex downs. Old as it was, however, the well-shaft was probably the only relic of the local history that remained absolutely unchanged. Many of the thatched and dormered dwelling-houses had been pulled down of late years, and many trees felled

on the green. Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, had been taken down, and either cracked up into heaps of road-metal in the lane, or utilized as pig-sty walls, garden seats, guard-stones to fences, and rockeries in the flower-beds of the neighbourhood. In place of it a tall new building of modern Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new piece of ground by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day. The site whereon so long had stood the ancient temple to the Christian divinities was not even recorded on the green and level grass-plot that had immemorially been the churchyard, the obliterated graves being commemorated by eighteen-penny cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years.

II

Slender as was Jude Fawley's frame he bore the two brimming house-buckets of water to the cottage without resting. Over the door was a little rectangular piece of blue board, on which was painted in yellow letters, "Drusilla Fawley, Baker." Within the little lead panes of the window—this being one of the few old houses left—were five bottles of sweets, and three buns on a plate of the willow pattern.

While emptying the buckets at the back of the house he could hear an animated conversation in progress within-doors between his great-aunt, the Drusilla of the sign-board, and some other villagers. Having seen the school-master depart, they were summing up particulars of the event, and indulging in predictions of his future.

"And who's he?" asked one, comparatively a stranger, when the boy entered.

"Well ye med ask it, Mrs. Williams. He's my great-nephew—come since you was last this way." The old inhabitant who answered was a tall, gaunt woman, who spoke tragically on the most trivial subject, and gave a phrase of her conversation to each auditor in turn. "He come from Mellstock, down in South Wessex, about a year ago—worse luck for 'n, Belinda" (turning to the right) "where his father was living, and was took wi' the shakings for death, and died in two days, as you know, Caroline" (turning to the left). "It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi' thy mother and father, poor useless boy! But I've got him here to stay with me till I can see what's to be done with un, though I am obliged to let him earn any penny he can. Just now he's a-scaring of birds for Farmer Troutham. It keeps him out of mischty. Why do ye turn away, Jude?" she continued, as the boy, feeling the impact of their glances like slaps upon his face, moved aside.

The local washerwoman replied that it was perhaps a very good plan of Miss or Mrs. Fawley's (as they called her indifferently) to have him with

her—"to kip 'ee company in your loneliness, fetch water, shet the winder-shetters o' nights, and help in the bit o' baking."

Miss Fawley doubted it. ... "Why didn't ye get the schoolmaster to take 'ee to Christminster wi' un, and make a scholar of 'ee," she continued, in frowning pleasantry. "I'm sure he couldn't ha' took a better one. The boy is crazy for books, that he is. It runs in our family rather. His cousin Sue is just the same—so I've heard; but I have not seen the child for years, though she was born in this place, within these four walls, as it happened. My niece and her husband, after they were married, didn' get a house of their own for some year or more; and then they only had one till—Well, I won't go into that. Jude, my child, don't you ever marry. 'Tisn't for the Fawleys to take that step any more. She, their only one, was like a child o' my own, Belinda, till the split come! Ah, that a little maid should know such changes!"

Jude, finding the general attention again centering on himself, went out to the bakehouse, where he ate the cake provided for his breakfast. The end of his spare time had now arrived, and emerging from the garden by getting over the hedge at the back he pursued a path northward, till he came to a wide and lonely depression in the general level of the upland, which was sown as a corn-field. This vast concave was the scene of his labours for Mr. Troutham the farmer, and he descended into the midst of it.

The brown surface of the field went right up towards the sky all round, where it was lost by degrees in the mist that shut out the actual verge and accentuated the solitude. The only marks on the uniformity of the scene were a rick of last year's produce standing in the midst of the arable, the rooks that rose at his approach, and the path athwart the fallow by which he had come, trodden now by he hardly knew whom, though once by many of his own dead family.

"How ugly it is here!" he murmured.

The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months, though to every clod and stone there really attached associations enough and to spare—echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days, of spoken words, and of sturdy deeds. Every inch of ground had been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickerings, weariness.

Groups of gleaners had squatted in the sun on every square yard. Love-matches that had populated the adjoining hamlet had been made up there between reaping and carrying. Under the hedge which divided the field from a distant plantation girls had given themselves to lovers who would not turn their heads to look at them by the next harvest; and in that ancient cornfield many a man had made love-promises to a woman at whose voice he had trembled by the next seed-time after fulfilling them in the church adjoining. But this neither Jude nor the rooks around him considered. For them it was a lonely place, possessing, in the one view, only the quality of a work-ground, and in the other that of a granary good to feed in.

The boy stood under the rick before mentioned, and every few seconds used his clacker or rattle briskly. At each clack the rooks left off pecking, and rose and went away on their leisurely wings, burnished like tassets of mail, afterwards wheeling back and regarding him warily, and descending to feed at a more respectful distance.

He sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. Why should he frighten them away? They took upon more and more the aspect of gentle friends and pensioners—the only friends he could claim as being in the least degree interested in him, for his aunt had often told him that she was not. He ceased his rattling, and they alighted anew.

“Poor little dears!” said Jude, aloud. “You *shall* have some dinner—you shall. There is enough for us all. Farmer Troutham can afford to let you have some. Eat, then my dear little birdies, and make a good meal!”

They stayed and ate, inky spots on the nut-brown soil, and Jude enjoyed their appetite. A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs. Puny and sorry as those lives were, they much resembled his own.

His clacker he had by this time thrown away from him, as being a mean and sordid instrument, offensive both to the birds and to himself as their friend. All at once he became conscious of a smart blow upon his buttocks, followed by a loud clack, which announced to his surprised senses that the clacker had been the instrument of offence used. The birds and Jude started up simultaneously, and the dazed eyes of the latter beheld the farmer in person, the great Troutham himself, his red face glaring down upon Jude's cowering frame, the clacker swinging in his hand.

“So it’s ‘Eat my dear birdies,’ is it, young man? ‘Eat, dear birdies,’ indeed! I’ll tickle your breeches, and see if you say, ‘Eat, dear birdies,’ again in a hurry! And you’ve been idling at the schoolmaster’s too, instead of coming here, ha’n’t ye, hey? That’s how you earn your sixpence a day for keeping the rooks off my corn!”

Whilst saluting Jude’s ears with this impassioned rhetoric, Troutham had seized his left hand with his own left, and swinging his slim frame round him at arm’s-length, again struck Jude on the hind parts with the flat side of Jude’s own rattle, till the field echoed with the blows, which were delivered once or twice at each revolution.

“Don’t ’ee, sir—please don’t ’ee!” cried the whirling child, as helpless under the centrifugal tendency of his person as a hooked fish swinging to land, and beholding the hill, the rick, the plantation, the path, and the rooks going round and round him in an amazing circular race. “I—I sir—only meant that—there was a good crop in the ground—I saw ’em sow it—and the rooks could have a little bit for dinner—and you wouldn’t miss it, sir—and Mr. Phillotson said I was to be kind to ’em—oh, oh, oh!”

This truthful explanation seemed to exasperate the farmer even more than if Jude had stoutly denied saying anything at all, and he still smacked the whirling urchin, the clacks of the instrument continuing to resound all across the field and as far as the ears of distant workers—who gathered thereupon that Jude was pursuing his business of clacking with great assiduity—and echoing from the brand-new church tower just behind the mist, towards the building of which structure the farmer had largely subscribed, to testify his love for God and man.

Presently Troutham grew tired of his punitive task, and depositing the quivering boy on his legs, took a sixpence from his pocket and gave it him in payment for his day’s work, telling him to go home and never let him see him in one of those fields again.

Jude leaped out of arm’s reach, and walked along the trackway weeping—not from the pain, though that was keen enough; not from the perception of the flaw in the terrestrial scheme, by which what was good for God’s birds was bad for God’s gardener; but with the awful sense that he had wholly disgraced himself before he had been a year in the parish, and hence might be a burden to his great-aunt for life.

With this shadow on his mind he did not care to show himself in the village, and went homeward by a roundabout track behind a high hedge and across a pasture. Here he beheld scores of coupled earthworms lying half their length on the surface of the damp ground, as they always did in such weather at that time of the year. It was impossible to advance in regular steps without crushing some of them at each tread.

Though Farmer Troutham had just hurt him, he was a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything. He had never brought home a nest of young birds without lying awake in misery half the night after, and often reinstating them and the nest in their original place the next morning. He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when the sap was up and the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy. This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again. He carefully picked his way on tiptoe among the earthworms, without killing a single one.

On entering the cottage he found his aunt selling a penny loaf to a little girl, and when the customer was gone she said, "Well, how do you come to be back here in the middle of the morning like this?"

"I'm turned away."

"What?"

"Mr. Troutham have turned me away because I let the rooks have a few peckings of corn. And there's my wages—the last I shall ever hae!"

He threw the sixpence tragically on the table.

"Ah!" said his aunt, suspending her breath. And she opened upon him a lecture on how she would now have him all the spring upon her hands doing nothing. "If you can't skeer birds, what can ye do? There! don't ye look so deedy! Farmer Troutham is not so much better than myself, come to that. But 'tis as Job said, 'Now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock.' His father was my father's journeyman, anyhow, and I must have been a fool to let 'ee go to work for 'n, which I shouldn't ha' done but to keep 'ee out of mischty."

More angry with Jude for demeaning her by coming there than for dereliction of duty, she rated him primarily from that point of view, and only secondarily from a moral one.

“Not that you should have let the birds eat what Farmer Troutham planted. Of course you was wrong in that. Jude, Jude, why didstn’t go off with that schoolmaster of thine to Christminster or somewhere? But, oh no—poor or’nary child—there never was any sprawl on thy side of the family, and never will be!”

“Where is this beautiful city, Aunt—this place where Mr. Phillotson is gone to?” asked the boy, after meditating in silence.

“Lord! you ought to know where the city of Christminster is. Near a score of miles from here. It is a place much too good for you ever to have much to do with, poor boy, I’m a-thinking.”

“And will Mr. Phillotson always be there?”

“How can I tell?”

“Could I go to see him?”

“Lord, no! You didn’t grow up hereabout, or you wouldn’t ask such as that. We’ve never had anything to do with folk in Christminster, nor folk in Christminster with we.”

Jude went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence to be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back on a heap of litter near the pig-sty. The fog had by this time become more translucent, and the position of the sun could be seen through it. He pulled his straw hat over his face, and peered through the interstices of the plaiting at the white brightness, vaguely reflecting. Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature’s logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it.

If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man.

Then, like the natural boy, he forgot his despondency, and sprang up. During the remainder of the morning he helped his aunt, and in the afternoon, when there was nothing more to be done, he went into the village. Here he asked a man whereabouts Christminster lay.

“Christminster? Oh, well, out by there yonder; though I’ve never bin there—not I. I’ve never had any business at such a place.”

The man pointed north-eastward, in the very direction where lay that field in which Jude had so disgraced himself. There was something unpleasant about the coincidence for the moment, but the fearsomeness of this fact rather increased his curiosity about the city. The farmer had said he was never to be seen in that field again; yet Christminster lay across it, and the path was a public one. So, stealing out of the hamlet, he descended into the same hollow which had witnessed his punishment in the morning, never swerving an inch from the path, and climbing up the long and tedious ascent on the other side till the track joined the highway by a little clump of trees. Here the ploughed land ended, and all before him was bleak open down.

III

Not a soul was visible on the hedgeless highway, or on either side of it, and the white road seemed to ascend and diminish till it joined the sky. At the very top it was crossed at right angles by a green “ridgeway”—the Ickneild Street and original Roman road through the district. This ancient track ran east and west for many miles, and down almost to within living memory had been used for driving flocks and herds to fairs and markets. But it was now neglected and overgrown.

The boy had never before strayed so far north as this from the nestling hamlet in which he had been deposited by the carrier from a railway station southward, one dark evening some few months earlier, and till now he had had no suspicion that such a wide, flat, low-lying country lay so near at hand, under the very verge of his upland world. The whole northern semicircle between east and west, to a distance of forty or fifty miles, spread itself before him; a bluer, moister atmosphere, evidently, than that he breathed up here.

Not far from the road stood a weather-beaten old barn of reddish-grey brick and tile. It was known as the Brown House by the people of the locality. He was about to pass it when he perceived a ladder against the eaves; and the reflection that the higher he got, the further he could see, led Jude to stand and regard it. On the slope of the roof two men were repairing the tiling. He turned into the ridgeway and drew towards the barn.

When he had wistfully watched the workmen for some time he took courage, and ascended the ladder till he stood beside them.

“Well, my lad, and what may you want up here?”

“I wanted to know where the city of Christminster is, if you please.”

“Christminster is out across there, by that clump. You can see it—at least you can on a clear day. Ah, no, you can’t now.”

The other tiler, glad of any kind of diversion from the monotony of his labour, had also turned to look towards the quarter designated. “You can’t

often see it in weather like this," he said. "The time I've noticed it is when the sun is going down in a blaze of flame, and it looks like—I don't know what."

"The heavenly Jerusalem," suggested the serious urchin.

"Ay—though I should never ha' thought of it myself. ... But I can't see no Christminster to-day."

The boy strained his eyes also; yet neither could he see the far-off city. He descended from the barn, and abandoning Christminster with the versatility of his age he walked along the ridge-track, looking for any natural objects of interest that might lie in the banks thereabout. When he repassed the barn to go back to Marygreen he observed that the ladder was still in its place, but that the men had finished their day's work and gone away.

It was waning towards evening; there was still a faint mist, but it had cleared a little except in the damper tracts of subjacent country and along the river-courses. He thought again of Christminster, and wished, since he had come two or three miles from his aunt's house on purpose, that he could have seen for once this attractive city of which he had been told. But even if he waited here it was hardly likely that the air would clear before night. Yet he was loth to leave the spot, for the northern expanse became lost to view on retreating towards the village only a few hundred yards.

He ascended the ladder to have one more look at the point the men had designated, and perched himself on the highest rung, overlying the tiles. He might not be able to come so far as this for many days. Perhaps if he prayed, the wish to see Christminster might be forwarded. People said that, if you prayed, things sometimes came to you, even though they sometimes did not. He had read in a tract that a man who had begun to build a church, and had no money to finish it, knelt down and prayed, and the money came in by the next post. Another man tried the same experiment, and the money did not come; but he found afterwards that the breeches he knelt in were made by a wicked Jew. This was not discouraging, and turning on the ladder Jude knelt on the third rung, where, resting against those above it, he prayed that the mist might rise.

He then seated himself again, and waited. In the course of ten or fifteen minutes the thinning mist dissolved altogether from the northern horizon, as it had already done elsewhere, and about a quarter of an hour before the

time of sunset the westward clouds parted, the sun's position being partially uncovered, and the beams streaming out in visible lines between two bars of slaty cloud. The boy immediately looked back in the old direction.

Some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleamed. The air increased in transparency with the lapse of minutes, till the topaz points showed themselves to be the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines that were faintly revealed. It was Christminster, unquestionably; either directly seen, or miraged in the peculiar atmosphere.

The spectator gazed on and on till the windows and vanes lost their shine, going out almost suddenly like extinguished candles. The vague city became veiled in mist. Turning to the west, he saw that the sun had disappeared. The foreground of the scene had grown funereally dark, and near objects put on the hues and shapes of chimaeras.

He anxiously descended the ladder, and started homewards at a run, trying not to think of giants, Herne the Hunter, Apollyon lying in wait for Christian, or of the captain with the bleeding hole in his forehead and the corpses round him that remutined every night on board the bewitched ship. He knew that he had grown out of belief in these horrors, yet he was glad when he saw the church tower and the lights in the cottage windows, even though this was not the home of his birth, and his great-aunt did not care much about him.

Inside and round about that old woman's "shop" window, with its twenty-four little panes set in lead-work, the glass of some of them oxidized with age, so that you could hardly see the poor penny articles exhibited within, and forming part of a stock which a strong man could have carried, Jude had his outer being for some long tideless time. But his dreams were as gigantic as his surroundings were small.

Through the solid barrier of cold cretaceous upland to the northward he was always beholding a gorgeous city—the fancied place he had likened to the new Jerusalem, though there was perhaps more of the painter's imagination and less of the diamond merchant's in his dreams thereof than in those of the Apocalyptic writer. And the city acquired a tangibility, a permanence, a hold on his life, mainly from the one nucleus of fact that the man for whose knowledge and purposes he had so much reverence was

actually living there; not only so, but living among the more thoughtful and mentally shining ones therein.

In sad wet seasons, though he knew it must rain at Christminster too, he could hardly believe that it rained so drearily there. Whenever he could get away from the confines of the hamlet for an hour or two, which was not often, he would steal off to the Brown House on the hill and strain his eyes persistently; sometimes to be rewarded by the sight of a dome or spire, at other times by a little smoke, which in his estimate had some of the mysticism of incense.

Then the day came when it suddenly occurred to him that if he ascended to the point of view after dark, or possibly went a mile or two further, he would see the night lights of the city. It would be necessary to come back alone, but even that consideration did not deter him, for he could throw a little manliness into his mood, no doubt.

The project was duly executed. It was not late when he arrived at the place of outlook, only just after dusk, but a black north-east sky, accompanied by a wind from the same quarter, made the occasion dark enough. He was rewarded; but what he saw was not the lamps in rows, as he had half expected. No individual light was visible, only a halo or glow-fog over-arching the place against the black heavens behind it, making the light and the city seem distant but a mile or so.

He set himself to wonder on the exact point in the glow where the schoolmaster might be—he who never communicated with anybody at Marygreen now; who was as if dead to them here. In the glow he seemed to see Phillotson promenading at ease, like one of the forms in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.

He had heard that breezes travelled at the rate of ten miles an hour, and the fact now came into his mind. He parted his lips as he faced the north-east, and drew in the wind as if it were a sweet liquor.

“You,” he said, addressing the breeze caressingly “were in Christminster city between one and two hours ago, floating along the streets, pulling round the weather-cocks, touching Mr. Phillotson's face, being breathed by him; and now you are here, breathed by me—you, the very same.”

Suddenly there came along this wind something towards him—a message from the place—from some soul residing there, it seemed. Surely it was the

sound of bells, the voice of the city, faint and musical, calling to him, “We are happy here!”

He had become entirely lost to his bodily situation during this mental leap, and only got back to it by a rough recalling. A few yards below the brow of the hill on which he paused a team of horses made its appearance, having reached the place by dint of half an hour’s serpentine progress from the bottom of the immense declivity. They had a load of coals behind them—a fuel that could only be got into the upland by this particular route. They were accompanied by a carter, a second man, and a boy, who now kicked a large stone behind one of the wheels, and allowed the panting animals to have a long rest, while those in charge took a flagon off the load and indulged in a drink round.

They were elderly men, and had genial voices. Jude addressed them, inquiring if they had come from Christminster.

“Heaven forbid, with this load!” said they.

“The place I mean is that one yonder.” He was getting so romantically attached to Christminster that, like a young lover alluding to his mistress, he felt bashful at mentioning its name again. He pointed to the light in the sky—hardly perceptible to their older eyes.

“Yes. There do seem a spot a bit brighter in the nor’-east than elsewhere, though I shouldn’t ha’ noticed it myself, and no doubt it med be Christminster.”

Here a little book of tales which Jude had tucked up under his arm, having brought them to read on his way hither before it grew dark, slipped and fell into the road. The carter eyed him while he picked it up and straightened the leaves.

“Ah, young man,” he observed, “you’d have to get your head screwed on t’other way before you could read what they read there.”

“Why?” asked the boy.

“Oh, they never look at anything that folks like we can understand,” the carter continued, by way of passing the time. “On’y foreign tongues used in the days of the Tower of Babel, when no two families spoke alike. They read that sort of thing as fast as a night-hawk will whirl. ’Tis all learning there—nothing but learning, except religion. And that’s learning too, for I never could understand it. Yes, ’tis a serious-minded place. Not but there’s

wenches in the streets o' nights... You know, I suppose, that they raise pa'sons there like radishes in a bed? And though it do take—how many years, Bob?—five years to turn a lirruping hobble-de-hoy chap into a solemn preaching man with no corrupt passions, they'll do it, if it can be done, and polish un off like the workmen they be, and turn un out wi' a long face, and a long black coat and waistcoat, and a religious collar and hat, same as they used to wear in the Scriptures, so that his own mother wouldn't know un sometimes. ... There, 'tis their business, like anybody else's."

"But how should you know?"

"Now don't you interrupt, my boy. Never interrupt your senyers. Move the fore hoss aside, Bobby; here's som'at coming... You must mind that I be a-talking of the college life. 'Em lives on a lofty level; there's no gainsaying it, though I myself med not think much of 'em. As we be here in our bodies on this high ground, so be they in their minds—noble-minded men enough, no doubt—some on 'em—able to earn hundreds by thinking out loud. And some on 'em be strong young fellows that can earn a'most as much in silver cups. As for music, there's beautiful music everywhere in Christminster. You med be religious, or you med not, but you can't help striking in your homely note with the rest. And there's a street in the place—the main street—that ha'n't another like it in the world. I should think I did know a little about Christminster!"

By this time the horses had recovered breath and bent to their collars again. Jude, throwing a last adoring look at the distant halo, turned and walked beside his remarkably well-informed friend, who had no objection to telling him as they moved on more yet of the city—its towers and halls and churches. The waggon turned into a cross-road, whereupon Jude thanked the carter warmly for his information, and said he only wished he could talk half as well about Christminster as he.

"Well, 'tis oonly what has come in my way," said the carter unboastfully. "I've never been there, no more than you; but I've picked up the knowledge here and there, and you be welcome to it. A-getting about the world as I do, and mixing with all classes of society, one can't help hearing of things. A friend o' mine, that used to clane the boots at the Crozier Hotel in Christminster when he was in his prime, why, I knowed un as well as my own brother in his later years."

Jude continued his walk homeward alone, pondering so deeply that he forgot to feel timid. He suddenly grew older. It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to—for some place which he could call admirable. Should he find that place in this city if he could get there? Would it be a spot in which, without fear of farmers, or hindrance, or ridicule, he could watch and wait, and set himself to some mighty undertaking like the men of old of whom he had heard? As the halo had been to his eyes when gazing at it a quarter of an hour earlier, so was the spot mentally to him as he pursued his dark way.

“It is a city of light,” he said to himself.

“The tree of knowledge grows there,” he added a few steps further on.

“It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to.”

“It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion.”

After this figure he was silent a long while, till he added:

“It would just suit me.”

IV

Walking somewhat slowly by reason of his concentration, the boy—an ancient man in some phases of thought, much younger than his years in others—was overtaken by a light-footed pedestrian, whom, notwithstanding the gloom, he could perceive to be wearing an extraordinarily tall hat, a swallow-tailed coat, and a watch-chain that danced madly and threw around scintillations of sky-light as its owner swung along upon a pair of thin legs and noiseless boots. Jude, beginning to feel lonely, endeavoured to keep up with him.

“Well, my man! I’m in a hurry, so you’ll have to walk pretty fast if you keep alongside of me. Do you know who I am?”

“Yes, I think. Physician Vilbert?”

“Ah—I’m known everywhere, I see! That comes of being a public benefactor.”

Vilbert was an itinerant quack-doctor, well known to the rustic population, and absolutely unknown to anybody else, as he, indeed, took care to be, to avoid inconvenient investigations. Cottagers formed his only patients, and his Wessex-wide repute was among them alone. His position was humbler and his field more obscure than those of the quacks with capital and an organized system of advertising. He was, in fact, a survival. The distances he traversed on foot were enormous, and extended nearly the whole length and breadth of Wessex. Jude had one day seen him selling a pot of coloured lard to an old woman as a certain cure for a bad leg, the woman arranging to pay a guinea, in instalments of a shilling a fortnight, for the precious salve, which, according to the physician, could only be obtained from a particular animal which grazed on Mount Sinai, and was to be captured only at great risk to life and limb. Jude, though he already had his doubts about this gentleman’s medicines, felt him to be unquestionably a travelled personage, and one who might be a trustworthy source of information on matters not strictly professional.

“I s’pose you’ve been to Christminster, Physician?”

“I have—many times,” replied the long thin man. “That’s one of my centres.”

“It’s a wonderful city for scholarship and religion?”

“You’d say so, my boy, if you’d seen it. Why, the very sons of the old women who do the washing of the colleges can talk in Latin—not good Latin, that I admit, as a critic: dog-Latin—cat-Latin, as we used to call it in my undergraduate days.”

“And Greek?”

“Well—that’s more for the men who are in training for bishops, that they may be able to read the New Testament in the original.”

“I want to learn Latin and Greek myself.”

“A lofty desire. You must get a grammar of each tongue.”

“I mean to go to Christminster some day.”

“Whenever you do, you say that Physician Vilbert is the only proprietor of those celebrated pills that infallibly cure all disorders of the alimentary system, as well as asthma and shortness of breath. Two and threepence a box—specially licensed by the government stamp.”

“Can you get me the grammars if I promise to say it hereabout?”

“I’ll sell you mine with pleasure—those I used as a student.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!” said Jude gratefully, but in gasps, for the amazing speed of the physician’s walk kept him in a dog-trot which was giving him a stitch in the side.

“I think you’d better drop behind, my young man. Now I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll get you the grammars, and give you a first lesson, if you’ll remember, at every house in the village, to recommend Physician Vilbert’s golden ointment, life-drops, and female pills.”

“Where will you be with the grammars?”

“I shall be passing here this day fortnight at precisely this hour of five-and-twenty minutes past seven. My movements are as truly timed as those of the planets in their courses.”

“Here I’ll be to meet you,” said Jude.

“With orders for my medicines?”

“Yes, Physician.”

Jude then dropped behind, waited a few minutes to recover breath, and went home with a consciousness of having struck a blow for Christminster.

Through the intervening fortnight he ran about and smiled outwardly at his inward thoughts, as if they were people meeting and nodding to him—smiled with that singularly beautiful irradiation which is seen to spread on young faces at the inception of some glorious idea, as if a supernatural lamp were held inside their transparent natures, giving rise to the flattering fancy that heaven lies about them then.

He honestly performed his promise to the man of many cures, in whom he now sincerely believed, walking miles hither and thither among the surrounding hamlets as the Physician’s agent in advance. On the evening appointed he stood motionless on the plateau, at the place where he had parted from Vilbert, and there awaited his approach. The road-physician was fairly up to time; but, to the surprise of Jude on striking into his pace, which the pedestrian did not diminish by a single unit of force, the latter seemed hardly to recognize his young companion, though with the lapse of the fortnight the evenings had grown light. Jude thought it might perhaps be owing to his wearing another hat, and he saluted the physician with dignity.

“Well, my boy?” said the latter abstractedly.

“I’ve come,” said Jude.

“You? who are you? Oh yes—to be sure! Got any orders, lad?”

“Yes.” And Jude told him the names and addresses of the cottagers who were willing to test the virtues of the world-renowned pills and salve. The quack mentally registered these with great care.

“And the Latin and Greek grammars?” Jude’s voice trembled with anxiety.

“What about them?”

“You were to bring me yours, that you used before you took your degree.”

“Ah, yes, yes! Forgot all about it—all! So many lives depending on my attention, you see, my man, that I can’t give so much thought as I would like to other things.”

Jude controlled himself sufficiently long to make sure of the truth; and he repeated, in a voice of dry misery, "You haven't brought 'em!"

"No. But you must get me some more orders from sick people, and I'll bring the grammars next time."

Jude dropped behind. He was an unsophisticated boy, but the gift of sudden insight which is sometimes vouchsafed to children showed him all at once what shoddy humanity the quack was made of. There was to be no intellectual light from this source. The leaves dropped from his imaginary crown of laurel; he turned to a gate, leant against it, and cried bitterly.

The disappointment was followed by an interval of blankness. He might, perhaps, have obtained grammars from Alfredston, but to do that required money, and a knowledge of what books to order; and though physically comfortable, he was in such absolute dependence as to be without a farthing of his own.

At this date Mr. Phillotson sent for his pianoforte, and it gave Jude a lead. Why should he not write to the schoolmaster, and ask him to be so kind as to get him the grammars in Christminster? He might slip a letter inside the case of the instrument, and it would be sure to reach the desired eyes. Why not ask him to send any old second-hand copies, which would have the charm of being mellowed by the university atmosphere?

To tell his aunt of his intention would be to defeat it. It was necessary to act alone.

After a further consideration of a few days he did act, and on the day of the piano's departure, which happened to be his next birthday, clandestinely placed the letter inside the packing-case, directed to his much-admired friend, being afraid to reveal the operation to his aunt Drusilla, lest she should discover his motive, and compel him to abandon his scheme.

The piano was despatched, and Jude waited days and weeks, calling every morning at the cottage post office before his great-aunt was stirring. At last a packet did indeed arrive at the village, and he saw from the ends of it that it contained two thin books. He took it away into a lonely place, and sat down on a felled elm to open it.

Ever since his first ecstasy or vision of Christminster and its possibilities, Jude had meditated much and curiously on the probable sort of process that was involved in turning the expressions of one language into those of

another. He concluded that a grammar of the required tongue would contain, primarily, a rule, prescription, or clue of the nature of a secret cipher, which, once known, would enable him, by merely applying it, to change at will all words of his own speech into those of the foreign one. His childish idea was, in fact, a pushing to the extremity of mathematical precision what is everywhere known as Grimm's Law—an aggrandizement of rough rules to ideal completeness. Thus he assumed that the words of the required language were always to be found somewhere latent in the words of the given language by those who had the art to uncover them, such art being furnished by the books aforesaid.

When, therefore, having noted that the packet bore the postmark of Christminster, he cut the string, opened the volumes, and turned to the Latin grammar, which chanced to come uppermost, he could scarcely believe his eyes.

The book was an old one—thirty years old, soiled, scribbled wantonly over with a strange name in every variety of enmity to the letterpress, and marked at random with dates twenty years earlier than his own day. But this was not the cause of Jude's amazement. He learnt for the first time that there was no law of transmutation, as in his innocence he had supposed (there was, in some degree, but the grammarian did not recognize it), but that every word in both Latin and Greek was to be individually committed to memory at the cost of years of plodding.

Jude flung down the books, lay backward along the broad trunk of the elm, and was an utterly miserable boy for the space of a quarter of an hour. As he had often done before, he pulled his hat over his face and watched the sun peering insidiously at him through the interstices of the straw. This was Latin and Greek, then, was it this grand delusion! The charm he had supposed in store for him was really a labour like that of Israel in Egypt.

What brains they must have in Christminster and the great schools, he presently thought, to learn words one by one up to tens of thousands! There were no brains in his head equal to this business; and as the little sun-rays continued to stream in through his hat at him, he wished he had never seen a book, that he might never see another, that he had never been born.

Somebody might have come along that way who would have asked him his trouble, and might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced than those of his grammarian. But nobody did come,

because nobody does; and under the crushing recognition of his gigantic error Jude continued to wish himself out of the world.

V

During the three or four succeeding years a quaint and singular vehicle might have been discerned moving along the lanes and by-roads near Marygreen, driven in a quaint and singular way.

In the course of a month or two after the receipt of the books Jude had grown callous to the shabby trick played him by the dead languages. In fact, his disappointment at the nature of those tongues had, after a while, been the means of still further glorifying the erudition of Christminster. To acquire languages, departed or living in spite of such obstinacies as he now knew them inherently to possess, was a herculean performance which gradually led him on to a greater interest in it than in the presupposed patent process. The mountain-weight of material under which the ideas lay in those dusty volumes called the classics piqued him into a dogged, mouselike subtlety of attempt to move it piecemeal.

He had endeavoured to make his presence tolerable to his crusty maiden aunt by assisting her to the best of his ability, and the business of the little cottage bakery had grown in consequence. An aged horse with a hanging head had been purchased for eight pounds at a sale, a creaking cart with a whity-brown tilt obtained for a few pounds more, and in this turn-out it became Jude's business thrice a week to carry loaves of bread to the villagers and solitary cotters immediately round Marygreen.

The singularity aforesaid lay, after all, less in the conveyance itself than in Jude's manner of conducting it along its route. Its interior was the scene of most of Jude's education by "private study." As soon as the horse had learnt the road and the houses at which he was to pause awhile, the boy, seated in front, would slip the reins over his arm, ingeniously fix open, by means of a strap attached to the tilt, the volume he was reading, spread the dictionary on his knees, and plunge into the simpler passages from Caesar, Virgil, or Horace, as the case might be, in his purblind stumbling way, and with an expenditure of labour that would have made a tender-hearted pedagogue shed tears; yet somehow getting at the meaning of what he read,

and divining rather than beholding the spirit of the original, which often to his mind was something else than that which he was taught to look for.

The only copies he had been able to lay hands on were old Delphin editions, because they were superseded, and therefore cheap. But, bad for idle schoolboys, it did so happen that they were passably good for him. The hampered and lonely itinerant conscientiously covered up the marginal readings, and used them merely on points of construction, as he would have used a comrade or tutor who should have happened to be passing by. And though Jude may have had little chance of becoming a scholar by these rough and ready means, he was in the way of getting into the groove he wished to follow.

While he was busied with these ancient pages, which had already been thumbed by hands possibly in the grave, digging out the thoughts of these minds so remote yet so near, the bony old horse pursued his rounds, and Jude would be aroused from the woes of Dido by the stoppage of his cart and the voice of some old woman crying, "Two to-day, baker, and I return this stale one."

He was frequently met in the lanes by pedestrians and others without his seeing them, and by degrees the people of the neighbourhood began to talk about his method of combining work and play (such they considered his reading to be), which, though probably convenient enough to himself, was not altogether a safe proceeding for other travellers along the same roads. There were murmurs. Then a private resident of an adjoining place informed the local policeman that the baker's boy should not be allowed to read while driving, and insisted that it was the constable's duty to catch him in the act, and take him to the police court at Alfredston, and get him fined for dangerous practices on the highway. The policeman thereupon lay in wait for Jude, and one day accosted him and cautioned him.

As Jude had to get up at three o'clock in the morning to heat the oven, and mix and set in the bread that he distributed later in the day, he was obliged to go to bed at night immediately after laying the sponge; so that if he could not read his classics on the highways he could hardly study at all. The only thing to be done was, therefore, to keep a sharp eye ahead and around him as well as he could in the circumstances, and slip away his books as soon as anybody loomed in the distance, the policeman in particular. To do that official justice, he did not put himself much in the way

of Jude's bread-cart, considering that in such a lonely district the chief danger was to Jude himself, and often on seeing the white tilt over the hedges he would move in another direction.

On a day when Fawley was getting quite advanced, being now about sixteen, and had been stumbling through the "Carmen Sæculare," on his way home, he found himself to be passing over the high edge of the plateau by the Brown House. The light had changed, and it was the sense of this which had caused him to look up. The sun was going down, and the full moon was rising simultaneously behind the woods in the opposite quarter. His mind had become so impregnated with the poem that, in a moment of the same impulsive emotion which years before had caused him to kneel on the ladder, he stopped the horse, alighted, and glancing round to see that nobody was in sight, knelt down on the roadside bank with open book. He turned first to the shiny goddess, who seemed to look so softly and critically at his doings, then to the disappearing luminary on the other hand, as he began:

"Phœbe silvarumque potens Diana!"

The horse stood still till he had finished the hymn, which Jude repeated under the sway of a polytheistic fancy that he would never have thought of humouring in broad daylight.

Reaching home, he mused over his curious superstition, innate or acquired, in doing this, and the strange forgetfulness which had led to such a lapse from common sense and custom in one who wished, next to being a scholar, to be a Christian divine. It had all come of reading heathen works exclusively. The more he thought of it the more convinced he was of his inconsistency. He began to wonder whether he could be reading quite the right books for his object in life. Certainly there seemed little harmony between this pagan literature and the mediæval colleges at Christminster, that ecclesiastical romance in stone.

Ultimately he decided that in his sheer love of reading he had taken up a wrong emotion for a Christian young man. He had dabbled in Clarke's Homer, but had never yet worked much at the New Testament in the Greek, though he possessed a copy, obtained by post from a second-hand bookseller. He abandoned the now familiar Ionic for a new dialect, and for a long time onward limited his reading almost entirely to the Gospels and

Epistles in Griesbach's text. Moreover, on going into Alfredston one day, he was introduced to patristic literature by finding at the bookseller's some volumes of the Fathers which had been left behind by an insolvent clergyman of the neighbourhood.

As another outcome of this change of groove he visited on Sundays all the churches within a walk, and deciphered the Latin inscriptions on fifteenth-century brasses and tombs. On one of these pilgrimages he met with a hunch-backed old woman of great intelligence, who read everything she could lay her hands on, and she told him more yet of the romantic charms of the city of light and lore. Thither he resolved as firmly as ever to go.

But how live in that city? At present he had no income at all. He had no trade or calling of any dignity or stability whatever on which he could subsist while carrying out an intellectual labour which might spread over many years.

What was most required by citizens? Food, clothing, and shelter. An income from any work in preparing the first would be too meagre; for making the second he felt a distaste; the preparation of the third requisite he inclined to. They built in a city; therefore he would learn to build. He thought of his unknown uncle, his cousin Susanna's father, an ecclesiastical worker in metal, and somehow mediæval art in any material was a trade for which he had rather a fancy. He could not go far wrong in following his uncle's footsteps, and engaging himself awhile with the carcasses that contained the scholar souls.

As a preliminary he obtained some small blocks of freestone, metal not being available, and suspending his studies awhile, occupied his spare half-hours in copying the heads and capitals in his parish church.

There was a stone-mason of a humble kind in Alfredston, and as soon as he had found a substitute for himself in his aunt's little business, he offered his services to this man for a trifling wage. Here Jude had the opportunity of learning at least the rudiments of freestone-working. Some time later he went to a church-builder in the same place, and under the architect's direction became handy at restoring the dilapidated masonries of several village churches round about.

Not forgetting that he was only following up this handicraft as a prop to lean on while he prepared those greater engines which he flattered himself

would be better fitted for him, he yet was interested in his pursuit on its own account. He now had lodgings during the week in the little town, whence he returned to Marygreen village every Saturday evening. And thus he reached and passed his nineteenth year.

VI

At this memorable date of his life he was, one Saturday, returning from Alfredston to Marygreen about three o'clock in the afternoon. It was fine, warm, and soft summer weather, and he walked with his tools at his back, his little chisels clinking faintly against the larger ones in his basket. It being the end of the week he had left work early, and had come out of the town by a round-about route which he did not usually frequent, having promised to call at a flour-mill near Cresscombe to execute a commission for his aunt.

He was in an enthusiastic mood. He seemed to see his way to living comfortably in Christminster in the course of a year or two, and knocking at the doors of one of those strongholds of learning of which he had dreamed so much. He might, of course, have gone there now, in some capacity or other, but he preferred to enter the city with a little more assurance as to means than he could be said to feel at present. A warm self-content suffused him when he considered what he had already done. Now and then as he went along he turned to face the peeps of country on either side of him. But he hardly saw them; the act was an automatic repetition of what he had been accustomed to do when less occupied; and the one matter which really engaged him was the mental estimate of his progress thus far.

“I have acquired quite an average student's power to read the common ancient classics, Latin in particular.” This was true, Jude possessing a facility in that language which enabled him with great ease to himself to beguile his lonely walks by imaginary conversations therein.

“I have read two books of the *Iliad*, besides being pretty familiar with passages such as the speech of Phœnix in the ninth book, the fight of Hector and Ajax in the fourteenth, the appearance of Achilles unarmed and his heavenly armour in the eighteenth, and the funeral games in the twenty-third. I have also done some Hesiod, a little scrap of Thucydides, and a lot of the Greek Testament... I wish there was only one dialect all the same.

“I have done some mathematics, including the first six and the eleventh and twelfth books of Euclid; and algebra as far as simple equations.

“I know something of the Fathers, and something of Roman and English history.

“These things are only a beginning. But I shall not make much farther advance here, from the difficulty of getting books. Hence I must next concentrate all my energies on settling in Christminster. Once there I shall so advance, with the assistance I shall there get, that my present knowledge will appear to me but as childish ignorance. I must save money, and I will; and one of those colleges shall open its doors to me—shall welcome whom now it would spurn, if I wait twenty years for the welcome.

“I’ll be D.D. before I have done!”

And then he continued to dream, and thought he might become even a bishop by leading a pure, energetic, wise, Christian life. And what an example he would set! If his income were £5000 a year, he would give away £4500 in one form and another, and live sumptuously (for him) on the remainder. Well, on second thoughts, a bishop was absurd. He would draw the line at an archdeacon. Perhaps a man could be as good and as learned and as useful in the capacity of archdeacon as in that of bishop. Yet he thought of the bishop again.

“Meanwhile I will read, as soon as I am settled in Christminster, the books I have not been able to get hold of here: Livy, Tacitus, Herodotus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes—”

“Ha, ha, ha! Hoity-toity!” The sounds were expressed in light voices on the other side of the hedge, but he did not notice them. His thoughts went on:

“—Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Epictetus, Seneca, Antoninus. Then I must master other things: the Fathers thoroughly; Bede and ecclesiastical history generally; a smattering of Hebrew—I only know the letters as yet—”

“Hoity-toity!”

“—but I can work hard. I have staying power in abundance, thank God! and it is that which tells... Yes, Christminster shall be my Alma Mater; and I’ll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased.”

In his deep concentration on these transactions of the future Jude's walk had slackened, and he was now standing quite still, looking at the ground as though the future were thrown thereon by a magic lantern. On a sudden something smacked him sharply in the ear, and he became aware that a soft cold substance had been flung at him, and had fallen at his feet.

A glance told him what it was—a piece of flesh, the characteristic part of a barrow-pig, which the countrymen used for greasing their boots, as it was useless for any other purpose. Pigs were rather plentiful hereabout, being bred and fattened in large numbers in certain parts of North Wessex.

On the other side of the hedge was a stream, whence, as he now for the first time realized, had come the slight sounds of voices and laughter that had mingled with his dreams. He mounted the bank and looked over the fence. On the further side of the stream stood a small homestead, having a garden and pig-sties attached; in front of it, beside the brook, three young women were kneeling, with buckets and platters beside them containing heaps of pigs' chitterlings, which they were washing in the running water. One or two pairs of eyes slyly glanced up, and perceiving that his attention had at last been attracted, and that he was watching them, they braced themselves for inspection by putting their mouths demurely into shape and recommencing their rinsing operations with assiduity.

"Thank you!" said Jude severely.

"I *didn't* throw it, I tell you!" asserted one girl to her neighbour, as if unconscious of the young man's presence.

"Nor I," the second answered.

"Oh, Anny, how can you!" said the third.

"If I had thrown anything at all, it shouldn't have been *that!*"

"Pooh! I don't care for him!" And they laughed and continued their work, without looking up, still ostentatiously accusing each other.

Jude grew sarcastic as he wiped his face, and caught their remarks.

"*You* didn't do it—oh no!" he said to the up-stream one of the three.

She whom he addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less; and Jude was almost

certain that to her was attributable the enterprise of attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters to what was simmering in the minds around him.

“That you’ll never be told,” said she deedily.

“Whoever did it was wasteful of other people’s property.”

“Oh, that’s nothing.”

“But you want to speak to me, I suppose?”

“Oh yes; if you like to.”

“Shall I clamber across, or will you come to the plank above here?”

Perhaps she foresaw an opportunity; for somehow or other the eyes of the brown girl rested in his own when he had said the words, and there was a momentary flash of intelligence, a dumb announcement of affinity *in posse* between herself and him, which, so far as Jude Fawley was concerned, had no sort of premeditation in it. She saw that he had singled her out from the three, as a woman is singled out in such cases, for no reasoned purpose of further acquaintance, but in commonplace obedience to conjunctive orders from headquarters, unconsciously received by unfortunate men when the last intention of their lives is to be occupied with the feminine.

Springing to her feet, she said: “Bring back what is lying there.”

Jude was now aware that no message on any matter connected with her father’s business had prompted her signal to him. He set down his basket of tools, picked up the scrap of offal, beat a pathway for himself with his stick, and got over the hedge. They walked in parallel lines, one on each bank of the stream, towards the small plank bridge. As the girl drew nearer to it, she gave without Jude perceiving it, an adroit little suck to the interior of each of her cheeks in succession, by which curious and original manœuvre she brought as by magic upon its smooth and rotund surface a perfect dimple, which she was able to retain there as long as she continued to smile. This production of dimples at will was a not unknown operation, which many attempted, but only a few succeeded in accomplishing.

They met in the middle of the plank, and Jude, tossing back her missile, seemed to expect her to explain why she had audaciously stopped him by this novel artillery instead of by hailing him.

But she, slyly looking in another direction, swayed herself backwards and forwards on her hand as it clutched the rail of the bridge; till, moved by

amatory curiosity, she turned her eyes critically upon him.

“You don’t think *I* would shy things at you?”

“Oh no.”

“We are doing this for my father, who naturally doesn’t want anything thrown away. He makes that into dubbin.” She nodded towards the fragment on the grass.

“What made either of the others throw it, I wonder?” Jude asked, politely accepting her assertion, though he had very large doubts as to its truth.

“Impudence. Don’t tell folk it was I, mind!”

“How can I? I don’t know your name.”

“Ah, no. Shall I tell it to you?”

“Do!”

“Arabella Donn. I’m living here.”

“I must have known it if I had often come this way. But I mostly go straight along the high-road.”

“My father is a pig-breeder, and these girls are helping me wash the innerds for black-puddings and such like.”

They talked a little more and a little more, as they stood regarding each other and leaning against the hand-rail of the bridge. The unvoiced call of woman to man, which was uttered very distinctly by Arabella’s personality, held Jude to the spot against his intention—almost against his will, and in a way new to his experience. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that till this moment Jude had never looked at a woman to consider her as such, but had vaguely regarded the sex as beings outside his life and purposes. He gazed from her eyes to her mouth, thence to her bosom, and to her full round naked arms, wet, mottled with the chill of the water, and firm as marble.

“What a nice-looking girl you are!” he murmured, though the words had not been necessary to express his sense of her magnetism.

“Ah, you should see me Sundays!” she said piquantly.

“I don’t suppose I could?” he answered

“That’s for you to think on. There’s nobody after me just now, though there med be in a week or two.” She had spoken this without a smile, and the dimples disappeared.

Jude felt himself drifting strangely, but could not help it. "Will you let me?"

"I don't mind."

By this time she had managed to get back one dimple by turning her face aside for a moment and repeating the odd little sucking operation before mentioned, Jude being still unconscious of more than a general impression of her appearance. "Next Sunday?" he hazarded. "To-morrow, that is?"

"Yes."

"Shall I call?"

"Yes."

She brightened with a little glow of triumph, swept him almost tenderly with her eyes in turning, and retracing her steps down the brookside grass rejoined her companions.

Jude Fawley shouldered his tool-basket and resumed his lonely way, filled with an ardour at which he mentally stood at gaze. He had just inhaled a single breath from a new atmosphere, which had evidently been hanging round him everywhere he went, for he knew not how long, but had somehow been divided from his actual breathing as by a sheet of glass. The intentions as to reading, working, and learning, which he had so precisely formulated only a few minutes earlier, were suffering a curious collapse into a corner, he knew not how.

"Well, it's only a bit of fun," he said to himself, faintly conscious that to common sense there was something lacking, and still more obviously something redundant in the nature of this girl who had drawn him to her which made it necessary that he should assert mere sportiveness on his part as his reason in seeking her—something in her quite antipathetic to that side of him which had been occupied with literary study and the magnificent Christminster dream. It had been no vestal who chose *that* missile for opening her attack on him. He saw this with his intellectual eye, just for a short fleeting while, as by the light of a falling lamp one might momentarily see an inscription on a wall before being enshrouded in darkness. And then this passing discriminative power was withdrawn, and Jude was lost to all conditions of things in the advent of a fresh and wild pleasure, that of having found a new channel for emotional interest hitherto unsuspected,

though it had lain close beside him. He was to meet this enkindling one of the other sex on the following Sunday.

Meanwhile the girl had joined her companions, and she silently resumed her flicking and sousing of the chitterlings in the pellucid stream.

“Caught un, my dear?” laconically asked the girl called Anny.

“I don’t know. I wish I had thrown something else than that!” regretfully murmured Arabella.

“Lord! he’s nobody, though you med think so. He used to drive old Drusilla Fawley’s bread-cart out at Marygreen, till he ’prenticed himself at Alfredston. Since then he’s been very stuck up, and always reading. He wants to be a scholar, they say.”

“Oh, I don’t care what he is, or anything about ’n. Don’t you think it, my child!”

“Oh, don’t ye! You needn’t try to deceive us! What did you stay talking to him for, if you didn’t want un? Whether you do or whether you don’t, he’s as simple as a child. I could see it as you courted on the bridge, when he looked at ’ee as if he had never seen a woman before in his born days. Well, he’s to be had by any woman who can get him to care for her a bit, if she likes to set herself to catch him the right way.”

VII

The next day Jude Fawley was pausing in his bedroom with the sloping ceiling, looking at the books on the table, and then at the black mark on the plaster above them, made by the smoke of his lamp in past months.

It was Sunday afternoon, four-and-twenty hours after his meeting with Arabella Donn. During the whole bygone week he had been resolving to set this afternoon apart for a special purpose,—the re-reading of his Greek Testament—his new one, with better type than his old copy, following Griesbach's text as amended by numerous correctors, and with variorum readings in the margin. He was proud of the book, having obtained it by boldly writing to its London publisher, a thing he had never done before.

He had anticipated much pleasure in this afternoon's reading, under the quiet roof of his great-aunt's house as formerly, where he now slept only two nights a week. But a new thing, a great hitch, had happened yesterday in the gliding and noiseless current of his life, and he felt as a snake must feel who has sloughed off its winter skin, and cannot understand the brightness and sensitiveness of its new one.

He would not go out to meet her, after all. He sat down, opened the book, and with his elbows firmly planted on the table, and his hands to his temples, began at the beginning:

Ἡ ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ.

Had he promised to call for her? Surely he had! She would wait indoors, poor girl, and waste all her afternoon on account of him. There was a something in her, too, which was very winning, apart from promises. He ought not to break faith with her. Even though he had only Sundays and week-day evenings for reading he could afford one afternoon, seeing that other young men afforded so many. After to-day he would never probably see her again. Indeed, it would be impossible, considering what his plans were.

In short, as if materially, a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him—something which had nothing in common with the spirits and influences that had moved him hitherto. This seemed to care little for his reason and his will, nothing for his so-called elevated intentions, and moved him along, as a violent schoolmaster a schoolboy he has seized by the collar, in a direction which tended towards the embrace of a woman for whom he had no respect, and whose life had nothing in common with his own except locality.

H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ was no more heeded, and the predestinate Jude sprang up and across the room. Foreseeing such an event he had already arrayed himself in his best clothes. In three minutes he was out of the house and descending by the path across the wide vacant hollow of corn-ground which lay between the village and the isolated house of Arabella in the dip beyond the upland.

As he walked he looked at his watch. He could be back in two hours, easily, and a good long time would still remain to him for reading after tea.

Passing the few unhealthy fir-trees and cottage where the path joined the highway he hastened along, and struck away to the left, descending the steep side of the country to the west of the Brown House. Here at the base of the chalk formation he neared the brook that oozed from it, and followed the stream till he reached her dwelling. A smell of piggeries came from the back, and the grunting of the originators of that smell. He entered the garden, and knocked at the door with the knob of his stick.

Somebody had seen him through the window, for a male voice on the inside said:

“Arabella! Here’s your young man come coorting! Mizzle, my girl!”

Jude winced at the words. Courting in such a businesslike aspect as it evidently wore to the speaker was the last thing he was thinking of. He was going to walk with her, perhaps kiss her; but “courting” was too coolly purposeful to be anything but repugnant to his ideas. The door was opened and he entered, just as Arabella came downstairs in radiant walking attire.

“Take a chair, Mr. What’s-your-name?” said her father, an energetic, black-whiskered man, in the same businesslike tones Jude had heard from outside.

“I’d rather go out at once, wouldn’t you?” she whispered to Jude.

“Yes,” said he. “We’ll walk up to the Brown House and back, we can do it in half an hour.”

Arabella looked so handsome amid her untidy surroundings that he felt glad he had come, and all the misgivings vanished that had hitherto haunted him.

First they clambered to the top of the great down, during which ascent he had occasionally to take her hand to assist her. Then they bore off to the left along the crest into the ridgeway, which they followed till it intersected the high-road at the Brown House aforesaid, the spot of his former fervid desires to behold Christminster. But he forgot them now. He talked the commonest local twaddle to Arabella with greater zest than he would have felt in discussing all the philosophies with all the Dons in the recently adored university, and passed the spot where he had knelt to Diana and Phœbus without remembering that there were any such people in the mythology, or that the sun was anything else than a useful lamp for illuminating Arabella’s face. An indescribable lightness of heel served to lift him along; and Jude, the incipient scholar, prospective D.D., professor, bishop, or what not, felt himself honoured and glorified by the condescension of this handsome country wench in agreeing to take a walk with him in her Sunday frock and ribbons.

They reached the Brown House barn—the point at which he had planned to turn back. While looking over the vast northern landscape from this spot they were struck by the rising of a dense volume of smoke from the neighbourhood of the little town which lay beneath them at a distance of a couple of miles.

“It is a fire,” said Arabella. “Let’s run and see it—do! It is not far!”

The tenderness which had grown up in Jude’s bosom left him no will to thwart her inclination now—which pleased him in affording him excuse for a longer time with her. They started off down the hill almost at a trot; but on gaining level ground at the bottom, and walking a mile, they found that the spot of the fire was much further off than it had seemed.

Having begun their journey, however, they pushed on; but it was not till five o’clock that they found themselves on the scene,—the distance being altogether about half-a-dozen miles from Marygreen, and three from Arabella’s. The conflagration had been got under by the time they reached

it, and after a short inspection of the melancholy ruins they retraced their steps—their course lying through the town of Alfredston.

Arabella said she would like some tea, and they entered an inn of an inferior class, and gave their order. As it was not for beer they had a long time to wait. The maid-servant recognized Jude, and whispered her surprise to her mistress in the background, that he, the student “who kept himself up so particular,” should have suddenly descended so low as to keep company with Arabella. The latter guessed what was being said, and laughed as she met the serious and tender gaze of her lover—the low and triumphant laugh of a careless woman who sees she is winning her game.

They sat and looked round the room, and at the picture of Samson and Delilah which hung on the wall, and at the circular beer-stains on the table, and at the spittoons underfoot filled with sawdust. The whole aspect of the scene had that depressing effect on Jude which few places can produce like a tap-room on a Sunday evening when the setting sun is slanting in, and no liquor is going, and the unfortunate wayfarer finds himself with no other haven of rest.

It began to grow dusk. They could not wait longer, really, for the tea, they said. “Yet what else can we do?” asked Jude. “It is a three-mile walk for you.”

“I suppose we can have some beer,” said Arabella.

“Beer, oh yes. I had forgotten that. Somehow it seems odd to come to a public-house for beer on a Sunday evening.”

“But we didn’t.”

“No, we didn’t.” Jude by this time wished he was out of such an uncongenial atmosphere; but he ordered the beer, which was promptly brought.

Arabella tasted it. “Ugh!” she said.

Jude tasted. “What’s the matter with it?” he asked. “I don’t understand beer very much now, it is true. I like it well enough, but it is bad to read on, and I find coffee better. But this seems all right.”

“Adulterated—I can’t touch it!” She mentioned three or four ingredients that she detected in the liquor beyond malt and hops, much to Jude’s surprise.

“How much you know!” he said good-humouredly.

Nevertheless she returned to the beer and drank her share, and they went on their way. It was now nearly dark, and as soon as they had withdrawn from the lights of the town they walked closer together, till they touched each other. She wondered why he did not put his arm round her waist, but he did not; he merely said what to himself seemed a quite bold enough thing: "Take my arm."

She took it, thoroughly, up to the shoulder. He felt the warmth of her body against his, and putting his stick under his other arm held with his right hand her right as it rested in its place.

"Now we are well together, dear, aren't we?" he observed.

"Yes," said she; adding to herself: "Rather mild!"

"How fast I have become!" he was thinking.

Thus they walked till they reached the foot of the upland, where they could see the white highway ascending before them in the gloom. From this point the only way of getting to Arabella's was by going up the incline, and dipping again into her valley on the right. Before they had climbed far they were nearly run into by two men who had been walking on the grass unseen.

"These lovers—you find 'em out o' doors in all seasons and weathers—lovers and homeless dogs only," said one of the men as they vanished down the hill.

Arabella tittered lightly.

"Are we lovers?" asked Jude.

"You know best."

"But you can tell me?"

For answer she inclined her head upon his shoulder. Jude took the hint, and encircling her waist with his arm, pulled her to him and kissed her.

They walked now no longer arm in arm but, as she had desired, clasped together. After all, what did it matter since it was dark, said Jude to himself. When they were half-way up the long hill they paused as by arrangement, and he kissed her again. They reached the top, and he kissed her once more.

"You can keep your arm there, if you would like to," she said gently.

He did so, thinking how trusting she was.

Thus they slowly went towards her home. He had left his cottage at half-past three, intending to be sitting down again to the New Testament by half-past five. It was nine o'clock when, with another embrace, he stood to deliver her up at her father's door.

She asked him to come in, if only for a minute, as it would seem so odd otherwise, and as if she had been out alone in the dark. He gave way, and followed her in. Immediately that the door was opened he found, in addition to her parents, several neighbours sitting round. They all spoke in a congratulatory manner, and took him seriously as Arabella's intended partner.

They did not belong to his set or circle, and he felt out of place and embarrassed. He had not meant this: a mere afternoon of pleasant walking with Arabella, that was all he had meant. He did not stay longer than to speak to her stepmother, a simple, quiet woman without features or character; and bidding them all good night plunged with a sense of relief into the track over the down.

But that sense was only temporary: Arabella soon re-asserted her sway in his soul. He walked as if he felt himself to be another man from the Jude of yesterday. What were his books to him? what were his intentions, hitherto adhered to so strictly, as to not wasting a single minute of time day by day? "Wasting!" It depended on your point of view to define that: he was just living for the first time: not wasting life. It was better to love a woman than to be a graduate, or a parson; ay, or a pope!

When he got back to the house his aunt had gone to bed, and a general consciousness of his neglect seemed written on the face of all things confronting him. He went upstairs without a light, and the dim interior of his room accosted him with sad inquiry. There lay his book open, just as he had left it, and the capital letters on the title-page regarded him with fixed reproach in the grey starlight, like the unclosed eyes of a dead man:

H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ.

* * * * *

Jude had to leave early next morning for his usual week of absence at lodgings; and it was with a sense of futility that he threw into his basket upon his tools and other necessaries the unread book he had brought with him.

He kept his impassioned doings a secret almost from himself. Arabella, on the contrary, made them public among all her friends and acquaintances.

Retracing by the light of dawn the road he had followed a few hours earlier under cover of darkness, with his sweetheart by his side, he reached the bottom of the hill, where he walked slowly, and stood still. He was on the spot where he had given her the first kiss. As the sun had only just risen it was possible that nobody had passed there since. Jude looked on the ground and sighed. He looked closely, and could just discern in the damp dust the imprints of their feet as they had stood locked in each other's arms. She was not there now, and "the embroidery of imagination upon the stuff of nature" so depicted her past presence that a void was in his heart which nothing could fill. A pollard willow stood close to the place, and that willow was different from all other willows in the world. Utter annihilation of the six days which must elapse before he could see her again as he had promised would have been his intensest wish if he had had only the week to live.

An hour and a half later Arabella came along the same way with her two companions of the Saturday. She passed unheeding the scene of the kiss, and the willow that marked it, though chattering freely on the subject to the other two.

"And what did he tell 'ee next?"

"Then he said—" And she related almost word for word some of his tenderest speeches. If Jude had been behind the fence he would have felt not a little surprised at learning how very few of his sayings and doings on the previous evening were private.

"You've got him to care for 'ee a bit, 'nation if you han't!" murmured Anny judicially. "It's well to be you!"

In a few moments Arabella replied in a curiously low, hungry tone of latent sensuousness: "I've got him to care for me: yes! But I want him to more than care for me; I want him to have me—to marry me! I must have him. I can't do without him. He's the sort of man I long for. I shall go mad

if I can't give myself to him altogether! I felt I should when I first saw him!"

"As he is a romancing, straightfor'ard, honest chap, he's to be had, and as a husband, if you set about catching him in the right way."

Arabella remained thinking awhile. "What med be the right way?" she asked.

"Oh you don't know—you don't!" said Sarah, the third girl.

"On my word I don't!—No further, that is, than by plain courting, and taking care he don't go too far!"

The third girl looked at the second. "She *don't* know!"

"'Tis clear she don't!" said Anny.

"And having lived in a town, too, as one may say! Well, we can teach 'ee som'at then, as well as you us."

"Yes. And how do you mean—a sure way to gain a man? Take me for an innocent, and have done wi' it!"

"As a husband."

"As a husband."

"A countryman that's honourable and serious-minded such as he; God forbid that I should say a sojer, or sailor, or commercial gent from the towns, or any of them that be slippery with poor women! I'd do no friend that harm!"

"Well, such as he, of course!"

Arabella's companions looked at each other, and turning up their eyes in drollery began smirking. Then one went up close to Arabella, and, although nobody was near, imparted some information in a low tone, the other observing curiously the effect upon Arabella.

"Ah!" said the last-named slowly. "I own I didn't think of that way! ... But suppose he *isn't* honourable? A woman had better not have tried it!"

"Nothing venture nothing have! Besides, you make sure that he's honourable before you begin. You'd be safe enough with yours. I wish I had the chance! Lots of girls do it; or do you think they'd get married at all?"

Arabella pursued her way in silent thought. "I'll try it!" she whispered; but not to them.

VIII

One week's end Jude was as usual walking out to his aunt's at Marygreen from his lodging in Alfredston, a walk which now had large attractions for him quite other than his desire to see his aged and morose relative. He diverged to the right before ascending the hill with the single purpose of gaining, on his way, a glimpse of Arabella that should not come into the reckoning of regular appointments. Before quite reaching the homestead his alert eye perceived the top of her head moving quickly hither and thither over the garden hedge. Entering the gate he found that three young unfattened pigs had escaped from their sty by leaping clean over the top, and that she was endeavouring unassisted to drive them in through the door which she had set open. The lines of her countenance changed from the rigidity of business to the softness of love when she saw Jude, and she bent her eyes languishingly upon him. The animals took advantage of the pause by doubling and bolting out of the way.

"They were only put in this morning!" she cried, stimulated to pursue in spite of her lover's presence. "They were drove from Spaddleholt Farm only yesterday, where Father bought 'em at a stiff price enough. They are wanting to get home again, the stupid toads! Will you shut the garden gate, dear, and help me to get 'em in. There are no men folk at home, only Mother, and they'll be lost if we don't mind."

He set himself to assist, and dodged this way and that over the potato rows and the cabbages. Every now and then they ran together, when he caught her for a moment and kissed her. The first pig was got back promptly; the second with some difficulty; the third a long-legged creature, was more obstinate and agile. He plunged through a hole in the garden hedge, and into the lane.

"He'll be lost if I don't follow 'n!" said she. "Come along with me!"

She rushed in full pursuit out of the garden, Jude alongside her, barely contriving to keep the fugitive in sight. Occasionally they would shout to

some boy to stop the animal, but he always wriggled past and ran on as before.

“Let me take your hand, darling,” said Jude. “You are getting out of breath.” She gave him her now hot hand with apparent willingness, and they trotted along together.

“This comes of driving ’em home,” she remarked. “They always know the way back if you do that. They ought to have been carted over.”

By this time the pig had reached an unfastened gate admitting to the open down, across which he sped with all the agility his little legs afforded. As soon as the pursuers had entered and ascended to the top of the high ground it became apparent that they would have to run all the way to the farmer’s if they wished to get at him. From this summit he could be seen as a minute speck, following an unerring line towards his old home.

“It is no good!” cried Arabella. “He’ll be there long before we get there. It don’t matter now we know he’s not lost or stolen on the way. They’ll see it is ours, and send un back. Oh dear, how hot I be!”

Without relinquishing her hold of Jude’s hand she swerved aside and flung herself down on the sod under a stunted thorn, precipitately pulling Jude on to his knees at the same time.

“Oh, I ask pardon—I nearly threw you down, didn’t I! But I am so tired!”

She lay supine, and straight as an arrow, on the sloping sod of this hill-top, gazing up into the blue miles of sky, and still retaining her warm hold of Jude’s hand. He reclined on his elbow near her.

“We’ve run all this way for nothing,” she went on, her form heaving and falling in quick pants, her face flushed, her full red lips parted, and a fine dew of perspiration on her skin. “Well—why don’t you speak, deary?”

“I’m blown too. It was all up hill.”

They were in absolute solitude—the most apparent of all solitudes, that of empty surrounding space. Nobody could be nearer than a mile to them without their seeing him. They were, in fact, on one of the summits of the county, and the distant landscape around Christminster could be discerned from where they lay. But Jude did not think of that then.

“Oh, I can see such a pretty thing up this tree,” said Arabella. “A sort of a—caterpillar, of the most loveliest green and yellow you ever came across!”

“Where?” said Jude, sitting up.

“You can’t see him there—you must come here,” said she.

He bent nearer and put his head in front of hers. “No—I can’t see it,” he said.

“Why, on the limb there where it branches off—close to the moving leaf—there!” She gently pulled him down beside her.

“I don’t see it,” he repeated, the back of his head against her cheek. “But I can, perhaps, standing up.” He stood accordingly, placing himself in the direct line of her gaze.

“How stupid you are!” she said crossly, turning away her face.

“I don’t care to see it, dear: why should I?” he replied looking down upon her. “Get up, Abby.”

“Why?”

“I want you to let me kiss you. I’ve been waiting to ever so long!”

She rolled round her face, remained a moment looking deedily aslant at him; then with a slight curl of the lip sprang to her feet, and exclaiming abruptly “I must mizzle!” walked off quickly homeward. Jude followed and rejoined her.

“Just one!” he coaxed.

“Shan’t!” she said.

He, surprised: “What’s the matter?”

She kept her two lips resentfully together, and Jude followed her like a pet lamb till she slackened her pace and walked beside him, talking calmly on indifferent subjects, and always checking him if he tried to take her hand or clasp her waist. Thus they descended to the precincts of her father’s homestead, and Arabella went in, nodding good-bye to him with a supercilious, affronted air.

“I expect I took too much liberty with her, somehow,” Jude said to himself, as he withdrew with a sigh and went on to Marygreen.

On Sunday morning the interior of Arabella’s home was, as usual, the scene of a grand weekly cooking, the preparation of the special Sunday dinner. Her father was shaving before a little glass hung on the mullion of the window, and her mother and Arabella herself were shelling beans hard by. A neighbour passed on her way home from morning service at the

nearest church, and seeing Donn engaged at the window with the razor, nodded and came in.

She at once spoke playfully to Arabella: "I zeed 'ee running with 'un—hee-hee! I hope 'tis coming to something?"

Arabella merely threw a look of consciousness into her face without raising her eyes.

"He's for Christminster, I hear, as soon as he can get there."

"Have you heard that lately—quite lately?" asked Arabella with a jealous, tigerish indrawing of breath.

"Oh no! But it has been known a long time that it is his plan. He's on'y waiting here for an opening. Ah well: he must walk about with somebody, I s'pose. Young men don't mean much now-a-days. 'Tis a sip here and a sip there with 'em. 'Twas different in my time."

When the gossip had departed Arabella said suddenly to her mother: "I want you and Father to go and inquire how the Edlins be, this evening after tea. Or no—there's evening service at Fensworth—you can walk to that."

"Oh? What's up to-night, then?"

"Nothing. Only I want the house to myself. He's shy; and I can't get un to come in when you are here. I shall let him slip through my fingers if I don't mind, much as I care for 'n!"

"If it is fine we med as well go, since you wish."

In the afternoon Arabella met and walked with Jude, who had now for weeks ceased to look into a book of Greek, Latin, or any other tongue. They wandered up the slopes till they reached the green track along the ridge, which they followed to the circular British earth-bank adjoining, Jude thinking of the great age of the trackway, and of the drovers who had frequented it, probably before the Romans knew the country. Up from the level lands below them floated the chime of church bells. Presently they were reduced to one note, which quickened, and stopped.

"Now we'll go back," said Arabella, who had attended to the sounds.

Jude assented. So long as he was near her he minded little where he was. When they arrived at her house he said lingeringly: "I won't come in. Why are you in such a hurry to go in to-night? It is not near dark."

“Wait a moment,” said she. She tried the handle of the door and found it locked.

“Ah—they are gone to church,” she added. And searching behind the scraper she found the key and unlocked the door. “Now, you’ll come in a moment?” she asked lightly. “We shall be all alone.”

“Certainly,” said Jude with alacrity, the case being unexpectedly altered.

Indoors they went. Did he want any tea? No, it was too late: he would rather sit and talk to her. She took off her jacket and hat, and they sat down—naturally enough close together.

“Don’t touch me, please,” she said softly. “I am part egg-shell. Or perhaps I had better put it in a safe place.” She began unfastening the collar of her gown.

“What is it?” said her lover.

“An egg—a cochin’s egg. I am hatching a very rare sort. I carry it about everywhere with me, and it will get hatched in less than three weeks.”

“Where do you carry it?”

“Just here.” She put her hand into her bosom and drew out the egg, which was wrapped in wool, outside it being a piece of pig’s bladder, in case of accidents. Having exhibited it to him she put it back, “Now mind you don’t come near me. I don’t want to get it broke, and have to begin another.”

“Why do you do such a strange thing?”

“It’s an old custom. I suppose it is natural for a woman to want to bring live things into the world.”

“It is very awkward for me just now,” he said, laughing.

“It serves you right. There—that’s all you can have of me”

She had turned round her chair, and, reaching over the back of it, presented her cheek to him gingerly.

“That’s very shabby of you!”

“You should have caught me a minute ago when I had put the egg down! There!” she said defiantly, “I am without it now!” She had quickly withdrawn the egg a second time; but before he could quite reach her she had put it back as quickly, laughing with the excitement of her strategy. Then there was a little struggle, Jude making a plunge for it and capturing it

triumphantly. Her face flushed; and becoming suddenly conscious he flushed also.

They looked at each other, panting; till he rose and said: "One kiss, now I can do it without damage to property; and I'll go!"

But she had jumped up too. "You must find me first!" she cried.

Her lover followed her as she withdrew. It was now dark inside the room, and the window being small he could not discover for a long time what had become of her, till a laugh revealed her to have rushed up the stairs, whither Jude rushed at her heels.

IX

It was some two months later in the year, and the pair had met constantly during the interval. Arabella seemed dissatisfied; she was always imagining, and waiting, and wondering.

One day she met the itinerant Vilbert. She, like all the cottagers thereabout, knew the quack well, and she began telling him of her experiences. Arabella had been gloomy, but before he left her she had grown brighter. That evening she kept an appointment with Jude, who seemed sad.

“I am going away,” he said to her. “I think I ought to go. I think it will be better both for you and for me. I wish some things had never begun! I was much to blame, I know. But it is never too late to mend.”

Arabella began to cry. “How do you know it is not too late?” she said. “That’s all very well to say! I haven’t told you yet!” and she looked into his face with streaming eyes.

“What?” he asked, turning pale. “Not...?”

“Yes! And what shall I do if you desert me?”

“Oh, Arabella—how can you say that, my dear! You *know* I wouldn’t desert you!”

“Well then—”

“I have next to no wages as yet, you know; or perhaps I should have thought of this before... But, of course if that’s the case, we must marry! What other thing do you think I could dream of doing?”

“I thought—I thought, deary, perhaps you would go away all the more for that, and leave me to face it alone!”

“You knew better! Of course I never dreamt six months ago, or even three, of marrying. It is a complete smashing up of my plans—I mean my plans before I knew you, my dear. But what are they, after all! Dreams

about books, and degrees, and impossible fellowships, and all that. Certainly we'll marry: we must!"

That night he went out alone, and walked in the dark self-communing. He knew well, too well, in the secret centre of his brain, that Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind. Yet, such being the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences. For his own soothing he kept up a factitious belief in her. His idea of her was the thing of most consequence, not Arabella herself, he sometimes said laconically.

The banns were put in and published the very next Sunday. The people of the parish all said what a simple fool young Fawley was. All his reading had only come to this, that he would have to sell his books to buy saucepans. Those who guessed the probable state of affairs, Arabella's parents being among them, declared that it was the sort of conduct they would have expected of such an honest young man as Jude in reparation of the wrong he had done his innocent sweetheart. The parson who married them seemed to think it satisfactory too. And so, standing before the aforesaid officiator, the two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore.

Fawley's aunt being a baker she made him a bride-cake, saying bitterly that it was the last thing she could do for him, poor silly fellow; and that it would have been far better if, instead of his living to trouble her, he had gone underground years before with his father and mother. Of this cake Arabella took some slices, wrapped them up in white note-paper, and sent them to her companions in the pork-dressing business, Anny and Sarah, labelling each packet "*In remembrance of good advice.*"

The prospects of the newly married couple were certainly not very brilliant even to the most sanguine mind. He, a stone-mason's apprentice, nineteen years of age, was working for half wages till he should be out of his time. His wife was absolutely useless in a town-lodging, where he at first had considered it would be necessary for them to live. But the urgent need of adding to income in ever so little a degree caused him to take a

lonely roadside cottage between the Brown House and Marygreen, that he might have the profits of a vegetable garden, and utilize her past experiences by letting her keep a pig. But it was not the sort of life he had bargained for, and it was a long way to walk to and from Alfredston every day. Arabella, however, felt that all these make-shifts were temporary; she had gained a husband; that was the thing—a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit, and stick to his trade, and throw aside those stupid books for practical undertakings.

So to the cottage he took her on the evening of the marriage, giving up his old room at his aunt's—where so much of the hard labour at Greek and Latin had been carried on.

A little chill overspread him at her first unrobing. A long tail of hair, which Arabella wore twisted up in an enormous knob at the back of her head, was deliberately unfastened, stroked out, and hung upon the looking-glass which he had bought her.

“What—it wasn't your own?” he said, with a sudden distaste for her.

“Oh no—it never is nowadays with the better class.”

“Nonsense! Perhaps not in towns. But in the country it is supposed to be different. Besides, you've enough of your own, surely?”

“Yes, enough as country notions go. But in town the men expect more, and when I was barmaid at Aldbrickham—”

“Barmaid at Aldbrickham?”

“Well, not exactly barmaid—I used to draw the drink at a public-house there—just for a little time; that was all. Some people put me up to getting this, and I bought it just for a fancy. The more you have the better in Aldbrickham, which is a finer town than all your Christminsters. Every lady of position wears false hair—the barber's assistant told me so.”

Jude thought with a feeling of sickness that though this might be true to some extent, for all that he knew, many unsophisticated girls would and did go to towns and remain there for years without losing their simplicity of life and embellishments. Others, alas, had an instinct towards artificiality in their very blood, and became adepts in counterfeiting at the first glimpse of it. However, perhaps there was no great sin in a woman adding to her hair, and he resolved to think no more of it.

A new-made wife can usually manage to excite interest for a few weeks, even though the prospects of the household ways and means are cloudy. There is a certain piquancy about her situation, and her manner to her acquaintance at the sense of it, which carries off the gloom of facts, and renders even the humblest bride independent awhile of the real. Mrs. Jude Fawley was walking in the streets of Alfredston one market-day with this quality in her carriage when she met Anny her former friend, whom she had not seen since the wedding.

As usual they laughed before talking; the world seemed funny to them without saying it.

“So it turned out a good plan, you see!” remarked the girl to the wife. “I knew it would with such as him. He’s a dear good fellow, and you ought to be proud of un.”

“I am,” said Mrs. Fawley quietly.

“And when do you expect?”

“Ssh! Not at all.”

“What!”

“I was mistaken.”

“Oh, Arabella, Arabella; you be a deep one! Mistaken! well, that’s clever—it’s a real stroke of genius! It is a thing I never thought o’, wi’ all my experience! I never thought beyond bringing about the real thing—not that one could sham it!”

“Don’t you be too quick to cry sham! ’Twasn’t sham. I didn’t know.”

“My word—won’t he be in a taking! He’ll give it to ’ee o’ Saturday nights! Whatever it was, he’ll say it was a trick—a double one, by the Lord!”

“I’ll own to the first, but not to the second... Pooh—he won’t care! He’ll be glad I was wrong in what I said. He’ll shake down, bless ’ee—men always do. What can ’em do otherwise? Married is married.”

Nevertheless it was with a little uneasiness that Arabella approached the time when in the natural course of things she would have to reveal that the alarm she had raised had been without foundation. The occasion was one evening at bedtime, and they were in their chamber in the lonely cottage by the wayside to which Jude walked home from his work every day. He had

worked hard the whole twelve hours, and had retired to rest before his wife. When she came into the room he was between sleeping and waking, and was barely conscious of her undressing before the little looking-glass as he lay.

One action of hers, however, brought him to full cognition. Her face being reflected towards him as she sat, he could perceive that she was amusing herself by artificially producing in each cheek the dimple before alluded to, a curious accomplishment of which she was mistress, effecting it by a momentary suction. It seemed to him for the first time that the dimples were far oftener absent from her face during his intercourse with her nowadays than they had been in the earlier weeks of their acquaintance.

“Don’t do that, Arabella!” he said suddenly. “There is no harm in it, but—I don’t like to see you.”

She turned and laughed. “Lord, I didn’t know you were awake!” she said. “How countrified you are! That’s nothing.”

“Where did you learn it?”

“Nowhere that I know of. They used to stay without any trouble when I was at the public-house; but now they won’t. My face was fatter then.”

“I don’t care about dimples. I don’t think they improve a woman—particularly a married woman, and of full-sized figure like you.”

“Most men think otherwise.”

“I don’t care what most men think, if they do. How do you know?”

“I used to be told so when I was serving in the tap-room.”

“Ah—that public-house experience accounts for your knowing about the adulteration of the ale when we went and had some that Sunday evening. I thought when I married you that you had always lived in your father’s house.”

“You ought to have known better than that, and seen I was a little more finished than I could have been by staying where I was born. There was not much to do at home, and I was eating my head off, so I went away for three months.”

“You’ll soon have plenty to do now, dear, won’t you?”

“How do you mean?”

“Why, of course—little things to make.”

“Oh.”

“When will it be? Can’t you tell me exactly, instead of in such general terms as you have used?”

“Tell you?”

“Yes—the date.”

“There’s nothing to tell. I made a mistake.”

“What?”

“It was a mistake.”

He sat bolt upright in bed and looked at her. “How can that be?”

“Women fancy wrong things sometimes.”

“But—! Why, of course, so unprepared as I was, without a stick of furniture, and hardly a shilling, I shouldn’t have hurried on our affair, and brought you to a half-furnished hut before I was ready, if it had not been for the news you gave me, which made it necessary to save you, ready or no... Good God!”

“Don’t take on, dear. What’s done can’t be undone.”

“I have no more to say!”

He gave the answer simply, and lay down; and there was silence between them.

When Jude awoke the next morning he seemed to see the world with a different eye. As to the point in question he was compelled to accept her word; in the circumstances he could not have acted otherwise while ordinary notions prevailed. But how came they to prevail?

There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a cancelling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labour, of foregoing a man’s one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation, because of a momentary surprise by a new and transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice, and could be only at the most called weakness. He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be caught in a gin which would cripple him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime? There was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that

the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained.

X

The time arrived for killing the pig which Jude and his wife had fattened in their sty during the autumn months, and the butchering was timed to take place as soon as it was light in the morning, so that Jude might get to Alfredston without losing more than a quarter of a day.

The night had seemed strangely silent. Jude looked out of the window long before dawn, and perceived that the ground was covered with snow—snow rather deep for the season, it seemed, a few flakes still falling.

“I’m afraid the pig-killer won’t be able to come,” he said to Arabella.

“Oh, he’ll come. You must get up and make the water hot, if you want Challow to scald him. Though I like singeing best.”

“I’ll get up,” said Jude. “I like the way of my own county.”

He went downstairs, lit the fire under the copper, and began feeding it with bean-stalks, all the time without a candle, the blaze flinging a cheerful shine into the room; though for him the sense of cheerfulness was lessened by thoughts on the reason of that blaze—to heat water to scald the bristles from the body of an animal that as yet lived, and whose voice could be continually heard from a corner of the garden. At half-past six, the time of appointment with the butcher, the water boiled, and Jude’s wife came downstairs.

“Is Challow come?” she asked.

“No.”

They waited, and it grew lighter, with the dreary light of a snowy dawn. She went out, gazed along the road, and returning said, “He’s not coming. Drunk last night, I expect. The snow is not enough to hinder him, surely!”

“Then we must put it off. It is only the water boiled for nothing. The snow may be deep in the valley.”

“Can’t be put off. There’s no more victuals for the pig. He ate the last mixing o’ barleymeal yesterday morning.”

“Yesterday morning? What has he lived on since?”

“Nothing.”

“What—he has been starving?”

“Yes. We always do it the last day or two, to save bother with the innerds. What ignorance, not to know that!”

“That accounts for his crying so. Poor creature!”

“Well—you must do the sticking—there’s no help for it. I’ll show you how. Or I’ll do it myself—I think I could. Though as it is such a big pig I had rather Challow had done it. However, his basket o’ knives and things have been already sent on here, and we can use ’em.”

“Of course you shan’t do it,” said Jude. “I’ll do it, since it must be done.”

He went out to the sty, shovelled away the snow for the space of a couple of yards or more, and placed the stool in front, with the knives and ropes at hand. A robin peered down at the preparations from the nearest tree, and, not liking the sinister look of the scene, flew away, though hungry. By this time Arabella had joined her husband, and Jude, rope in hand, got into the sty, and noosed the affrighted animal, who, beginning with a squeak of surprise, rose to repeated cries of rage. Arabella opened the sty-door, and together they hoisted the victim on to the stool, legs upward, and while Jude held him Arabella bound him down, looping the cord over his legs to keep him from struggling.

The animal’s note changed its quality. It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless.

“Upon my soul I would sooner have gone without the pig than have had this to do!” said Jude. “A creature I have fed with my own hands.”

“Don’t be such a tender-hearted fool! There’s the sticking-knife—the one with the point. Now whatever you do, don’t stick un too deep.”

“I’ll stick him effectually, so as to make short work of it. That’s the chief thing.”

“You must not!” she cried. “The meat must be well bled, and to do that he must die slow. We shall lose a shilling a score if the meat is red and bloody! Just touch the vein, that’s all. I was brought up to it, and I know. Every good butcher keeps un bleeding long. He ought to be eight or ten minutes dying, at least.”

“He shall not be half a minute if I can help it, however the meat may look,” said Jude determinedly. Scraping the bristles from the pig’s upturned throat, as he had seen the butchers do, he slit the fat; then plunged in the knife with all his might.

“‘Od damn it all!” she cried, “that ever I should say it! You’ve over-stuck un! And I telling you all the time—”

“Do be quiet, Arabella, and have a little pity on the creature!”

“Hold up the pail to catch the blood, and don’t talk!”

However unworkmanlike the deed, it had been mercifully done. The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal’s cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends.

“Make un stop that!” said Arabella. “Such a noise will bring somebody or other up here, and I don’t want people to know we are doing it ourselves.” Picking up the knife from the ground whereon Jude had flung it, she slipped it into the gash, and slit the windpipe. The pig was instantly silent, his dying breath coming through the hole.

“That’s better,” she said.

“It is a hateful business!” said he.

“Pigs must be killed.”

The animal heaved in a final convulsion, and, despite the rope, kicked out with all his last strength. A tablespoonful of black clot came forth, the trickling of red blood having ceased for some seconds.

“That’s it; now he’ll go,” said she. “Artful creatures—they always keep back a drop like that as long as they can!”

The last plunge had come so unexpectedly as to make Jude stagger, and in recovering himself he kicked over the vessel in which the blood had been caught.

“There!” she cried, thoroughly in a passion. “Now I can’t make any blackpot. There’s a waste, all through you!”

Jude put the pail upright, but only about a third of the whole steaming liquid was left in it, the main part being splashed over the snow, and

forming a dismal, sordid, ugly spectacle—to those who saw it as other than an ordinary obtaining of meat. The lips and nostrils of the animal turned livid, then white, and the muscles of his limbs relaxed.

“Thank God!” Jude said. “He’s dead.”

“What’s God got to do with such a messy job as a pig-killing, I should like to know!” she said scornfully. “Poor folks must live.”

“I know, I know,” said he. “I don’t scold you.”

Suddenly they became aware of a voice at hand.

“Well done, young married volk! I couldn’t have carried it out much better myself, cuss me if I could!” The voice, which was husky, came from the garden-gate, and looking up from the scene of slaughter they saw the burly form of Mr. Challow leaning over the gate, critically surveying their performance.

“’Tis well for ’ee to stand there and glane!” said Arabella. “Owing to your being late the meat is blooded and half spoiled! ’Twon’t fetch so much by a shilling a score!”

Challow expressed his contrition. “You should have waited a bit” he said, shaking his head, “and not have done this—in the delicate state, too, that you be in at present, ma’am. ’Tis risking yourself too much.”

“You needn’t be concerned about that,” said Arabella, laughing. Jude too laughed, but there was a strong flavour of bitterness in his amusement.

Challow made up for his neglect of the killing by zeal in the scalding and scraping. Jude felt dissatisfied with himself as a man at what he had done, though aware of his lack of common sense, and that the deed would have amounted to the same thing if carried out by deputy. The white snow, stained with the blood of his fellow-mortal, wore an illogical look to him as a lover of justice, not to say a Christian; but he could not see how the matter was to be mended. No doubt he was, as his wife had called him, a tender-hearted fool.

He did not like the road to Alfredston now. It stared him cynically in the face. The wayside objects reminded him so much of his courtship of his wife that, to keep them out of his eyes, he read whenever he could as he walked to and from his work. Yet he sometimes felt that by caring for books he was not escaping common-place nor gaining rare ideas, every working-man being of that taste now. When passing near the spot by the stream on

which he had first made her acquaintance he one day heard voices just as he had done at that earlier time. One of the girls who had been Arabella's companions was talking to a friend in a shed, himself being the subject of discourse, possibly because they had seen him in the distance. They were quite unaware that the shed-walls were so thin that he could hear their words as he passed.

"Howsomever, 'twas I put her up to it! 'Nothing venture nothing have,' I said. If I hadn't she'd no more have been his mis'ess than I."

"'Tis my belief she knew there was nothing the matter when she told him she was..."

What had Arabella been put up to by this woman, so that he should make her his "mis'ess," otherwise wife? The suggestion was horridly unpleasant, and it rankled in his mind so much that instead of entering his own cottage when he reached it he flung his basket inside the garden-gate and passed on, determined to go and see his old aunt and get some supper there.

This made his arrival home rather late. Arabella however, was busy melting down lard from fat of the deceased pig, for she had been out on a jaunt all day, and so delayed her work. Dreading lest what he had heard should lead him to say something regrettable to her he spoke little. But Arabella was very talkative, and said among other things that she wanted some money. Seeing the book sticking out of his pocket she added that he ought to earn more.

"An apprentice's wages are not meant to be enough to keep a wife on, as a rule, my dear."

"Then you shouldn't have had one."

"Come, Arabella! That's too bad, when you know how it came about."

"I'll declare afore Heaven that I thought what I told you was true. Doctor Vilbert thought so. It was a good job for you that it wasn't so!"

"I don't mean that," he said hastily. "I mean before that time. I know it was not your fault; but those women friends of yours gave you bad advice. If they hadn't, or you hadn't taken it, we should at this moment have been free from a bond which, not to mince matters, galls both of us devilishly. It may be very sad, but it is true."

"Who's been telling you about my friends? What advice? I insist upon you telling me."

“Pooh—I’d rather not.”

“But you shall—you ought to. It is mean of ’ee not to!”

“Very well.” And he hinted gently what had been revealed to him. “But I don’t wish to dwell upon it. Let us say no more about it.”

Her defensive manner collapsed. “That was nothing,” she said, laughing coldly. “Every woman has a right to do such as that. The risk is hers.”

“I quite deny it, Bella. She might if no lifelong penalty attached to it for the man, or, in his default, for herself; if the weakness of the moment could end with the moment, or even with the year. But when effects stretch so far she should not go and do that which entraps a man if he is honest, or herself if he is otherwise.”

“What ought I to have done?”

“Given me time... Why do you fuss yourself about melting down that pig’s fat to-night? Please put it away!”

“Then I must do it to-morrow morning. It won’t keep.”

“Very well—do.”

XI

Next morning, which was Sunday, she resumed operations about ten o'clock; and the renewed work recalled the conversation which had accompanied it the night before, and put her back into the same intractable temper.

"That's the story about me in Marygreen, is it—that I entrapped 'ee? Much of a catch you were, Lord send!" As she warmed she saw some of Jude's dear ancient classics on a table where they ought not to have been laid. "I won't have them books here in the way!" she cried petulantly; and seizing them one by one she began throwing them upon the floor.

"Leave my books alone!" he said. "You might have thrown them aside if you had liked, but as to soiling them like that, it is disgusting!" In the operation of making lard Arabella's hands had become smeared with the hot grease, and her fingers consequently left very perceptible imprints on the book-covers. She continued deliberately to toss the books severally upon the floor, till Jude, incensed beyond bearing, caught her by the arms to make her leave off. Somehow, in going so, he loosened the fastening of her hair, and it rolled about her ears.

"Let me go!" she said.

"Promise to leave the books alone."

She hesitated. "Let me go!" she repeated.

"Promise!"

After a pause: "I do."

Jude relinquished his hold, and she crossed the room to the door, out of which she went with a set face, and into the highway. Here she began to saunter up and down, perversely pulling her hair into a worse disorder than he had caused, and unfastening several buttons of her gown. It was a fine Sunday morning, dry, clear and frosty, and the bells of Alfredston Church could be heard on the breeze from the north. People were going along the road, dressed in their holiday clothes; they were mainly lovers—such pairs

as Jude and Arabella had been when they sported along the same track some months earlier. These pedestrians turned to stare at the extraordinary spectacle she now presented, bonnetless, her dishevelled hair blowing in the wind, her bodice apart, her sleeves rolled above her elbows for her work, and her hands reeking with melted fat. One of the passers said in mock terror: "Good Lord deliver us!"

"See how he's served me!" she cried. "Making me work Sunday mornings when I ought to be going to my church, and tearing my hair off my head, and my gown off my back!"

Jude was exasperated, and went out to drag her in by main force. Then he suddenly lost his heat. Illuminated with the sense that all was over between them, and that it mattered not what she did, or he, her husband stood still, regarding her. Their lives were ruined, he thought; ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a lifelong comradeship tolerable.

"Going to ill-use me on principle, as your father ill-used your mother, and your father's sister ill-used her husband?" she asked. "All you be a queer lot as husbands and wives!"

Jude fixed an arrested, surprised look on her. But she said no more, and continued her saunter till she was tired. He left the spot, and, after wandering vaguely a little while, walked in the direction of Marygreen. Here he called upon his great-aunt, whose infirmities daily increased.

"Aunt—did my father ill-use my mother, and my aunt her husband?" said Jude abruptly, sitting down by the fire.

She raised her ancient eyes under the rim of the by-gone bonnet that she always wore. "Who's been telling you that?" she said.

"I have heard it spoken of, and want to know all."

"You med so well, I s'pose; though your wife—I reckon 'twas she—must have been a fool to open up that! There isn't much to know after all. Your father and mother couldn't get on together, and they parted. It was coming home from Alfredston market, when you were a baby—on the hill by the Brown House barn—that they had their last difference, and took leave of one another for the last time. Your mother soon afterwards died—she

drowned herself, in short, and your father went away with you to South Wessex, and never came here any more.”

Jude recalled his father’s silence about North Wessex and Jude’s mother, never speaking of either till his dying day.

“It was the same with your father’s sister. Her husband offended her, and she so disliked living with him afterwards that she went away to London with her little maid. The Fawleys were not made for wedlock: it never seemed to sit well upon us. There’s sommat in our blood that won’t take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound. That’s why you ought to have hearkened to me, and not ha’ married.”

“Where did Father and Mother part—by the Brown House, did you say?”

“A little further on—where the road to Fenworth branches off, and the handpost stands. A gibbet once stood there not onconnected with our history. But let that be.”

In the dusk of that evening Jude walked away from his old aunt’s as if to go home. But as soon as he reached the open down he struck out upon it till he came to a large round pond. The frost continued, though it was not particularly sharp, and the larger stars overhead came out slow and flickering. Jude put one foot on the edge of the ice, and then the other: it cracked under his weight; but this did not deter him. He ploughed his way inward to the centre, the ice making sharp noises as he went. When just about the middle he looked around him and gave a jump. The cracking repeated itself; but he did not go down. He jumped again, but the cracking had ceased. Jude went back to the edge, and stepped upon the ground.

It was curious, he thought. What was he reserved for? He supposed he was not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide. Peaceful death abhorred him as a subject, and would not take him.

What could he do of a lower kind than self-extermination; what was there less noble, more in keeping with his present degraded position? He could get drunk. Of course that was it; he had forgotten. Drinking was the regular, stereotyped resource of the despairing worthless. He began to see now why some men boozed at inns. He struck down the hill northwards and came to an obscure public-house. On entering and sitting down the sight of the picture of Samson and Delilah on the wall caused him to recognize the

place as that he had visited with Arabella on that first Sunday evening of their courtship. He called for liquor and drank briskly for an hour or more.

Staggering homeward late that night, with all his sense of depression gone, and his head fairly clear still, he began to laugh boisterously, and to wonder how Arabella would receive him in his new aspect. The house was in darkness when he entered, and in his stumbling state it was some time before he could get a light. Then he found that, though the marks of pig-dressing, of fats and scallops, were visible, the materials themselves had been taken away. A line written by his wife on the inside of an old envelope was pinned to the cotton blower of the fireplace:

“Have gone to my friends. Shall not return.”

All the next day he remained at home, and sent off the carcass of the pig to Alfredston. He then cleaned up the premises, locked the door, put the key in a place she would know if she came back, and returned to his masonry at Alfredston.

At night when he again plodded home he found she had not visited the house. The next day went in the same way, and the next. Then there came a letter from her.

That she had gone tired of him she frankly admitted. He was such a slow old coach, and she did not care for the sort of life he led. There was no prospect of his ever bettering himself or her. She further went on to say that her parents had, as he knew, for some time considered the question of emigrating to Australia, the pig-jobbing business being a poor one nowadays. They had at last decided to go, and she proposed to go with them, if he had no objection. A woman of her sort would have more chance over there than in this stupid country.

Jude replied that he had not the least objection to her going. He thought it a wise course, since she wished to go, and one that might be to the advantage of both. He enclosed in the packet containing the letter the money that had been realized by the sale of the pig, with all he had besides, which was not much.

From that day he heard no more of her except indirectly, though her father and his household did not immediately leave, but waited till his goods and other effects had been sold off. When Jude learnt that there was to be an auction at the house of the Donns he packed his own household

goods into a waggon, and sent them to her at the aforesaid homestead, that she might sell them with the rest, or as many of them as she should choose.

He then went into lodgings at Alfredston, and saw in a shopwindow the little handbill announcing the sale of his father-in-law's furniture. He noted its date, which came and passed without Jude's going near the place, or perceiving that the traffic out of Alfredston by the southern road was materially increased by the auction. A few days later he entered a dingy broker's shop in the main street of the town, and amid a heterogeneous collection of saucepans, a clothes-horse, rolling-pin, brass candlestick, swing looking-glass, and other things at the back of the shop, evidently just brought in from a sale, he perceived a framed photograph, which turned out to be his own portrait.

It was one which he had had specially taken and framed by a local man in bird's-eye maple, as a present for Arabella, and had duly given her on their wedding-day. On the back was still to be read, "*Jude to Arabella*," with the date. She must have thrown it in with the rest of her property at the auction.

"Oh," said the broker, seeing him look at this and the other articles in the heap, and not perceiving that the portrait was of himself, "It is a small lot of stuff that was knocked down to me at a cottage sale out on the road to Marygreen. The frame is a very useful one, if you take out the likeness. You shall have it for a shilling."

The utter death of every tender sentiment in his wife, as brought home to him by this mute and undesigned evidence of her sale of his portrait and gift, was the conclusive little stroke required to demolish all sentiment in him. He paid the shilling, took the photograph away with him, and burnt it, frame and all, when he reached his lodging.

Two or three days later he heard that Arabella and her parents had departed. He had sent a message offering to see her for a formal leave-taking, but she had said that it would be better otherwise, since she was bent on going, which perhaps was true. On the evening following their emigration, when his day's work was done, he came out of doors after supper, and strolled in the starlight along the too familiar road towards the upland whereon had been experienced the chief emotions of his life. It seemed to be his own again.

He could not realize himself. On the old track he seemed to be a boy still, hardly a day older than when he had stood dreaming at the top of that hill,

inwardly fired for the first time with ardours for Christminster and scholarship. "Yet I am a man," he said. "I have a wife. More, I have arrived at the still riper stage of having disagreed with her, disliked her, had a scuffle with her, and parted from her."

He remembered then that he was standing not far from the spot at which the parting between his father and his mother was said to have occurred.

A little further on was the summit whence Christminster, or what he had taken for that city, had seemed to be visible. A milestone, now as always, stood at the roadside hard by. Jude drew near it, and felt rather than read the mileage to the city. He remembered that once on his way home he had proudly cut with his keen new chisel an inscription on the back of that milestone, embodying his aspirations. It had been done in the first week of his apprenticeship, before he had been diverted from his purposes by an unsuitable woman. He wondered if the inscription were legible still, and going to the back of the milestone brushed away the nettles. By the light of a match he could still discern what he had cut so enthusiastically so long ago:

THITHER
J. F.



The sight of it, unimpaired, within its screen of grass and nettles, lit in his soul a spark of the old fire. Surely his plan should be to move onward through good and ill—to avoid morbid sorrow even though he did see uglinesses in the world? *Bene agere et lætari*—to do good cheerfully—which he had heard to be the philosophy of one Spinoza, might be his own even now.

He might battle with his evil star, and follow out his original intention.

By moving to a spot a little way off he uncovered the horizon in a north-easterly direction. There actually rose the faint halo, a small dim nebulosity, hardly recognizable save by the eye of faith. It was enough for him. He would go to Christminster as soon as the term of his apprenticeship expired.

He returned to his lodgings in a better mood, and said his prayers.

Part Second
AT CHRISTMINSTER

“Save his own soul he hath no star.”—SWINBURNE.

*“Notitiam primosque gradus vicinia fecit;
Tempore crevit amor.”*—OVID.

I

The next noteworthy move in Jude's life was that in which he appeared gliding steadily onward through a dusky landscape of some three years' later leafage than had graced his courtship of Arabella, and the disruption of his coarse conjugal life with her. He was walking towards Christminster City, at a point a mile or two to the south-west of it.

He had at last found himself clear of Marygreen and Alfredston: he was out of his apprenticeship, and with his tools at his back seemed to be in the way of making a new start—the start to which, barring the interruption involved in his intimacy and married experience with Arabella, he had been looking forward for about ten years.

Jude would now have been described as a young man with a forcible, meditative, and earnest rather than handsome cast of countenance. He was of dark complexion, with dark harmonizing eyes, and he wore a closely trimmed black beard of more advanced growth than is usual at his age; this, with his great mass of black curly hair, was some trouble to him in combing and washing out the stone-dust that settled on it in the pursuit of his trade. His capabilities in the latter, having been acquired in the country, were of an all-round sort, including monumental stone-cutting, gothic free-stone work for the restoration of churches, and carving of a general kind. In London he would probably have become specialized and have made himself a "moulding mason," a "foliage sculptor"—perhaps a "statuary."

He had that afternoon driven in a cart from Alfredston to the village nearest the city in this direction, and was now walking the remaining four miles rather from choice than from necessity, having always fancied himself arriving thus.

The ultimate impulse to come had had a curious origin—one more nearly related to the emotional side of him than to the intellectual, as is often the case with young men. One day while in lodgings at Alfredston he had gone to Marygreen to see his old aunt, and had observed between the brass

candlesticks on her mantelpiece the photograph of a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo. He had asked who she was. His grand-aunt had gruffly replied that she was his cousin Sue Bridehead, of the inimical branch of the family; and on further questioning the old woman had replied that the girl lived in Christminster, though she did not know where, or what she was doing.

His aunt would not give him the photograph. But it haunted him; and ultimately formed a quickening ingredient in his latent intent of following his friend the school master thither.

He now paused at the top of a crooked and gentle declivity, and obtained his first near view of the city. Grey-stoned and dun-roofed, it stood within hail of the Wessex border, and almost with the tip of one small toe within it, at the northernmost point of the crinkled line along which the leisurely Thames strokes the fields of that ancient kingdom. The buildings now lay quiet in the sunset, a vane here and there on their many spires and domes giving sparkle to a picture of sober secondary and tertiary hues.

Reaching the bottom he moved along the level way between pollard willows growing indistinct in the twilight, and soon confronted the outmost lamps of the town—some of those lamps which had sent into the sky the gleam and glory that caught his strained gaze in his days of dreaming, so many years ago. They winked their yellow eyes at him dubiously, and as if, though they had been awaiting him all these years in disappointment at his tarrying, they did not much want him now.

He was a species of Dick Whittington whose spirit was touched to finer issues than a mere material gain. He went along the outlying streets with the cautious tread of an explorer. He saw nothing of the real city in the suburbs on this side. His first want being a lodging he scrutinized carefully such localities as seemed to offer on inexpensive terms the modest type of accommodation he demanded; and after inquiry took a room in a suburb nicknamed “Beersheba,” though he did not know this at the time. Here he installed himself, and having had some tea sallied forth.

It was a windy, whispering, moonless night. To guide himself he opened under a lamp a map he had brought. The breeze ruffled and fluttered it, but he could see enough to decide on the direction he should take to reach the heart of the place.

After many turnings he came up to the first ancient mediæval pile that he had encountered. It was a college, as he could see by the gateway. He entered it, walked round, and penetrated to dark corners which no lamplight reached. Close to this college was another; and a little further on another; and then he began to be encircled as it were with the breath and sentiment of the venerable city. When he passed objects out of harmony with its general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them.

A bell began clanging, and he listened till a hundred-and-one strokes had sounded. He must have made a mistake, he thought: it was meant for a hundred.

When the gates were shut, and he could no longer get into the quadrangles, he rambled under the walls and doorways, feeling with his fingers the contours of their mouldings and carving. The minutes passed, fewer and fewer people were visible, and still he serpented among the shadows, for had he not imagined these scenes through ten bygone years, and what mattered a night's rest for once? High against the black sky the flash of a lamp would show crocketed pinnacles and indented battlements. Down obscure alleys, apparently never trodden now by the foot of man, and whose very existence seemed to be forgotten, there would jut into the path porticoes, oriels, doorways of enriched and florid middle-age design, their extinct air being accentuated by the rottenness of the stones. It seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers.

Knowing not a human being here, Jude began to be impressed with the isolation of his own personality, as with a self-spectre, the sensation being that of one who walked but could not make himself seen or heard. He drew his breath pensively, and, seeming thus almost his own ghost, gave his thoughts to the other ghostly presences with which the nooks were haunted.

During the interval of preparation for this venture, since his wife and furniture's uncompromising disappearance into space, he had read and learnt almost all that could be read and learnt by one in his position, of the worthies who had spent their youth within these reverend walls, and whose souls had haunted them in their maturer age. Some of them, by the accidents of his reading, loomed out in his fancy disproportionately large by comparison with the rest. The brushings of the wind against the angles,

buttresses, and door-jambs were as the passing of these only other inhabitants, the tappings of each ivy leaf on its neighbour were as the mutterings of their mournful souls, the shadows as their thin shapes in nervous movement, making him comrades in his solitude. In the gloom it was as if he ran against them without feeling their bodily frames.

The streets were now deserted, but on account of these things he could not go in. There were poets abroad, of early date and of late, from the friend and eulogist of Shakespeare down to him who has recently passed into silence, and that musical one of the tribe who is still among us. Speculative philosophers drew along, not always with wrinkled foreheads and hoary hair as in framed portraits, but pink-faced, slim, and active as in youth; modern divines sheeted in their surplices, among whom the most real to Jude Fawley were the founders of the religious school called Tractarian; the well-known three, the enthusiast, the poet, and the formularist, the echoes of whose teachings had influenced him even in his obscure home. A start of aversion appeared in his fancy to move them at sight of those other sons of the place, the form in the full-bottomed wig, statesman, rake, reasoner, and sceptic; the smoothly shaven historian so ironically civil to Christianity; with others of the same incredulous temper, who knew each quad as well as the faithful, and took equal freedom in haunting its cloisters.

He regarded the statesmen in their various types, men of firmer movement and less dreamy air; the scholar, the speaker, the plodder; the man whose mind grew with his growth in years, and the man whose mind contracted with the same.

The scientists and philologists followed on in his mind-sight in an odd impossible combination, men of meditative faces, strained foreheads, and weak-eyed as bats with constant research; then official characters—such men as governor-generals and lord-lieutenants, in whom he took little interest; chief-justices and lord chancellors, silent thin-lipped figures of whom he knew barely the names. A keener regard attached to the prelates, by reason of his own former hopes. Of them he had an ample band—some men of heart, others rather men of head; he who apologized for the Church in Latin; the saintly author of the Evening Hymn; and near them the great itinerant preacher, hymn-writer, and zealot, shadowed like Jude by his matrimonial difficulties.

Jude found himself speaking out loud, holding conversations with them as it were, like an actor in a melodrama who apostrophizes the audience on the other side of the footlights; till he suddenly ceased with a start at his absurdity. Perhaps those incoherent words of the wanderer were heard within the walls by some student or thinker over his lamp; and he may have raised his head, and wondered what voice it was, and what it betokened. Jude now perceived that, so far as solid flesh went, he had the whole aged city to himself with the exception of a belated townsman here and there, and that he seemed to be catching a cold.

A voice reached him out of the shade; a real and local voice:

“You’ve been a-settin’ a long time on that plinth-stone, young man. What med you be up to?”

It came from a policeman who had been observing Jude without the latter observing him.

Jude went home and to bed, after reading up a little about these men and their several messages to the world from a book or two that he had brought with him concerning the sons of the university. As he drew towards sleep various memorable words of theirs that he had just been conning seemed spoken by them in muttering utterances; some audible, some unintelligible to him. One of the spectres (who afterwards mourned Christminster as “the home of lost causes,” though Jude did not remember this) was now apostrophizing her thus:

“Beautiful city! so venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene! ... Her ineffable charm keeps ever calling us to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection.”

Another voice was that of the Corn Law convert, whose phantom he had just seen in the quadrangle with a great bell. Jude thought his soul might have been shaping the historic words of his master-speech:

“Sir, I may be wrong, but my impression is that my duty towards a country threatened with famine requires that that which has been the ordinary remedy under all similar circumstances should be resorted to now, namely, that there should be free access to the food of man from whatever quarter it may come... Deprive me of office to-morrow, you can never deprive me of the consciousness that I have exercised the powers committed to me from no corrupt or interested motives, from no desire to gratify ambition, for no personal gain.”

Then the sly author of the immortal Chapter on Christianity: “How shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences [miracles] which were presented by Omnipotence? ... The sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world.”

Then the shade of the poet, the last of the optimists:

How the world is made for each of us!

* * * * *

And each of the Many helps to recruit
The life of the race by a general plan.

Then one of the three enthusiasts he had seen just now, the author of the *Apologia*:

“My argument was ... that absolute certitude as to the truths of natural theology was the result of an assemblage of concurring and converging probabilities ... that probabilities which did not reach to logical certainty might create a mental certitude.”

The second of them, no polemic, murmured quieter things:

Why should we faint, and fear to live alone,
Since all alone, so Heaven has will'd, we die?

He likewise heard some phrases spoken by the phantom with the short face, the genial Spectator:

“When I look upon the tombs of the great, every motion of envy dies in me; when I read the epitaphs of the beautiful, every inordinate desire goes out; when I meet with the grief of parents upon a tombstone, my heart melts with compassion; when I see the tombs of the parents themselves, I consider the vanity of grieving for those whom we must quickly follow.”

And lastly a gentle-voiced prelate spoke, during whose meek, familiar rhyme, endeared to him from earliest childhood, Jude fell asleep:

Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed.
Teach me to die...

He did not wake till morning. The ghostly past seemed to have gone, and everything spoke of to-day. He started up in bed, thinking he had overslept himself and then said:

“By Jove—I had quite forgotten my sweet-faced cousin, and that she’s here all the time! ... and my old schoolmaster, too.” His words about his schoolmaster had, perhaps, less zest in them than his words concerning his cousin.

II

Necessary meditations on the actual, including the mean bread-and-cheese question, dissipated the phantasmal for a while, and compelled Jude to smother high thinkings under immediate needs. He had to get up, and seek for work, manual work; the only kind deemed by many of its professors to be work at all.

Passing out into the streets on this errand he found that the colleges had treacherously changed their sympathetic countenances: some were pompous; some had put on the look of family vaults above ground; something barbaric loomed in the masonries of all. The spirits of the great men had disappeared.

The numberless architectural pages around him he read, naturally, less as an artist-critic of their forms than as an artizan and comrade of the dead handicraftsmen whose muscles had actually executed those forms. He examined the mouldings, stroked them as one who knew their beginning, said they were difficult or easy in the working, had taken little or much time, were trying to the arm, or convenient to the tool.

What at night had been perfect and ideal was by day the more or less defective real. Cruelties, insults, had, he perceived, been inflicted on the aged erections. The condition of several moved him as he would have been moved by maimed sentient beings. They were wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shape in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man.

The rottenness of these historical documents reminded him that he was not, after all, hastening on to begin the morning practically as he had intended. He had come to work, and to live by work, and the morning had nearly gone. It was, in one sense, encouraging to think that in a place of crumbling stones there must be plenty for one of his trade to do in the business of renovation. He asked his way to the workyard of the stonemason whose name had been given him at Alfredston; and soon heard the familiar sound of the rubbers and chisels.

The yard was a little centre of regeneration. Here, with keen edges and smooth curves, were forms in the exact likeness of those he had seen abraded and time-eaten on the walls. These were the ideas in modern prose which the lichened colleges presented in old poetry. Even some of those antiques might have been called prose when they were new. They had done nothing but wait, and had become poetical. How easy to the smallest building; how impossible to most men.

He asked for the foreman, and looked round among the new traceries, mullions, transoms, shafts, pinnacles, and battlements standing on the bankers half worked, or waiting to be removed. They were marked by precision, mathematical straightness, smoothness, exactitude: there in the old walls were the broken lines of the original idea; jagged curves, disdain of precision, irregularity, disarray.

For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges. But he lost it under stress of his old idea. He would accept any employment which might be offered him on the strength of his late employer's recommendation; but he would accept it as a provisional thing only. This was his form of the modern vice of unrest.

Moreover he perceived that at best only copying, patching and imitating went on here; which he fancied to be owing to some temporary and local cause. He did not at that time see that mediævalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal; that other developments were shaping in the world around him, in which Gothic architecture and its associations had no place. The deadly animosity of contemporary logic and vision towards so much of what he held in reverence was not yet revealed to him.

Having failed to obtain work here as yet he went away, and thought again of his cousin, whose presence somewhere at hand he seemed to feel in wavelets of interest, if not of emotion. How he wished he had that pretty portrait of her! At last he wrote to his aunt to send it. She did so, with a request, however, that he was not to bring disturbance into the family by going to see the girl or her relations. Jude, a ridiculously affectionate fellow, promised nothing, put the photograph on the mantel-piece, kissed it—he did not know why—and felt more at home. She seemed to look down and

preside over his tea. It was cheering—the one thing uniting him to the emotions of the living city.

There remained the schoolmaster—probably now a reverend parson. But he could not possibly hunt up such a respectable man just yet; so raw and unpolished was his condition, so precarious were his fortunes. Thus he still remained in loneliness. Although people moved round him he virtually saw none. Not as yet having mingled with the active life of the place it was largely non-existent to him. But the saints and prophets in the window-tracery, the paintings in the galleries, the statues, the busts, the gargoyles, the corbel-heads—these seemed to breathe his atmosphere. Like all newcomers to a spot on which the past is deeply graven he heard that past announcing itself with an emphasis altogether unsuspected by, and even incredible to, the habitual residents.

For many days he haunted the cloisters and quadrangles of the colleges at odd minutes in passing them, surprised by impish echoes of his own footsteps, smart as the blows of a mallet. The Christminster “sentiment,” as it had been called, ate further and further into him; till he probably knew more about those buildings materially, artistically, and historically, than any one of their inmates.

It was not till now, when he found himself actually on the spot of his enthusiasm, that Jude perceived how far away from the object of that enthusiasm he really was. Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life; men who had nothing to do from morning till night but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Only a wall—but what a wall!

Every day, every hour, as he went in search of labour, he saw them going and coming also, rubbed shoulders with them, heard their voices, marked their movements. The conversation of some of the more thoughtful among them seemed oftentimes, owing to his long and persistent preparation for this place, to be peculiarly akin to his own thoughts. Yet he was as far from them as if he had been at the antipodes. Of course he was. He was a young workman in a white blouse, and with stone-dust in the creases of his clothes; and in passing him they did not even see him, or hear him, rather saw through him as through a pane of glass at their familiars beyond. Whatever they were to him, he to them was not on the spot at all; and yet he had fancied he would be close to their lives by coming there.

But the future lay ahead after all; and if he could only be so fortunate as to get into good employment he would put up with the inevitable. So he thanked God for his health and strength, and took courage. For the present he was outside the gates of everything, colleges included: perhaps some day he would be inside. Those palaces of light and leading; he might some day look down on the world through their panes.

At length he did receive a message from the stone-mason's yard—that a job was waiting for him. It was his first encouragement, and he closed with the offer promptly.

He was young and strong, or he never could have executed with such zest the undertakings to which he now applied himself, since they involved reading most of the night after working all the day. First he bought a shaded lamp for four and six-pence, and obtained a good light. Then he got pens, paper, and such other necessary books as he had been unable to obtain elsewhere. Then, to the consternation of his landlady, he shifted all the furniture of his room—a single one for living and sleeping—rigged up a curtain on a rope across the middle, to make a double chamber out of one, hung up a thick blind that nobody should know how he was curtailing the hours of sleep, laid out his books, and sat down.

Having been deeply encumbered by marrying, getting a cottage, and buying the furniture which had disappeared in the wake of his wife, he had never been able to save any money since the time of those disastrous ventures, and till his wages began to come in he was obliged to live in the narrowest way. After buying a book or two he could not even afford himself a fire; and when the nights reeked with the raw and cold air from the Meadows he sat over his lamp in a great-coat, hat, and woollen gloves.

From his window he could perceive the spire of the cathedral, and the ogee dome under which resounded the great bell of the city. The tall tower, tall belfry windows, and tall pinnacles of the college by the bridge he could also get a glimpse of by going to the staircase. These objects he used as stimulants when his faith in the future was dim.

Like enthusiasts in general he made no inquiries into details of procedure. Picking up general notions from casual acquaintance, he never dwelt upon them. For the present, he said to himself, the one thing necessary was to get ready by accumulating money and knowledge, and await whatever chances were afforded to such an one of becoming a son of

the University. "For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." His desire absorbed him, and left no part of him to weigh its practicability.

At this time he received a nervously anxious letter from his poor old aunt, on the subject which had previously distressed her—a fear that Jude would not be strong-minded enough to keep away from his cousin Sue Bridehead and her relations. Sue's father, his aunt believed, had gone back to London, but the girl remained at Christminster. To make her still more objectionable, she was an artist or designer of some sort in what was called an ecclesiastical warehouse, which was a perfect seed-bed of idolatry, and she was no doubt abandoned to mummeries on that account—if not quite a Papist. (Miss Drusilla Fawley was of her date, Evangelical.)

As Jude was rather on an intellectual track than a theological, this news of Sue's probable opinions did not much influence him one way or the other, but the clue to her whereabouts was decidedly interesting. With an altogether singular pleasure he walked at his earliest spare minutes past the shops answering to his great-aunt's description; and beheld in one of them a young girl sitting behind a desk, who was suspiciously like the original of the portrait. He ventured to enter on a trivial errand, and having made his purchase lingered on the scene. The shop seemed to be kept entirely by women. It contained Anglican books, stationery, texts, and fancy goods: little plaster angels on brackets, Gothic-framed pictures of saints, ebony crosses that were almost crucifixes, prayer-books that were almost missals. He felt very shy of looking at the girl in the desk; she was so pretty that he could not believe it possible that she should belong to him. Then she spoke to one of the two older women behind the counter; and he recognized in the accents certain qualities of his own voice; softened and sweetened, but his own. What was she doing? He stole a glance round. Before her lay a piece of zinc, cut to the shape of a scroll three or four feet long, and coated with a dead-surface paint on one side. Hereon she was designing or illuminating, in characters of Church text, the single word

A L L E L U J A

“A sweet, saintly, Christian business, hers!” thought he.

Her presence here was now fairly enough explained, her skill in work of this sort having no doubt been acquired from her father’s occupation as an ecclesiastical worker in metal. The lettering on which she was engaged was clearly intended to be fixed up in some chancel to assist devotion.

He came out. It would have been easy to speak to her there and then, but it seemed scarcely honourable towards his aunt to disregard her request so incontinently. She had used him roughly, but she had brought him up: and the fact of her being powerless to control him lent a pathetic force to a wish that would have been inoperative as an argument.

So Jude gave no sign. He would not call upon Sue just yet. He had other reasons against doing so when he had walked away. She seemed so dainty beside himself in his rough working-jacket and dusty trousers that he felt he was as yet unready to encounter her, as he had felt about Mr. Phillotson. And how possible it was that she had inherited the antipathies of her family, and would scorn him, as far as a Christian could, particularly when he had told her that unpleasant part of his history which had resulted in his becoming enchained to one of her own sex whom she would certainly not admire.

Thus he kept watch over her, and liked to feel she was there. The consciousness of her living presence stimulated him. But she remained more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams.

Between two and three weeks afterwards Jude was engaged with some more men, outside Crozier College in Old-time Street, in getting a block of worked freestone from a waggon across the pavement, before hoisting it to the parapet which they were repairing. Standing in position the head man said, “Spaik when he heave! He-ho!” And they heaved.

All of a sudden, as he lifted, his cousin stood close to his elbow, pausing a moment on the bend of her foot till the obstructing object should have been removed. She looked right into his face with liquid, untranslatable eyes, that combined, or seemed to him to combine, keenness with tenderness, and mystery with both, their expression, as well as that of her lips, taking its life from some words just spoken to a companion, and being carried on into his face quite unconsciously. She no more observed his

presence than that of the dust-motes which his manipulations raised into the sunbeams.

His closeness to her was so suggestive that he trembled, and turned his face away with a shy instinct to prevent her recognizing him, though as she had never once seen him she could not possibly do so; and might very well never have heard even his name. He could perceive that though she was a country-girl at bottom, a latter girlhood of some years in London, and a womanhood here, had taken all rawness out of her.

When she was gone he continued his work, reflecting on her. He had been so caught by her influence that he had taken no count of her general mould and build. He remembered now that she was not a large figure, that she was light and slight, of the type dubbed elegant. That was about all he had seen. There was nothing statuesque in her; all was nervous motion. She was mobile, living, yet a painter might not have called her handsome or beautiful. But the much that she was surprised him. She was quite a long way removed from the rusticity that was his. How could one of his cross-grained, unfortunate, almost accursed stock, have contrived to reach this pitch of niceness? London had done it, he supposed.

From this moment the emotion which had been accumulating in his breast as the bottled-up effect of solitude and the poetized locality he dwelt in, insensibly began to precipitate itself on this half-visionary form; and he perceived that, whatever his obedient wish in a contrary direction, he would soon be unable to resist the desire to make himself known to her.

He affected to think of her quite in a family way, since there were crushing reasons why he should not and could not think of her in any other.

The first reason was that he was married, and it would be wrong. The second was that they were cousins. It was not well for cousins to fall in love even when circumstances seemed to favour the passion. The third: even were he free, in a family like his own where marriage usually meant a tragic sadness, marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and a tragic sadness might be intensified to a tragic horror.

Therefore, again, he would have to think of Sue with only a relation's mutual interest in one belonging to him; regard her in a practical way as some one to be proud of; to talk and nod to; later on, to be invited to tea by, the emotion spent on her being rigorously that of a kinsman and well-

wisher. So would she be to him a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend.

III

But under the various deterrent influences Jude's instinct was to approach her timidly, and the next Sunday he went to the morning service in the Cathedral church of Cardinal College to gain a further view of her, for he had found that she frequently attended there.

She did not come, and he awaited her in the afternoon, which was finer. He knew that if she came at all she would approach the building along the eastern side of the great green quadrangle from which it was accessible, and he stood in a corner while the bell was going. A few minutes before the hour for service she appeared as one of the figures walking along under the college walls, and at sight of her he advanced up the side opposite, and followed her into the building, more than ever glad that he had not as yet revealed himself. To see her, and to be himself unseen and unknown, was enough for him at present.

He lingered awhile in the vestibule, and the service was some way advanced when he was put into a seat. It was a louring, mournful, still afternoon, when a religion of some sort seems a necessity to ordinary practical men, and not only a luxury of the emotional and leisured classes. In the dim light and the baffling glare of the clerestory windows he could discern the opposite worshippers indistinctly only, but he saw that Sue was among them. He had not long discovered the exact seat that she occupied when the chanting of the 119th Psalm in which the choir was engaged reached its second part, *In quo corriget*, the organ changing to a pathetic Gregorian tune as the singers gave forth:

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?

It was the very question that was engaging Jude's attention at this moment. What a wicked worthless fellow he had been to give vent as he had done to an animal passion for a woman, and allow it to lead to such disastrous consequences; then to think of putting an end to himself; then to

go recklessly and get drunk. The great waves of pedal music tumbled round the choir, and, nursed on the supernatural as he had been, it is not wonderful that he could hardly believe that the psalm was not specially set by some regardful Providence for this moment of his first entry into the solemn building. And yet it was the ordinary psalm for the twenty-fourth evening of the month.

The girl for whom he was beginning to nourish an extraordinary tenderness was at this time ensphered by the same harmonies as those which floated into his ears; and the thought was a delight to him. She was probably a frequenter of this place, and, steeped body and soul in church sentiment as she must be by occupation and habit, had, no doubt, much in common with him. To an impressionable and lonely young man the consciousness of having at last found anchorage for his thoughts, which promised to supply both social and spiritual possibilities, was like the dew of Hermon, and he remained throughout the service in a sustaining atmosphere of ecstasy.

Though he was loth to suspect it, some people might have said to him that the atmosphere blew as distinctly from Cyprus as from Galilee.

Jude waited till she had left her seat and passed under the screen before he himself moved. She did not look towards him, and by the time he reached the door she was half-way down the broad path. Being dressed up in his Sunday suit he was inclined to follow her and reveal himself. But he was not quite ready; and, alas, ought he to do so with the kind of feeling that was awakening in him?

For though it had seemed to have an ecclesiastical basis during the service, and he had persuaded himself that such was the case, he could not altogether be blind to the real nature of the magnetism. She was such a stranger that the kinship was affectation, and he said, "It can't be! I, a man with a wife, must not know her!" Still Sue *was* his own kin, and the fact of his having a wife, even though she was not in evidence in this hemisphere, might be a help in one sense. It would put all thought of a tender wish on his part out of Sue's mind, and make her intercourse with him free and fearless. It was with some heartache that he saw how little he cared for the freedom and fearlessness that would result in her from such knowledge.

Some little time before the date of this service in the cathedral the pretty, liquid-eyed, light-footed young woman, Sue Bridehead, had an afternoon's

holiday, and leaving the ecclesiastical establishment in which she not only assisted but lodged, took a walk into the country with a book in her hand. It was one of those cloudless days which sometimes occur in Wessex and elsewhere between days of cold and wet, as if intercalated by caprice of the weather-god. She went along for a mile or two until she came to much higher ground than that of the city she had left behind her. The road passed between green fields, and coming to a stile Sue paused there, to finish the page she was reading, and then looked back at the towers and domes and pinnacles new and old.

On the other side of the stile, in the footpath, she beheld a foreigner with black hair and a sallow face, sitting on the grass beside a large square board whereon were fixed, as closely as they could stand, a number of plaster statuettes, some of them bronzed, which he was re-arranging before proceeding with them on his way. They were in the main reduced copies of ancient marbles, and comprised divinities of a very different character from those the girl was accustomed to see portrayed, among them being a Venus of standard pattern, a Diana, and, of the other sex, Apollo, Bacchus, and Mars. Though the figures were many yards away from her the south-west sun brought them out so brilliantly against the green herbage that she could discern their contours with luminous distinctness; and being almost in a line between herself and the church towers of the city they awoke in her an oddly foreign and contrasting set of ideas by comparison. The man rose, and, seeing her, politely took off his cap, and cried, "I-i-i-mages!" in an accent that agreed with his appearance. In a moment he dexterously lifted upon his knee the great board with its assembled notabilities divine and human, and raised it to the top of his head, bringing them on to her and resting the board on the stile. First he offered her his smaller wares—the busts of kings and queens, then a minstrel, then a winged Cupid. She shook her head.

"How much are these two?" she said, touching with her finger the Venus and the Apollo—the largest figures on the tray.

He said she should have them for ten shillings.

"I cannot afford that," said Sue. She offered considerably less, and to her surprise the image-man drew them from their wire stay and handed them over the stile. She clasped them as treasures.

When they were paid for, and the man had gone, she began to be concerned as to what she should do with them. They seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked. Being of a nervous temperament she trembled at her enterprise. When she handled them the white pipeclay came off on her gloves and jacket. After carrying them along a little way openly an idea came to her, and, pulling some huge burdock leaves, parsley, and other rank growths from the hedge, she wrapped up her burden as well as she could in these, so that what she carried appeared to be an enormous armful of green stuff gathered by a zealous lover of nature.

“Well, anything is better than those everlasting church fallals!” she said. But she was still in a trembling state, and seemed almost to wish she had not bought the figures.

Occasionally peeping inside the leaves to see that Venus’s arm was not broken, she entered with her heathen load into the most Christian city in the country by an obscure street running parallel to the main one, and round a corner to the side door of the establishment to which she was attached. Her purchases were taken straight up to her own chamber, and she at once attempted to lock them in a box that was her very own property; but finding them too cumbersome she wrapped them in large sheets of brown paper, and stood them on the floor in a corner.

The mistress of the house, Miss Fontover, was an elderly lady in spectacles, dressed almost like an abbess; a dab at Ritual, as become one of her business, and a worshipper at the ceremonial church of St. Silas, in the suburb of Beersheba before-mentioned, which Jude also had begun to attend. She was the daughter of a clergyman in reduced circumstances, and at his death, which had occurred several years before this date, she boldly avoided penury by taking over a little shop of church requisites and developing it to its present creditable proportions. She wore a cross and beads round her neck as her only ornament, and knew the Christian Year by heart.

She now came to call Sue to tea, and, finding that the girl did not respond for a moment, entered the room just as the other was hastily putting a string round each parcel.

“Something you have been buying, Miss Bridehead?” she asked, regarding the enwrapped objects.

“Yes—just something to ornament my room,” said Sue.

“Well, I should have thought I had put enough here already,” said Miss Fontover, looking round at the Gothic-framed prints of saints, the Church-text scrolls, and other articles which, having become too stale to sell, had been used to furnish this obscure chamber. “What is it? How bulky!” She tore a little hole, about as big as a wafer, in the brown paper, and tried to peep in. “Why, statuary? Two figures? Where did you get them?”

“Oh—I bought them of a travelling man who sells casts—”

“Two saints?”

“Yes.”

“What ones?”

“St. Peter and St.—St. Mary Magdalen.”

“Well—now come down to tea, and go and finish that organ-text, if there’s light enough afterwards.”

These little obstacles to the indulgence of what had been the merest passing fancy created in Sue a great zest for unpacking her objects and looking at them; and at bedtime, when she was sure of being undisturbed, she unrobed the divinities in comfort. Placing the pair of figures on the chest of drawers, a candle on each side of them, she withdrew to the bed, flung herself down thereon, and began reading a book she had taken from her box, which Miss Fontover knew nothing of. It was a volume of Gibbon, and she read the chapter dealing with the reign of Julian the Apostate. Occasionally she looked up at the statuettes, which appeared strange and out of place, there happening to be a Calvary print hanging between them, and, as if the scene suggested the action, she at length jumped up and withdrew another book from her box—a volume of verse—and turned to the familiar poem—

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean:
The world has grown grey from thy breath!

which she read to the end. Presently she put out the candles, undressed, and finally extinguished her own light.

She was of an age which usually sleeps soundly, yet to-night she kept waking up, and every time she opened her eyes there was enough diffused

light from the street to show her the white plaster figures, standing on the chest of drawers in odd contrast to their environment of text and martyr, and the Gothic-framed Crucifix-picture that was only discernible now as a Latin cross, the figure thereon being obscured by the shades.

On one of these occasions the church clocks struck some small hour. It fell upon the ears of another person who sat bending over his books at a not very distant spot in the same city. Being Saturday night the morrow was one on which Jude had not set his alarm-clock to call him at his usually early time, and hence he had stayed up, as was his custom, two or three hours later than he could afford to do on any other day of the week. Just then he was earnestly reading from his Griesbach's text. At the very time that Sue was tossing and staring at her figures, the policeman and belated citizens passing along under his window might have heard, if they had stood still, strange syllables mumbled with fervour within—words that had for Jude an indescribable enchantment: inexplicable sounds something like these:—

“All hemin heis Theos ho Pater, ex hou ta panta, kai hemeis eis auton.”

Till the sounds rolled with reverent loudness, as a book was heard to close:—

“Kai heis Kurios Iesous Christos, di hou ta panta kai hemeis di autou!”

IV

He was a handy man at his trade, an all-round man, as artizans in country-towns are apt to be. In London the man who carves the boss or knob of leafage declines to cut the fragment of moulding which merges in that leafage, as if it were a degradation to do the second half of one whole. When there was not much Gothic moulding for Jude to run, or much window-tracery on the bankers, he would go out lettering monuments or tombstones, and take a pleasure in the change of handiwork.

The next time that he saw her was when he was on a ladder executing a job of this sort inside one of the churches. There was a short morning service, and when the parson entered Jude came down from his ladder, and sat with the half-dozen people forming the congregation, till the prayer should be ended, and he could resume his tapping. He did not observe till the service was half over that one of the women was Sue, who had perforce accompanied the elderly Miss Fontover thither.

Jude sat watching her pretty shoulders, her easy, curiously nonchalant risings and sittings, and her perfunctory genuflexions, and thought what a help such an Anglican would have been to him in happier circumstances. It was not so much his anxiety to get on with his work that made him go up to it immediately the worshipers began to take their leave: it was that he dared not, in this holy spot, confront the woman who was beginning to influence him in such an indescribable manner. Those three enormous reasons why he must not attempt intimate acquaintance with Sue Bridehead, now that his interest in her had shown itself to be unmistakably of a sexual kind, loomed as stubbornly as ever. But it was also obvious that man could not live by work alone; that the particular man Jude, at any rate, wanted something to love. Some men would have rushed incontinently to her, snatched the pleasure of easy friendship which she could hardly refuse, and have left the rest to chance. Not so Jude—at first.

But as the days, and still more particularly the lonely evenings, dragged along, he found himself, to his moral consternation, to be thinking more of

her instead of thinking less of her, and experiencing a fearful bliss in doing what was erratic, informal, and unexpected. Surrounded by her influence all day, walking past the spots she frequented, he was always thinking of her, and was obliged to own to himself that his conscience was likely to be the loser in this battle.

To be sure she was almost an ideality to him still. Perhaps to know her would be to cure himself of this unexpected and unauthorized passion. A voice whispered that, though he desired to know her, he did not desire to be cured.

There was not the least doubt that from his own orthodox point of view the situation was growing immoral. For Sue to be the loved one of a man who was licensed by the laws of his country to love Arabella and none other unto his life's end, was a pretty bad second beginning when the man was bent on such a course as Jude purposed. This conviction was so real with him that one day when, as was frequent, he was at work in a neighbouring village church alone, he felt it to be his duty to pray against his weakness. But much as he wished to be an exemplar in these things he could not get on. It was quite impossible, he found, to ask to be delivered from temptation when your heart's desire was to be tempted unto seventy times seven. So he excused himself. "After all," he said, "it is not altogether an *erotolepsy* that is the matter with me, as at that first time. I can see that she is exceptionally bright; and it is partly a wish for intellectual sympathy, and a craving for loving-kindness in my solitude." Thus he went on adoring her, fearing to realize that it was human perversity. For whatever Sue's virtues, talents, or ecclesiastical saturation, it was certain that those items were not at all the cause of his affection for her.

On an afternoon at this time a young girl entered the stone-mason's yard with some hesitation, and, lifting her skirts to avoid dragging them in the white dust, crossed towards the office.

"That's a nice girl," said one of the men known as Uncle Joe.

"Who is she?" asked another.

"I don't know—I've seen her about here and there. Why, yes, she's the daughter of that clever chap Bridehead who did all the wrought ironwork at St. Silas' ten years ago, and went away to London afterwards. I don't know what he's doing now—not much I fancy—as she's come back here."

Meanwhile the young woman had knocked at the office door and asked if Mr. Jude Fawley was at work in the yard. It so happened that Jude had gone out somewhere or other that afternoon, which information she received with a look of disappointment, and went away immediately. When Jude returned they told him, and described her, whereupon he exclaimed, "Why—that's my cousin Sue!"

He looked along the street after her, but she was out of sight. He had no longer any thought of a conscientious avoidance of her, and resolved to call upon her that very evening. And when he reached his lodging he found a note from her—a first note—one of those documents which, simple and commonplace in themselves, are seen retrospectively to have been pregnant with impassioned consequences. The very unconsciousness of a looming drama which is shown in such innocent first epistles from women to men, or *vice versa*, makes them, when such a drama follows, and they are read over by the purple or lurid light of it, all the more impressive, solemn, and in cases, terrible.

Sue's was of the most artless and natural kind. She addressed him as her dear cousin Jude; said she had only just learnt by the merest accident that he was living in Christminster, and reproached him with not letting her know. They might have had such nice times together, she said, for she was thrown much upon herself, and had hardly any congenial friend. But now there was every probability of her soon going away, so that the chance of companionship would be lost perhaps for ever.

A cold sweat overspread Jude at the news that she was going away. That was a contingency he had never thought of, and it spurred him to write all the more quickly to her. He would meet her that very evening, he said, one hour from the time of writing, at the cross in the pavement which marked the spot of the Martyrdoms.

When he had despatched the note by a boy he regretted that in his hurry he should have suggested to her to meet him out of doors, when he might have said he would call upon her. It was, in fact, the country custom to meet thus, and nothing else had occurred to him. Arabella had been met in the same way, unfortunately, and it might not seem respectable to a dear girl like Sue. However, it could not be helped now, and he moved towards the point a few minutes before the hour, under the glimmer of the newly lighted lamps.

The broad street was silent, and almost deserted, although it was not late. He saw a figure on the other side, which turned out to be hers, and they both converged towards the crossmark at the same moment. Before either had reached it she called out to him:

“I am not going to meet you just there, for the first time in my life! Come further on.”

The voice, though positive and silvery, had been tremulous. They walked on in parallel lines, and, waiting her pleasure, Jude watched till she showed signs of closing in, when he did likewise, the place being where the carriers’ carts stood in the daytime, though there was none on the spot then.

“I am sorry that I asked you to meet me, and didn’t call,” began Jude with the bashfulness of a lover. “But I thought it would save time if we were going to walk.”

“Oh—I don’t mind that,” she said with the freedom of a friend. “I have really no place to ask anybody in to. What I meant was that the place you chose was so horrid—I suppose I ought not to say horrid—I mean gloomy and inauspicious in its associations... But isn’t it funny to begin like this, when I don’t know you yet?” She looked him up and down curiously, though Jude did not look much at her.

“You seem to know me more than I know you,” she added.

“Yes—I have seen you now and then.”

“And you knew who I was, and didn’t speak? And now I am going away!”

“Yes. That’s unfortunate. I have hardly any other friend. I have, indeed, one very old friend here somewhere, but I don’t quite like to call on him just yet. I wonder if you know anything of him—Mr. Phillotson? A parson somewhere about the county I think he is.”

“No—I only know of one Mr. Phillotson. He lives a little way out in the country, at Lumsdon. He’s a village schoolmaster.”

“Ah! I wonder if he’s the same. Surely it is impossible! Only a schoolmaster still! Do you know his Christian name—is it Richard?”

“Yes—it is; I’ve directed books to him, though I’ve never seen him.”

“Then he couldn’t do it!”

Jude's countenance fell, for how could he succeed in an enterprise wherein the great Phillotson had failed? He would have had a day of despair if the news had not arrived during his sweet Sue's presence, but even at this moment he had visions of how Phillotson's failure in the grand university scheme would depress him when she had gone.

"As we are going to take a walk, suppose we go and call upon him?" said Jude suddenly. "It is not late."

She agreed, and they went along up a hill, and through some prettily wooded country. Presently the embattled tower and square turret of the church rose into the sky, and then the school-house. They inquired of a person in the street if Mr. Phillotson was likely to be at home, and were informed that he was always at home. A knock brought him to the school-house door, with a candle in his hand and a look of inquiry on his face, which had grown thin and careworn since Jude last set eyes on him.

That after all these years the meeting with Mr. Phillotson should be of this homely complexion destroyed at one stroke the halo which had surrounded the school-master's figure in Jude's imagination ever since their parting. It created in him at the same time a sympathy with Phillotson as an obviously much chastened and disappointed man. Jude told him his name, and said he had come to see him as an old friend who had been kind to him in his youthful days.

"I don't remember you in the least," said the school-master thoughtfully. "You were one of my pupils, you say? Yes, no doubt; but they number so many thousands by this time of my life, and have naturally changed so much, that I remember very few except the quite recent ones."

"It was out at Marygreen," said Jude, wishing he had not come.

"Yes. I was there a short time. And is this an old pupil, too?"

"No—that's my cousin... I wrote to you for some grammars, if you recollect, and you sent them?"

"Ah—yes!—I do dimly recall that incident."

"It was very kind of you to do it. And it was you who first started me on that course. On the morning you left Marygreen, when your goods were on the waggon, you wished me good-bye, and said your scheme was to be a university man and enter the Church—that a degree was the necessary hallmark of one who wanted to do anything as a theologian or teacher."

“I remember I thought all that privately; but I wonder I did not keep my own counsel. The idea was given up years ago.”

“I have never forgotten it. It was that which brought me to this part of the country, and out here to see you to-night.”

“Come in,” said Phillotson. “And your cousin, too.”

They entered the parlour of the school-house, where there was a lamp with a paper shade, which threw the light down on three or four books. Phillotson took it off, so that they could see each other better, and the rays fell on the nervous little face and vivacious dark eyes and hair of Sue, on the earnest features of her cousin, and on the schoolmaster’s own maturer face and figure, showing him to be a spare and thoughtful personage of five-and-forty, with a thin-lipped, somewhat refined mouth, a slightly stooping habit, and a black frock coat, which from continued frictions shone a little at the shoulder-blades, the middle of the back, and the elbows.

The old friendship was imperceptibly renewed, the schoolmaster speaking of his experiences, and the cousins of theirs. He told them that he still thought of the Church sometimes, and that though he could not enter it as he had intended to do in former years he might enter it as a licentiate. Meanwhile, he said, he was comfortable in his present position, though he was in want of a pupil-teacher.

They did not stay to supper, Sue having to be indoors before it grew late, and the road was retraced to Christminster. Though they had talked of nothing more than general subjects, Jude was surprised to find what a revelation of woman his cousin was to him. She was so vibrant that everything she did seemed to have its source in feeling. An exciting thought would make her walk ahead so fast that he could hardly keep up with her; and her sensitiveness on some points was such that it might have been misread as vanity. It was with heart-sickness he perceived that, while her sentiments towards him were those of the frankest friendliness only, he loved her more than before becoming acquainted with her; and the gloom of the walk home lay not in the night overhead, but in the thought of her departure.

“Why must you leave Christminster?” he said regretfully. “How can you do otherwise than cling to a city in whose history such men as Newman, Pusey, Ward, Keble, loom so large!”

“Yes—they do. Though how large do they loom in the history of the world? ... What a funny reason for caring to stay! I should never have thought of it!” She laughed.

“Well—I must go,” she continued. “Miss Fontover, one of the partners whom I serve, is offended with me, and I with her; and it is best to go.”

“How did that happen?”

“She broke some statuary of mine.”

“Oh? Wilfully?”

“Yes. She found it in my room, and though it was my property she threw it on the floor and stamped on it, because it was not according to her taste, and ground the arms and the head of one of the figures all to bits with her heel—a horrid thing!”

“Too Catholic-Apostolic for her, I suppose? No doubt she called them popish images and talked of the invocation of saints.”

“No... No, she didn’t do that. She saw the matter quite differently.”

“Ah! Then I am surprised!”

“Yes. It was for quite some other reason that she didn’t like my patron-saints. So I was led to retort upon her; and the end of it was that I resolved not to stay, but to get into an occupation in which I shall be more independent.”

“Why don’t you try teaching again? You once did, I heard.”

“I never thought of resuming it; for I was getting on as an art-designer.”

“*Do* let me ask Mr. Phillotson to let you try your hand in his school? If you like it, and go to a training college, and become a first-class certificated mistress, you get twice as large an income as any designer or church artist, and twice as much freedom.”

“Well—ask him. Now I must go in. Good-bye, dear Jude! I am so glad we have met at last. We needn’t quarrel because our parents did, need we?”

Jude did not like to let her see quite how much he agreed with her, and went his way to the remote street in which he had his lodging.

To keep Sue Bridehead near him was now a desire which operated without regard of consequences, and the next evening he again set out for Lumsdon, fearing to trust to the persuasive effects of a note only. The school-master was unprepared for such a proposal.

“What I rather wanted was a second year’s transfer, as it is called,” he said. “Of course your cousin would do, personally; but she has had no experience. Oh—she has, has she? Does she really think of adopting teaching as a profession?”

Jude said she was disposed to do so, he thought, and his ingenious arguments on her natural fitness for assisting Mr. Phillotson, of which Jude knew nothing whatever, so influenced the schoolmaster that he said he would engage her, assuring Jude as a friend that unless his cousin really meant to follow on in the same course, and regarded this step as the first stage of an apprenticeship, of which her training in a normal school would be the second stage, her time would be wasted quite, the salary being merely nominal.

The day after this visit Phillotson received a letter from Jude, containing the information that he had again consulted his cousin, who took more and more warmly to the idea of tuition; and that she had agreed to come. It did not occur for a moment to the schoolmaster and recluse that Jude’s ardour in promoting the arrangement arose from any other feelings towards Sue than the instinct of co-operation common among members of the same family.

V

The schoolmaster sat in his homely dwelling attached to the school, both being modern erections; and he looked across the way at the old house in which his teacher Sue had a lodging. The arrangement had been concluded very quickly. A pupil-teacher who was to have been transferred to Mr. Phillotson's school had failed him, and Sue had been taken as stop-gap. All such provisional arrangements as these could only last till the next annual visit of H.M. Inspector, whose approval was necessary to make them permanent. Having taught for some two years in London, though she had abandoned that vocation of late, Miss Bridehead was not exactly a novice, and Phillotson thought there would be no difficulty in retaining her services, which he already wished to do, though she had only been with him three or four weeks. He had found her quite as bright as Jude had described her; and what master-tradesman does not wish to keep an apprentice who saves him half his labour?

It was a little over half-past eight o'clock in the morning and he was waiting to see her cross the road to the school, when he would follow. At twenty minutes to nine she did cross, a light hat tossed on her head; and he watched her as a curiosity. A new emanation, which had nothing to do with her skill as a teacher, seemed to surround her this morning. He went to the school also, and Sue remained governing her class at the other end of the room, all day under his eye. She certainly was an excellent teacher.

It was part of his duty to give her private lessons in the evening, and some article in the Code made it necessary that a respectable, elderly woman should be present at these lessons when the teacher and the taught were of different sexes. Richard Phillotson thought of the absurdity of the regulation in this case, when he was old enough to be the girl's father; but he faithfully acted up to it; and sat down with her in a room where Mrs. Hawes, the widow at whose house Sue lodged, occupied herself with sewing. The regulation was, indeed, not easy to evade, for there was no other sitting-room in the dwelling.

Sometimes as she figured—it was arithmetic that they were working at—she would involuntarily glance up with a little inquiring smile at him, as if she assumed that, being the master, he must perceive all that was passing in her brain, as right or wrong. Phillotson was not really thinking of the arithmetic at all, but of her, in a novel way which somehow seemed strange to him as preceptor. Perhaps she knew that he was thinking of her thus.

For a few weeks their work had gone on with a monotony which in itself was a delight to him. Then it happened that the children were to be taken to Christminster to see an itinerant exhibition, in the shape of a model of Jerusalem, to which schools were admitted at a penny a head in the interests of education. They marched along the road two and two, she beside her class with her simple cotton sunshade, her little thumb cocked up against its stem; and Phillotson behind in his long dangling coat, handling his walking-stick genteelly, in the musing mood which had come over him since her arrival. The afternoon was one of sun and dust, and when they entered the exhibition room few people were present but themselves. The model of the ancient city stood in the middle of the apartment, and the proprietor, with a fine religious philanthropy written on his features, walked round it with a pointer in his hand, showing the young people the various quarters and places known to them by name from reading their Bibles; Mount Moriah, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the City of Zion, the walls and the gates, outside one of which there was a large mound like a tumulus, and on the mound a little white cross. The spot, he said, was Calvary.

“I think,” said Sue to the schoolmaster, as she stood with him a little in the background, “that this model, elaborate as it is, is a very imaginary production. How does anybody know that Jerusalem was like this in the time of Christ? I am sure this man doesn’t.”

“It is made after the best conjectural maps, based on actual visits to the city as it now exists.”

“I fancy we have had enough of Jerusalem,” she said, “considering we are not descended from the Jews. There was nothing first-rate about the place, or people, after all—as there was about Athens, Rome, Alexandria, and other old cities.”

“But my dear girl, consider what it is to us!”

She was silent, for she was easily repressed; and then perceived behind the group of children clustered round the model a young man in a white

flannel jacket, his form being bent so low in his intent inspection of the Valley of Jehoshaphat that his face was almost hidden from view by the Mount of Olives. "Look at your cousin Jude," continued the schoolmaster. "He doesn't think we have had enough of Jerusalem!"

"Ah—I didn't see him!" she cried in her quick, light voice. "Jude—how seriously you are going into it!"

Jude started up from his reverie, and saw her. "Oh—Sue!" he said, with a glad flush of embarrassment. "These are your school-children, of course! I saw that schools were admitted in the afternoons, and thought you might come; but I got so deeply interested that I didn't remember where I was. How it carries one back, doesn't it! I could examine it for hours, but I have only a few minutes, unfortunately; for I am in the middle of a job out here."

"Your cousin is so terribly clever that she criticizes it unmercifully," said Phillotson, with good-humoured satire. "She is quite sceptical as to its correctness."

"No, Mr. Phillotson, I am not—altogether! I hate to be what is called a clever girl—there are too many of that sort now!" answered Sue sensitively. "I only meant—I don't know what I meant—except that it was what you don't understand!"

"I know your meaning," said Jude ardently (although he did not). "And I think you are quite right."

"That's a good Jude—I know *you* believe in me!" She impulsively seized his hand, and leaving a reproachful look on the schoolmaster turned away to Jude, her voice revealing a tremor which she herself felt to be absurdly uncalled for by sarcasm so gentle. She had not the least conception how the hearts of the twain went out to her at this momentary revelation of feeling, and what a complication she was building up thereby in the futures of both.

The model wore too much of an educational aspect for the children not to tire of it soon, and a little later in the afternoon they were all marched back to Lumsdon, Jude returning to his work. He watched the juvenile flock in their clean frocks and pinafores, filing down the street towards the country beside Phillotson and Sue, and a sad, dissatisfied sense of being out of the scheme of the latters' lives had possession of him. Phillotson had invited him to walk out and see them on Friday evening, when there would be no lessons to give to Sue, and Jude had eagerly promised to avail himself of the opportunity.

Meanwhile the scholars and teachers moved homewards, and the next day, on looking on the blackboard in Sue's class, Phillotson was surprised to find upon it, skilfully drawn in chalk, a perspective view of Jerusalem, with every building shown in its place.

"I thought you took no interest in the model, and hardly looked at it?" he said.

"I hardly did," said she, "but I remembered that much of it."

"It is more than I had remembered myself."

Her Majesty's school-inspector was at that time paying "surprise-visits" in this neighbourhood to test the teaching unawares; and two days later, in the middle of the morning lessons, the latch of the door was softly lifted, and in walked my gentleman, the king of terrors—to pupil-teachers.

To Mr. Phillotson the surprise was not great; like the lady in the story, he had been played that trick too many times to be unprepared. But Sue's class was at the further end of the room, and her back was towards the entrance; the inspector therefore came and stood behind her and watched her teaching some half-minute before she became aware of his presence. She turned, and realized that an oft-dreaded moment had come. The effect upon her timidity was such that she uttered a cry of fright. Phillotson, with a strange instinct of solicitude quite beyond his control, was at her side just in time to prevent her falling from faintness. She soon recovered herself, and laughed; but when the inspector had gone there was a reaction, and she was so white that Phillotson took her into his room, and gave her some brandy to bring her round. She found him holding her hand.

"You ought to have told me," she gasped petulantly, "that one of the inspector's surprise-visits was imminent! Oh, what shall I do! Now he'll write and tell the managers that I am no good, and I shall be disgraced for ever!"

"He won't do that, my dear little girl. You are the best teacher ever I had!"

He looked so gently at her that she was moved, and regretted that she had upbraided him. When she was better she went home.

Jude in the meantime had been waiting impatiently for Friday. On both Wednesday and Thursday he had been so much under the influence of his desire to see her that he walked after dark some distance along the road in

the direction of the village, and, on returning to his room to read, found himself quite unable to concentrate his mind on the page. On Friday, as soon as he had got himself up as he thought Sue would like to see him, and made a hasty tea, he set out, notwithstanding that the evening was wet. The trees overhead deepened the gloom of the hour, and they dripped sadly upon him, impressing him with forebodings—illogical forebodings; for though he knew that he loved her he also knew that he could not be more to her than he was.

On turning the corner and entering the village the first sight that greeted his eyes was that of two figures under one umbrella coming out of the vicarage gate. He was too far back for them to notice him, but he knew in a moment that they were Sue and Phillotson. The latter was holding the umbrella over her head, and they had evidently been paying a visit to the vicar—probably on some business connected with the school work. And as they walked along the wet and deserted lane Jude saw Phillotson place his arm round the girl's waist; whereupon she gently removed it; but he replaced it; and she let it remain, looking quickly round her with an air of misgiving. She did not look absolutely behind her, and therefore did not see Jude, who sank into the hedge like one struck with a blight. There he remained hidden till they had reached Sue's cottage and she had passed in, Phillotson going on to the school hard by.

“Oh, he's too old for her—too old!” cried Jude in all the terrible sickness of hopeless, handicapped love.

He could not interfere. Was he not Arabella's? He was unable to go on further, and retraced his steps towards Christminster. Every tread of his feet seemed to say to him that he must on no account stand in the schoolmaster's way with Sue. Phillotson was perhaps twenty years her senior, but many a happy marriage had been made in such conditions of age. The ironical clinch to his sorrow was given by the thought that the intimacy between his cousin and the schoolmaster had been brought about entirely by himself.

VI

Jude's old and embittered aunt lay unwell at Marygreen, and on the following Sunday he went to see her—a visit which was the result of a victorious struggle against his inclination to turn aside to the village of Lumsdon and obtain a miserable interview with his cousin, in which the word nearest his heart could not be spoken, and the sight which had tortured him could not be revealed.

His aunt was now unable to leave her bed, and a great part of Jude's short day was occupied in making arrangements for her comfort. The little bakery business had been sold to a neighbour, and with the proceeds of this and her savings she was comfortably supplied with necessaries and more, a widow of the same village living with her and ministering to her wants. It was not till the time had nearly come for him to leave that he obtained a quiet talk with her, and his words tended insensibly towards his cousin.

“Was Sue born here?”

“She was—in this room. They were living here at that time. What made 'ee ask that?”

“Oh—I wanted to know.”

“Now you've been seeing her!” said the harsh old woman. “And what did I tell 'ee?”

“Well—that I was not to see her.”

“Have you gossiped with her?”

“Yes.”

“Then don't keep it up. She was brought up by her father to hate her mother's family; and she'll look with no favour upon a working chap like you—a townish girl as she's become by now. I never cared much about her. A pert little thing, that's what she was too often, with her tight-strained nerves. Many's the time I've smacked her for her impertinence. Why, one day when she was walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off,

and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame, she said: ‘Move on, Aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes!’”

“She was a little child then.”

“She was twelve if a day.”

“Well—of course. But now she’s older she’s of a thoughtful, quivering, tender nature, and as sensitive as—”

“Jude!” cried his aunt, springing up in bed. “Don’t you be a fool about her!”

“No, no, of course not.”

“Your marrying that woman Arabella was about as bad a thing as a man could possibly do for himself by trying hard. But she’s gone to the other side of the world, and med never trouble you again. And there’ll be a worse thing if you, tied and bound as you be, should have a fancy for Sue. If your cousin is civil to you, take her civility for what it is worth. But anything more than a relation’s good wishes it is stark madness for ’ee to give her. If she’s townish and wanton it med bring ’ee to ruin.”

“Don’t say anything against her, Aunt! Don’t, please!”

A relief was afforded to him by the entry of the companion and nurse of his aunt, who must have been listening to the conversation, for she began a commentary on past years, introducing Sue Bridehead as a character in her recollections. She described what an odd little maid Sue had been when a pupil at the village school across the green opposite, before her father went to London—how, when the vicar arranged readings and recitations, she appeared on the platform, the smallest of them all, “in her little white frock, and shoes, and pink sash”; how she recited “Excelsior,” “There was a sound of revelry by night,” and “The Raven”; how during the delivery she would knit her little brows and glare round tragically, and say to the empty air, as if some real creature stood there—

“Ghastly, grim, and ancient Raven,
wandering from the Nightly shore,
Tell me what thy lordly name is
on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”

“She’d bring up the nasty carrion bird that clear,” corroborated the sick woman reluctantly, “as she stood there in her little sash and things, that you

could see un a'most before your very eyes. You too, Jude, had the same trick as a child of seeming to see things in the air."

The neighbour told also of Sue's accomplishments in other kinds:

"She was not exactly a tomboy, you know; but she could do things that only boys do, as a rule. I've seen her hit in and steer down the long slide on yonder pond, with her little curls blowing, one of a file of twenty moving along against the sky like shapes painted on glass, and up the back slide without stopping. All boys except herself; and then they'd cheer her, and then she'd say, 'Don't be saucy, boys,' and suddenly run indoors. They'd try to coax her out again. But 'a wouldn't come."

These retrospective visions of Sue only made Jude the more miserable that he was unable to woo her, and he left the cottage of his aunt that day with a heavy heart. He would fain have glanced into the school to see the room in which Sue's little figure had so glorified itself; but he checked his desire and went on.

It being Sunday evening some villagers who had known him during his residence here were standing in a group in their best clothes. Jude was startled by a salute from one of them:

"Ye've got there right enough, then!"

Jude showed that he did not understand.

"Why, to the seat of l'arning—the 'City of Light' you used to talk to us about as a little boy! Is it all you expected of it?"

"Yes; more!" cried Jude.

"When I was there once for an hour I didn't see much in it for my part; auld crumbling buildings, half church, half almshouse, and not much going on at that."

"You are wrong, John; there is more going on than meets the eye of a man walking through the streets. It is a unique centre of thought and religion—the intellectual and spiritual granary of this country. All that silence and absence of goings-on is the stillness of infinite motion—the sleep of the spinning-top, to borrow the simile of a well-known writer."

"Oh, well, it med be all that, or it med not. As I say, I didn't see nothing of it the hour or two I was there; so I went in and had a pot o' beer, and a penny loaf, and a ha'porth o' cheese, and waited till it was time to come along home. You've j'ined a college by this time, I suppose?"

“Ah, no!” said Jude. “I am almost as far off that as ever.”

“How so?”

Jude slapped his pocket.

“Just what we thought! Such places be not for such as you—only for them with plenty o’ money.”

“There you are wrong,” said Jude, with some bitterness. “They are for such ones!”

Still, the remark was sufficient to withdraw Jude’s attention from the imaginative world he had lately inhabited, in which an abstract figure, more or less himself, was steeping his mind in a sublimation of the arts and sciences, and making his calling and election sure to a seat in the paradise of the learned. He was set regarding his prospects in a cold northern light. He had lately felt that he could not quite satisfy himself in his Greek—in the Greek of the dramatists particularly. So fatigued was he sometimes after his day’s work that he could not maintain the critical attention necessary for thorough application. He felt that he wanted a coach—a friend at his elbow to tell him in a moment what sometimes would occupy him a weary month in extracting from unanticipative, clumsy books.

It was decidedly necessary to consider facts a little more closely than he had done of late. What was the good, after all, of using up his spare hours in a vague labour called “private study” without giving an outlook on practicabilities?

“I ought to have thought of this before,” he said, as he journeyed back. “It would have been better never to have embarked in the scheme at all than to do it without seeing clearly where I am going, or what I am aiming at... This hovering outside the walls of the colleges, as if expecting some arm to be stretched out from them to lift me inside, won’t do! I must get special information.”

The next week accordingly he sought it. What at first seemed an opportunity occurred one afternoon when he saw an elderly gentleman, who had been pointed out as the head of a particular college, walking in the public path of a parklike enclosure near the spot at which Jude chanced to be sitting. The gentleman came nearer, and Jude looked anxiously at his face. It seemed benign, considerate, yet rather reserved. On second thoughts Jude felt that he could not go up and address him; but he was sufficiently

influenced by the incident to think what a wise thing it would be for him to state his difficulties by letter to some of the best and most judicious of these old masters, and obtain their advice.

During the next week or two he accordingly placed himself in such positions about the city as would afford him glimpses of several of the most distinguished among the provosts, wardens, and other heads of houses; and from those he ultimately selected five whose physiognomies seemed to say to him that they were appreciative and far-seeing men. To these five he addressed letters, briefly stating his difficulties, and asking their opinion on his stranded situation.

When the letters were posted Jude mentally began to criticize them; he wished they had not been sent. "It is just one of those intrusive, vulgar, pushing, applications which are so common in these days," he thought. "Why couldn't I know better than address utter strangers in such a way? I may be an impostor, an idle scamp, a man with a bad character, for all that they know to the contrary... Perhaps that's what I am!"

Nevertheless, he found himself clinging to the hope of some reply as to his one last chance of redemption. He waited day after day, saying that it was perfectly absurd to expect, yet expecting. While he waited he was suddenly stirred by news about Phillotson. Phillotson was giving up the school near Christminster, for a larger one further south, in Mid-Wessex. What this meant; how it would affect his cousin; whether, as seemed possible, it was a practical move of the schoolmaster's towards a larger income, in view of a provision for two instead of one, he would not allow himself to say. And the tender relations between Phillotson and the young girl of whom Jude was passionately enamoured effectually made it repugnant to Jude's tastes to apply to Phillotson for advice on his own scheme.

Meanwhile the academic dignitaries to whom Jude had written vouchsafed no answer, and the young man was thus thrown back entirely on himself, as formerly, with the added gloom of a weakened hope. By indirect inquiries he soon perceived clearly what he had long uneasily suspected, that to qualify himself for certain open scholarships and exhibitions was the only brilliant course. But to do this a good deal of coaching would be necessary, and much natural ability. It was next to impossible that a man reading on his own system, however widely and thoroughly, even over the

prolonged period of ten years, should be able to compete with those who had passed their lives under trained teachers and had worked to ordained lines.

The other course, that of buying himself in, so to speak, seemed the only one really open to men like him, the difficulty being simply of a material kind. With the help of his information he began to reckon the extent of this material obstacle, and ascertained, to his dismay, that, at the rate at which, with the best of fortune, he would be able to save money, fifteen years must elapse before he could be in a position to forward testimonials to the head of a college and advance to a matriculation examination. The undertaking was hopeless.

He saw what a curious and cunning glamour the neighbourhood of the place had exercised over him. To get there and live there, to move among the churches and halls and become imbued with the *genius loci*, had seemed to his dreaming youth, as the spot shaped its charms to him from its halo on the horizon, the obvious and ideal thing to do. "Let me only get there," he had said with the fatuousness of Crusoe over his big boat, "and the rest is but a matter of time and energy." It would have been far better for him in every way if he had never come within sight and sound of the delusive precincts, had gone to some busy commercial town with the sole object of making money by his wits, and thence surveyed his plan in true perspective. Well, all that was clear to him amounted to this, that the whole scheme had burst up, like an iridescent soap-bubble, under the touch of a reasoned inquiry. He looked back at himself along the vista of his past years, and his thought was akin to Heine's:

Above the youth's inspired and flashing eyes
I see the motley mocking fool's-cap rise!

Fortunately he had not been allowed to bring his disappointment into his dear Sue's life by involving her in this collapse. And the painful details of his awakening to a sense of his limitations should now be spared her as far as possible. After all, she had only known a little part of the miserable struggle in which he had been engaged thus unequipped, poor, and unforeseeing.

He always remembered the appearance of the afternoon on which he awoke from his dream. Not quite knowing what to do with himself, he went

up to an octagonal chamber in the lantern of a singularly built theatre that was set amidst this quaint and singular city. It had windows all round, from which an outlook over the whole town and its edifices could be gained. Jude's eyes swept all the views in succession, meditatively, mournfully, yet sturdily. Those buildings and their associations and privileges were not for him. From the looming roof of the great library, into which he hardly ever had time to enter, his gaze travelled on to the varied spires, halls, gables, streets, chapels, gardens, quadrangles, which composed the ensemble of this unrivalled panorama. He saw that his destiny lay not with these, but among the manual toilers in the shabby purlieu which he himself occupied, unrecognized as part of the city at all by its visitors and panegyrists, yet without whose denizens the hard readers could not read nor the high thinkers live.

He looked over the town into the country beyond, to the trees which screened her whose presence had at first been the support of his heart, and whose loss was now a maddening torture. But for this blow he might have borne with his fate. With Sue as companion he could have renounced his ambitions with a smile. Without her it was inevitable that the reaction from the long strain to which he had subjected himself should affect him disastrously. Phillotson had no doubt passed through a similar intellectual disappointment to that which now enveloped him. But the schoolmaster had been since blest with the consolation of sweet Sue, while for him there was no consoler.

Descending to the streets, he went listlessly along till he arrived at an inn, and entered it. Here he drank several glasses of beer in rapid succession, and when he came out it was night. By the light of the flickering lamps he rambled home to supper, and had not long been sitting at table when his landlady brought up a letter that had just arrived for him. She laid it down as if impressed with a sense of its possible importance, and on looking at it Jude perceived that it bore the embossed stamp of one of the colleges whose heads he had addressed. "*One*—at last!" cried Jude.

The communication was brief, and not exactly what he had expected; though it really was from the master in person. It ran thus:

BIBLIOLL COLLEGE.

SIR,—I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do. Yours faithfully,

T. TETUPHENAY.

To Mr. J. FAWLEY, Stone-mason.

This terribly sensible advice exasperated Jude. He had known all that before. He knew it was true. Yet it seemed a hard slap after ten years of labour, and its effect upon him just now was to make him rise recklessly from the table, and, instead of reading as usual, to go downstairs and into the street. He stood at a bar and tossed off two or three glasses, then unconsciously sauntered along till he came to a spot called The Fourways in the middle of the city, gazing abstractedly at the groups of people like one in a trance, till, coming to himself, he began talking to the policeman fixed there.

That officer yawned, stretched out his elbows, elevated himself an inch and a half on the balls of his toes, smiled, and looking humorously at Jude, said, "You've had a wet, young man."

"No; I've only begun," he replied cynically.

Whatever his wetness, his brains were dry enough. He only heard in part the policeman's further remarks, having fallen into thought on what struggling people like himself had stood at that crossway, whom nobody ever thought of now. It had more history than the oldest college in the city. It was literally teeming, stratified, with the shades of human groups, who had met there for tragedy, comedy, farce; real enactments of the intensest kind. At Fourways men had stood and talked of Napoleon, the loss of America, the execution of King Charles, the burning of the Martyrs, the Crusades, the Norman Conquest, possibly of the arrival of Caesar. Here the two sexes had met for loving, hating, coupling, parting; had waited, had suffered, for each other; had triumphed over each other; cursed each other in jealousy, blessed each other in forgiveness.

He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious than the gown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster. That was one of the humours of things. The floating population of students and teachers, who did know both in a way, were not Christminster in a local sense at all.

He looked at his watch, and, in pursuit of this idea, he went on till he came to a public hall, where a promenade concert was in progress. Jude entered, and found the room full of shop youths and girls, soldiers, apprentices, boys of eleven smoking cigarettes, and light women of the more respectable and amateur class. He had tapped the real Christminster life. A band was playing, and the crowd walked about and jostled each other, and every now and then a man got upon a platform and sang a comic song.

The spirit of Sue seemed to hover round him and prevent his flirting and drinking with the frolicsome girls who made advances—wistful to gain a little joy. At ten o'clock he came away, choosing a circuitous route homeward to pass the gates of the college whose head had just sent him the note.

The gates were shut, and, by an impulse, he took from his pocket the lump of chalk which as a workman he usually carried there, and wrote along the wall:

“I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?”—Job xii. 3.

VII

The stroke of scorn relieved his mind, and the next morning he laughed at his self-conceit. But the laugh was not a healthy one. He re-read the letter from the master, and the wisdom in its lines, which had at first exasperated him, chilled and depressed him now. He saw himself as a fool indeed.

Deprived of the objects of both intellect and emotion, he could not proceed to his work. Whenever he felt reconciled to his fate as a student, there came to disturb his calm his hopeless relations with Sue. That the one affined soul he had ever met was lost to him through his marriage returned upon him with cruel persistency, till, unable to bear it longer, he again rushed for distraction to the real Christminster life. He now sought it out in an obscure and low-ceiled tavern up a court which was well known to certain worthies of the place, and in brighter times would have interested him simply by its quaintness. Here he sat more or less all the day, convinced that he was at bottom a vicious character, of whom it was hopeless to expect anything.

In the evening the frequenters of the house dropped in one by one, Jude still retaining his seat in the corner, though his money was all spent, and he had not eaten anything the whole day except a biscuit. He surveyed his gathering companions with all the equanimity and philosophy of a man who has been drinking long and slowly, and made friends with several: to wit, Tinker Taylor, a decayed church-ironmonger who appeared to have been of a religious turn in earlier years, but was somewhat blasphemous now; also a red-nosed auctioneer; also two Gothic masons like himself, called Uncle Jim and Uncle Joe. There were present, too, some clerks, and a gown- and surplice-maker's assistant; two ladies who sported moral characters of various depths of shade, according to their company, nicknamed "Bower o' Bliss" and "Freckles"; some horsey men "in the know" of betting circles; a travelling actor from the theatre, and two devil-may-care young men who proved to be gownless undergraduates; they had slipped in by stealth to

meet a man about bull-pups, and stayed to drink and smoke short pipes with the racing gents aforesaid, looking at their watches every now and then.

The conversation waxed general. Christminster society was criticized, the dons, magistrates, and other people in authority being sincerely pitied for their shortcomings, while opinions on how they ought to conduct themselves and their affairs to be properly respected, were exchanged in a large-minded and disinterested manner.

Jude Fawley, with the self-conceit, effrontery, and *aplomb* of a strong-brained fellow in liquor, threw in his remarks somewhat peremptorily; and his aims having been what they were for so many years, everything the others said turned upon his tongue, by a sort of mechanical craze, to the subject of scholarship and study, the extent of his own learning being dwelt upon with an insistence that would have appeared pitiable to himself in his sane hours.

“I don’t care a damn,” he was saying, “for any provost, warden, principal, fellow, or cursed master of arts in the university! What I know is that I’d lick ’em on their own ground if they’d give me a chance, and show ’em a few things they are not up to yet!”

“Hear, hear!” said the undergraduates from the corner, where they were talking privately about the pups.

“You always was fond o’ books, I’ve heard,” said Tinker Taylor, “and I don’t doubt what you state. Now with me ’twas different. I always saw there was more to be learnt outside a book than in; and I took my steps accordingly, or I shouldn’t have been the man I am.”

“You aim at the Church, I believe?” said Uncle Joe. “If you are such a scholar as to pitch yer hopes so high as that, why not give us a specimen of your scholarship? Canst say the Creed in Latin, man? That was how they once put it to a chap down in my country.”

“I should think so!” said Jude haughtily.

“Not he! Like his conceit!” screamed one of the ladies.

“Just you shut up, Bower o’ Bliss!” said one of the undergraduates. “Silence!” He drank off the spirits in his tumbler, rapped with it on the counter, and announced, “The gentleman in the corner is going to rehearse the Articles of his Belief, in the Latin tongue, for the edification of the company.”

“I won’t!” said Jude.

“Yes—have a try!” said the surplice-maker.

“You can’t!” said Uncle Joe.

“Yes, he can!” said Tinker Taylor.

“I’ll swear I can!” said Jude. “Well, come now, stand me a small Scotch cold, and I’ll do it straight off.”

“That’s a fair offer,” said the undergraduate, throwing down the money for the whisky.

The barmaid concocted the mixture with the bearing of a person compelled to live amongst animals of an inferior species, and the glass was handed across to Jude, who, having drunk the contents, stood up and began rhetorically, without hesitation:

“Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, Factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.”

“Good! Excellent Latin!” cried one of the undergraduates, who, however, had not the slightest conception of a single word.

A silence reigned among the rest in the bar, and the maid stood still, Jude’s voice echoing sonorously into the inner parlour, where the landlord was dozing, and bringing him out to see what was going on. Jude had declaimed steadily ahead, and was continuing:

“Crucifixus etiam pro nobis: sub Pontio Pilato passus, et sepultus est. Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas.”

“That’s the Nicene,” sneered the second undergraduate. “And we wanted the Apostles’!”

“You didn’t say so! And every fool knows, except you, that the Nicene is the most historic creed!”

“Let un go on, let un go on!” said the auctioneer.

But Jude’s mind seemed to grow confused soon, and he could not get on. He put his hand to his forehead, and his face assumed an expression of pain.

“Give him another glass—then he’ll fetch up and get through it,” said Tinker Taylor.

Somebody threw down threepence, the glass was handed, Jude stretched out his arm for it without looking, and having swallowed the liquor, went

on in a moment in a revived voice, raising it as he neared the end with the manner of a priest leading a congregation:

“Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit. Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur. Qui locutus est per prophetas.

“Et unam Catholicam et Apostolicam Ecclesiam. Confiteor unum Baptisma in remissionem peccatorum. Et exspecto Resurrectionem mortuorum. Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.”

“Well done!” said several, enjoying the last word, as being the first and only one they had recognized.

Then Jude seemed to shake the fumes from his brain, as he stared round upon them.

“You pack of fools!” he cried. “Which one of you knows whether I have said it or no? It might have been the Ratcatcher’s Daughter in double Dutch for all that your besotted heads can tell! See what I have brought myself to—the crew I have come among!”

The landlord, who had already had his license endorsed for harbouring queer characters, feared a riot, and came outside the counter; but Jude, in his sudden flash of reason, had turned in disgust and left the scene, the door slamming with a dull thud behind him.

He hastened down the lane and round into the straight broad street, which he followed till it merged in the highway, and all sound of his late companions had been left behind. Onward he still went, under the influence of a childlike yearning for the one being in the world to whom it seemed possible to fly—an unreasoning desire, whose ill judgement was not apparent to him now. In the course of an hour, when it was between ten and eleven o’clock, he entered the village of Lumsdon, and reaching the cottage, saw that a light was burning in a downstairs room, which he assumed, rightly as it happened, to be hers.

Jude stepped close to the wall, and tapped with his finger on the pane, saying impatiently, “Sue, Sue!”

She must have recognized his voice, for the light disappeared from the apartment, and in a second or two the door was unlocked and opened, and Sue appeared with a candle in her hand.

“Is it Jude? Yes, it is! My dear, dear cousin, what’s the matter?”

“Oh, I am—I couldn’t help coming, Sue!” said he, sinking down upon the doorstep. “I am so wicked, Sue—my heart is nearly broken, and I could not bear my life as it was! So I have been drinking, and blaspheming, or next door to it, and saying holy things in disreputable quarters—repeating in idle bravado words which ought never to be uttered but reverently! Oh, do anything with me, Sue—kill me—I don’t care! Only don’t hate me and despise me like all the rest of the world!”

“You are ill, poor dear! No, I won’t despise you; of course I won’t! Come in and rest, and let me see what I can do for you. Now lean on me, and don’t mind.” With one hand holding the candle and the other supporting him, she led him indoors, and placed him in the only easy chair the meagrely furnished house afforded, stretching his feet upon another, and pulling off his boots. Jude, now getting towards his sober senses, could only say, “Dear, dear Sue!” in a voice broken by grief and contrition.

She asked him if he wanted anything to eat, but he shook his head. Then telling him to go to sleep, and that she would come down early in the morning and get him some breakfast, she bade him good-night and ascended the stairs.

Almost immediately he fell into a heavy slumber, and did not wake till dawn. At first he did not know where he was, but by degrees his situation cleared to him, and he beheld it in all the ghastliness of a right mind. She knew the worst of him—the very worst. How could he face her now? She would soon be coming down to see about breakfast, as she had said, and there would he be in all his shame confronting her. He could not bear the thought, and softly drawing on his boots, and taking his hat from the nail on which she had hung it, he slipped noiselessly out of the house.

His fixed idea was to get away to some obscure spot and hide, and perhaps pray; and the only spot which occurred to him was Marygreen. He called at his lodging in Christminster, where he found awaiting him a note of dismissal from his employer; and having packed up he turned his back upon the city that had been such a thorn in his side, and struck southward into Wessex. He had no money left in his pocket, his small savings, deposited at one of the banks in Christminster, having fortunately been left untouched. To get to Marygreen, therefore, his only course was walking; and the distance being nearly twenty miles, he had ample time to complete on the way the sobering process begun in him.

At some hour of the evening he reached Alfredston. Here he pawned his waistcoat, and having gone out of the town a mile or two, slept under a rick that night. At dawn he rose, shook off the hayseeds and stems from his clothes, and started again, breasting the long white road up the hill to the downs, which had been visible to him a long way off, and passing the milestone at the top, whereon he had carved his hopes years ago.

He reached the ancient hamlet while the people were at breakfast. Weary and mud-bespattered, but quite possessed of his ordinary clearness of brain, he sat down by the well, thinking as he did so what a poor Christ he made. Seeing a trough of water near he bathed his face, and went on to the cottage of his great-aunt, whom he found breakfasting in bed, attended by the woman who lived with her.

“What—out o’ work?” asked his relative, regarding him through eyes sunken deep, under lids heavy as pot-covers, no other cause for his tumbled appearance suggesting itself to one whose whole life had been a struggle with material things.

“Yes,” said Jude heavily. “I think I must have a little rest.”

Refreshed by some breakfast, he went up to his old room and lay down in his shirt-sleeves, after the manner of the artizan. He fell asleep for a short while, and when he awoke it was as if he had awakened in hell. It *was* hell—“the hell of conscious failure,” both in ambition and in love. He thought of that previous abyss into which he had fallen before leaving this part of the country; the deepest deep he had supposed it then; but it was not so deep as this. That had been the breaking in of the outer bulwarks of his hope: this was of his second line.

If he had been a woman he must have screamed under the nervous tension which he was now undergoing. But that relief being denied to his virility, he clenched his teeth in misery, bringing lines about his mouth like those in the Laocoön, and corrugations between his brows.

A mournful wind blew through the trees, and sounded in the chimney like the pedal notes of an organ. Each ivy leaf overgrowing the wall of the churchless church-yard hard by, now abandoned, pecked its neighbour smartly, and the vane on the new Victorian-Gothic church in the new spot had already begun to creak. Yet apparently it was not always the outdoor wind that made the deep murmurs; it was a voice. He guessed its origin in a moment or two; the curate was praying with his aunt in the adjoining room.

He remembered her speaking of him. Presently the sounds ceased, and a step seemed to cross the landing. Jude sat up, and shouted "Hoi!"

The step made for his door, which was open, and a man looked in. It was a young clergyman.

"I think you are Mr. Highridge," said Jude. "My aunt has mentioned you more than once. Well, here I am, just come home; a fellow gone to the bad; though I had the best intentions in the world at one time. Now I am melancholy mad, what with drinking and one thing and another."

Slowly Jude unfolded to the curate his late plans and movements, by an unconscious bias dwelling less upon the intellectual and ambitious side of his dream, and more upon the theological, though this had, up till now, been merely a portion of the general plan of advancement.

"Now I know I have been a fool, and that folly is with me," added Jude in conclusion. "And I don't regret the collapse of my university hopes one jot. I wouldn't begin again if I were sure to succeed. I don't care for social success any more at all. But I do feel I should like to do some good thing; and I bitterly regret the Church, and the loss of my chance of being her ordained minister."

The curate, who was a new man to this neighbourhood, had grown deeply interested, and at last he said: "If you feel a real call to the ministry, and I won't say from your conversation that you do not, for it is that of a thoughtful and educated man, you might enter the Church as a licentiate. Only you must make up your mind to avoid strong drink."

"I could avoid that easily enough, if I had any kind of hope to support me!"

Part Third
AT MELCHESTER

“For there was no other girl, O bridegroom, like her!”
—SAPPHO (H. T. Wharton).

I

It was a new idea—the ecclesiastical and altruistic life as distinct from the intellectual and emulative life. A man could preach and do good to his fellow-creatures without taking double-firsts in the schools of Christminster, or having anything but ordinary knowledge. The old fancy which had led on to the culminating vision of the bishopric had not been an ethical or theological enthusiasm at all, but a mundane ambition masquerading in a surplice. He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to, even though it might not have originated in, a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization. There were thousands of young men on the same self-seeking track at the present moment. The sensual hind who ate, drank, and lived carelessly with his wife through the days of his vanity was a more likable being than he.

But to enter the Church in such an unscholarly way that he could not in any probability rise to a higher grade through all his career than that of the humble curate wearing his life out in an obscure village or city slum—that might have a touch of goodness and greatness in it; that might be true religion, and a purgatorial course worthy of being followed by a remorseful man.

The favourable light in which this new thought showed itself by contrast with his foregone intentions cheered Jude, as he sat there, shabby and lonely; and it may be said to have given, during the next few days, the *coup de grâce* to his intellectual career—a career which had extended over the greater part of a dozen years. He did nothing, however, for some long stagnant time to advance his new desire, occupying himself with little local jobs in putting up and lettering headstones about the neighbouring villages, and submitting to be regarded as a social failure, a returned purchase, by the half-dozen or so of farmers and other country-people who condescended to nod to him.

The human interest of the new intention—and a human interest is indispensable to the most spiritual and self-sacrificing—was created by a letter from Sue, bearing a fresh postmark. She evidently wrote with anxiety, and told very little about her own doings, more than that she had passed some sort of examination for a Queen's Scholarship, and was going to enter a training college at Melchester to complete herself for the vocation she had chosen, partly by his influence. There was a theological college at Melchester; Melchester was a quiet and soothing place, almost entirely ecclesiastical in its tone; a spot where worldly learning and intellectual smartness had no establishment; where the altruistic feeling that he did possess would perhaps be more highly estimated than a brilliancy which he did not.

As it would be necessary that he should continue for a time to work at his trade while reading up Divinity, which he had neglected at Christminster for the ordinary classical grind, what better course for him than to get employment at the further city, and pursue this plan of reading? That his excessive human interest in the new place was entirely of Sue's making, while at the same time Sue was to be regarded even less than formerly as proper to create it, had an ethical contradictoriness to which he was not blind. But that much he conceded to human frailty, and hoped to learn to love her only as a friend and kinswoman.

He considered that he might so mark out his coming years as to begin his ministry at the age of thirty—an age which much attracted him as being that of his exemplar when he first began to teach in Galilee. This would allow him plenty of time for deliberate study, and for acquiring capital by his trade to help his aftercourse of keeping the necessary terms at a theological college.

Christmas had come and passed, and Sue had gone to the Melchester Normal School. The time was just the worst in the year for Jude to get into new employment, and he had written suggesting to her that he should postpone his arrival for a month or so, till the days had lengthened. She had acquiesced so readily that he wished he had not proposed it—she evidently did not much care about him, though she had never once reproached him for his strange conduct in coming to her that night, and his silent disappearance. Neither had she ever said a word about her relations with Mr. Phillotson.

Suddenly, however, quite a passionate letter arrived from Sue. She was quite lonely and miserable, she told him. She hated the place she was in; it was worse than the ecclesiastical designer's; worse than anywhere. She felt utterly friendless; could he come immediately?—though when he did come she would only be able to see him at limited times, the rules of the establishment she found herself in being strict to a degree. It was Mr. Phillotson who had advised her to come there, and she wished she had never listened to him.

Phillotson's suit was not exactly prospering, evidently; and Jude felt unreasonably glad. He packed up his things and went to Melchester with a lighter heart than he had known for months.

This being the turning over a new leaf he duly looked about for a temperance hotel, and found a little establishment of that description in the street leading from the station. When he had had something to eat he walked out into the dull winter light over the town bridge, and turned the corner towards the Close. The day was foggy, and standing under the walls of the most graceful architectural pile in England he paused and looked up. The lofty building was visible as far as the roofridge; above, the dwindling spire rose more and more remotely, till its apex was quite lost in the mist drifting across it.

The lamps now began to be lighted, and turning to the west front he walked round. He took it as a good omen that numerous blocks of stone were lying about, which signified that the cathedral was undergoing restoration or repair to a considerable extent. It seemed to him, full of the superstitions of his beliefs, that this was an exercise of forethought on the part of a ruling Power, that he might find plenty to do in the art he practised while waiting for a call to higher labours.

Then a wave of warmth came over him as he thought how near he now stood to the bright-eyed vivacious girl with the broad forehead and pile of dark hair above it; the girl with the kindling glance, daringly soft at times—something like that of the girls he had seen in engravings from paintings of the Spanish school. She was here—actually in this Close—in one of the houses confronting this very west façade.

He went down the broad gravel path towards the building. It was an ancient edifice of the fifteenth century, once a palace, now a training-school, with mullioned and transomed windows, and a courtyard in front

shut in from the road by a wall. Jude opened the gate and went up to the door through which, on inquiring for his cousin, he was gingerly admitted to a waiting-room, and in a few minutes she came.

Though she had been here such a short while, she was not as he had seen her last. All her bounding manner was gone; her curves of motion had become subdued lines. The screens and subtleties of convention had likewise disappeared. Yet neither was she quite the woman who had written the letter that summoned him. That had plainly been dashed off in an impulse which second thoughts had somewhat regretted; thoughts that were possibly of his recent self-disgrace. Jude was quite overcome with emotion.

“You don’t—think me a demoralized wretch—for coming to you as I was—and going so shamefully, Sue?”

“Oh, I have tried not to! You said enough to let me know what had caused it. I hope I shall never have any doubt of your worthiness, my poor Jude! And I am glad you have come!”

She wore a murrey-coloured gown with a little lace collar. It was made quite plain, and hung about her slight figure with clinging gracefulness. Her hair, which formerly she had worn according to the custom of the day was now twisted up tightly, and she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline, an under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach.

She had come forward prettily, but Jude felt that she had hardly expected him to kiss her, as he was burning to do, under other colours than those of cousinship. He could not perceive the least sign that Sue regarded him as a lover, or ever would do so, now that she knew the worst of him, even if he had the right to behave as one; and this helped on his growing resolve to tell her of his matrimonial entanglement, which he had put off doing from time to time in sheer dread of losing the bliss of her company.

Sue came out into the town with him, and they walked and talked with tongues centred only on the passing moments. Jude said he would like to buy her a little present of some sort, and then she confessed, with something of shame, that she was dreadfully hungry. They were kept on very short allowances in the college, and a dinner, tea, and supper all in one was the present she most desired in the world. Jude thereupon took her to an inn and ordered whatever the house afforded, which was not much. The place,

however, gave them a delightful opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*, nobody else being in the room, and they talked freely.

She told him about the school as it was at that date, and the rough living, and the mixed character of her fellow-students, gathered together from all parts of the diocese, and how she had to get up and work by gas-light in the early morning, with all the bitterness of a young person to whom restraint was new. To all this he listened; but it was not what he wanted especially to know—her relations with Phillotson. That was what she did not tell. When they had sat and eaten, Jude impulsively placed his hand upon hers; she looked up and smiled, and took his quite freely into her own little soft one, dividing his fingers and coolly examining them, as if they were the fingers of a glove she was purchasing.

“Your hands are rather rough, Jude, aren’t they?” she said.

“Yes. So would yours be if they held a mallet and chisel all day.”

“I don’t dislike it, you know. I think it is noble to see a man’s hands subdued to what he works in... Well, I’m rather glad I came to this training-school, after all. See how independent I shall be after the two years’ training! I shall pass pretty high, I expect, and Mr. Phillotson will use his influence to get me a big school.”

She had touched the subject at last. “I had a suspicion, a fear,” said Jude, “that he—cared about you rather warmly, and perhaps wanted to marry you.”

“Now don’t be such a silly boy!”

“He has said something about it, I expect.”

“If he had, what would it matter? An old man like him!”

“Oh, come, Sue; he’s not so very old. And I know what I saw him doing —”

“Not kissing me—that I’m certain!”

“No. But putting his arm round your waist.”

“Ah—I remember. But I didn’t know he was going to.”

“You are wriggling out if it, Sue, and it isn’t quite kind!”

Her ever-sensitive lip began to quiver, and her eye to blink, at something this reproof was deciding her to say.

“I know you’ll be angry if I tell you everything, and that’s why I don’t want to!”

“Very well, then, dear,” he said soothingly. “I have no real right to ask you, and I don’t wish to know.”

“I shall tell you!” said she, with the perverseness that was part of her. “This is what I have done: I have promised—I have promised—that I will marry him when I come out of the training-school two years hence, and have got my certificate; his plan being that we shall then take a large double school in a great town—he the boys’ and I the girls’—as married school-teachers often do, and make a good income between us.”

“Oh, Sue! ... But of course it is right—you couldn’t have done better!”

He glanced at her and their eyes met, the reproach in his own belying his words. Then he drew his hand quite away from hers, and turned his face in estrangement from her to the window. Sue regarded him passively without moving.

“I knew you would be angry!” she said with an air of no emotion whatever. “Very well—I am wrong, I suppose! I ought not to have let you come to see me! We had better not meet again; and we’ll only correspond at long intervals, on purely business matters!”

This was just the one thing he would not be able to bear, as she probably knew, and it brought him round at once. “Oh yes, we will,” he said quickly. “Your being engaged can make no difference to me whatever. I have a perfect right to see you when I want to; and I shall!”

“Then don’t let us talk of it any more. It is quite spoiling our evening together. What does it matter about what one is going to do two years hence!”

She was something of a riddle to him, and he let the subject drift away. “Shall we go and sit in the cathedral?” he asked, when their meal was finished.

“Cathedral? Yes. Though I think I’d rather sit in the railway station,” she answered, a remnant of vexation still in her voice. “That’s the centre of the town life now. The cathedral has had its day!”

“How modern you are!”

“So would you be if you had lived so much in the Middle Ages as I have done these last few years! The cathedral was a very good place four or five

centuries ago; but it is played out now... I am not modern, either. I am more ancient than mediævalism, if you only knew.”

Jude looked distressed.

“There—I won’t say any more of that!” she cried. “Only you don’t know how bad I am, from your point of view, or you wouldn’t think so much of me, or care whether I was engaged or not. Now there’s just time for us to walk round the Close, then I must go in, or I shall be locked out for the night.”

He took her to the gate and they parted. Jude had a conviction that his unhappy visit to her on that sad night had precipitated this marriage engagement, and it did anything but add to his happiness. Her reproach had taken that shape, then, and not the shape of words. However, next day he set about seeking employment, which it was not so easy to get as at Christminster, there being, as a rule, less stone-cutting in progress in this quiet city, and hands being mostly permanent. But he edged himself in by degrees. His first work was some carving at the cemetery on the hill; and ultimately he became engaged on the labour he most desired—the cathedral repairs, which were very extensive, the whole interior stonework having been overhauled, to be largely replaced by new. It might be a labour of years to get it all done, and he had confidence enough in his own skill with the mallet and chisel to feel that it would be a matter of choice with himself how long he would stay.

The lodgings he took near the Close Gate would not have disgraced a curate, the rent representing a higher percentage on his wages than mechanics of any sort usually care to pay. His combined bed and sitting-room was furnished with framed photographs of the rectories and deaneries at which his landlady had lived as trusted servant in her time, and the parlour downstairs bore a clock on the mantelpiece inscribed to the effect that it was presented to the same serious-minded woman by her fellow-servants on the occasion of her marriage. Jude added to the furniture of his room by unpacking photographs of the ecclesiastical carvings and monuments that he had executed with his own hands; and he was deemed a satisfactory acquisition as tenant of the vacant apartment.

He found an ample supply of theological books in the city book-shops, and with these his studies were recommenced in a different spirit and direction from his former course. As a relaxation from the Fathers, and such

stock works as Paley and Butler, he read Newman, Pusey, and many other modern lights. He hired a harmonium, set it up in his lodging, and practised chants thereon, single and double.

II

“To-morrow is our grand day, you know. Where shall we go?”

“I have leave from three till nine. Wherever we can get to and come back from in that time. Not ruins, Jude—I don’t care for them.”

“Well—Wardour Castle. And then we can do Fonthill if we like—all in the same afternoon.”

“Wardour is Gothic ruins—and I hate Gothic!”

“No. Quite otherwise. It is a classic building—Corinthian, I think; with a lot of pictures.”

“Ah—that will do. I like the sound of Corinthian. We’ll go.”

Their conversation had run thus some few weeks later, and next morning they prepared to start. Every detail of the outing was a facet reflecting a sparkle to Jude, and he did not venture to meditate on the life of inconsistency he was leading. His Sue’s conduct was one lovely conundrum to him; he could say no more.

There duly came the charm of calling at the college door for her; her emergence in a nunlike simplicity of costume that was rather enforced than desired; the traipsing along to the station, the porters’ “B’your leave!,” the screaming of the trains—everything formed the basis of a beautiful crystallization. Nobody stared at Sue, because she was so plainly dressed, which comforted Jude in the thought that only himself knew the charms those habiliments subdued. A matter of ten pounds spent in a drapery-shop, which had no connection with her real life or her real self, would have set all Melchester staring. The guard of the train thought they were lovers, and put them into a compartment all by themselves.

“That’s a good intention wasted!” said she.

Jude did not respond. He thought the remark unnecessarily cruel, and partly untrue.

They reached the park and castle and wandered through the picture-galleries, Jude stopping by preference in front of the devotional pictures by Del Sarto, Guido Reni, Spagnoletto, Sassoferrato, Carlo Dolci, and others. Sue paused patiently beside him, and stole critical looks into his face as, regarding the Virgins, Holy Families, and Saints, it grew reverent and abstracted. When she had thoroughly estimated him at this, she would move on and wait for him before a Lely or Reynolds. It was evident that her cousin deeply interested her, as one might be interested in a man puzzling out his way along a labyrinth from which one had one's self escaped.

When they came out a long time still remained to them and Jude proposed that as soon as they had had something to eat they should walk across the high country to the north of their present position, and intercept the train of another railway leading back to Melchester, at a station about seven miles off. Sue, who was inclined for any adventure that would intensify the sense of her day's freedom, readily agreed; and away they went, leaving the adjoining station behind them.

It was indeed open country, wide and high. They talked and bounded on, Jude cutting from a little covert a long walking-stick for Sue as tall as herself, with a great crook, which made her look like a shepherdess. About half-way on their journey they crossed a main road running due east and west—the old road from London to Land's End. They paused, and looked up and down it for a moment, and remarked upon the desolation which had come over this once lively thoroughfare, while the wind dipped to earth and scooped straws and hay-stems from the ground.

They crossed the road and passed on, but during the next half-mile Sue seemed to grow tired, and Jude began to be distressed for her. They had walked a good distance altogether, and if they could not reach the other station it would be rather awkward. For a long time there was no cottage visible on the wide expanse of down and turnip-land; but presently they came to a sheepfold, and next to the shepherd, pitching hurdles. He told them that the only house near was his mother's and his, pointing to a little dip ahead from which a faint blue smoke arose, and recommended them to go on and rest there.

This they did, and entered the house, admitted by an old woman without a single tooth, to whom they were as civil as strangers can be when their only chance of rest and shelter lies in the favour of the householder.

“A nice little cottage,” said Jude.

“Oh, I don’t know about the niceness. I shall have to thatch it soon, and where the thatch is to come from I can’t tell, for straw do get that dear, that ’twill soon be cheaper to cover your house wi’ chaineey plates than thatch.”

They sat resting, and the shepherd came in. “Don’t ’ee mind I,” he said with a deprecating wave of the hand; “bide here as long as ye will. But mid you be thinking o’ getting back to Melchester to-night by train? Because you’ll never do it in this world, since you don’t know the lie of the country. I don’t mind going with ye some o’ the ways, but even then the train mid be gone.”

They started up.

“You can bide here, you know, over the night—can’t ’em, Mother? The place is welcome to ye. ’Tis hard lying, rather, but volk may do worse.” He turned to Jude and asked privately: “Be you a married couple?”

“Hsh—no!” said Jude.

“Oh—I meant nothing ba’dy—not I! Well then, she can go into Mother’s room, and you and I can lie in the outer chimmer after they’ve gone through. I can call ye soon enough to catch the first train back. You’ve lost this one now.”

On consideration they decided to close with this offer, and drew up and shared with the shepherd and his mother the boiled bacon and greens for supper.

“I rather like this,” said Sue, while their entertainers were clearing away the dishes. “Outside all laws except gravitation and germination.”

“You only think you like it; you don’t: you are quite a product of civilization,” said Jude, a recollection of her engagement reviving his soreness a little.

“Indeed I am not, Jude. I like reading and all that, but I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom.”

“Do you remember it so well? You seem to me to have nothing unconventional at all about you.”

“Oh, haven’t I! You don’t know what’s inside me.”

“What?”

“The Ishmaelite.”

“An urban miss is what you are.”

She looked severe disagreement, and turned away.

The shepherd aroused them the next morning, as he had said. It was bright and clear, and the four miles to the train were accomplished pleasantly. When they had reached Melchester, and walked to the Close, and the gables of the old building in which she was again to be immured rose before Sue's eyes, she looked a little scared. “I expect I shall catch it!” she murmured.

They rang the great bell and waited.

“Oh, I bought something for you, which I had nearly forgotten,” she said quickly, searching her pocket. “It is a new little photograph of me. Would you like it?”

“*Would I!*” He took it gladly, and the porter came. There seemed to be an ominous glance on his face when he opened the gate. She passed in, looking back at Jude, and waving her hand.

III

The seventy young women, of ages varying in the main from nineteen to one-and-twenty, though several were older, who at this date filled the species of nunnery known as the Training-School at Melchester, formed a very mixed community, which included the daughters of mechanics, curates, surgeons, shopkeepers, farmers, dairy-men, soldiers, sailors, and villagers. They sat in the large school-room of the establishment on the evening previously described, and word was passed round that Sue Bridehead had not come in at closing-time.

“She went out with her young man,” said a second-year’s student, who knew about young men. “And Miss Traceley saw her at the station with him. She’ll have it hot when she does come.”

“She said he was her cousin,” observed a youthful new girl.

“That excuse has been made a little too often in this school to be effectual in saving our souls,” said the head girl of the year, drily.

The fact was that, only twelve months before, there had occurred a lamentable seduction of one of the pupils who had made the same statement in order to gain meetings with her lover. The affair had created a scandal, and the management had consequently been rough on cousins ever since.

At nine o’clock the names were called, Sue’s being pronounced three times sonorously by Miss Traceley without eliciting an answer.

At a quarter past nine the seventy stood up to sing the “Evening Hymn,” and then knelt down to prayers. After prayers they went in to supper, and every girl’s thought was, Where is Sue Bridehead? Some of the students, who had seen Jude from the window, felt that they would not mind risking her punishment for the pleasure of being kissed by such a kindly-faced young man. Hardly one among them believed in the cousinship.

Half an hour later they all lay in their cubicles, their tender feminine faces upturned to the flaring gas-jets which at intervals stretched down the long dormitories, every face bearing the legend “The Weaker” upon it, as

the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious, and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded.

One of the mistresses came in to turn out the lights, and before doing so gave a final glance at Sue's cot, which remained empty, and at her little dressing-table at the foot, which, like all the rest, was ornamented with various girlish trifles, framed photographs being not the least conspicuous among them. Sue's table had a moderate show, two men in their filigree and velvet frames standing together beside her looking-glass.

"Who are these men—did she ever say?" asked the mistress. "Strictly speaking, relations' portraits only are allowed on these tables, you know."

"One—the middle-aged man," said a student in the next bed—"is the schoolmaster she served under—Mr. Phillotson."

"And the other—this undergraduate in cap and gown—who is he?"

"He is a friend, or was. She has never told his name."

"Was it either of these two who came for her?"

"No."

"You are sure 'twas not the undergraduate?"

"Quite. He was a young man with a black beard."

The lights were promptly extinguished, and till they fell asleep the girls indulged in conjectures about Sue, and wondered what games she had carried on in London and at Christminster before she came here, some of the more restless ones getting out of bed and looking from the mullioned windows at the vast west front of the cathedral opposite, and the spire rising behind it.

When they awoke the next morning they glanced into Sue's nook, to find it still without a tenant. After the early lessons by gas-light, in half-toilet, and when they had come up to dress for breakfast, the bell of the entrance gate was heard to ring loudly. The mistress of the dormitory went away, and

presently came back to say that the principal's orders were that nobody was to speak to Bridehead without permission.

When, accordingly, Sue came into the dormitory to hastily tidy herself, looking flushed and tired, she went to her cubicle in silence, none of them coming out to greet her or to make inquiry. When they had gone downstairs they found that she did not follow them into the dining-hall to breakfast, and they then learnt that she had been severely reprimanded, and ordered to a solitary room for a week, there to be confined, and take her meals, and do all her reading.

At this the seventy murmured, the sentence being, they thought, too severe. A round robin was prepared and sent in to the principal, asking for a remission of Sue's punishment. No notice was taken. Towards evening, when the geography mistress began dictating her subject, the girls in the class sat with folded arms.

"You mean that you are not going to work?" said the mistress at last. "I may as well tell you that it has been ascertained that the young man Bridehead stayed out with was not her cousin, for the very good reason that she has no such relative. We have written to Christminster to ascertain."

"We are willing to take her word," said the head girl.

"This young man was discharged from his work at Christminster for drunkenness and blasphemy in public-houses, and he has come here to live, entirely to be near her."

However, they remained stolid and motionless, and the mistress left the room to inquire from her superiors what was to be done.

Presently, towards dusk, the pupils, as they sat, heard exclamations from the first-year's girls in an adjoining classroom, and one rushed in to say that Sue Bridehead had got out of the back window of the room in which she had been confined, escaped in the dark across the lawn, and disappeared. How she had managed to get out of the garden nobody could tell, as it was bounded by the river at the bottom, and the side door was locked.

They went and looked at the empty room, the casement between the middle mullions of which stood open. The lawn was again searched with a lantern, every bush and shrub being examined, but she was nowhere hidden. Then the porter of the front gate was interrogated, and on reflection he said that he remembered hearing a sort of splashing in the stream at the back, but

he had taken no notice, thinking some ducks had come down the river from above.

“She must have walked through the river!” said a mistress.

“Or drowned herself,” said the porter.

The mind of the matron was horrified—not so much at the possible death of Sue as at the possible half-column detailing that event in all the newspapers, which, added to the scandal of the year before, would give the college an unenviable notoriety for many months to come.

More lanterns were procured, and the river examined; and then, at last, on the opposite shore, which was open to the fields, some little boot-tracks were discerned in the mud, which left no doubt that the too excitable girl had waded through a depth of water reaching nearly to her shoulders—for this was the chief river of the county, and was mentioned in all the geography books with respect. As Sue had not brought disgrace upon the school by drowning herself, the matron began to speak superciliously of her, and to express gladness that she was gone.

On the self-same evening Jude sat in his lodgings by the Close Gate. Often at this hour after dusk he would enter the silent Close, and stand opposite the house that contained Sue, and watch the shadows of the girls’ heads passing to and fro upon the blinds, and wish he had nothing else to do but to sit reading and learning all day what many of the thoughtless inmates despised. But to-night, having finished tea and brushed himself up, he was deep in the perusal of the Twenty-ninth Volume of Pusey’s Library of the Fathers, a set of books which he had purchased of a second-hand dealer at a price that seemed to him to be one of miraculous cheapness for that invaluable work. He fancied he heard something rattle lightly against his window; then he heard it again. Certainly somebody had thrown gravel. He rose and gently lifted the sash.

“Jude!” (from below).

“Sue!”

“Yes—it is! Can I come up without being seen?”

“Oh yes!”

“Then don’t come down. Shut the window.”

Jude waited, knowing that she could enter easily enough, the front door being opened merely by a knob which anybody could turn, as in most old

country towns. He palpitated at the thought that she had fled to him in her trouble as he had fled to her in his. What counterparts they were! He unlatched the door of his room, heard a stealthy rustle on the dark stairs, and in a moment she appeared in the light of his lamp. He went up to seize her hand, and found she was clammy as a marine deity, and that her clothes clung to her like the robes upon the figures in the Parthenon frieze.

“I’m so cold!” she said through her chattering teeth. “Can I come by your fire, Jude?”

She crossed to his little grate and very little fire, but as the water dripped from her as she moved, the idea of drying herself was absurd. “Whatever have you done, darling?” he asked, with alarm, the tender epithet slipping out unawares.

“Walked through the largest river in the county—that’s what I’ve done! They locked me up for being out with you; and it seemed so unjust that I couldn’t bear it, so I got out of the window and escaped across the stream!” She had begun the explanation in her usual slightly independent tones, but before she had finished the thin pink lips trembled, and she could hardly refrain from crying.

“Dear Sue!” he said. “You must take off all your things! And let me see—you must borrow some from the landlady. I’ll ask her.”

“No, no! Don’t let her know, for God’s sake! We are so near the school that they’ll come after me!”

“Then you must put on mine. You don’t mind?”

“Oh no.”

“My Sunday suit, you know. It is close here.” In fact, everything was close and handy in Jude’s single chamber, because there was not room for it to be otherwise. He opened a drawer, took out his best dark suit, and giving the garments a shake, said, “Now, how long shall I give you?”

“Ten minutes.”

Jude left the room and went into the street, where he walked up and down. A clock struck half-past seven, and he returned. Sitting in his only arm-chair he saw a slim and fragile being masquerading as himself on a Sunday, so pathetic in her defencelessness that his heart felt big with the sense of it. On two other chairs before the fire were her wet garments. She blushed as he sat down beside her, but only for a moment.

“I suppose, Jude, it is odd that you should see me like this and all my things hanging there? Yet what nonsense! They are only a woman’s clothes—sexless cloth and linen... I wish I didn’t feel so ill and sick! Will you dry my clothes now? Please do, Jude, and I’ll get a lodging by and by. It is not late yet.”

“No, you shan’t, if you are ill. You must stay here. Dear, dear Sue, what can I get for you?”

“I don’t know! I can’t help shivering. I wish I could get warm.” Jude put on her his great-coat in addition, and then ran out to the nearest public-house, whence he returned with a little bottle in his hand. “Here’s six of best brandy,” he said. “Now you drink it, dear; all of it.”

“I can’t out of the bottle, can I?” Jude fetched the glass from the dressing-table, and administered the spirit in some water. She gasped a little, but gulped it down, and lay back in the armchair.

She then began to relate circumstantially her experiences since they had parted; but in the middle of her story her voice faltered, her head nodded, and she ceased. She was in a sound sleep. Jude, dying of anxiety lest she should have caught a chill which might permanently injure her, was glad to hear the regular breathing. He softly went nearer to her, and observed that a warm flush now rosed her hitherto blue cheeks, and felt that her hanging hand was no longer cold. Then he stood with his back to the fire regarding her, and saw in her almost a divinity.

IV

Jude's reverie was interrupted by the creak of footsteps ascending the stairs.

He whisked Sue's clothing from the chair where it was drying, thrust it under the bed, and sat down to his book. Somebody knocked and opened the door immediately. It was the landlady.

"Oh, I didn't know whether you was in or not, Mr. Fawley. I wanted to know if you would require supper. I see you've a young gentleman—"

"Yes, ma'am. But I think I won't come down to-night. Will you bring supper up on a tray, and I'll have a cup of tea as well."

It was Jude's custom to go downstairs to the kitchen, and eat his meals with the family, to save trouble. His landlady brought up the supper, however, on this occasion, and he took it from her at the door.

When she had descended he set the teapot on the hob, and drew out Sue's clothes anew; but they were far from dry. A thick woollen gown, he found, held a deal of water. So he hung them up again, and enlarged his fire and mused as the steam from the garments went up the chimney.

Suddenly she said, "Jude!"

"Yes. All right. How do you feel now?"

"Better. Quite well. Why, I fell asleep, didn't I? What time is it? Not late surely?"

"It is past ten."

"Is it really? What *shall* I do!" she said, starting up.

"Stay where you are."

"Yes; that's what I want to do. But I don't know what they would say! And what will you do?"

"I am going to sit here by the fire all night, and read. To-morrow is Sunday, and I haven't to go out anywhere. Perhaps you will be saved a

severe illness by resting there. Don't be frightened. I'm all right. Look here, what I have got for you. Some supper."

When she had sat upright she breathed plaintively and said, "I do feel rather weak still. I thought I was well; and I ought not to be here, ought I?" But the supper fortified her somewhat, and when she had had some tea and had lain back again she was bright and cheerful.

The tea must have been green, or too long drawn, for she seemed preternaturally wakeful afterwards, though Jude, who had not taken any, began to feel heavy; till her conversation fixed his attention.

"You called me a creature of civilization, or something, didn't you?" she said, breaking a silence. "It was very odd you should have done that."

"Why?"

"Well, because it is provokingly wrong. I am a sort of negation of it."

"You are very philosophical. 'A negation' is profound talking."

"Is it? Do I strike you as being learned?" she asked, with a touch of raillery.

"No—not learned. Only you don't talk quite like a girl—well, a girl who has had no advantages."

"I have had advantages. I don't know Latin and Greek, though I know the grammars of those tongues. But I know most of the Greek and Latin classics through translations, and other books too. I read Lemprière, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantôme, Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible, and other such; and found that all interest in the unwholesome part of those books ended with its mystery."

"You have read more than I," he said with a sigh. "How came you to read some of those queerer ones?"

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "it was by accident. My life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them—one or two of them particularly—almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel—to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue; for no average man—no man short of a sensual savage—will molest a woman by day or night, at home or abroad, unless she invites him. Until she says by a look 'Come on' he is always afraid to,

and if you never say it, or look it, he never comes. However, what I was going to say is that when I was eighteen I formed a friendly intimacy with an undergraduate at Christminster, and he taught me a great deal, and lent me books which I should never have got hold of otherwise.”

“Is your friendship broken off?”

“Oh yes. He died, poor fellow, two or three years after he had taken his degree and left Christminster.”

“You saw a good deal of him, I suppose?”

“Yes. We used to go about together—on walking tours, reading tours, and things of that sort—like two men almost. He asked me to live with him, and I agreed to by letter. But when I joined him in London I found he meant a different thing from what I meant. He wanted me to be his mistress, in fact, but I wasn’t in love with him—and on my saying I should go away if he didn’t agree to *my* plan, he did so. We shared a sitting-room for fifteen months; and he became a leader-writer for one of the great London dailies; till he was taken ill, and had to go abroad. He said I was breaking his heart by holding out against him so long at such close quarters; he could never have believed it of woman. I might play that game once too often, he said. He came home merely to die. His death caused a terrible remorse in me for my cruelty—though I hope he died of consumption and not of me entirely. I went down to Sandbourne to his funeral, and was his only mourner. He left me a little money—because I broke his heart, I suppose. That’s how men are—so much better than women!”

“Good heavens!—what did you do then?”

“Ah—now you are angry with me!” she said, a contralto note of tragedy coming suddenly into her silvery voice. “I wouldn’t have told you if I had known!”

“No, I am not. Tell me all.”

“Well, I invested his money, poor fellow, in a bubble scheme, and lost it. I lived about London by myself for some time, and then I returned to Christminster, as my father—who was also in London, and had started as an art metal-worker near Long-Acre—wouldn’t have me back; and I got that occupation in the artist-shop where you found me... I said you didn’t know how bad I was!”

Jude looked round upon the arm-chair and its occupant, as if to read more carefully the creature he had given shelter to. His voice trembled as he said: "However you have lived, Sue, I believe you are as innocent as you are unconventional!"

"I am not particularly innocent, as you see, now that I have

‘twitched the robe
From that blank lay-figure your fancy draped,’”

said she, with an ostensible sneer, though he could hear that she was brimming with tears. "But I have never yielded myself to any lover, if that's what you mean! I have remained as I began."

"I quite believe you. But some women would not have remained as they began."

"Perhaps not. Better women would not. People say I must be cold-natured—sexless—on account of it. But I won't have it! Some of the most passionately erotic poets have been the most self-contained in their daily lives."

"Have you told Mr. Phillotson about this university scholar friend?"

"Yes—long ago. I have never made any secret of it to anybody."

"What did he say?"

"He did not pass any criticism—only said I was everything to him, whatever I did; and things like that."

Jude felt much depressed; she seemed to get further and further away from him with her strange ways and curious unconsciousness of gender.

"Aren't you *really* vexed with me, dear Jude?" she suddenly asked, in a voice of such extraordinary tenderness that it hardly seemed to come from the same woman who had just told her story so lightly. "I would rather offend anybody in the world than you, I think!"

"I don't know whether I am vexed or not. I know I care very much about you!"

"I care as much for you as for anybody I ever met."

"You don't care *more*! There, I ought not to say that. Don't answer it!"

There was another long silence. He felt that she was treating him cruelly, though he could not quite say in what way. Her very helplessness seemed to

make her so much stronger than he.

“I am awfully ignorant on general matters, although I have worked so hard,” he said, to turn the subject. “I am absorbed in theology, you know. And what do you think I should be doing just about now, if you weren’t here? I should be saying my evening prayers. I suppose you wouldn’t like —”

“Oh no, no,” she answered, “I would rather not, if you don’t mind. I should seem so—such a hypocrite.”

“I thought you wouldn’t join, so I didn’t propose it. You must remember that I hope to be a useful minister some day.”

“To be ordained, I think you said?”

“Yes.”

“Then you haven’t given up the idea?—I thought that perhaps you had by this time.”

“Of course not. I fondly thought at first that you felt as I do about that, as you were so mixed up in Christminster Anglicanism. And Mr. Phillotson —”

“I have no respect for Christminster whatever, except, in a qualified degree, on its intellectual side,” said Sue Bridehead earnestly. “My friend I spoke of took that out of me. He was the most irreligious man I ever knew, and the most moral. And intellect at Christminster is new wine in old bottles. The mediævalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go. To be sure, at times one couldn’t help having a sneaking liking for the traditions of the old faith, as preserved by a section of the thinkers there in touching and simple sincerity; but when I was in my saddest, rightest mind I always felt,

‘O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted
Gods!’”...

“Sue, you are not a good friend of mine to talk like that!”

“Then I won’t, dear Jude!” The emotional throat-note had come back, and she turned her face away.

“I still think Christminster has much that is glorious; though I was resentful because I couldn’t get there.” He spoke gently, and resisted his

impulse to pique her on to tears.

“It is an ignorant place, except as to the townspeople, artizans, drunkards, and paupers,” she said, perverse still at his differing from her. “*They* see life as it is, of course; but few of the people in the colleges do. You prove it in your own person. You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires’ sons.”

“Well, I can do without what it confers. I care for something higher.”

“And I for something broader, truer,” she insisted. “At present intellect in Christminster is pushing one way, and religion the other; and so they stand stock-still, like two rams butting each other.”

“What would Mr. Phillotson—”

“It is a place full of fetishists and ghost-seers!”

He noticed that whenever he tried to speak of the schoolmaster she turned the conversation to some generalizations about the offending university. Jude was extremely, morbidly, curious about her life as Phillotson’s *protégée* and betrothed; yet she would not enlighten him.

“Well, that’s just what I am, too,” he said. “I am fearful of life, spectre-seeing always.”

“But you are good and dear!” she murmured.

His heart bumped, and he made no reply.

“You are in the Tractarian stage just now, are you not?” she added, putting on flippancy to hide real feeling, a common trick with her. “Let me see—when was I there? In the year eighteen hundred and—”

“There’s a sarcasm in that which is rather unpleasant to me, Sue. Now will you do what I want you to? At this time I read a chapter, and then say prayers, as I told you. Now will you concentrate your attention on any book of these you like, and sit with your back to me, and leave me to my custom? You are sure you won’t join me?”

“I’ll look at you.”

“No. Don’t tease, Sue!”

“Very well—I’ll do just as you bid me, and I won’t vex you, Jude,” she replied, in the tone of a child who was going to be good for ever after,

turning her back upon him accordingly. A small Bible other than the one he was using lay near her, and during his retreat she took it up, and turned over the leaves.

“Jude,” she said brightly, when he had finished and come back to her; “will you let me make you a *new* New Testament, like the one I made for myself at Christminster?”

“Oh yes. How was that made?”

“I altered my old one by cutting up all the Epistles and Gospels into separate *brochures*, and rearranging them in chronological order as written, beginning the book with Thessalonians, following on with the Epistles, and putting the Gospels much further on. Then I had the volume rebound. My university friend Mr.—but never mind his name, poor boy—said it was an excellent idea. I know that reading it afterwards made it twice as interesting as before, and twice as understandable.”

“H’m!” said Jude, with a sense of sacrilege.

“And what a literary enormity this is,” she said, as she glanced into the pages of Solomon’s Song. “I mean the synopsis at the head of each chapter, explaining away the real nature of that rhapsody. You needn’t be alarmed: nobody claims inspiration for the chapter headings. Indeed, many divines treat them with contempt. It seems the drollest thing to think of the four-and-twenty elders, or bishops, or whatever number they were, sitting with long faces and writing down such stuff.”

Jude looked pained. “You are quite Voltairean!” he murmured.

“Indeed? Then I won’t say any more, except that people have no right to falsify the Bible! I *hate* such hum-bug as could attempt to plaster over with ecclesiastical abstractions such ecstatic, natural, human love as lies in that great and passionate song!” Her speech had grown spirited, and almost petulant at his rebuke, and her eyes moist. “I *wish* I had a friend here to support me; but nobody is ever on my side!”

“But my dear Sue, my very dear Sue, I am not against you!” he said, taking her hand, and surprised at her introducing personal feeling into mere argument.

“Yes you are, yes you are!” she cried, turning away her face that he might not see her brimming eyes. “You are on the side of the people in the training-school—at least you seem almost to be! What I insist on is, that to

explain such verses as this: ‘Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women?’ by the note: ‘*The Church professeth her faith,*’ is supremely ridiculous!”

“Well then, let it be! You make such a personal matter of everything! I am—only too inclined just now to apply the words profanely. You know *you* are fairest among women to me, come to that!”

“But you are not to say it now!” Sue replied, her voice changing to its softest note of severity. Then their eyes met, and they shook hands like cronies in a tavern, and Jude saw the absurdity of quarrelling on such a hypothetical subject, and she the silliness of crying about what was written in an old book like the Bible.

“I won’t disturb your convictions—I really won’t!” she went on soothingly, for now he was rather more ruffled than she. “But I did want and long to ennoble some man to high aims; and when I saw you, and knew you wanted to be my comrade, I—shall I confess it?—thought that man might be you. But you take so much tradition on trust that I don’t know what to say.”

“Well, dear; I suppose one must take some things on trust. Life isn’t long enough to work out everything in Euclid problems before you believe it. I take Christianity.”

“Well, perhaps you might take something worse.”

“Indeed I might. Perhaps I have done so!” He thought of Arabella.

“I won’t ask what, because we are going to be *very* nice with each other, aren’t we, and never, never, vex each other any more?” She looked up trustfully, and her voice seemed trying to nestle in his breast.

“I shall always care for you!” said Jude.

“And I for you. Because you are single-hearted, and forgiving to your faulty and tiresome little Sue!”

He looked away, for that epicene tenderness of hers was too harrowing. Was it that which had broken the heart of the poor leader-writer; and was he to be the next one? ... But Sue was so dear! ... If he could only get over the sense of her sex, as she seemed to be able to do so easily of his, what a comrade she would make; for their difference of opinion on conjectural subjects only drew them closer together on matters of daily human experience. She was nearer to him than any other woman he had ever met,

and he could scarcely believe that time, creed, or absence, would ever divide him from her.

But his grief at her incredulities returned. They sat on till she fell asleep again, and he nodded in his chair likewise. Whenever he aroused himself he turned her things, and made up the fire anew. About six o'clock he awoke completely, and lighting a candle, found that her clothes were dry. Her chair being a far more comfortable one than his she still slept on inside his great-coat, looking warm as a new bun and boyish as a Ganymede. Placing the garments by her and touching her on the shoulder he went downstairs, and washed himself by starlight in the yard.

V

When he returned she was dressed as usual.

“Now could I get out without anybody seeing me?” she asked. “The town is not yet astir.”

“But you have had no breakfast.”

“Oh, I don’t want any! I fear I ought not to have run away from that school! Things seem so different in the cold light of morning, don’t they? What Mr. Phillotson will say I don’t know! It was quite by his wish that I went there. He is the only man in the world for whom I have any respect or fear. I hope he’ll forgive me; but he’ll scold me dreadfully, I expect!”

“I’ll go to him and explain—” began Jude.

“Oh no, you shan’t. I don’t care for him! He may think what he likes—I shall do just as I choose!”

“But you just this moment said—”

“Well, if I did, I shall do as I like for all him! I have thought of what I shall do—go to the sister of one of my fellow-students in the training-school, who has asked me to visit her. She has a school near Shaston, about eighteen miles from here—and I shall stay there till this has blown over, and I get back to the training-school again.”

At the last moment he persuaded her to let him make her a cup of coffee, in a portable apparatus he kept in his room for use on rising to go to his work every day before the household was astir.

“Now a dew-bit to eat with it,” he said; “and off we go. You can have a regular breakfast when you get there.”

They went quietly out of the house, Jude accompanying her to the station. As they departed along the street a head was thrust out of an upper window of his lodging and quickly withdrawn. Sue still seemed sorry for her rashness, and to wish she had not rebelled; telling him at parting that she would let him know as soon as she got re-admitted to the training-

school. They stood rather miserably together on the platform; and it was apparent that he wanted to say more.

“I want to tell you something—two things,” he said hurriedly as the train came up. “One is a warm one, the other a cold one!”

“Jude,” she said. “I know one of them. And you mustn’t!”

“What?”

“You mustn’t love me. You are to like me—that’s all!”

Jude’s face became so full of complicated glooms that hers was agitated in sympathy as she bade him adieu through the carriage window. And then the train moved on, and waving her pretty hand to him she vanished away.

Melchester was a dismal place enough for Jude that Sunday of her departure, and the Close so hateful that he did not go once to the cathedral services. The next morning there came a letter from her, which, with her usual promptitude, she had written directly she had reached her friend’s house. She told him of her safe arrival and comfortable quarters, and then added:—

What I really write about, dear Jude, is something I said to you at parting. You had been so very good and kind to me that when you were out of sight I felt what a cruel and ungrateful woman I was to say it, and it has reproached me ever since. *If you want to love me, Jude, you may:* I don’t mind at all; and I’ll never say again that you mustn’t!

Now I won’t write any more about that. You do forgive your thoughtless friend for her cruelty? and won’t make her miserable by saying you don’t?—Ever,

SUE.

It would be superfluous to say what his answer was; and how he thought what he would have done had he been free, which should have rendered a long residence with a female friend quite unnecessary for Sue. He felt he might have been pretty sure of his own victory if it had come to a conflict between Phillotson and himself for the possession of her.

Yet Jude was in danger of attaching more meaning to Sue’s impulsive note than it really was intended to bear.

After the lapse of a few days he found himself hoping that she would write again. But he received no further communication; and in the intensity of his solicitude he sent another note, suggesting that he should pay her a visit some Sunday, the distance being under eighteen miles.

He expected a reply on the second morning after despatching his missive; but none came. The third morning arrived; the postman did not stop. This was Saturday, and in a feverish state of anxiety about her he sent off three brief lines stating that he was coming the following day, for he felt sure something had happened.

His first and natural thought had been that she was ill from her immersion; but it soon occurred to him that somebody would have written for her in such a case. Conjectures were put an end to by his arrival at the village school-house near Shaston on the bright morning of Sunday, between eleven and twelve o'clock, when the parish was as vacant as a desert, most of the inhabitants having gathered inside the church, whence their voices could occasionally be heard in unison.

A little girl opened the door. "Miss Bridehead is up-stairs," she said. "And will you please walk up to her?"

"Is she ill?" asked Jude hastily.

"Only a little—not very."

Jude entered and ascended. On reaching the landing a voice told him which way to turn—the voice of Sue calling his name. He passed the doorway, and found her lying in a little bed in a room a dozen feet square.

"Oh, Sue!" he cried, sitting down beside her and taking her hand. "How is this! You couldn't write?"

"No—it wasn't that!" she answered. "I did catch a bad cold—but I could have written. Only I wouldn't!"

"Why not?—frightening me like this!"

"Yes—that was what I was afraid of! But I had decided not to write to you any more. They won't have me back at the school—that's why I couldn't write. Not the fact, but the reason!"

"Well?"

"They not only won't have me, but they gave me a parting piece of advice—"

“What?”

She did not answer directly. “I vowed I never would tell you, Jude—it is so vulgar and distressing!”

“Is it about us?”

“Yes.”

“But do tell me!”

“Well—somebody has sent them baseless reports about us, and they say you and I ought to marry as soon as possible, for the sake of my reputation! ... There—now I have told you, and I wish I hadn’t!”

“Oh, poor Sue!”

“I don’t think of you like that means! It did just *occur* to me to regard you in the way they think I do, but I hadn’t begun to. I *have* recognized that the cousinship was merely nominal, since we met as total strangers. But my marrying you, dear Jude—why, of course, if I had reckoned upon marrying you I shouldn’t have come to you so often! And I never supposed you thought of such a thing as marrying me till the other evening; when I began to fancy you did love me a little. Perhaps I ought not to have been so intimate with you. It is all my fault. Everything is my fault always!”

The speech seemed a little forced and unreal, and they regarded each other with a mutual distress.

“I was so blind at first!” she went on. “I didn’t see what you felt at all. Oh, you have been unkind to me—you have—to look upon me as a sweetheart without saying a word, and leaving me to discover it myself! Your attitude to me has become known; and naturally they think we’ve been doing wrong! I’ll never trust you again!”

“Yes, Sue,” he said simply; “I am to blame—more than you think. I was quite aware that you did not suspect till within the last meeting or two what I was feeling about you. I admit that our meeting as strangers prevented a sense of relationship, and that it was a sort of subterfuge to avail myself of it. But don’t you think I deserve a little consideration for concealing my wrong, very wrong, sentiments, since I couldn’t help having them?”

She turned her eyes doubtfully towards him, and then looked away as if afraid she might forgive him.

By every law of nature and sex a kiss was the only rejoinder that fitted the mood and the moment, under the suasion of which Sue's undemonstrative regard of him might not inconceivably have changed its temperature. Some men would have cast scruples to the winds, and ventured it, oblivious both of Sue's declaration of her neutral feelings, and of the pair of autographs in the vestry chest of Arabella's parish church. Jude did not. He had, in fact, come in part to tell his own fatal story. It was upon his lips; yet at the hour of this distress he could not disclose it. He preferred to dwell upon the recognized barriers between them.

"Of course—I know you don't—care about me in any particular way," he sorrowed. "You ought not, and you are right. You belong to—Mr. Phillotson. I suppose he has been to see you?"

"Yes," she said shortly, her face changing a little. "Though I didn't ask him to come. You are glad, of course, that he has been! But I shouldn't care if he didn't come any more!"

It was very perplexing to her lover that she should be piqued at his honest acquiescence in his rival, if Jude's feelings of love were deprecated by her. He went on to something else.

"This will blow over, dear Sue," he said. "The training-school authorities are not all the world. You can get to be a student in some other, no doubt."

"I'll ask Mr. Phillotson," she said decisively.

Sue's kind hostess now returned from church, and there was no more intimate conversation. Jude left in the afternoon, hopelessly unhappy. But he had seen her, and sat with her. Such intercourse as that would have to content him for the remainder of his life. The lesson of renunciation it was necessary and proper that he, as a parish priest, should learn.

But the next morning when he awoke he felt rather vexed with her, and decided that she was rather unreasonable, not to say capricious. Then, in illustration of what he had begun to discern as one of her redeeming characteristics there came promptly a note, which she must have written almost immediately he had gone from her:

Forgive me for my petulance yesterday! I was horrid to you; I know it, and I feel perfectly miserable at my horridness. It was so dear of you not to be angry! Jude, please still keep me as your friend and associate, with all my faults. I'll try

not to be like it again.

I am coming to Melchester on Saturday, to get my things away from the T. S., &c. I could walk with you for half an hour, if you would like?—Your repentant

SUE.

Jude forgave her straightway, and asked her to call for him at the cathedral works when she came.

VI

Meanwhile a middle-aged man was dreaming a dream of great beauty concerning the writer of the above letter. He was Richard Phillotson, who had recently removed from the mixed village school at Lumsdon near Christminster, to undertake a large boys' school in his native town of Shaston, which stood on a hill sixty miles to the south-west as the crow flies.

A glance at the place and its accessories was almost enough to reveal that the schoolmaster's plans and dreams so long indulged in had been abandoned for some new dream with which neither the Church nor literature had much in common. Essentially an unpractical man, he was now bent on making and saving money for a practical purpose—that of keeping a wife, who, if she chose, might conduct one of the girls' schools adjoining his own; for which purpose he had advised her to go into training, since she would not marry him offhand.

About the time that Jude was removing from Marygreen to Melchester, and entering on adventures at the latter place with Sue, the schoolmaster was settling down in the new school-house at Shaston. All the furniture being fixed, the books shelved, and the nails driven, he had begun to sit in his parlour during the dark winter nights and re-attempt some of his old studies—one branch of which had included Roman-Britannic antiquities—an unremunerative labour for a national school-master but a subject, that, after his abandonment of the university scheme, had interested him as being a comparatively unworked mine; practicable to those who, like himself, had lived in lonely spots where these remains were abundant, and were seen to compel inferences in startling contrast to accepted views on the civilization of that time.

A resumption of this investigation was the outward and apparent hobby of Phillotson at present—his ostensible reason for going alone into fields where causeways, dykes, and tumuli abounded, or shutting himself up in his house with a few urns, tiles, and mosaics he had collected, instead of calling

round upon his new neighbours, who for their part had showed themselves willing enough to be friendly with him. But it was not the real, or the whole, reason, after all. Thus on a particular evening in the month, when it had grown quite late—to near midnight, indeed—and the light of his lamp, shining from his window at a salient angle of the hill-top town over infinite miles of valley westward, announced as by words a place and person given over to study, he was not exactly studying.

The interior of the room—the books, the furniture, the schoolmaster's loose coat, his attitude at the table, even the flickering of the fire, bespoke the same dignified tale of undistracted research—more than creditable to a man who had had no advantages beyond those of his own making. And yet the tale, true enough till latterly, was not true now. What he was regarding was not history. They were historic notes, written in a bold womanly hand at his dictation some months before, and it was the clerical rendering of word after word that absorbed him.

He presently took from a drawer a carefully tied bundle of letters, few, very few, as correspondence counts nowadays. Each was in its envelope just as it had arrived, and the handwriting was of the same womanly character as the historic notes. He unfolded them one by one and read them musingly. At first sight there seemed in these small documents to be absolutely nothing to muse over. They were straightforward, frank letters, signed “Sue B—”; just such ones as would be written during short absences, with no other thought than their speedy destruction, and chiefly concerning books in reading and other experiences of a training school, forgotten doubtless by the writer with the passing of the day of their inditing. In one of them—quite a recent note—the young woman said that she had received his considerate letter, and that it was honourable and generous of him to say he would not come to see her oftener than she desired (the school being such an awkward place for callers, and because of her strong wish that her engagement to him should not be known, which it would infallibly be if he visited her often). Over these phrases the school-master pored. What precise shade of satisfaction was to be gathered from a woman's gratitude that the man who loved her had not been often to see her? The problem occupied him, distracted him.

He opened another drawer, and found therein an envelope, from which he drew a photograph of Sue as a child, long before he had known her,

standing under trellis-work with a little basket in her hand. There was another of her as a young woman, her dark eyes and hair making a very distinct and attractive picture of her, which just disclosed, too, the thoughtfulness that lay behind her lighter moods. It was a duplicate of the one she had given Jude, and would have given to any man. Phillotson brought it half-way to his lips, but withdrew it in doubt at her perplexing phrases: ultimately kissing the dead pasteboard with all the passionateness, and more than all the devotion, of a young man of eighteen.

The schoolmaster's was an unhealthy-looking, old-fashioned face, rendered more old-fashioned by his style of shaving. A certain gentlemanliness had been imparted to it by nature, suggesting an inherent wish to do rightly by all. His speech was a little slow, but his tones were sincere enough to make his hesitation no defect. His greying hair was curly, and radiated from a point in the middle of his crown. There were four lines across his forehead, and he only wore spectacles when reading at night. It was almost certainly a renunciation forced upon him by his academic purpose, rather than a distaste for women, which had hitherto kept him from closing with one of the sex in matrimony.

Such silent proceedings as those of this evening were repeated many and oft times when he was not under the eye of the boys, whose quick and penetrating regard would frequently become almost intolerable to the self-conscious master in his present anxious care for Sue, making him, in the grey hours of morning, dread to meet anew the gimlet glances, lest they should read what the dream within him was.

He had honourably acquiesced in Sue's announced wish that he was not often to visit her at the training school; but at length, his patience being sorely tried, he set out one Saturday afternoon to pay her an unexpected call. There the news of her departure—expulsion as it might almost have been considered—was flashed upon him without warning or mitigation as he stood at the door expecting in a few minutes to behold her face; and when he turned away he could hardly see the road before him.

Sue had, in fact, never written a line to her suitor on the subject, although it was fourteen days old. A short reflection told him that this proved nothing, a natural delicacy being as ample a reason for silence as any degree of blameworthiness.

They had informed him at the school where she was living, and having no immediate anxiety about her comfort, his thoughts took the direction of a burning indignation against the training school committee. In his bewilderment Phillotson entered the adjacent cathedral, just now in a direly dismantled state by reason of the repairs. He sat down on a block of freestone, regardless of the dusty imprint it made on his breeches; and his listless eyes following the movements of the workmen he presently became aware that the reputed culprit, Sue's lover Jude, was one amongst them.

Jude had never spoken to his former hero since the meeting by the model of Jerusalem. Having inadvertently witnessed Phillotson's tentative courtship of Sue in the lane there had grown up in the younger man's mind a curious dislike to think of the elder, to meet him, to communicate in any way with him; and since Phillotson's success in obtaining at least her promise had become known to Jude, he had frankly recognized that he did not wish to see or hear of his senior any more, learn anything of his pursuits, or even imagine again what excellencies might appertain to his character. On this very day of the schoolmaster's visit Jude was expecting Sue, as she had promised; and when therefore he saw the schoolmaster in the nave of the building, saw, moreover, that he was coming to speak to him, he felt no little embarrassment; which Phillotson's own embarrassment prevented his observing.

Jude joined him, and they both withdrew from the other workmen to the spot where Phillotson had been sitting. Jude offered him a piece of sackcloth for a cushion, and told him it was dangerous to sit on the bare block.

"Yes; yes," said Phillotson abstractedly, as he reseated himself, his eyes resting on the ground as if he were trying to remember where he was. "I won't keep you long. It was merely that I have heard that you have seen my little friend Sue recently. It occurred to me to speak to you on that account. I merely want to ask—about her."

"I think I know what!" Jude hurriedly said. "About her escaping from the training school, and her coming to me?"

"Yes."

"Well"—Jude for a moment felt an unprincipled and fiendish wish to annihilate his rival at all cost. By the exercise of that treachery which love for the same woman renders possible to men the most honourable in every

other relation of life, he could send off Phillotson in agony and defeat by saying that the scandal was true, and that Sue had irretrievably committed herself with him. But his action did not respond for a moment to his animal instinct; and what he said was, "I am glad of your kindness in coming to talk plainly to me about it. You know what they say?—that I ought to marry her."

"What!"

"And I wish with all my soul I could!"

Phillotson trembled, and his naturally pale face acquired a corpselike sharpness in its lines. "I had no idea that it was of this nature! God forbid!"

"No, no!" said Jude aghast. "I thought you understood? I mean that were I in a position to marry her, or someone, and settle down, instead of living in lodgings here and there, I should be glad!"

What he had really meant was simply that he loved her.

"But—since this painful matter has been opened up—what really happened?" asked Phillotson, with the firmness of a man who felt that a sharp smart now was better than a long agony of suspense hereafter. "Cases arise, and this is one, when even ungenerous questions must be put to make false assumptions impossible, and to kill scandal."

Jude explained readily; giving the whole series of adventures, including the night at the shepherd's, her wet arrival at his lodging, her indisposition from her immersion, their vigil of discussion, and his seeing her off next morning.

"Well now," said Phillotson at the conclusion, "I take it as your final word, and I know I can believe you, that the suspicion which led to her rustication is an absolutely baseless one?"

"It is," said Jude solemnly. "Absolutely. So help me God!"

The schoolmaster rose. Each of the twain felt that the interview could not comfortably merge in a friendly discussion of their recent experiences, after the manner of friends; and when Jude had taken him round, and shown him some features of the renovation which the old cathedral was undergoing, Phillotson bade the young man good-day and went away.

This visit took place about eleven o'clock in the morning; but no Sue appeared. When Jude went to his dinner at one he saw his beloved ahead of him in the street leading up from the North Gate, walking as if no way

looking for him. Speedily overtaking her he remarked that he had asked her to come to him at the cathedral, and she had promised.

“I have been to get my things from the college,” she said—an observation which he was expected to take as an answer, though it was not one. Finding her to be in this evasive mood he felt inclined to give her the information so long withheld.

“You have not seen Mr. Phillotson to-day?” he ventured to inquire.

“I have not. But I am not going to be cross-examined about him; and if you ask anything more I won’t answer!”

“It is very odd that—” He stopped, regarding her.

“What?”

“That you are often not so nice in your real presence as you are in your letters!”

“Does it really seem so to you?” said she, smiling with quick curiosity. “Well, that’s strange; but I feel just the same about you, Jude. When you are gone away I seem such a coldhearted—”

As she knew his sentiment towards her Jude saw that they were getting upon dangerous ground. It was now, he thought, that he must speak as an honest man.

But he did not speak, and she continued: “It was that which made me write and say—I didn’t mind your loving me—if you wanted to, much!”

The exultation he might have felt at what that implied, or seemed to imply, was nullified by his intention, and he rested rigid till he began: “I have never told you—”

“Yes you have,” murmured she.

“I mean, I have never told you my history—all of it.”

“But I guess it. I know nearly.”

Jude looked up. Could she possibly know of that morning performance of his with Arabella; which in a few months had ceased to be a marriage more completely than by death? He saw that she did not.

“I can’t quite tell you here in the street,” he went on with a gloomy tongue. “And you had better not come to my lodgings. Let us go in here.”

The building by which they stood was the market-house; it was the only place available; and they entered, the market being over, and the stalls and

areas empty. He would have preferred a more congenial spot, but, as usually happens, in place of a romantic field or solemn aisle for his tale, it was told while they walked up and down over a floor littered with rotten cabbage-leaves, and amid all the usual squalors of decayed vegetable matter and unsaleable refuse. He began and finished his brief narrative, which merely led up to the information that he had married a wife some years earlier, and that his wife was living still. Almost before her countenance had time to change she hurried out the words,

“Why didn’t you tell me before!”

“I couldn’t. It seemed so cruel to tell it.”

“To yourself, Jude. So it was better to be cruel to me!”

“No, dear darling!” cried Jude passionately. He tried to take her hand, but she withdrew it. Their old relations of confidence seemed suddenly to have ended, and the antagonisms of sex to sex were left without any counterpoising predilections. She was his comrade, friend, unconscious sweetheart no longer; and her eyes regarded him in estranged silence.

“I was ashamed of the episode in my life which brought about the marriage,” he continued. “I can’t explain it precisely now. I could have done it if you had taken it differently!”

“But how can I?” she burst out. “Here I have been saying, or writing, that—that you might love me, or something of the sort!—just out of charity—and all the time—oh, it is perfectly damnable how things are!” she said, stamping her foot in a nervous quiver.

“You take me wrong, Sue! I never thought you cared for me at all, till quite lately; so I felt it did not matter! Do you care for me, Sue?—you know how I mean?—I don’t like ‘out of charity’ at all!”

It was a question which in the circumstances Sue did not choose to answer.

“I suppose she—your wife—is—a very pretty woman, even if she’s wicked?” she asked quickly.

“She’s pretty enough, as far as that goes.”

“Prettier than I am, no doubt!”

“You are not the least alike. And I have never seen her for years... But she’s sure to come back—they always do!”

“How strange of you to stay apart from her like this!” said Sue, her trembling lip and lumpy throat belying her irony. “You, such a religious man. How will the demi-gods in your Pantheon—I mean those legendary persons you call saints—intercede for you after this? Now if I had done such a thing it would have been different, and not remarkable, for I at least don’t regard marriage as a sacrament. Your theories are not so advanced as your practice!”

“Sue, you are terribly cutting when you like to be—a perfect Voltaire! But you must treat me as you will!”

When she saw how wretched he was she softened, and trying to blink away her sympathetic tears said with all the winning reproachfulness of a heart-hurt woman: “Ah—you should have told me before you gave me that idea that you wanted to be allowed to love me! I had no feeling before that moment at the railway-station, except—” For once Sue was as miserable as he, in her attempts to keep herself free from emotion, and her less than half-success.

“Don’t cry, dear!” he implored.

“I am—not crying—because I meant to—love you; but because of your want of—confidence!”

They were quite screened from the market-square without, and he could not help putting out his arm towards her waist. His momentary desire was the means of her rallying. “No, no!” she said, drawing back stringently, and wiping her eyes. “Of course not! It would be hypocrisy to pretend that it would be meant as from my cousin; and it can’t be in any other way.”

They moved on a dozen paces, and she showed herself recovered. It was distracting to Jude, and his heart would have ached less had she appeared anyhow but as she did appear; essentially large-minded and generous on reflection, despite a previous exercise of those narrow womanly humours on impulse that were necessary to give her sex.

“I don’t blame you for what you couldn’t help,” she said, smiling. “How should I be so foolish? I do blame you a little bit for not telling me before. But, after all, it doesn’t matter. We should have had to keep apart, you see, even if this had not been in your life.”

“No, we shouldn’t, Sue! This is the only obstacle.”

“You forget that I must have loved you, and wanted to be your wife, even if there had been no obstacle,” said Sue, with a gentle seriousness which did not reveal her mind. “And then we are cousins, and it is bad for cousins to marry. And—I am engaged to somebody else. As to our going on together as we were going, in a sort of friendly way, the people round us would have made it unable to continue. Their views of the relations of man and woman are limited, as is proved by their expelling me from the school. Their philosophy only recognizes relations based on animal desire. The wide field of strong attachment where desire plays, at least, only a secondary part, is ignored by them—the part of—who is it?—Venus Urania.”

Her being able to talk learnedly showed that she was mistress of herself again; and before they parted she had almost regained her vivacious glance, her reciprocity of tone, her gay manner, and her second-thought attitude of critical largeness towards others of her age and sex.

He could speak more freely now. “There were several reasons against my telling you rashly. One was what I have said; another, that it was always impressed upon me that I ought not to marry—that I belonged to an odd and peculiar family—the wrong breed for marriage.”

“Ah—who used to say that to you?”

“My great-aunt. She said it always ended badly with us Fawleys.”

“That’s strange. My father used to say the same to me!”

They stood possessed by the same thought, ugly enough, even as an assumption: that a union between them, had such been possible, would have meant a terrible intensification of unfitness—two bitters in one dish.

“Oh, but there can’t be anything in it!” she said with nervous lightness. “Our family have been unlucky of late years in choosing mates—that’s all.”

And then they pretended to persuade themselves that all that had happened was of no consequence, and that they could still be cousins and friends and warm correspondents, and have happy genial times when they met, even if they met less frequently than before. Their parting was in good friendship, and yet Jude’s last look into her eyes was tinged with inquiry, for he felt that he did not even now quite know her mind.

VII

Tidings from Sue a day or two after passed across Jude like a withering blast.

Before reading the letter he was led to suspect that its contents were of a somewhat serious kind by catching sight of the signature—which was in her full name, never used in her correspondence with him since her first note:

MY DEAR JUDE,—I have something to tell you which perhaps you will not be surprised to hear, though certainly it may strike you as being accelerated (as the railway companies say of their trains). Mr. Phillotson and I are to be married quite soon—in three or four weeks. We had intended, as you know, to wait till I had gone through my course of training and obtained my certificate, so as to assist him, if necessary, in the teaching. But he generously says he does not see any object in waiting, now I am not at the training school. It is so good of him, because the awkwardness of my situation has really come about by my fault in getting expelled.

Wish me joy. Remember I say you are to, and you mustn't refuse!—Your affectionate cousin,

SUSANNA FLORENCE MARY BRIDEHEAD.

Jude staggered under the news; could eat no breakfast; and kept on drinking tea because his mouth was so dry. Then presently he went back to his work and laughed the usual bitter laugh of a man so confronted. Everything seemed turning to satire. And yet, what could the poor girl do? he asked himself, and felt worse than shedding tears.

“O Susanna Florence Mary!” he said as he worked. “You don't know what marriage means!”

Could it be possible that his announcement of his own marriage had pricked her on to this, just as his visit to her when in liquor may have pricked her on to her engagement? To be sure, there seemed to exist these other and sufficient reasons, practical and social, for her decision; but Sue was not a very practical or calculating person; and he was compelled to think that a pique at having his secret sprung upon her had moved her to give way to Phillotson's probable representations, that the best course to prove how unfounded were the suspicions of the school authorities would be to marry him off-hand, as in fulfilment of an ordinary engagement. Sue had, in fact, been placed in an awkward corner. Poor Sue!

He determined to play the Spartan; to make the best of it, and support her; but he could not write the requested good wishes for a day or two. Meanwhile there came another note from his impatient little dear:

Jude, will you give me away? I have nobody else who could do it so conveniently as you, being the only married relation I have here on the spot, even if my father were friendly enough to be willing, which he isn't. I hope you won't think it a trouble? I have been looking at the marriage service in the prayer-book, and it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody *gives* me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O churchman! But I forget: I am no longer privileged to tease you.—Ever,

SUSANNA FLORENCE MARY BRIDEHEAD.

Jude screwed himself up to heroic key; and replied:

MY DEAR SUE,—Of course I wish you joy! And also of course I will give you away. What I suggest is that, as you have no house of your own, you do not marry from your school friend's, but from mine. It would be more proper, I think, since I am, as you say, the person nearest related to

you in this part of the world.

I don't see why you sign your letter in such a new and terribly formal way? Surely you care a bit about me still!—
Ever your affectionate,

JUDE.

What had jarred on him even more than the signature was a little sting he had been silent on—the phrase “married relation”—What an idiot it made him seem as her lover! If Sue had written that in satire, he could hardly forgive her; if in suffering—ah, that was another thing!

His offer of his lodging must have commended itself to Phillotson at any rate, for the schoolmaster sent him a line of warm thanks, accepting the convenience. Sue also thanked him. Jude immediately moved into more commodious quarters, as much to escape the espionage of the suspicious landlady who had been one cause of Sue's unpleasant experience as for the sake of room.

Then Sue wrote to tell him the day fixed for the wedding; and Jude decided, after inquiry, that she should come into residence on the following Saturday, which would allow of a ten days' stay in the city prior to the ceremony, sufficiently representing a nominal residence of fifteen.

She arrived by the ten o'clock train on the day aforesaid, Jude not going to meet her at the station, by her special request, that he should not lose a morning's work and pay, she said (if this were her true reason). But so well by this time did he know Sue that the remembrance of their mutual sensitiveness at emotional crises might, he thought, have weighed with her in this. When he came home to dinner she had taken possession of her apartment.

She lived in the same house with him, but on a different floor, and they saw each other little, an occasional supper being the only meal they took together, when Sue's manner was something like that of a scared child. What she felt he did not know; their conversation was mechanical, though she did not look pale or ill. Phillotson came frequently, but mostly when Jude was absent. On the morning of the wedding, when Jude had given himself a holiday, Sue and her cousin had breakfast together for the first and last time during this curious interval; in his room—the parlour—which

he had hired for the period of Sue's residence. Seeing, as women do, how helpless he was in making the place comfortable, she bustled about.

"What's the matter, Jude?" she said suddenly.

He was leaning with his elbows on the table and his chin on his hands, looking into a futurity which seemed to be sketched out on the tablecloth.

"Oh—nothing!"

"You are 'father', you know. That's what they call the man who gives you away."

Jude could have said "Phillotson's age entitles him to be called that!" But he would not annoy her by such a cheap retort.

She talked incessantly, as if she dreaded his indulgence in reflection, and before the meal was over both he and she wished they had not put such confidence in their new view of things, and had taken breakfast apart. What oppressed Jude was the thought that, having done a wrong thing of this sort himself, he was aiding and abetting the woman he loved in doing a like wrong thing, instead of imploring and warning her against it. It was on his tongue to say, "You have quite made up your mind?"

After breakfast they went out on an errand together moved by a mutual thought that it was the last opportunity they would have of indulging in unceremonious companionship. By the irony of fate, and the curious trick in Sue's nature of tempting Providence at critical times, she took his arm as they walked through the muddy street—a thing she had never done before in her life—and on turning the corner they found themselves close to a grey perpendicular church with a low-pitched roof—the church of St. Thomas.

"That's the church," said Jude.

"Where I am going to be married?"

"Yes."

"Indeed!" she exclaimed with curiosity. "How I should like to go in and see what the spot is like where I am so soon to kneel and do it."

Again he said to himself, "She does not realize what marriage means!"

He passively acquiesced in her wish to go in, and they entered by the western door. The only person inside the gloomy building was a charwoman cleaning. Sue still held Jude's arm, almost as if she loved him.

Cruelly sweet, indeed, she had been to him that morning; but his thoughts of a penance in store for her were tempered by an ache:

... I can find no way
How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,
Nor prove too much for your womanhood!

They strolled undemonstratively up the nave towards the altar railing, which they stood against in silence, turning then and walking down the nave again, her hand still on his arm, precisely like a couple just married. The too suggestive incident, entirely of her making, nearly broke down Jude.

“I like to do things like this,” she said in the delicate voice of an epicure in emotions, which left no doubt that she spoke the truth.

“I know you do!” said Jude.

“They are interesting, because they have probably never been done before. I shall walk down the church like this with my husband in about two hours, shan’t I!”

“No doubt you will!”

“Was it like this when you were married?”

“Good God, Sue—don’t be so awfully merciless! ... There, dear one, I didn’t mean it!”

“Ah—you are vexed!” she said regretfully, as she blinked away an access of eye moisture. “And I promised never to vex you! ... I suppose I ought not to have asked you to bring me in here. Oh, I oughtn’t! I see it now. My curiosity to hunt up a new sensation always leads me into these scrapes. Forgive me! ... You will, won’t you, Jude?”

The appeal was so remorseful that Jude’s eyes were even wetter than hers as he pressed her hand for Yes.

“Now we’ll hurry away, and I won’t do it any more!” she continued humbly; and they came out of the building, Sue intending to go on to the station to meet Phillotson. But the first person they encountered on entering the main street was the schoolmaster himself, whose train had arrived sooner than Sue expected. There was nothing really to demur to in her

leaning on Jude's arm; but she withdrew her hand, and Jude thought that Phillotson had looked surprised.

"We have been doing such a funny thing!" said she, smiling candidly. "We've been to the church, rehearsing as it were. Haven't we, Jude?"

"How?" said Phillotson curiously.

Jude inwardly deplored what he thought to be unnecessary frankness; but she had gone too far not to explain all, which she accordingly did, telling him how they had marched up to the altar.

Seeing how puzzled Phillotson seemed, Jude said as cheerfully as he could, "I am going to buy her another little present. Will you both come to the shop with me?"

"No," said Sue, "I'll go on to the house with him"; and requesting her lover not to be a long time she departed with the schoolmaster.

Jude soon joined them at his rooms, and shortly after they prepared for the ceremony. Phillotson's hair was brushed to a painful extent, and his shirt collar appeared stiffer than it had been for the previous twenty years. Beyond this he looked dignified and thoughtful, and altogether a man of whom it was not unsafe to predict that he would make a kind and considerate husband. That he adored Sue was obvious; and she could almost be seen to feel that she was undeserving his adoration.

Although the distance was so short he had hired a fly from the Red Lion, and six or seven women and children had gathered by the door when they came out. The schoolmaster and Sue were unknown, though Jude was getting to be recognized as a citizen; and the couple were judged to be some relations of his from a distance, nobody supposing Sue to have been a recent pupil at the training school.

In the carriage Jude took from his pocket his extra little wedding-present, which turned out to be two or three yards of white tulle, which he threw over her bonnet and all, as a veil.

"It looks so odd over a bonnet," she said. "I'll take the bonnet off."

"Oh no—let it stay," said Phillotson. And she obeyed.

When they had passed up the church and were standing in their places Jude found that the antecedent visit had certainly taken off the edge of this performance, but by the time they were half-way on with the service he wished from his heart that he had not undertaken the business of giving her

away. How could Sue have had the temerity to ask him to do it—a cruelty possibly to herself as well as to him? Women were different from men in such matters. Was it that they were, instead of more sensitive, as reputed, more callous, and less romantic; or were they more heroic? Or was Sue simply so perverse that she wilfully gave herself and him pain for the odd and mournful luxury of practising long-suffering in her own person, and of being touched with tender pity for him at having made him practise it? He could perceive that her face was nervously set, and when they reached the trying ordeal of Jude giving her to Phillotson she could hardly command herself; rather, however, as it seemed, from her knowledge of what her cousin must feel, whom she need not have had there at all, than from self-consideration. Possibly she would go on inflicting such pains again and again, and grieving for the sufferer again and again, in all her colossal inconsistency.

Phillotson seemed not to notice, to be surrounded by a mist which prevented his seeing the emotions of others. As soon as they had signed their names and come away, and the suspense was over, Jude felt relieved.

The meal at his lodging was a very simple affair, and at two o'clock they went off. In crossing the pavement to the fly she looked back; and there was a frightened light in her eyes. Could it be that Sue had acted with such unusual foolishness as to plunge into she knew not what for the sake of asserting her independence of him, of retaliating on him for his secrecy? Perhaps Sue was thus venturesome with men because she was childishly ignorant of that side of their natures which wore out women's hearts and lives.

When her foot was on the carriage-step she turned round, saying that she had forgotten something. Jude and the landlady offered to get it.

“No,” she said, running back. “It is my handkerchief. I know where I left it.”

Jude followed her back. She had found it, and came holding it in her hand. She looked into his eyes with her own tearful ones, and her lips suddenly parted as if she were going to avow something. But she went on; and whatever she had meant to say remained unspoken.

VIII

Jude wondered if she had really left her handkerchief behind; or whether it were that she had miserably wished to tell him of a love that at the last moment she could not bring herself to express.

He could not stay in his silent lodging when they were gone, and fearing that he might be tempted to drown his misery in alcohol he went upstairs, changed his dark clothes for his white, his thin boots for his thick, and proceeded to his customary work for the afternoon.

But in the cathedral he seemed to hear a voice behind him, and to be possessed with an idea that she would come back. She could not possibly go home with Phillotson, he fancied. The feeling grew and stirred. The moment that the clock struck the last of his working hours he threw down his tools and rushed homeward. "Has anybody been for me?" he asked.

Nobody had been there.

As he could claim the downstairs sitting-room till twelve o'clock that night he sat in it all the evening; and even when the clock had struck eleven, and the family had retired, he could not shake off the feeling that she would come back and sleep in the little room adjoining his own in which she had slept so many previous days. Her actions were always unpredictable: why should she not come? Gladly would he have compounded for the denial of her as a sweetheart and wife by having her live thus as a fellow-lodger and friend, even on the most distant terms. His supper still remained spread, and going to the front door, and softly setting it open, he returned to the room and sat as watchers sit on Old-Midsummer eves, expecting the phantom of the Beloved. But she did not come.

Having indulged in this wild hope he went upstairs, and looked out of the window, and pictured her through the evening journey to London, whither she and Phillotson had gone for their holiday; their rattling along through the damp night to their hotel, under the same sky of ribbed cloud as that he beheld, through which the moon showed its position rather than its shape,

and one or two of the larger stars made themselves visible as faint nebulae only. It was a new beginning of Sue's history. He projected his mind into the future, and saw her with children more or less in her own likeness around her. But the consolation of regarding them as a continuation of her identity was denied to him, as to all such dreamers, by the wilfulness of Nature in not allowing issue from one parent alone. Every desired renewal of an existence is debased by being half alloy. "If at the estrangement or death of my lost love, I could go and see her child—hers solely—there would be comfort in it!" said Jude. And then he again uneasily saw, as he had latterly seen with more and more frequency, the scorn of Nature for man's finer emotions, and her lack of interest in his aspirations.

The oppressive strength of his affection for Sue showed itself on the morrow and following days yet more clearly. He could no longer endure the light of the Melchester lamps; the sunshine was as drab paint, and the blue sky as zinc. Then he received news that his old aunt was dangerously ill at Marygreen, which intelligence almost coincided with a letter from his former employer at Christminster, who offered him permanent work of a good class if he would come back. The letters were almost a relief to him. He started to visit Aunt Drusilla, and resolved to go onward to Christminster to see what worth there might be in the builder's offer.

Jude found his aunt even worse than the communication from the Widow Edlin had led him to expect. There was every possibility of her lingering on for weeks or months, though little likelihood. He wrote to Sue informing her of the state of her aunt, and suggesting that she might like to see her aged relative alive. He would meet her at Alfredston Road, the following evening, Monday, on his way back from Christminster, if she could come by the up-train which crossed his down-train at that station. Next morning, according, he went on to Christminster, intending to return to Alfredston soon enough to keep the suggested appointment with Sue.

The city of learning wore an estranged look, and he had lost all feeling for its associations. Yet as the sun made vivid lights and shades of the mullioned architecture of the façades, and drew patterns of the crinkled battlements on the young turf of the quadrangles, Jude thought he had never seen the place look more beautiful. He came to the street in which he had first beheld Sue. The chair she had occupied when, leaning over her ecclesiastical scrolls, a hog-hair brush in her hand, her girlish figure had

arrested the gaze of his inquiring eyes, stood precisely in its former spot, empty. It was as if she were dead, and nobody had been found capable of succeeding her in that artistic pursuit. Hers was now the city phantom, while those of the intellectual and devotional worthies who had once moved him to emotion were no longer able to assert their presence there.

However, here he was; and in fulfilment of his intention he went on to his former lodging in "Beersheba," near the ritualistic church of St. Silas. The old landlady who opened the door seemed glad to see him again, and bringing some lunch informed him that the builder who had employed him had called to inquire his address.

Jude went on to the stone-yard where he had worked. But the old sheds and bankers were distasteful to him; he felt it impossible to engage himself to return and stay in this place of vanished dreams. He longed for the hour of the homeward train to Alfredston, where he might probably meet Sue.

Then, for one ghastly half-hour of depression caused by these scenes, there returned upon him that feeling which had been his undoing more than once—that he was not worth the trouble of being taken care of either by himself or others; and during this half-hour he met Tinker Taylor, the bankrupt ecclesiastical ironmonger, at Fourways, who proposed that they should adjourn to a bar and drink together. They walked along the street till they stood before one of the great palpitating centres of Christminster life, the inn wherein he formerly had responded to the challenge to rehearse the Creed in Latin—now a popular tavern with a spacious and inviting entrance, which gave admittance to a bar that had been entirely renovated and refitted in modern style since Jude's residence here.

Tinker Taylor drank off his glass and departed, saying it was too stylish a place now for him to feel at home in unless he was drunker than he had money to be just then. Jude was longer finishing his, and stood abstractedly silent in the, for the minute, almost empty place. The bar had been gutted and newly arranged throughout, mahogany fixtures having taken the place of the old painted ones, while at the back of the standing-space there were stuffed sofa-benches. The room was divided into compartments in the approved manner, between which were screens of ground glass in mahogany framing, to prevent toppers in one compartment being put to the blush by the recognitions of those in the next. On the inside of the counter

two barmaids leant over the white-handled beer-engines, and the row of little silvered taps inside, dripping into a pewter trough.

Feeling tired, and having nothing more to do till the train left, Jude sat down on one of the sofas. At the back of the barmaids rose bevel-edged mirrors, with glass shelves running along their front, on which stood precious liquids that Jude did not know the name of, in bottles of topaz, sapphire, ruby and amethyst. The moment was enlivened by the entrance of some customers into the next compartment, and the starting of the mechanical tell-tale of monies received, which emitted a ting-ting every time a coin was put in.

The barmaid attending to this compartment was invisible to Jude's direct glance, though a reflection of her back in the glass behind her was occasionally caught by his eyes. He had only observed this listlessly, when she turned her face for a moment to the glass to set her hair tidy. Then he was amazed to discover that the face was Arabella's.

If she had come on to his compartment she would have seen him. But she did not, this being presided over by the maiden on the other side. Abby was in a black gown, with white linen cuffs and a broad white collar, and her figure, more developed than formerly, was accentuated by a bunch of daffodils that she wore on her left bosom. In the compartment she served stood an electro-plated fountain of water over a spirit-lamp, whose blue flame sent a steam from the top, all this being visible to him only in the mirror behind her; which also reflected the faces of the men she was attending to—one of them a handsome, dissipated young fellow, possibly an undergraduate, who had been relating to her an experience of some humorous sort.

"Oh, Mr. Cockman, now! How can you tell such a tale to me in my innocence!" she cried gaily. "Mr. Cockman, what do you use to make your moustache curl so beautiful?" As the young man was clean shaven, the retort provoked a laugh at his expense.

"Come!" said he, "I'll have a curaçao; and a light, please."

She served the liqueur from one of the lovely bottles and striking a match held it to his cigarette with ministering archness while he whiffed.

"Well, have you heard from your husband lately, my dear?" he asked.

"Not a sound," said she.

“Where is he?”

“I left him in Australia; and I suppose he’s there still.”

Jude’s eyes grew rounder.

“What made you part from him?”

“Don’t you ask questions, and you won’t hear lies.”

“Come then, give me my change, which you’ve been keeping from me for the last quarter of an hour; and I’ll romantically vanish up the street of this picturesque city.”

She handed the change over the counter, in taking which he caught her fingers and held them. There was a slight struggle and titter, and he bade her good-bye and left.

Jude had looked on with the eye of a dazed philosopher. It was extraordinary how far removed from his life Arabella now seemed to be. He could not realize their nominal closeness. And, this being the case, in his present frame of mind he was indifferent to the fact that Arabella was his wife indeed.

The compartment that she served emptied itself of visitors, and after a brief thought he entered it, and went forward to the counter. Arabella did not recognize him for a moment. Then their glances met. She started; till a humorous impudence sparkled in her eyes, and she spoke.

“Well, I’m blest! I thought you were underground years ago!”

“Oh!”

“I never heard anything of you, or I don’t know that I should have come here. But never mind! What shall I treat you to this afternoon? A Scotch and soda? Come, anything that the house will afford, for old acquaintance’ sake!”

“Thanks, Arabella,” said Jude without a smile. “But I don’t want anything more than I’ve had.” The fact was that her unexpected presence there had destroyed at a stroke his momentary taste for strong liquor as completely as if it had whisked him back to his milk-fed infancy.

“That’s a pity, now you could get it for nothing.”

“How long have you been here?”

“About six weeks. I returned from Sydney three months ago. I always liked this business, you know.”

“I wonder you came to this place!”

“Well, as I say, I thought you were gone to glory, and being in London I saw the situation in an advertisement. Nobody was likely to know me here, even if I had minded, for I was never in Christminster in my growing up.”

“Why did you return from Australia?”

“Oh, I had my reasons... Then you are not a don yet?”

“No.”

“Not even a reverend?”

“No.”

“Nor so much as a rather reverend dissenting gentleman?”

“I am as I was.”

“True—you look so.” She idly allowed her fingers to rest on the pull of the beer-engine as she inspected him critically. He observed that her hands were smaller and whiter than when he had lived with her, and that on the hand which pulled the engine she wore an ornamental ring set with what seemed to be real sapphires—which they were, indeed, and were much admired as such by the young men who frequented the bar.

“So you pass as having a living husband,” he continued.

“Yes. I thought it might be awkward if I called myself a widow, as I should have liked.”

“True. I am known here a little.”

“I didn’t mean on that account—for as I said I didn’t expect you. It was for other reasons.”

“What were they?”

“I don’t care to go into them,” she replied evasively. “I make a very good living, and I don’t know that I want your company.”

Here a chappie with no chin, and a moustache like a lady’s eyebrow, came and asked for a curiously compounded drink, and Arabella was obliged to go and attend to him. “We can’t talk here,” she said, stepping back a moment. “Can’t you wait till nine? Say yes, and don’t be a fool. I can get off duty two hours sooner than usual, if I ask. I am not living in the house at present.”

He reflected and said gloomily, "I'll come back. I suppose we'd better arrange something."

"Oh, bother arranging! I'm not going to arrange anything!"

"But I must know a thing or two; and, as you say, we can't talk here. Very well; I'll call for you."

Depositing his unemptied glass he went out and walked up and down the street. Here was a rude flounce into the pellucid sentimentality of his sad attachment to Sue. Though Arabella's word was absolutely untrustworthy, he thought there might be some truth in her implication that she had not wished to disturb him, and had really supposed him dead. However, there was only one thing now to be done, and that was to play a straightforward part, the law being the law, and the woman between whom and himself there was no more unity than between east and west, being in the eye of the Church one person with him.

Having to meet Arabella here, it was impossible to meet Sue at Alfredston as he had promised. At every thought of this a pang had gone through him; but the conjuncture could not be helped. Arabella was perhaps an intended intervention to punish him for his unauthorized love. Passing the evening, therefore, in a desultory waiting about the town wherein he avoided the precincts of every cloister and hall, because he could not bear to behold them, he repaired to the tavern bar while the hundred and one strokes were resounding from the Great Bell of Cardinal College, a coincidence which seemed to him gratuitous irony. The inn was now brilliantly lighted up, and the scene was altogether more brisk and gay. The faces of the barmaids had risen in colour, each having a pink flush on her cheek; their manners were still more vivacious than before—more abandoned, more excited, more sensuous, and they expressed their sentiments and desires less euphemistically, laughing in a lackadaisical tone, without reserve.

The bar had been crowded with men of all sorts during the previous hour, and he had heard from without the hubbub of their voices; but the customers were fewer at last. He nodded to Arabella, and told her that she would find him outside the door when she came away.

"But you must have something with me first," she said with great good humour. "Just an early night-cap: I always do. Then you can go out and wait a minute, as it is best we should not be seen going together." She drew

a couple of liqueur glasses of brandy; and though she had evidently, from her countenance, already taken in enough alcohol either by drinking or, more probably, from the atmosphere she had breathed for so many hours, she finished hers quickly. He also drank his, and went outside the house.

In a few minutes she came, in a thick jacket and a hat with a black feather. "I live quite near," she said, taking his arm, "and can let myself in by a latch-key at any time. What arrangement do you want to come to?"

"Oh—none in particular," he answered, thoroughly sick and tired, his thoughts again reverting to Alfredston, and the train he did not go by; the probable disappointment of Sue that he was not there when she arrived, and the missed pleasure of her company on the long and lonely climb by starlight up the hills to Marygreen. "I ought to have gone back really! My aunt is on her deathbed, I fear."

"I'll go over with you to-morrow morning. I think I could get a day off."

There was something particularly uncongenial in the idea of Arabella, who had no more sympathy than a tigress with his relations or him, coming to the bedside of his dying aunt, and meeting Sue. Yet he said, "Of course, if you'd like to, you can."

"Well, that we'll consider... Now, until we have come to some agreement it is awkward our being together here—where you are known, and I am getting known, though without any suspicion that I have anything to do with you. As we are going towards the station, suppose we take the nine-forty train to Aldbrickham? We shall be there in little more than half an hour, and nobody will know us for one night, and we shall be quite free to act as we choose till we have made up our minds whether we'll make anything public or not."

"As you like."

"Then wait till I get two or three things. This is my lodging. Sometimes when late I sleep at the hotel where I am engaged, so nobody will think anything of my staying out."

She speedily returned, and they went on to the railway, and made the half-hour's journey to Aldbrickham, where they entered a third-rate inn near the station in time for a late supper.

IX

On the morrow between nine and half-past they were journeying back to Christminster, the only two occupants of a compartment in a third-class railway-carriage. Having, like Jude, made rather a hasty toilet to catch the train, Arabella looked a little frowsy, and her face was very far from possessing the animation which had characterized it at the bar the night before. When they came out of the station she found that she still had half an hour to spare before she was due at the bar. They walked in silence a little way out of the town in the direction of Alfredston. Jude looked up the far highway.

“Ah ... poor feeble me!” he murmured at last.

“What?” said she.

“This is the very road by which I came into Christminster years ago full of plans!”

“Well, whatever the road is I think my time is nearly up, as I have to be in the bar by eleven o’clock. And as I said, I shan’t ask for the day to go with you to see your aunt. So perhaps we had better part here. I’d sooner not walk up Chief Street with you, since we’ve come to no conclusion at all.”

“Very well. But you said when we were getting up this morning that you had something you wished to tell me before I left?”

“So I had—two things—one in particular. But you wouldn’t promise to keep it a secret. I’ll tell you now if you promise? As an honest woman I wish you to know it... It was what I began telling you in the night—about that gentleman who managed the Sydney hotel.” Arabella spoke somewhat hurriedly for her. “You’ll keep it close?”

“Yes—yes—I promise!” said Jude impatiently. “Of course I don’t want to reveal your secrets.”

“Whenever I met him out for a walk, he used to say that he was much taken with my looks, and he kept pressing me to marry him. I never thought

of coming back to England again; and being out there in Australia, with no home of my own after leaving my father, I at last agreed, and did.”

“What—marry him?”

“Yes.”

“Regularly—legally—in church?”

“Yes. And lived with him till shortly before I left. It was stupid, I know; but I did! There, now I’ve told you. Don’t round upon me! He talks of coming back to England, poor old chap. But if he does, he won’t be likely to find me.”

Jude stood pale and fixed.

“Why the devil didn’t you tell me last, night!” he said.

“Well—I didn’t... Won’t you make it up with me, then?”

“So in talking of ‘your husband’ to the bar gentlemen you meant him, of course—not me!”

“Of course... Come, don’t fuss about it.”

“I have nothing more to say!” replied Jude. “I have nothing at all to say about the—crime—you’ve confessed to!”

“Crime! Pooh. They don’t think much of such as that over there! Lots of ’em do it... Well, if you take it like that I shall go back to him! He was very fond of me, and we lived honourable enough, and as respectable as any married couple in the colony! How did I know where you were?”

“I won’t go blaming you. I could say a good deal; but perhaps it would be misplaced. What do you wish me to do?”

“Nothing. There was one thing more I wanted to tell you; but I fancy we’ve seen enough of one another for the present! I shall think over what you said about your circumstances, and let you know.”

Thus they parted. Jude watched her disappear in the direction of the hotel, and entered the railway station close by. Finding that it wanted three-quarters of an hour of the time at which he could get a train back to Alfredston, he strolled mechanically into the city as far as to the Fourways, where he stood as he had so often stood before, and surveyed Chief Street stretching ahead, with its college after college, in picturesqueness unrivalled except by such Continental vistas as the Street of Palaces in Genoa; the lines of the buildings being as distinct in the morning air as in an

architectural drawing. But Jude was far from seeing or criticizing these things; they were hidden by an indescribable consciousness of Arabella's midnight contiguity, a sense of degradation at his revived experiences with her, of her appearance as she lay asleep at dawn, which set upon his motionless face a look as of one accurst. If he could only have felt resentment towards her he would have been less unhappy; but he pitied while he contemned her.

Jude turned and retraced his steps. Drawing again towards the station he started at hearing his name pronounced—less at the name than at the voice. To his great surprise no other than Sue stood like a vision before him—her look bodeful and anxious as in a dream, her little mouth nervous, and her strained eyes speaking reproachful inquiry.

“Oh, Jude—I am so glad—to meet you like this!” she said in quick, uneven accents not far from a sob. Then she flushed as she observed his thought that they had not met since her marriage.

They looked away from each other to hide their emotion, took each other's hand without further speech, and went on together awhile, till she glanced at him with furtive solicitude. “I arrived at Alfredston station last night, as you asked me to, and there was nobody to meet me! But I reached Marygreen alone, and they told me Aunt was a trifle better. I sat up with her, and as you did not come all night I was frightened about you—I thought that perhaps, when you found yourself back in the old city, you were upset at—at thinking I was—married, and not there as I used to be; and that you had nobody to speak to; so you had tried to drown your gloom—as you did at that former time when you were disappointed about entering as a student, and had forgotten your promise to me that you never would again. And this, I thought, was why you hadn't come to meet me!”

“And you came to hunt me up, and deliver me, like a good angel!”

“I thought I would come by the morning train and try to find you—in case—in case—”

“I did think of my promise to you, dear, continually! I shall never break out again as I did, I am sure. I may have been doing nothing better, but I was not doing that—I loathe the thought of it.”

“I am glad your staying had nothing to do with that. But,” she said, the faintest pout entering into her tone, “you didn't come back last night and meet me, as you engaged to!”

“I didn’t—I am sorry to say. I had an appointment at nine o’clock—too late for me to catch the train that would have met yours, or to get home at all.”

Looking at his loved one as she appeared to him now, in his tender thought the sweetest and most disinterested comrade that he had ever had, living largely in vivid imaginings, so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs, he felt heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella’s company. There was something rude and immoral in thrusting these recent facts of his life upon the mind of one who, to him, was so uncarnate as to seem at times impossible as a human wife to any average man. And yet she was Phillotson’s. How she had become such, how she lived as such, passed his comprehension as he regarded her to-day.

“You’ll go back with me?” he said. “There’s a train just now. I wonder how my aunt is by this time... And so, Sue, you really came on my account all this way! At what an early time you must have started, poor thing!”

“Yes. Sitting up watching alone made me all nerves for you, and instead of going to bed when it got light I started. And now you won’t frighten me like this again about your morals for nothing?”

He was not so sure that she had been frightened about his morals for nothing. He released her hand till they had entered the train,—it seemed the same carriage he had lately got out of with another—where they sat down side by side, Sue between him and the window. He regarded the delicate lines of her profile, and the small, tight, applelike convexities of her bodice, so different from Arabella’s amplitudes. Though she knew he was looking at her she did not turn to him, but kept her eyes forward, as if afraid that by meeting his own some troublous discussion would be initiated.

“Sue—you are married now, you know, like me; and yet we have been in such a hurry that we have not said a word about it!”

“There’s no necessity,” she quickly returned.

“Oh well—perhaps not... But I wish”

“Jude—don’t talk about *me*—I wish you wouldn’t!” she entreated. “It distresses me, rather. Forgive my saying it! ... Where did you stay last night?”

She had asked the question in perfect innocence, to change the topic. He knew that, and said merely, "At an inn," though it would have been a relief to tell her of his meeting with an unexpected one. But the latter's final announcement of her marriage in Australia bewildered him lest what he might say should do his ignorant wife an injury.

Their talk proceeded but awkwardly till they reached Alfredston. That Sue was not as she had been, but was labelled "Phillotson," paralyzed Jude whenever he wanted to commune with her as an individual. Yet she seemed unaltered—he could not say why. There remained the five-mile extra journey into the country, which it was just as easy to walk as to drive, the greater part of it being uphill. Jude had never before in his life gone that road with Sue, though he had with another. It was now as if he carried a bright light which temporarily banished the shady associations of the earlier time.

Sue talked; but Jude noticed that she still kept the conversation from herself. At length he inquired if her husband were well.

"O yes," she said. "He is obliged to be in the school all the day, or he would have come with me. He is so good and kind that to accompany me he would have dismissed the school for once, even against his principles—for he is strongly opposed to giving casual holidays—only I wouldn't let him. I felt it would be better to come alone. Aunt Drusilla, I knew, was so very eccentric; and his being almost a stranger to her now would have made it irksome to both. Since it turns out that she is hardly conscious I am glad I did not ask him."

Jude had walked moodily while this praise of Phillotson was being expressed. "Mr. Phillotson obliges you in everything, as he ought," he said.

"Of course."

"You ought to be a happy wife."

"And of course I am."

"Bride, I might almost have said, as yet. It is not so many weeks since I gave you to him, and—"

"Yes, I know! I know!" There was something in her face which belied her late assuring words, so strictly proper and so lifelessly spoken that they might have been taken from a list of model speeches in "The Wife's Guide to Conduct." Jude knew the quality of every vibration in Sue's voice, could

read every symptom of her mental condition; and he was convinced that she was unhappy, although she had not been a month married. But her rushing away thus from home, to see the last of a relative whom she had hardly known in her life, proved nothing; for Sue naturally did such things as those.

“Well, you have my good wishes now as always, Mrs. Phillotson.”

She reproached him by a glance.

“No, you are not Mrs. Phillotson,” murmured Jude. “You are dear, free Sue Bridehead, only you don’t know it! Wifedom has not yet squashed up and digested you in its vast maw as an atom which has no further individuality.”

Sue put on a look of being offended, till she answered, “Nor has husbandom you, so far as I can see!”

“But it has!” he said, shaking his head sadly.

When they reached the lone cottage under the firs, between the Brown House and Marygreen, in which Jude and Arabella had lived and quarrelled, he turned to look at it. A squalid family lived there now. He could not help saying to Sue: “That’s the house my wife and I occupied the whole of the time we lived together. I brought her home to that house.”

She looked at it. “That to you was what the school-house at Shaston is to me.”

“Yes; but I was not very happy there as you are in yours.”

She closed her lips in retortive silence, and they walked some way till she glanced at him to see how he was taking it. “Of course I may have exaggerated your happiness—one never knows,” he continued blandly.

“Don’t think that, Jude, for a moment, even though you may have said it to sting me! He’s as good to me as a man can be, and gives me perfect liberty—which elderly husbands don’t do in general... If you think I am not happy because he’s too old for me, you are wrong.”

“I don’t think anything against him—to you dear.”

“And you won’t say things to distress me, will you?”

“I will not.”

He said no more, but he knew that, from some cause or other, in taking Phillotson as a husband, Sue felt that she had done what she ought not to

have done.

They plunged into the concave field on the other side of which rose the village—the field wherein Jude had received a thrashing from the farmer many years earlier. On ascending to the village and approaching the house they found Mrs. Edlin standing at the door, who at sight of them lifted her hands deprecatingly. “She’s downstairs, if you’ll believe me!” cried the widow. “Out o’ bed she got, and nothing could turn her. What will come o’ t I do not know!”

On entering, there indeed by the fireplace sat the old woman, wrapped in blankets, and turning upon them a countenance like that of Sebastiano’s Lazarus. They must have looked their amazement, for she said in a hollow voice:

“Ah—sceered ye, have I! I wasn’t going to bide up there no longer, to please nobody! ’Tis more than flesh and blood can bear, to be ordered to do this and that by a feller that don’t know half as well as you do yourself! ... Ah—you’ll rue this marrying as well as he!” she added, turning to Sue. “All our family do—and nearly all everybody else’s. You should have done as I did, you simpleton! And Phillotson the schoolmaster, of all men! What made ’ee marry him?”

“What makes most women marry, Aunt?”

“Ah! You mean to say you loved the man!”

“I don’t meant to say anything definite.”

“Do ye love un?”

“Don’t ask me, Aunt.”

“I can mind the man very well. A very civil, honourable liver; but Lord! —I don’t want to wownd your feelings, but—there be certain men here and there that no woman of any niceness can stomach. I should have said he was one. I don’t say so *now*, since you must ha’ known better than I—but that’s what I *should* have said!”

Sue jumped up and went out. Jude followed her, and found her in the outhouse, crying.

“Don’t cry, dear!” said Jude in distress. “She means well, but is very crusty and queer now, you know.”

“Oh no—it isn’t that!” said Sue, trying to dry her eyes. “I don’t mind her roughness one bit.”

“What is it, then?”

“It is that what she says is—is true!”

“God—what—you don’t like him?” asked Jude.

“I don’t mean that!” she said hastily. “That I ought—perhaps I ought not to have married!”

He wondered if she had really been going to say that at first. They went back, and the subject was smoothed over, and her aunt took rather kindly to Sue, telling her that not many young women newly married would have come so far to see a sick old crone like her. In the afternoon Sue prepared to depart, Jude hiring a neighbour to drive her to Alfredston.

“I’ll go with you to the station, if you’d like?” he said.

She would not let him. The man came round with the trap, and Jude helped her into it, perhaps with unnecessary attention, for she looked at him prohibitively.

“I suppose—I may come to see you some day, when I am back again at Melchester?” he half-crossly observed.

She bent down and said softly: “No, dear—you are not to come yet. I don’t think you are in a good mood.”

“Very well,” said Jude. “Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!” She waved her hand and was gone.

“She’s right! I won’t go!” he murmured.

He passed the evening and following days in mortifying by every possible means his wish to see her, nearly starving himself in attempts to extinguish by fasting his passionate tendency to love her. He read sermons on discipline, and hunted up passages in Church history that treated of the Ascetics of the second century. Before he had returned from Marygreen to Melchester there arrived a letter from Arabella. The sight of it revived a stronger feeling of self-condemnation for his brief return to her society than for his attachment to Sue.

The letter, he perceived, bore a London postmark instead of the Christminster one. Arabella informed him that a few days after their parting in the morning at Christminster, she had been surprised by an affectionate

letter from her Australian husband, formerly manager of the hotel in Sydney. He had come to England on purpose to find her; and had taken a free, fully-licensed public, in Lambeth, where he wished her to join him in conducting the business, which was likely to be a very thriving one, the house being situated in an excellent, densely populated, gin-drinking neighbourhood, and already doing a trade of £200 a month, which could be easily doubled.

As he had said that he loved her very much still, and implored her to tell him where she was, and as they had only parted in a slight tiff, and as her engagement in Christminster was only temporary, she had just gone to join him as he urged. She could not help feeling that she belonged to him more than to Jude, since she had properly married him, and had lived with him much longer than with her first husband. In thus wishing Jude good-bye she bore him no ill-will, and trusted he would not turn upon her, a weak woman, and inform against her, and bring her to ruin now that she had a chance of improving her circumstances and leading a genteel life.

X

Jude returned to Melchester, which had the questionable recommendation of being only a dozen and a half miles from his Sue's now permanent residence. At first he felt that this nearness was a distinct reason for not going southward at all; but Christminster was too sad a place to bear, while the proximity of Shaston to Melchester might afford him the glory of worsting the Enemy in a close engagement, such as was deliberately sought by the priests and virgins of the early Church, who, disdaining an ignominious flight from temptation, became even chamber-partners with impunity. Jude did not pause to remember that, in the laconic words of the historian, "insulted Nature sometimes vindicated her rights" in such circumstances.

He now returned with feverish desperation to his study for the priesthood—in the recognition that the single-mindedness of his aims, and his fidelity to the cause, had been more than questionable of late. His passion for Sue troubled his soul; yet his lawful abandonment to the society of Arabella for twelve hours seemed instinctively a worse thing—even though she had not told him of her Sydney husband till afterwards. He had, he verily believed, overcome all tendency to fly to liquor—which, indeed, he had never done from taste, but merely as an escape from intolerable misery of mind. Yet he perceived with despondency that, taken all round, he was a man of too many passions to make a good clergyman; the utmost he could hope for was that in a life of constant internal warfare between flesh and spirit the former might not always be victorious.

As a hobby, auxiliary to his readings in Divinity, he developed his slight skill in church-music and thorough-bass, till he could join in part-singing from notation with some accuracy. A mile or two from Melchester there was a restored village church, to which Jude had originally gone to fix the new columns and capitals. By this means he had become acquainted with the organist, and the ultimate result was that he joined the choir as a bass voice.

He walked out to this parish twice every Sunday, and sometimes in the week. One evening about Easter the choir met for practice, and a new hymn which Jude had heard of as being by a Wessex composer was to be tried and prepared for the following week. It turned out to be a strangely emotional composition. As they all sang it over and over again its harmonies grew upon Jude, and moved him exceedingly.

When they had finished he went round to the organist to make inquiries. The score was in manuscript, the name of the composer being at the head, together with the title of the hymn: "The Foot of the Cross."

"Yes," said the organist. "He is a local man. He is a professional musician at Kennetbridge—between here and Christminster. The vicar knows him. He was brought up and educated in Christminster traditions, which accounts for the quality of the piece. I think he plays in the large church there, and has a surpliced choir. He comes to Melchester sometimes, and once tried to get the cathedral organ when the post was vacant. The hymn is getting about everywhere this Easter."

As he walked humming the air on his way home, Jude fell to musing on its composer, and the reasons why he composed it. What a man of sympathies he must be! Perplexed and harassed as he himself was about Sue and Arabella, and troubled as was his conscience by the complication of his position, how he would like to know that man! "He of all men would understand my difficulties," said the impulsive Jude. If there were any person in the world to choose as a confidant, this composer would be the one, for he must have suffered, and throbbed, and yearned.

In brief, ill as he could afford the time and money for the journey, Fawley resolved, like the child that he was, to go to Kennetbridge the very next Sunday. He duly started, early in the morning, for it was only by a series of crooked railways that he could get to the town. About mid-day he reached it, and crossing the bridge into the quaint old borough he inquired for the house of the composer.

They told him it was a red brick building some little way further on. Also that the gentleman himself had just passed along the street not five minutes before.

"Which way?" asked Jude with alacrity.

"Straight along homeward from church."

Jude hastened on, and soon had the pleasure of observing a man in a black coat and a black slouched felt hat no considerable distance ahead. Stretching out his legs yet more widely, he stalked after. "A hungry soul in pursuit of a full soul!" he said. "I must speak to that man!"

He could not, however, overtake the musician before he had entered his own house, and then arose the question if this were an expedient time to call. Whether or not he decided to do so there and then, now that he had got here, the distance home being too great for him to wait till late in the afternoon. This man of soul would understand scant ceremony, and might be quite a perfect adviser in a case in which an earthly and illegitimate passion had cunningly obtained entrance into his heart through the opening afforded for religion.

Jude accordingly rang the bell, and was admitted.

The musician came to him in a moment, and being respectably dressed, good-looking, and frank in manner, Jude obtained a favourable reception. He was nevertheless conscious that there would be a certain awkwardness in explaining his errand.

"I have been singing in the choir of a little church near Melchester," he said. "And we have this week practised 'The Foot of the Cross,' which I understand, sir, that you composed?"

"I did—a year or so ago."

"I—like it. I think it supremely beautiful!"

"Ah well—other people have said so too. Yes, there's money in it, if I could only see about getting it published. I have other compositions to go with it, too; I wish I could bring them out; for I haven't made a five-pound note out of any of them yet. These publishing people—they want the copyright of an obscure composer's work, such as mine is, for almost less than I should have to pay a person for making a fair manuscript copy of the score. The one you speak of I have lent to various friends about here and Melchester, and so it has got to be sung a little. But music is a poor staff to lean on—I am giving it up entirely. You must go into trade if you want to make money nowadays. The wine business is what I am thinking of. This is my forthcoming list—it is not issued yet—but you can take one."

He handed Jude an advertisement list of several pages in booklet shape, ornamentally margined with a red line, in which were set forth the various

clarets, champagnes, ports, sherries, and other wines with which he purposed to initiate his new venture. It took Jude more than by surprise that the man with the soul was thus and thus; and he felt that he could not open up his confidences.

They talked a little longer, but constrainedly, for when the musician found that Jude was a poor man his manner changed from what it had been while Jude's appearance and address deceived him as to his position and pursuits. Jude stammered out something about his feelings in wishing to congratulate the author on such an exalted composition, and took an embarrassed leave.

All the way home by the slow Sunday train, sitting in the fireless waiting-rooms on this cold spring day, he was depressed enough at his simplicity in taking such a journey. But no sooner did he reach his Melchester lodging than he found awaiting him a letter which had arrived that morning a few minutes after he had left the house. It was a contrite little note from Sue, in which she said, with sweet humility, that she felt she had been horrid in telling him he was not to come to see her, that she despised herself for having been so conventional; and that he was to be sure to come by the eleven-forty-five train that very Sunday, and have dinner with them at half-past one.

Jude almost tore his hair at having missed this letter till it was too late to act upon its contents; but he had chastened himself considerably of late, and at last his chimerical expedition to Kennetbridge really did seem to have been another special intervention of Providence to keep him away from temptation. But a growing impatience of faith, which he had noticed in himself more than once of late, made him pass over in ridicule the idea that God sent people on fools' errands. He longed to see her; he was angry at having missed her: and he wrote instantly, telling her what had happened, and saying he had not enough patience to wait till the following Sunday, but would come any day in the week that she liked to name.

Since he wrote a little over-ardently, Sue, as her manner was, delayed her reply till Thursday before Good Friday, when she said he might come that afternoon if he wished, this being the earliest day on which she could welcome him, for she was now assistant-teacher in her husband's school. Jude therefore got leave from the cathedral works at the trifling expense of a stoppage of pay, and went.

Part Fourth
AT SHASTON

“Whoso prefers either Matrimony or other Ordinance before the Good of Man and the plain Exigence of Charity, let him profess Papist, or Protestant, or what he will, he is no better than a Pharisee.”—J. MILTON.

I

Shaston, the ancient British Palladour,

From whose foundation first such strange reports arise,

(as Drayton sang it), was, and is, in itself the city of a dream. Vague imaginings of its castle, its three mints, its magnificent apsidal abbey, the chief glory of South Wessex, its twelve churches, its shrines, chantries, hospitals, its gabled freestone mansions—all now ruthlessly swept away—throw the visitor, even against his will, into a pensive melancholy, which the stimulating atmosphere and limitless landscape around him can scarcely dispel. The spot was the burial-place of a king and a queen, of abbots and abbesses, saints and bishops, knights and squires. The bones of King Edward “the Martyr,” carefully removed hither for holy preservation, brought Shaston a renown which made it the resort of pilgrims from every part of Europe, and enabled it to maintain a reputation extending far beyond English shores. To this fair creation of the great Middle-Age the Dissolution was, as historians tell us, the death-knell. With the destruction of the enormous abbey the whole place collapsed in a general ruin: the Martyr’s bones met with the fate of the sacred pile that held them, and not a stone is now left to tell where they lie.

The natural picturesqueness and singularity of the town still remain; but strange to say these qualities, which were noted by many writers in ages when scenic beauty is said to have been unappreciated, are passed over in this, and one of the queerest and quaintest spots in England stands virtually unvisited to-day.

It has a unique position on the summit of a steep and imposing scarp, rising on the north, south, and west sides of the borough out of the deep alluvial Vale of Blackmoor, the view from the Castle Green over three counties of verdant pasture—South, Mid, and Nether Wessex—being as sudden a surprise to the unexpectant traveller’s eyes as the medicinal air is

to his lungs. Impossible to a railway, it can best be reached on foot, next best by light vehicles; and it is hardly accessible to these but by a sort of isthmus on the north-east, that connects it with the high chalk table-land on that side.

Such is, and such was, the now world-forgotten Shaston or Palladour. Its situation rendered water the great want of the town; and within living memory, horses, donkeys and men may have been seen toiling up the winding ways to the top of the height, laden with tubs and barrels filled from the wells beneath the mountain, and hawkers retailing their contents at the price of a halfpenny a bucketful.

This difficulty in the water supply, together with two other odd facts, namely, that the chief graveyard slopes up as steeply as a roof behind the church, and that in former times the town passed through a curious period of corruption, conventual and domestic, gave rise to the saying that Shaston was remarkable for three consolations to man, such as the world afforded not elsewhere. It was a place where the churchyard lay nearer heaven than the church steeple, where beer was more plentiful than water, and where there were more wanton women than honest wives and maids. It is also said that after the Middle Ages the inhabitants were too poor to pay their priests, and hence were compelled to pull down their churches, and refrain altogether from the public worship of God; a necessity which they bemoaned over their cups in the settles of their inns on Sunday afternoons. In those days the Shastonians were apparently not without a sense of humour.

There was another peculiarity—this a modern one—which Shaston appeared to owe to its site. It was the resting-place and headquarters of the proprietors of wandering vans, shows, shooting-galleries, and other itinerant concerns, whose business lay largely at fairs and markets. As strange wild birds are seen assembled on some lofty promontory, meditatively pausing for longer flights, or to return by the course they followed thither, so here, in this cliff-town, stood in stultified silence the yellow and green caravans bearing names not local, as if surprised by a change in the landscape so violent as to hinder their further progress; and here they usually remained all the winter till they turned to seek again their old tracks in the following spring.

It was to this breezy and whimsical spot that Jude ascended from the nearest station for the first time in his life about four o'clock one afternoon, and entering on the summit of the peak after a toilsome climb, passed the first houses of the aerial town; and drew towards the school-house. The hour was too early; the pupils were still in school, humming small, like a swarm of gnats; and he withdrew a few steps along Abbey Walk, whence he regarded the spot which fate had made the home of all he loved best in the world. In front of the schools, which were extensive and stone-built, grew two enormous beeches with smooth mouse-coloured trunks, as such trees will only grow on chalk uplands. Within the mullioned and transomed windows he could see the black, brown, and flaxen crowns of the scholars over the sills, and to pass the time away he walked down to the level terrace where the abbey gardens once had spread, his heart throbbing in spite of him.

Unwilling to enter till the children were dismissed he remained here till young voices could be heard in the open air, and girls in white pinafores over red and blue frocks appeared dancing along the paths which the abbess, prioress, subprioress, and fifty nuns had demurely paced three centuries earlier. Retracing his steps he found that he had waited too long, and that Sue had gone out into the town at the heels of the last scholar, Mr. Phillotson having been absent all the afternoon at a teachers' meeting at Shottsford.

Jude went into the empty schoolroom and sat down, the girl who was sweeping the floor having informed him that Mrs. Phillotson would be back again in a few minutes. A piano stood near—actually the old piano that Phillotson had possessed at Marygreen—and though the dark afternoon almost prevented him seeing the notes Jude touched them in his humble way, and could not help modulating into the hymn which had so affected him in the previous week.

A figure moved behind him, and thinking it was still the girl with the broom Jude took no notice, till the person came close and laid her fingers lightly upon his bass hand. The imposed hand was a little one he seemed to know, and he turned.

“Don't stop,” said Sue. “I like it. I learnt it before I left Melchester. They used to play it in the training school.”

“I can't strum before you! Play it for me.”

“Oh well—I don’t mind.”

Sue sat down, and her rendering of the piece, though not remarkable, seemed divine as compared with his own. She, like him, was evidently touched—to her own surprise—by the recalled air; and when she had finished, and he moved his hand towards hers, it met his own half-way. Jude grasped it—just as he had done before her marriage.

“It is odd,” she said, in a voice quite changed, “that I should care about that air; because—”

“Because what?”

“I am not that sort—quite.”

“Not easily moved?”

“I didn’t quite mean that.”

“Oh, but you *are* one of that sort, for you are just like me at heart!”

“But not at head.”

She played on and suddenly turned round; and by an unpremeditated instinct each clasped the other’s hand again.

She uttered a forced little laugh as she relinquished his quickly. “How funny!” she said. “I wonder what we both did that for?”

“I suppose because we are both alike, as I said before.”

“Not in our thoughts! Perhaps a little in our feelings.”

“And they rule thoughts... Isn’t it enough to make one blaspheme that the composer of that hymn is one of the most commonplace men I ever met!”

“What—you know him?”

“I went to see him.”

“Oh, you goose—to do just what I should have done! Why did you?”

“Because we are not alike,” he said drily.

“Now we’ll have some tea,” said Sue. “Shall we have it here instead of in my house? It is no trouble to get the kettle and things brought in. We don’t live at the school you know, but in that ancient dwelling across the way called Old-Grove Place. It is so antique and dismal that it depresses me dreadfully. Such houses are very well to visit, but not to live in—I feel crushed into the earth by the weight of so many previous lives there spent.

In a new place like these schools there is only your own life to support. Sit down, and I'll tell Ada to bring the tea-things across."

He waited in the light of the stove, the door of which she flung open before going out, and when she returned, followed by the maiden with tea, they sat down by the same light, assisted by the blue rays of a spirit-lamp under the brass kettle on the stand.

"This is one of your wedding-presents to me," she said, signifying the latter.

"Yes," said Jude.

The kettle of his gift sang with some satire in its note, to his mind; and to change the subject he said, "Do you know of any good readable edition of the uncanonical books of the New Testament? You don't read them in the school I suppose?"

"Oh dear no!—'twould alarm the neighbourhood... Yes, there is one. I am not familiar with it now, though I was interested in it when my former friend was alive. Cowper's *Apocryphal Gospels*."

"That sounds like what I want." His thoughts, however reverted with a twinge to the "former friend"—by whom she meant, as he knew, the university comrade of her earlier days. He wondered if she talked of him to Phillotson.

"The Gospel of Nicodemus is very nice," she went on to keep him from his jealous thoughts, which she read clearly, as she always did. Indeed when they talked on an indifferent subject, as now, there was ever a second silent conversation passing between their emotions, so perfect was the reciprocity between them. "It is quite like the genuine article. All cut up into verses, too; so that it is like one of the other evangelists read in a dream, when things are the same, yet not the same. But, Jude, do you take an interest in those questions still? Are you getting up *Apologetica*?"

"Yes. I am reading Divinity harder than ever."

She regarded him curiously.

"Why do you look at me like that?" said Jude.

"Oh—why do you want to know?"

"I am sure you can tell me anything I may be ignorant of in that subject. You must have learnt a lot of everything from your dear dead friend!"

“We won’t get on to that now!” she coaxed. “Will you be carving out at that church again next week, where you learnt the pretty hymn?”

“Yes, perhaps.”

“That will be very nice. Shall I come and see you there? It is in this direction, and I could come any afternoon by train for half an hour?”

“No. Don’t come!”

“What—aren’t we going to be friends, then, any longer, as we used to be?”

“No.”

“I didn’t know that. I thought you were always going to be kind to me!”

“No, I am not.”

“What have I done, then? I am sure I thought we two—” The *tremolo* in her voice caused her to break off.

“Sue, I sometimes think you are a flirt,” said he abruptly.

There was a momentary pause, till she suddenly jumped up; and to his surprise he saw by the kettle-flame that her face was flushed.

“I can’t talk to you any longer, Jude!” she said, the tragic contralto note having come back as of old. “It is getting too dark to stay together like this, after playing morbid Good Friday tunes that make one feel what one shouldn’t! ... We mustn’t sit and talk in this way any more. Yes—you must go away, for you mistake me! I am very much the reverse of what you say so cruelly—Oh, Jude, it *was* cruel to say that! Yet I can’t tell you the truth—I should shock you by letting you know how I give way to my impulses, and how much I feel that I shouldn’t have been provided with attractiveness unless it were meant to be exercised! Some women’s love of being loved is insatiable; and so, often, is their love of loving; and in the last case they may find that they can’t give it continuously to the chamber-officer appointed by the bishop’s licence to receive it. But you are so straightforward, Jude, that you can’t understand me! ... Now you must go. I am sorry my husband is not at home.”

“Are you?”

“I perceive I have said that in mere convention! Honestly I don’t think I am sorry. It does not matter, either way, sad to say!”

As they had overdone the grasp of hands some time sooner, she touched his fingers but lightly when he went out now. He had hardly gone from the door when, with a dissatisfied look, she jumped on a form and opened the iron casement of a window beneath which he was passing in the path without. "When do you leave here to catch your train, Jude?" she asked.

He looked up in some surprise. "The coach that runs to meet it goes in three-quarters of an hour or so."

"What will you do with yourself for the time?"

"Oh—wander about, I suppose. Perhaps I shall go and sit in the old church."

"It does seem hard of me to pack you off so! You have thought enough of churches, Heaven knows, without going into one in the dark. Stay there."

"Where?"

"Where you are. I can talk to you better like this than when you were inside... It was so kind and tender of you to give up half a day's work to come to see me! ... You are Joseph the dreamer of dreams, dear Jude. And a tragic Don Quixote. And sometimes you are St. Stephen, who, while they were stoning him, could see Heaven opened. Oh, my poor friend and comrade, you'll suffer yet!"

Now that the high window-sill was between them, so that he could not get at her, she seemed not to mind indulging in a frankness she had feared at close quarters.

"I have been thinking," she continued, still in the tone of one brimful of feeling, "that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies... Now you mustn't wait longer, or you will lose the coach. Come and see me again. You must come to the house then."

"Yes!" said Jude. "When shall it be?"

"To-morrow week. Good-bye—good-bye!" She stretched out her hand and stroked his forehead pitifully—just once. Jude said good-bye, and went away into the darkness.

Passing along Bimport Street he thought he heard the wheels of the coach departing, and, truly enough, when he reached the Duke's Arms in the Market Place the coach had gone. It was impossible for him to get to the station on foot in time for this train, and he settled himself perforce to wait for the next—the last to Melchester that night.

He wandered about awhile, obtained something to eat; and then, having another half-hour on his hands, his feet involuntarily took him through the venerable graveyard of Trinity Church, with its avenues of limes, in the direction of the schools again. They were entirely in darkness. She had said she lived over the way at Old-Grove Place, a house which he soon discovered from her description of its antiquity.

A glimmering candlelight shone from a front window, the shutters being yet unclosed. He could see the interior clearly—the floor sinking a couple of steps below the road without, which had become raised during the centuries since the house was built. Sue, evidently just come in, was standing with her hat on in this front parlour or sitting-room, whose walls were lined with wainscoting of panelled oak reaching from floor to ceiling, the latter being crossed by huge moulded beams only a little way above her head. The mantelpiece was of the same heavy description, carved with Jacobean pilasters and scroll-work. The centuries did, indeed, ponderously overhang a young wife who passed her time here.

She had opened a rosewood work-box, and was looking at a photograph. Having contemplated it a little while she pressed it against her bosom, and put it again in its place.

Then becoming aware that she had not obscured the windows she came forward to do so, candle in hand. It was too dark for her to see Jude without, but he could see her face distinctly, and there was an unmistakable tearfulness about the dark, long-lashed eyes.

She closed the shutters, and Jude turned away to pursue his solitary journey home. "Whose photograph was she looking at?" he said. He had once given her his; but she had others, he knew. Yet it was his, surely?

He knew he should go to see her again, according to her invitation. Those earnest men he read of, the saints, whom Sue, with gentle irreverence, called his demi-gods, would have shunned such encounters if they doubted their own strength. But he could not. He might fast and pray during the whole interval, but the human was more powerful in him than the Divine.

II

However, if God disposed not, woman did. The next morning but one brought him this note from her:

Don't come next week. On your own account don't! We were too free, under the influence of that morbid hymn and the twilight. Think no more than you can help of

SUSANNA FLORENCE MARY.

The disappointment was keen. He knew her mood, the look of her face, when she subscribed herself at length thus. But, whatever her mood, he could not say she was wrong in her view. He replied:

I acquiesce. You are right. It is a lesson in renunciation which I suppose I ought to learn at this season.

JUDE.

He despatched the note on Easter Eve, and there seemed a finality in their decisions. But other forces and laws than theirs were in operation. On Easter Monday morning he received a message from the Widow Edlin, whom he had directed to telegraph if anything serious happened:

Your aunt is sinking. Come at once.

He threw down his tools and went. Three and a half hours later he was crossing the downs about Marygreen, and presently plunged into the concave field across which the short cut was made to the village. As he ascended on the other side a labouring man, who had been watching his approach from a gate across the path, moved uneasily, and prepared to

speak. "I can see in his face that she is dead," said Jude. "Poor Aunt Drusilla!"

It was as he had supposed, and Mrs. Edlin had sent out the man to break the news to him.

"She wouldn't have knowed 'ee. She lay like a doll wi' glass eyes; so it didn't matter that you wasn't here," said he.

Jude went on to the house, and in the afternoon, when everything was done, and the layers-out had finished their beer, and gone, he sat down alone in the silent place. It was absolutely necessary to communicate with Sue, though two or three days earlier they had agreed to mutual severance. He wrote in the briefest terms:

Aunt Drusilla is dead, having been taken almost suddenly.
The funeral is on Friday afternoon.

He remained in and about Marygreen through the intervening days, went out on Friday morning to see that the grave was finished, and wondered if Sue would come. She had not written, and that seemed to signify rather that she would come than that she would not. Having timed her by her only possible train, he locked the door about mid-day, and crossed the hollow field to the verge of the upland by the Brown House, where he stood and looked over the vast prospect northwards, and over the nearer landscape in which Alfredston stood. Two miles behind it a jet of white steam was travelling from the left to the right of the picture.

There was a long time to wait, even now, till he would know if she had arrived. He did wait, however, and at last a small hired vehicle pulled up at the bottom of the hill, and a person alighted, the conveyance going back, while the passenger began ascending the hill. He knew her; and she looked so slender to-day that it seemed as if she might be crushed in the intensity of a too passionate embrace—such as it was not for him to give. Two-thirds of the way up her head suddenly took a solicitous poise, and he knew that she had at that moment recognized him. Her face soon began a pensive smile, which lasted till, having descended a little way, he met her.

"I thought," she began with nervous quickness, "that it would be so sad to let you attend the funeral alone! And so—at the last moment—I came."

"Dear faithful Sue!" murmured Jude.

With the elusiveness of her curious double nature, however, Sue did not stand still for any further greeting, though it wanted some time to the burial. A pathos so unusually compounded as that which attached to this hour was unlikely to repeat itself for years, if ever, and Jude would have paused, and meditated, and conversed. But Sue either saw it not at all, or, seeing it more than he, would not allow herself to feel it.

The sad and simple ceremony was soon over, their progress to the church being almost at a trot, the bustling undertaker having a more important funeral an hour later, three miles off. Drusilla was put into the new ground, quite away from her ancestors. Sue and Jude had gone side by side to the grave, and now sat down to tea in the familiar house; their lives united at least in this last attention to the dead.

“She was opposed to marriage, from first to last, you say?” murmured Sue.

“Yes. Particularly for members of our family.”

Her eyes met his, and remained on him awhile.

“We are rather a sad family, don’t you think, Jude?”

“She said we made bad husbands and wives. Certainly we make unhappy ones. At all events, I do, for one!”

Sue was silent. “Is it wrong, Jude,” she said with a tentative tremor, “for a husband or wife to tell a third person that they are unhappy in their marriage? If a marriage ceremony is a religious thing, it is possibly wrong; but if it is only a sordid contract, based on material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known—which it seems to be—why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her?”

“I have said so, anyhow, to you.”

Presently she went on: “Are there many couples, do you think, where one dislikes the other for no definite fault?”

“Yes, I suppose. If either cares for another person, for instance.”

“But even apart from that? Wouldn’t the woman, for example, be very bad-natured if she didn’t like to live with her husband; merely”—her voice undulated, and he guessed things—“merely because she had a personal feeling against it—a physical objection—a fastidiousness, or whatever it

may be called—although she might respect and be grateful to him? I am merely putting a case. Ought she to try to overcome her pruderies?”

Jude threw a troubled look at her. He said, looking away: “It would be just one of those cases in which my experiences go contrary to my dogmas. Speaking as an order-loving man—which I hope I am, though I fear I am not—I should say, yes. Speaking from experience and unbiased nature, I should say, no. ... Sue, I believe you are not happy!”

“Of course I am!” she contradicted. “How can a woman be unhappy who has only been married eight weeks to a man she chose freely?”

“Chose freely!”

“Why do you repeat it? ... But I have to go back by the six o’clock train. You will be staying on here, I suppose?”

“For a few days to wind up Aunt’s affairs. This house is gone now. Shall I go to the train with you?”

A little laugh of objection came from Sue. “I think not. You may come part of the way.”

“But stop—you can’t go to-night! That train won’t take you to Shaston. You must stay and go back to-morrow. Mrs. Edlin has plenty of room, if you don’t like to stay here?”

“Very well,” she said dubiously. “I didn’t tell him I would come for certain.”

Jude went to the widow’s house adjoining, to let her know; and returning in a few minutes sat down again.

“It is horrible how we are circumstanced, Sue—horrible!” he said abruptly, with his eyes bent to the floor.

“No! Why?”

“I can’t tell you all my part of the gloom. Your part is that you ought not to have married him. I saw it before you had done it, but I thought I mustn’t interfere. I was wrong. I ought to have!”

“But what makes you assume all this, dear?”

“Because—I can see you through your feathers, my poor little bird!”

Her hand lay on the table, and Jude put his upon it. Sue drew hers away.

“That’s absurd, Sue,” cried he, “after what we’ve been talking about! I am more strict and formal than you, if it comes to that; and that you should

object to such an innocent action shows that you are ridiculously inconsistent!”

“Perhaps it was too prudish,” she said repentantly. “Only I have fancied it was a sort of trick of ours—too frequent perhaps. There, you may hold it as much as you like. Is that good of me?”

“Yes; very.”

“But I must tell him.”

“Who?”

“Richard.”

“Oh—of course, if you think it necessary. But as it means nothing it may be bothering him needlessly.”

“Well—are you sure you mean it only as my cousin?”

“Absolutely sure. I have no feelings of love left in me.”

“That’s news. How has it come to be?”

“I’ve seen Arabella.”

She winced at the hit; then said curiously, “When did you see her?”

“When I was at Christminster.”

“So she’s come back; and you never told me! I suppose you will live with her now?”

“Of course—just as you live with your husband.”

She looked at the window pots with the geraniums and cactuses, withered for want of attention, and through them at the outer distance, till her eyes began to grow moist. “What is it?” said Jude, in a softened tone.

“Why should you be so glad to go back to her if—if what you used to say to me is still true—I mean if it were true then! Of course it is not now! How could your heart go back to Arabella so soon?”

“A special Providence, I suppose, helped it on its way.”

“Ah—it isn’t true!” she said with gentle resentment. “You are teasing me—that’s all—because you think I am not happy!”

“I don’t know. I don’t wish to know.”

“If I were unhappy it would be my fault, my wickedness; not that I should have a right to dislike him! He is considerate to me in everything; and he is very interesting, from the amount of general knowledge he has

acquired by reading everything that comes in his way. ... Do you think, Jude, that a man ought to marry a woman his own age, or one younger than himself—eighteen years—as I am than he?”

“It depends upon what they feel for each other.”

He gave her no opportunity of self-satisfaction, and she had to go on unaided, which she did in a vanquished tone, verging on tears:

“I—I think I must be equally honest with you as you have been with me. Perhaps you have seen what it is I want to say?—that though I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don’t like him—it is a torture to me to—live with him as a husband!—There, now I have let it out—I couldn’t help it, although I have been—pretending I am happy.—Now you’ll have a contempt for me for ever, I suppose!” She bent down her face upon her hands as they lay upon the cloth, and silently sobbed in little jerks that made the fragile three-legged table quiver.

“I have only been married a month or two!” she went on, still remaining bent upon the table, and sobbing into her hands. “And it is said that what a woman shrinks from—in the early days of her marriage—she shakes down to with comfortable indifference in half a dozen years. But that is much like saying that the amputation of a limb is no affliction, since a person gets comfortably accustomed to the use of a wooden leg or arm in the course of time!”

Jude could hardly speak, but he said, “I thought there was something wrong, Sue! Oh, I thought there was!”

“But it is not as you think!—there is nothing wrong except my own wickedness, I suppose you’d call it—a repugnance on my part, for a reason I cannot disclose, and what would not be admitted as one by the world in general! ... What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally!—the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness! ... I wish he would beat me, or be faithless to me, or do some open thing that I could talk about as a justification for feeling as I do! But he does nothing, except that he has grown a little cold since he has found out how I feel. That’s why he didn’t come to the funeral... Oh, I am very miserable—I don’t know what to do! ... Don’t come near me, Jude, because you mustn’t. Don’t—don’t!”

But he had jumped up and put his face against hers—or rather against her ear, her face being inaccessible.

“I told you not to, Jude!”

“I know you did—I only wish to—console you! It all arose through my being married before we met, didn’t it? You would have been my wife, Sue, wouldn’t you, if it hadn’t been for that?”

Instead of replying she rose quickly, and saying she was going to walk to her aunt’s grave in the churchyard to recover herself, went out of the house. Jude did not follow her. Twenty minutes later he saw her cross the village green towards Mrs. Edlin’s, and soon she sent a little girl to fetch her bag, and tell him she was too tired to see him again that night.

In the lonely room of his aunt’s house, Jude sat watching the cottage of the Widow Edlin as it disappeared behind the night shade. He knew that Sue was sitting within its walls equally lonely and disheartened; and again questioned his devotional motto that all was for the best.

He retired to rest early, but his sleep was fitful from the sense that Sue was so near at hand. At some time near two o’clock, when he was beginning to sleep more soundly, he was aroused by a shrill squeak that had been familiar enough to him when he lived regularly at Marygreen. It was the cry of a rabbit caught in a gin. As was the little creature’s habit, it did not soon repeat its cry; and probably would not do so more than once or twice; but would remain bearing its torture till the morrow when the trapper would come and knock it on the head.

He who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture the agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a “bad catch” by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when, should a weak-sprung instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the fields from the mortification of the limb. If it were a “good catch,” namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape.

Almost half an hour passed, and the rabbit repeated its cry. Jude could rest no longer till he had put it out of its pain, so dressing himself quickly he descended, and by the light of the moon went across the green in the direction of the sound. He reached the hedge bordering the widow’s garden, when he stood still. The faint click of the trap as dragged about by the

writhing animal guided him now, and reaching the spot he struck the rabbit on the back of the neck with the side of his palm, and it stretched itself out dead.

He was turning away when he saw a woman looking out of the open casement at a window on the ground floor of the adjacent cottage. “Jude!” said a voice timidly—Sue’s voice. “It is you—is it not?”

“Yes, dear!”

“I haven’t been able to sleep at all, and then I heard the rabbit, and couldn’t help thinking of what it suffered, till I felt I must come down and kill it! But I am so glad you got there first... They ought not to be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!”

Jude had reached the window, which was quite a low one, so that she was visible down to her waist. She let go the casement-stay and put her hand upon his, her moonlit face regarding him wistfully.

“Did it keep you awake?” he said.

“No—I was awake.”

“How was that?”

“Oh, you know—now! I know you, with your religious doctrines, think that a married woman in trouble of a kind like mine commits a mortal sin in making a man the confidant of it, as I did you. I wish I hadn’t, now!”

“Don’t wish it, dear,” he said. “That may have *been* my view; but my doctrines and I begin to part company.”

“I knew it—I knew it! And that’s why I vowed I wouldn’t disturb your belief. But—I am *so glad* to see you!—and, oh, I didn’t mean to see you again, now the last tie between us, Aunt Drusilla, is dead!”

Jude seized her hand and kissed it. “There is a stronger one left!” he said. “I’ll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go! Let me help you, even if I do love you, and even if you...”

“Don’t say it!—I know what you mean; but I can’t admit so much as that. There! Guess what you like, but don’t press me to answer questions!”

“I wish you were happy, whatever I may be!”

“I *can’t* be! So few could enter into my feeling—they would say ’twas my fanciful fastidiousness, or something of that sort, and condemn me... It is none of the natural tragedies of love that’s love’s usual tragedy in

civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting! ... It would have been wrong, perhaps, for me to tell my distress to you, if I had been able to tell it to anybody else. But I have nobody. And I *must* tell somebody! Jude, before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me—there is no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced. So I rushed on, when I had got into that training school scrape, with all the cock-sureness of the fool that I was! ... I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one had done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women, only they submit, and I kick... When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what *will* they say!”

“You are very bitter, darling Sue! How I wish—I wish—”

“You must go in now!”

In a moment of impulse she bent over the sill, and laid her face upon his hair, weeping, and then imprinting a scarcely perceptible little kiss upon the top of his head, withdrawing quickly, so that he could not put his arms round her, as otherwise he unquestionably would have done. She shut the casement, and he returned to his cottage.

III

Sue's distressful confession recurred to Jude's mind all the night as being a sorrow indeed.

The morning after, when it was time for her to go, the neighbours saw her companion and herself disappearing on foot down the hill path which led into the lonely road to Alfredston. An hour passed before he returned along the same route, and in his face there was a look of exaltation not unmixed with recklessness. An incident had occurred.

They had stood parting in the silent highway, and their tense and passionate moods had led to bewildered inquiries of each other on how far their intimacy ought to go; till they had almost quarrelled, and she said tearfully that it was hardly proper of him as a parson in embryo to think of such a thing as kissing her even in farewell as he now wished to do. Then she had conceded that the fact of the kiss would be nothing: all would depend upon the spirit of it. If given in the spirit of a cousin and a friend she saw no objection: if in the spirit of a lover she could not permit it. "Will you swear that it will not be in that spirit?" she had said.

No: he would not. And then they had turned from each other in estrangement, and gone their several ways, till at a distance of twenty or thirty yards both had looked round simultaneously. That look behind was fatal to the reserve hitherto more or less maintained. They had quickly run back, and met, and embracing most unpremeditatedly, kissed close and long. When they parted for good it was with flushed cheeks on her side, and a beating heart on his.

The kiss was a turning-point in Jude's career. Back again in the cottage, and left to reflection, he saw one thing: that though his kiss of that aerial being had seemed the purest moment of his faultful life, as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming the soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation.

What Sue had said in warmth was really the cold truth. When to defend his affection tooth and nail, to persist with headlong force in impassioned attentions to her, was all he thought of, he was condemned *ipso facto* as a professor of the accepted school of morals. He was as unfit, obviously, by nature, as he had been by social position, to fill the part of a propounder of accredited dogma.

Strange that his first aspiration—towards academical proficiency—had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration—towards apostleship—had also been checked by a woman. “Is it,” he said, “that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress?”

It had been his standing desire to become a prophet, however humble, to his struggling fellow-creatures, without any thought of personal gain. Yet with a wife living away from him with another husband, and himself in love erratically, the loved one’s revolt against her state being possibly on his account, he had sunk to be barely respectable according to regulation views.

It was not for him to consider further: he had only to confront the obvious, which was that he had made himself quite an impostor as a law-abiding religious teacher.

At dusk that evening he went into the garden and dug a shallow hole, to which he brought out all the theological and ethical works that he possessed, and had stored here. He knew that, in this country of true believers, most of them were not saleable at a much higher price than waste-paper value, and preferred to get rid of them in his own way, even if he should sacrifice a little money to the sentiment of thus destroying them. Lighting some loose pamphlets to begin with, he cut the volumes into pieces as well as he could, and with a three-pronged fork shook them over the flames. They kindled, and lighted up the back of the house, the pigsty, and his own face, till they were more or less consumed.

Though he was almost a stranger here now, passing cottagers talked to him over the garden hedge.

“Burning up your awld aunt’s rubbidge, I suppose? Ay; a lot gets heaped up in nooks and corners when you’ve lived eighty years in one house.”

It was nearly one o’clock in the morning before the leaves, covers, and binding of Jeremy Taylor, Butler, Doddridge, Paley, Pusey, Newman and

the rest had gone to ashes, but the night was quiet, and as he turned and turned the paper shreds with the fork, the sense of being no longer a hypocrite to himself afforded his mind a relief which gave him calm. He might go on believing as before, but he professed nothing, and no longer owned and exhibited engines of faith which, as their proprietor, he might naturally be supposed to exercise on himself first of all. In his passion for Sue he could not stand as an ordinary sinner, and not as a whited sepulchre.

Meanwhile Sue, after parting from him earlier in the day, had gone along to the station, with tears in her eyes for having run back and let him kiss her. Jude ought not to have pretended that he was not a lover, and made her give way to an impulse to act unconventionally, if not wrongly. She was inclined to call it the latter; for Sue's logic was extraordinarily compounded, and seemed to maintain that before a thing was done it might be right to do, but that being done it became wrong; or, in other words, that things which were right in theory were wrong in practice.

"I have been too weak, I think!" she jerked out as she pranced on, shaking down tear-drops now and then. "It was burning, like a lover's—oh, it was! And I won't write to him any more, or at least for a long time, to impress him with my dignity! And I hope it will hurt him very much—expecting a letter to-morrow morning, and the next, and the next, and no letter coming. He'll suffer then with suspense—won't he, that's all!—and I am very glad of it!"—Tears of pity for Jude's approaching sufferings at her hands mingled with those which had surged up in pity for herself.

Then the slim little wife of a husband whose person was disagreeable to her, the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfil the conditions of the matrimonial relation with Phillotson, possibly with scarce any man, walked fitfully along, and panted, and brought weariness into her eyes by gazing and worrying hopelessly.

Phillotson met her at the arrival station, and, seeing that she was troubled, thought it must be owing to the depressing effect of her aunt's death and funeral. He began telling her of his day's doings, and how his friend Gillingham, a neighbouring schoolmaster whom he had not seen for years, had called upon him. While ascending to the town, seated on the top of the omnibus beside him, she said suddenly and with an air of self-chastisement, regarding the white road and its bordering bushes of hazel:

“Richard—I let Mr. Fawley hold my hand a long while. I don’t know whether you think it wrong?”

He, waking apparently from thoughts of far different mould, said vaguely, “Oh, did you? What did you do that for?”

“I don’t know. He wanted to, and I let him.”

“I hope it pleased him. I should think it was hardly a novelty.”

They lapsed into silence. Had this been a case in the court of an omniscient judge, he might have entered on his notes the curious fact that Sue had placed the minor for the major indiscretion, and had not said a word about the kiss.

After tea that evening Phillotson sat balancing the school registers. She remained in an unusually silent, tense, and restless condition, and at last, saying she was tired, went to bed early. When Phillotson arrived upstairs, weary with the drudgery of the attendance-numbers, it was a quarter to twelve o’clock. Entering their chamber, which by day commanded a view of some thirty or forty miles over the Vale of Blackmoor, and even into Outer Wessex, he went to the window, and, pressing his face against the pane, gazed with hard-breathing fixity into the mysterious darkness which now covered the far-reaching scene. He was musing, “I think,” he said at last, without turning his head, “that I must get the committee to change the school-stationer. All the copybooks are sent wrong this time.”

There was no reply. Thinking Sue was dozing he went on:

“And there must be a rearrangement of that ventilator in the class-room. The wind blows down upon my head unmercifully and gives me the ear-ache.”

As the silence seemed more absolute than ordinarily he turned round. The heavy, gloomy oak wainscot, which extended over the walls upstairs and down in the dilapidated “Old-Grove Place,” and the massive chimney-piece reaching to the ceiling, stood in odd contrast to the new and shining brass bedstead, and the new suite of birch furniture that he had bought for her, the two styles seeming to nod to each other across three centuries upon the shaking floor.

“Soo!” he said (this being the way in which he pronounced her name).

She was not in the bed, though she had apparently been there—the clothes on her side being flung back. Thinking she might have forgotten

some kitchen detail and gone downstairs for a moment to see to it, he pulled off his coat and idled quietly enough for a few minutes, when, finding she did not come, he went out upon the landing, candle in hand, and said again “Soo!”

“Yes!” came back to him in her voice, from the distant kitchen quarter.

“What are you doing down there at midnight—tiring yourself out for nothing!”

“I am not sleepy; I am reading; and there is a larger fire here.”

He went to bed. Some time in the night he awoke. She was not there, even now. Lighting a candle he hastily stepped out upon the landing, and again called her name.

She answered “Yes!” as before, but the tones were small and confined, and whence they came he could not at first understand. Under the staircase was a large clothes-closet, without a window; they seemed to come from it. The door was shut, but there was no lock or other fastening. Phillotson, alarmed, went towards it, wondering if she had suddenly become deranged.

“What are you doing in there?” he asked.

“Not to disturb you I came here, as it was so late.”

“But there’s no bed, is there? And no ventilation! Why, you’ll be suffocated if you stay all night!”

“Oh no, I think not. Don’t trouble about me.”

“But—” Phillotson seized the knob and pulled at the door. She had fastened it inside with a piece of string, which broke at his pull. There being no bedstead she had flung down some rugs and made a little nest for herself in the very cramped quarters the closet afforded.

When he looked in upon her she sprang out of her lair, great-eyed and trembling.

“You ought not to have pulled open the door!” she cried excitedly. “It is not becoming in you! Oh, will you go away; please will you!”

She looked so pitiful and pleading in her white nightgown against the shadowy lumber-hole that he was quite worried. She continued to beseech him not to disturb her.

He said: “I’ve been kind to you, and given you every liberty; and it is monstrous that you should feel in this way!”

“Yes,” said she, weeping. “I know that! It is wrong and wicked of me, I suppose! I am very sorry. But it is not I altogether that am to blame!”

“Who is then? Am I?”

“No—I don’t know! The universe, I suppose—things in general, because they are so horrid and cruel!”

“Well, it is no use talking like that. Making a man’s house so unseemly at this time o’ night! Eliza will hear if we don’t mind.” (He meant the servant.) “Just think if either of the parsons in this town was to see us now! I hate such eccentricities, Sue. There’s no order or regularity in your sentiments! ... But I won’t intrude on you further; only I would advise you not to shut the door too tight, or I shall find you stifled to-morrow.”

On rising the next morning he immediately looked into the closet, but Sue had already gone downstairs. There was a little nest where she had lain, and spiders’ webs hung overhead. “What must a woman’s aversion be when it is stronger than her fear of spiders!” he said bitterly.

He found her sitting at the breakfast-table, and the meal began almost in silence, the burghers walking past upon the pavement—or rather roadway, pavements being scarce here—which was two or three feet above the level of the parlour floor. They nodded down to the happy couple their morning greetings, as they went on.

“Richard,” she said all at once; “would you mind my living away from you?”

“Away from me? Why, that’s what you were doing when I married you. What then was the meaning of marrying at all?”

“You wouldn’t like me any the better for telling you.”

“I don’t object to know.”

“Because I thought I could do nothing else. You had got my promise a long time before that, remember. Then, as time went on, I regretted I had promised you, and was trying to see an honourable way to break it off. But as I couldn’t I became rather reckless and careless about the conventions. Then you know what scandals were spread, and how I was turned out of the training school you had taken such time and trouble to prepare me for and get me into; and this frightened me and it seemed then that the one thing I could do would be to let the engagement stand. Of course I, of all people, ought not to have cared what was said, for it was just what I fancied I never

did care for. But I was a coward—as so many women are—and my theoretic unconventionality broke down. If that had not entered into the case it would have been better to have hurt your feelings once for all then, than to marry you and hurt them all my life after... And you were so generous in never giving credit for a moment to the rumour.”

“I am bound in honesty to tell you that I weighed its probability and inquired of your cousin about it.”

“Ah!” she said with pained surprise.

“I didn’t doubt you.”

“But you inquired!”

“I took his word.”

Her eyes had filled. “*He* wouldn’t have inquired!” she said. “But you haven’t answered me. Will you let me go away? I know how irregular it is of me to ask it—”

“It is irregular.”

“But I do ask it! Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified. If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others! ... Will you let me?”

“But we married—”

“What is the use of thinking of laws and ordinances,” she burst out, “if they make you miserable when you know you are committing no sin?”

“But you are committing a sin in not liking me.”

“I *do* like you! But I didn’t reflect it would be—that it would be so much more than that... For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal. There—I’ve said it! ... Will you let me, Richard?”

“You distress me, Susanna, by such importunity!”

“Why can’t we agree to free each other? We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it—not legally of course; but we can morally, especially as no new interests, in the shape of children, have arisen to be looked after. Then we might be friends, and meet without pain to either. Oh Richard, be my friend and have pity! We shall both be dead in a few years, and then what will it matter to anybody that you relieved me from

constraint for a little while? I daresay you think me eccentric, or super-sensitive, or something absurd. Well—why should I suffer for what I was born to be, if it doesn't hurt other people?"

"But it does—it hurts *me*! And you vowed to love me."

"Yes—that's it! I am in the wrong. I always am! It is as culpable to bind yourself to love always as to believe a creed always, and as silly as to vow always to like a particular food or drink!"

"And do you mean, by living away from me, living by yourself?"

"Well, if you insisted, yes. But I meant living with Jude."

"As his wife?"

"As I choose."

Phillotson writhed.

Sue continued: "She, or he, 'who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.' J. S. Mill's words, those are. I have been reading it up. Why can't you act upon them? I wish to, always."

"What do I care about J. S. Mill!" moaned he. "I only want to lead a quiet life! Do you mind my saying that I have guessed what never once occurred to me before our marriage—that you were in love, and are in love, with Jude Fawley!"

"You may go on guessing that I am, since you have begun. But do you suppose that if I had been I should have asked you to let me go and live with him?"

The ringing of the school bell saved Phillotson from the necessity of replying at present to what apparently did not strike him as being such a convincing *argumentum ad verecundiam* as she, in her loss of courage at the last moment, meant it to appear. She was beginning to be so puzzling and unstateable that he was ready to throw in with her other little peculiarities the extremest request which a wife could make.

They proceeded to the schools that morning as usual, Sue entering the class-room, where he could see the back of her head through the glass partition whenever he turned his eyes that way. As he went on giving and hearing lessons his forehead and eyebrows twitched from concentrated

agitation of thought, till at length he tore a scrap from a sheet of scribbling paper and wrote:

Your request prevents my attending to work at all. I don't know what I am doing! Was it seriously made?

He folded the piece of paper very small, and gave it to a little boy to take to Sue. The child toddled off into the class-room. Phillotson saw his wife turn and take the note, and the bend of her pretty head as she read it, her lips slightly crisped, to prevent undue expression under fire of so many young eyes. He could not see her hands, but she changed her position, and soon the child returned, bringing nothing in reply. In a few minutes, however, one of Sue's class appeared, with a little note similar to his own. These words only were pencilled therein:

I am sincerely sorry to say that it was seriously made.

Phillotson looked more disturbed than before, and the meeting-place of his brows twitched again. In ten minutes he called up the child he had just sent to her, and dispatched another missive:

God knows I don't want to thwart you in any reasonable way. My whole thought is to make you comfortable and happy. But I cannot agree to such a preposterous notion as your going to live with your lover. You would lose everybody's respect and regard; and so should I!

After an interval a similar part was enacted in the class-room, and an answer came:

I know you mean my good. But I don't want to be respectable! To produce "Human development in its richest diversity" (to quote your Humboldt) is to my mind far above respectability. No doubt my tastes are low—in your view—hopelessly low! If you won't let me go to him, will you grant me this one request—allow me to live in your house in a separate way?

To this he returned no answer.

She wrote again:

I know what you think. But cannot you have pity on me? I beg you to; I implore you to be merciful! I would not ask if I were not almost compelled by what I can't bear! No poor woman has ever wished more than I that Eve had not fallen, so that (as the primitive Christians believed) some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise. But I won't trifle! Be kind to me—even though I have not been kind to you! I will go away, go abroad, anywhere, and never trouble you.

Nearly an hour passed, and then he returned an answer:

I do not wish to pain you. How well you *know* I don't! Give me a little time. I am disposed to agree to your last request.

One line from her:

Thank you from my heart, Richard. I do not deserve your kindness.

All day Phillotson bent a dazed regard upon her through the glazed partition; and he felt as lonely as when he had not known her.

But he was as good as his word, and consented to her living apart in the house. At first, when they met at meals, she had seemed more composed under the new arrangement; but the irksomeness of their position worked on her temperament, and the fibres of her nature seemed strained like harp-strings. She talked vaguely and indiscriminately to prevent his talking pertinently.

IV

Phillotson was sitting up late, as was often his custom, trying to get together the materials for his long-neglected hobby of Roman antiquities. For the first time since reviving the subject he felt a return of his old interest in it. He forgot time and place, and when he remembered himself and ascended to rest it was nearly two o'clock.

His preoccupation was such that, though he now slept on the other side of the house, he mechanically went to the room that he and his wife had occupied when he first became a tenant of Old-Grove Place, which since his differences with Sue had been hers exclusively. He entered, and unconsciously began to undress.

There was a cry from the bed, and a quick movement. Before the schoolmaster had realized where he was he perceived Sue starting up half-awake, staring wildly, and springing out upon the floor on the side away from him, which was towards the window. This was somewhat hidden by the canopy of the bedstead, and in a moment he heard her flinging up the sash. Before he had thought that she meant to do more than get air she had mounted upon the sill and leapt out. She disappeared in the darkness, and he heard her fall below.

Phillotson, horrified, ran downstairs, striking himself sharply against the newel in his haste. Opening the heavy door he ascended the two or three steps to the level of the ground, and there on the gravel before him lay a white heap. Phillotson seized it in his arms, and bringing Sue into the hall seated her on a chair, where he gazed at her by the flapping light of the candle which he had set down in the draught on the bottom stair.

She had certainly not broken her neck. She looked at him with eyes that seemed not to take him in; and though not particularly large in general they appeared so now. She pressed her side and rubbed her arm, as if conscious of pain; then stood up, averting her face, in evident distress at his gaze.

“Thank God—you are not killed! Though it’s not for want of trying—not much hurt I hope?”

Her fall, in fact, had not been a serious one, probably owing to the lowness of the old rooms and to the high level of the ground without. Beyond a scraped elbow and a blow in the side she had apparently incurred little harm.

“I was asleep, I think!” she began, her pale face still turned away from him. “And something frightened me—a terrible dream—I thought I saw you—” The actual circumstances seemed to come back to her, and she was silent.

Her cloak was hanging at the back of the door, and the wretched Phillotson flung it round her. “Shall I help you upstairs?” he asked drearily; for the significance of all this sickened him of himself and of everything.

“No thank you, Richard. I am very little hurt. I can walk.”

“You ought to lock your door,” he mechanically said, as if lecturing in school. “Then no one could intrude even by accident.”

“I have tried—it won’t lock. All the doors are out of order.”

The aspect of things was not improved by her admission. She ascended the staircase slowly, the waving light of the candle shining on her. Phillotson did not approach her, or attempt to ascend himself till he heard her enter her room. Then he fastened up the front door, and returning, sat down on the lower stairs, holding the newel with one hand, and bowing his face into the other. Thus he remained for a long long time—a pitiable object enough to one who had seen him; till, raising his head and sighing a sigh which seemed to say that the business of his life must be carried on, whether he had a wife or no, he took the candle and went upstairs to his lonely room on the other side of the landing.

No further incident touching the matter between them occurred till the following evening, when, immediately school was over, Phillotson walked out of Shaston, saying he required no tea, and not informing Sue where he was going. He descended from the town level by a steep road in a north-westerly direction, and continued to move downwards till the soil changed from its white dryness to a tough brown clay. He was now on the low alluvial beds

Where Duncliffe is the traveller's mark,
And cloty Stour's a-rolling dark.

More than once he looked back in the increasing obscurity of evening.
Against the sky was Shaston, dimly visible

On the grey-topp'd height
Of Paladore, as pale day wore
Away...^[1]

[1] William Barnes.

The new-lit lights from its windows burnt with a steady shine as if watching him, one of which windows was his own. Above it he could just discern the pinnacled tower of Trinity Church. The air down here, tempered by the thick damp bed of tenacious clay, was not as it had been above, but soft and relaxing, so that when he had walked a mile or two he was obliged to wipe his face with his handkerchief.

Leaving Duncliffe Hill on the left he proceeded without hesitation through the shade, as a man goes on, night or day, in a district over which he has played as a boy. He had walked altogether about four and a half miles

Where Stour receives her strength,
From six cleere fountains fed,^[2]

[2] Drayton.

when he crossed a tributary of the Stour, and reached Leddenton—a little town of three or four thousand inhabitants—where he went on to the boys' school, and knocked at the door of the master's residence.

A boy pupil-teacher opened it, and to Phillotson's inquiry if Mr. Gillingham was at home, replied that he was, going at once off to his own house, and leaving Phillotson to find his way in as he could. He discovered his friend putting away some books from which he had been giving evening lessons. The light of the paraffin lamp fell on Phillotson's face—pale and wretched by contrast with his friend's, who had a cool, practical look. They had been schoolmates in boyhood, and fellow-students at Wintonchester Training College, many years before this time.

“Glad to see you, Dick! But you don’t look well! Nothing the matter?”

Phillotson advanced without replying, and Gillingham closed the cupboard and pulled up beside his visitor.

“Why you haven’t been here—let me see—since you were married? I called, you know, but you were out; and upon my word it is such a climb after dark that I have been waiting till the days are longer before lumbering up again. I am glad you didn’t wait, however.”

Though well-trained and even proficient masters, they occasionally used a dialect-word of their boyhood to each other in private.

“I’ve come, George, to explain to you my reasons for taking a step that I am about to take, so that you, at least, will understand my motives if other people question them anywhen—as they may, indeed certainly will... But anything is better than the present condition of things. God forbid that you should ever have such an experience as mine!”

“Sit down. You don’t mean—anything wrong between you and Mrs. Phillotson?”

“I do... My wretched state is that I’ve a wife I love who not only does not love me, but—but— Well, I won’t say. I know her feeling! I should prefer hatred from her!”

“Ssh!”

“And the sad part of it is that she is not so much to blame as I. She was a pupil-teacher under me, as you know, and I took advantage of her inexperience, and toled her out for walks, and got her to agree to a long engagement before she well knew her own mind. Afterwards she saw somebody else, but she blindly fulfilled her engagement.”

“Loving the other?”

“Yes; with a curious tender solicitude seemingly; though her exact feeling for him is a riddle to me—and to him too, I think—possibly to herself. She is one of the oddest creatures I ever met. However, I have been struck with these two facts; the extraordinary sympathy, or similarity, between the pair. He is her cousin, which perhaps accounts for some of it. They seem to be one person split in two! And with her unconquerable aversion to myself as a husband, even though she may like me as a friend, ’tis too much to bear longer. She has conscientiously struggled against it, but to no purpose. I cannot bear it—I cannot! I can’t answer her arguments

—she has read ten times as much as I. Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smoulders like brown paper... She's one too many for me!"

"She'll get over it, good-now?"

"Never! It is—but I won't go into it—there are reasons why she never will. At last she calmly and firmly asked if she might leave me and go to him. The climax came last night, when, owing to my entering her room by accident, she jumped out of window—so strong was her dread of me! She pretended it was a dream, but that was to soothe me. Now when a woman jumps out of window without caring whether she breaks her neck or no, she's not to be mistaken; and this being the case I have come to a conclusion: that it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won't be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!"

"What—you'll let her go? And with her lover?"

"Whom with is her matter. I shall let her go; with him certainly, if she wishes. I know I may be wrong—I know I can't logically, or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers, or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her. I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets such a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps. But is that essentially right, and proper, and honourable, or is it contemptibly mean and selfish? I don't profess to decide. I simply am going to act by instinct, and let principles take care of themselves. If a person who has blindly walked into a quagmire cries for help, I am inclined to give it, if possible."

"But—you see, there's the question of neighbours and society—what will happen if everybody—"

"Oh, I am not going to be a philosopher any longer! I only see what's under my eyes."

"Well—I don't agree with your instinct, Dick!" said Gillingham gravely. "I am quite amazed, to tell the truth, that such a sedate, plodding fellow as you should have entertained such a craze for a moment. You said when I called that she was puzzling and peculiar: I think you are!"

“Have you ever stood before a woman whom you know to be intrinsically a good woman, while she has pleaded for release—been the man she has knelt to and implored indulgence of?”

“I am thankful to say I haven’t.”

“Then I don’t think you are in a position to give an opinion. I have been that man, and it makes all the difference in the world, if one has any manliness or chivalry in him. I had not the remotest idea—living apart from women as I have done for so many years—that merely taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger could by any possibility involve one in such a daily, continuous tragedy as that now shared by her and me!”

“Well, I could admit some excuse for letting her leave you, provided she kept to herself. But to go attended by a cavalier—that makes a difference.”

“Not a bit. Suppose, as I believe, she would rather endure her present misery than be made to promise to keep apart from him? All that is a question for herself. It is not the same thing at all as the treachery of living on with a husband and playing him false... However, she has not distinctly implied living with him as wife, though I think she means to... And, to the best of my understanding, it is not an ignoble, merely animal, feeling between the two: that is the worst of it; because it makes me think their affection will be enduring. I did not mean to confess to you that in the first jealous weeks of my marriage, before I had come to my right mind, I hid myself in the school one evening when they were together there, and I heard what they said. I am ashamed of it now, though I suppose I was only exercising a legal right. I found from their manner that an extraordinary affinity, or sympathy, entered into their attachment, which somehow took away all flavour of grossness. Their supreme desire is to be together—to share each other’s emotions, and fancies, and dreams.”

“Platonic!”

“Well no. Shelleyan would be nearer to it. They remind me of—what are their names—Laon and Cythna. Also of Paul and Virginia a little. The more I reflect, the more *entirely* I am on their side!”

“But if people did as you want to do, there’d be a general domestic disintegration. The family would no longer be the social unit.”

“Yes—I am all abroad, I suppose!” said Phillotson sadly. “I was never a very bright reasoner, you remember. ... And yet, I don’t see why the

woman and the children should not be the unit without the man.”

“By the Lord Harry!—Matriarchy! ... Does *she* say all this too?”

“Oh no. She little thinks I have out-Sued Sue in this—all in the last twelve hours!”

“It will upset all received opinion hereabout. Good God—what will Shaston say!”

“I don’t say that it won’t. I don’t know—I don’t know! ... As I say, I am only a feeler, not a reasoner.”

“Now,” said Gillingham, “let us take it quietly, and have something to drink over it.” He went under the stairs, and produced a bottle of cider-wine, of which they drank a rummer each. “I think you are rafted, and not yourself,” he continued. “Do go back and make up your mind to put up with a few whims. But keep her. I hear on all sides that she’s a charming young thing.”

“Ah yes! That’s the bitterness of it! Well, I won’t stay. I have a long walk before me.”

Gillingham accompanied his friend a mile on his way, and at parting expressed his hope that this consultation, singular as its subject was, would be the renewal of their old comradeship. “Stick to her!” were his last words, flung into the darkness after Phillotson; from which his friend answered “Aye, aye!”

But when Phillotson was alone under the clouds of night, and no sound was audible but that of the purling tributaries of the Stour, he said, “So Gillingham, my friend, you had no stronger arguments against it than those!”

“I think she ought to be smacked, and brought to her senses—that’s what I think!” murmured Gillingham, as he walked back alone.

The next morning came, and at breakfast Phillotson told Sue:

“You may go—with whom you will. I absolutely and unconditionally agree.”

Having once come to this conclusion it seemed to Phillotson more and more indubitably the true one. His mild serenity at the sense that he was doing his duty by a woman who was at his mercy almost overpowered his grief at relinquishing her.

Some days passed, and the evening of their last meal together had come—a cloudy evening with wind—which indeed was very seldom absent in this elevated place. How permanently it was imprinted upon his vision; that look of her as she glided into the parlour to tea; a slim flexible figure; a face, strained from its roundness, and marked by the pallors of restless days and nights, suggesting tragic possibilities quite at variance with her times of buoyancy; a trying of this morsel and that, and an inability to eat either. Her nervous manner, begotten of a fear lest he should be injured by her course, might have been interpreted by a stranger as displeasure that Phillotson intruded his presence on her for the few brief minutes that remained.

“You had better have a slice of ham or an egg, or something with your tea? You can’t travel on a mouthful of bread and butter.”

She took the slice he helped her to; and they discussed as they sat trivial questions of housekeeping, such as where he would find the key of this or that cupboard, what little bills were paid, and what not.

“I am a bachelor by nature, as you know, Sue,” he said, in a heroic attempt to put her at her ease. “So that being without a wife will not really be irksome to me, as it might be to other men who have had one a little while. I have, too, this grand hobby in my head of writing ‘The Roman Antiquities of Wessex,’ which will occupy all my spare hours.”

“If you will send me some of the manuscript to copy at any time, as you used to, I will do it with so much pleasure!” she said with amenable gentleness. “I should much like to be some help to you still—as a—f-f-friend.”

Phillotson mused, and said: “No, I think we ought to be really separate, if we are to be at all. And for this reason, that I don’t wish to ask you any questions, and particularly wish you not to give me information as to your movements, or even your address... Now, what money do you want? You must have some, you know.”

“Oh, of course, Richard, I couldn’t think of having any of your money to go away from you with! I don’t want any either. I have enough of my own to last me for a long while, and Jude will let me have—”

“I would rather not know anything about him, if you don’t mind. You are free, absolutely; and your course is your own.”

“Very well. But I’ll just say that I have packed only a change or two of my own personal clothing, and one or two little things besides that are my very own. I wish you would look into my trunk before it is closed. Besides that I have only a small parcel that will go into Jude’s portmanteau.”

“Of course I shall do no such thing as examine your luggage! I wish you would take three-quarters of the household furniture. I don’t want to be bothered with it. I have a sort of affection for a little of it that belonged to my poor mother and father. But the rest you are welcome to whenever you like to send for it.”

“That I shall never do.”

“You go by the six-thirty train, don’t you? It is now a quarter to six.”

“You... You don’t seem very sorry I am going, Richard!”

“Oh no—perhaps not.”

“I like you much for how you have behaved. It is a curious thing that directly I have begun to regard you as not my husband, but as my old teacher, I like you. I won’t be so affected as to say I love you, because you know I don’t, except as a friend. But you do seem that to me!”

Sue was for a few moments a little tearful at these reflections, and then the station omnibus came round to take her up. Phillotson saw her things put on the top, handed her in, and was obliged to make an appearance of kissing her as he wished her good-bye, which she quite understood and imitated. From the cheerful manner in which they parted the omnibus-man had no other idea than that she was going for a short visit.

When Phillotson got back into the house he went upstairs and opened the window in the direction the omnibus had taken. Soon the noise of its wheels died away. He came down then, his face compressed like that of one bearing pain; he put on his hat and went out, following by the same route for nearly a mile. Suddenly turning round he came home.

He had no sooner entered than the voice of his friend Gillingham greeted him from the front room.

“I could make nobody hear; so finding your door open I walked in, and made myself comfortable. I said I would call, you remember.”

“Yes. I am much obliged to you, Gillingham, particularly for coming to-night.”

“How is Mrs.—”

“She is quite well. She is gone—just gone. That’s her tea-cup, that she drank out of only an hour ago. And that’s the plate she—” Phillotson’s throat got choked up, and he could not go on. He turned and pushed the tea-things aside.

“Have you had any tea, by the by?” he asked presently in a renewed voice.

“No—yes—never mind,” said Gillingham, preoccupied. “Gone, you say she is?”

“Yes... I would have died for her; but I wouldn’t be cruel to her in the name of the law. She is, as I understand, gone to join her lover. What they are going to do I cannot say. Whatever it may be she has my full consent to.”

There was a stability, a ballast, in Phillotson’s pronouncement which restrained his friend’s comment. “Shall I—leave you?” he asked.

“No, no. It is a mercy to me that you have come. I have some articles to arrange and clear away. Would you help me?”

Gillingham assented; and having gone to the upper rooms the schoolmaster opened drawers, and began taking out all Sue’s things that she had left behind, and laying them in a large box. “She wouldn’t take all I wanted her to,” he continued. “But when I made up my mind to her going to live in her own way I did make up my mind.”

“Some men would have stopped at an agreement to separate.”

“I’ve gone into all that, and don’t wish to argue it. I was, and am, the most old-fashioned man in the world on the question of marriage—in fact I had never thought critically about its ethics at all. But certain facts stared me in the face, and I couldn’t go against them.”

They went on with the packing silently. When it was done Phillotson closed the box and turned the key.

“There,” he said. “To adorn her in somebody’s eyes; never again in mine!”

V

Four-and-twenty hours before this time Sue had written the following note to Jude:

It is as I told you; and I am leaving to-morrow evening. Richard and I thought it could be done with less obtrusiveness after dark. I feel rather frightened, and therefore ask you to be sure you are on the Melchester platform to meet me. I arrive at a little to seven. I know you will, of course, dear Jude; but I feel so timid that I can't help begging you to be punctual. He has been so *very* kind to me through it all!

Now to our meeting!

S.

As she was carried by the omnibus farther and farther down from the mountain town—the single passenger that evening—she regarded the receding road with a sad face. But no hesitation was apparent therein.

The up-train by which she was departing stopped by signal only. To Sue it seemed strange that such a powerful organization as a railway train should be brought to a stand-still on purpose for her—a fugitive from her lawful home.

The twenty minutes' journey drew towards its close, and Sue began gathering her things together to alight. At the moment that the train came to a stand-still by the Melchester platform a hand was laid on the door and she beheld Jude. He entered the compartment promptly. He had a black bag in his hand, and was dressed in the dark suit he wore on Sundays and in the evening after work. Altogether he looked a very handsome young fellow, his ardent affection for her burning in his eyes.

“Oh Jude!” She clasped his hand with both hers, and her tense state caused her to simmer over in a little succession of dry sobs. “I—I am so glad! I get out here?”

“No. I get in, dear one! I’ve packed. Besides this bag I’ve only a big box which is labelled.”

“But don’t I get out? Aren’t we going to stay here?”

“We couldn’t possibly, don’t you see. We are known here—I, at any rate, am well known. I’ve booked for Aldbrickham; and here’s your ticket for the same place, as you have only one to here.”

“I thought we should have stayed here,” she repeated.

“It wouldn’t have done at all.”

“Ah! Perhaps not.”

“There wasn’t time for me to write and say the place I had decided on. Aldbrickham is a much bigger town—sixty or seventy thousand inhabitants—and nobody knows anything about us there.”

“And you have given up your cathedral work here?”

“Yes. It was rather sudden—your message coming unexpectedly. Strictly, I might have been made to finish out the week. But I pleaded urgency and I was let off. I would have deserted any day at your command, dear Sue. I have deserted more than that for you!”

“I fear I am doing you a lot of harm. Ruining your prospects of the Church; ruining your progress in your trade; everything!”

“The Church is no more to me. Let it lie! *I* am not to be one of

The soldier-saints who, row on row,
Burn upward each to his point of bliss,

if any such there be! My point of bliss is not upward, but here.”

“Oh I seem so bad—upsetting men’s courses like this!” said she, taking up in her voice the emotion that had begun in his. But she recovered her equanimity by the time they had travelled a dozen miles.

“He has been so good in letting me go,” she resumed. “And here’s a note I found on my dressing-table, addressed to you.”

“Yes. He’s not an unworthy fellow,” said Jude, glancing at the note. “And I am ashamed of myself for hating him because he married you.”

“According to the rule of women’s whims I suppose I ought to suddenly love him, because he has let me go so generously and unexpectedly,” she answered smiling. “But I am so cold, or devoid of gratitude, or so something, that even this generosity hasn’t made me love him, or repent, or want to stay with him as his wife; although I do feel I like his large-mindedness, and respect him more than ever.”

“It may not work so well for us as if he had been less kind, and you had run away against his will,” murmured Jude.

“That I *never* would have done.”

Jude’s eyes rested musingly on her face. Then he suddenly kissed her; and was going to kiss her again. “No—only once now—please, Jude!”

“That’s rather cruel,” he answered; but acquiesced. “Such a strange thing has happened to me,” Jude continued after a silence. “Arabella has actually written to ask me to get a divorce from her—in kindness to her, she says. She wants to honestly and legally marry that man she has already married virtually; and begs me to enable her to do it.”

“What have you done?”

“I have agreed. I thought at first I couldn’t do it without getting her into trouble about that second marriage, and I don’t want to injure her in any way. Perhaps she’s no worse than I am, after all! But nobody knows about it over here, and I find it will not be a difficult proceeding at all. If she wants to start afresh I have only too obvious reasons for not hindering her.”

“Then you’ll be free?”

“Yes, I shall be free.”

“Where are we booked for?” she asked, with the discontinuity that marked her to-night.

“Aldbrickham, as I said.”

“But it will be very late when we get there?”

“Yes. I thought of that, and I wired for a room for us at the Temperance Hotel there.”

“One?”

“Yes—one.”

She looked at him. "Oh Jude!" Sue bent her forehead against the corner of the compartment. "I thought you might do it; and that I was deceiving you. But I didn't mean that!"

In the pause which followed, Jude's eyes fixed themselves with a stultified expression on the opposite seat. "Well!" he said... "Well!"

He remained in silence; and seeing how discomfited he was she put her face against his cheek, murmuring, "Don't be vexed, dear!"

"Oh—there's no harm done," he said. "But—I understood it like that... Is this a sudden change of mind?"

"You have no right to ask me such a question; and I shan't answer!" she said, smiling.

"My dear one, your happiness is more to me than anything—although we seem to verge on quarrelling so often!—and your will is law to me. I am something more than a mere—selfish fellow, I hope. Have it as you wish!" On reflection his brow showed perplexity. "But perhaps it is that you don't love me—not that you have become conventional! Much as, under your teaching, I hate convention, I hope it *is* that, not the other terrible alternative!"

Even at this obvious moment for candour Sue could not be quite candid as to the state of that mystery, her heart. "Put it down to my timidity," she said with hurried evasiveness; "to a woman's natural timidity when the crisis comes. I may feel as well as you that I have a perfect right to live with you as you thought—from this moment. I may hold the opinion that, in a proper state of society, the father of a woman's child will be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her underlinen, on whom nobody will have any right to question her. But partly, perhaps, because it is by his generosity that I am now free, I would rather not be other than a little rigid. If there had been a rope-ladder, and he had run after us with pistols, it would have seemed different, and I may have acted otherwise. But don't press me and criticize me, Jude! Assume that I haven't the courage of my opinions. I know I am a poor miserable creature. My nature is not so passionate as yours!"

He repeated simply! "I thought—what I naturally thought. But if we are not lovers, we are not. Phillotson thought so, I am sure. See, here is what he has written to me." He opened the letter she had brought, and read:

“I make only one condition—that you are tender and kind to her. I know you love her. But even love may be cruel at times. You are made for each other: it is obvious, palpable, to any unbiased older person. You were all along ‘the shadowy third’ in my short life with her. I repeat, take care of Sue.”

“He’s a good fellow, isn’t he!” she said with latent tears. On reconsideration she added, “He was very resigned to letting me go—too resigned almost! I never was so near being in love with him as when he made such thoughtful arrangements for my being comfortable on my journey, and offering to provide money. Yet I was not. If I loved him ever so little as a wife, I’d go back to him even now.”

“But you don’t, do you?”

“It is true—oh so terribly true!—I don’t.”

“Nor me neither, I half-fear!” he said pettishly. “Nor anybody perhaps! Sue, sometimes, when I am vexed with you, I think you are incapable of real love.”

“That’s not good and loyal of you!” she said, and drawing away from him as far as she could, looked severely out into the darkness. She added in hurt tones, without turning round: “My liking for you is not as some women’s perhaps. But it is a delight in being with you, of a supremely delicate kind, and I don’t want to go further and risk it by—an attempt to intensify it! I quite realized that, as woman with man, it was a risk to come. But, as me with you, I resolved to trust you to set my wishes above your gratification. Don’t discuss it further, dear Jude!”

“Of course, if it would make you reproach yourself... but you do like me very much, Sue? Say you do! Say that you do a quarter, a tenth, as much as I do you, and I’ll be content!”

“I’ve let you kiss me, and that tells enough.”

“Just once or so!”

“Well—don’t be a greedy boy.”

He leant back, and did not look at her for a long time. That episode in her past history of which she had told him—of the poor Christminster graduate whom she had handled thus, returned to Jude’s mind; and he saw himself as a possible second in such a torturing destiny.

“This is a queer elopement!” he murmured. “Perhaps you are making a cat’s paw of me with Phillotson all this time. Upon my word it almost seems so—to see you sitting up there so prim!”

“Now you mustn’t be angry—I won’t let you!” she coaxed, turning and moving nearer to him. “You did kiss me just now, you know; and I didn’t dislike you to, I own it, Jude. Only I don’t want to let you do it again, just yet—considering how we are circumstanced, don’t you see!”

He could never resist her when she pleaded (as she well knew). And they sat side by side with joined hands, till she aroused herself at some thought.

“I can’t possibly go to that Temperance Inn, after your telegraphing that message!”

“Why not?”

“You can see well enough!”

“Very well; there’ll be some other one open, no doubt. I have sometimes thought, since your marrying Phillotson because of a stupid scandal, that under the affectation of independent views you are as enslaved to the social code as any woman I know!”

“Not mentally. But I haven’t the courage of my views, as I said before. I didn’t marry him altogether because of the scandal. But sometimes a woman’s *love of being loved* gets the better of her conscience, and though she is agonized at the thought of treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her while she doesn’t love him at all. Then, when she sees him suffering, her remorse sets in, and she does what she can to repair the wrong.”

“You simply mean that you flirted outrageously with him, poor old chap, and then repented, and to make reparation, married him, though you tortured yourself to death by doing it.”

“Well—if you will put it brutally!—it was a little like that—that and the scandal together—and your concealing from me what you ought to have told me before!”

He could see that she was distressed and tearful at his criticisms, and soothed her, saying: “There, dear; don’t mind! Crucify me, if you will! You know you are all the world to me, whatever you do!”

“I am very bad and unprincipled—I know you think that!” she said, trying to blink away her tears.

“I think and know you are my dear Sue, from whom neither length nor breadth, nor things present nor things to come, can divide me!”

Though so sophisticated in many things, she was such a child in others that this satisfied her, and they reached the end of their journey on the best of terms. It was about ten o'clock when they arrived at Aldbrickham, the county town of North Wessex. As she would not go to the Temperance Hotel because of the form of his telegram, Jude inquired for another; and a youth who volunteered to find one wheeled their luggage to the George farther on, which proved to be the inn at which Jude had stayed with Arabella on that one occasion of their meeting after their division for years.

Owing, however, to their now entering it by another door, and to his preoccupation, he did not at first recognize the place. When they had engaged their respective rooms they went down to a late supper. During Jude's temporary absence the waiting-maid spoke to Sue.

“I think, ma'am, I remember your relation, or friend, or whatever he is, coming here once before—late, just like this, with his wife—a lady, at any rate, that wasn't you by no manner of means—jest as med be with you now.”

“Oh do you?” said Sue, with a certain sickness of heart. “Though I think you must be mistaken! How long ago was it?”

“About a month or two. A handsome, full-figured woman. They had this room.”

When Jude came back and sat down to supper Sue seemed moping and miserable. “Jude,” she said to him plaintively, at their parting that night upon the landing, “it is not so nice and pleasant as it used to be with us! I don't like it here—I can't bear the place! And I don't like you so well as I did!”

“How fidgeted you seem, dear! Why do you change like this?”

“Because it was cruel to bring me here!”

“Why?”

“You were lately here with Arabella. There, now I have said it!”

“Dear me, why—” said Jude looking round him. “Yes—it is the same! I really didn't know it, Sue. Well—it is not cruel, since we have come as we have—two relations staying together.”

“How long ago was it you were here? Tell me, tell me!”

“The day before I met you in Christminster, when we went back to Marygreen together. I told you I had met her.”

“Yes, you said you had met her, but you didn’t tell me all. Your story was that you had met as estranged people, who were not husband and wife at all in Heaven’s sight—not that you had made it up with her.”

“We didn’t make it up,” he said sadly. “I can’t explain, Sue.”

“You’ve been false to me; you, my last hope! And I shall never forget it, never!”

“But by your own wish, dear Sue, we are only to be friends, not lovers! It is so very inconsistent of you to—”

“Friends can be jealous!”

“I don’t see that. You concede nothing to me and I have to concede everything to you. After all, you were on good terms with your husband at that time.”

“No, I wasn’t, Jude. Oh how can you think so! And you have taken me in, even if you didn’t intend to.” She was so mortified that he was obliged to take her into her room and close the door lest the people should hear. “Was it this room? Yes it was—I see by your look it was! I won’t have it for mine! Oh it was treacherous of you to have her again! *I jumped out of the window!*”

“But Sue, she was, after all, my legal wife, if not—”

Slipping down on her knees Sue buried her face in the bed and wept.

“I never knew such an unreasonable—such a dog-in-the-manger feeling,” said Jude. “I am not to approach you, nor anybody else!”

“Oh don’t you *understand* my feeling? Why don’t you? Why are you so gross? *I jumped out of the window?*”

“Jumped out of window?”

“I can’t explain!”

It was true that he did not understand her feelings very well. But he did a little; and began to love her none the less.

“I—I thought you cared for nobody—desired nobody in the world but me at that time—and ever since!” continued Sue.

“It is true. I did not, and don’t now!” said Jude, as distressed as she.

“But you must have thought much of her! Or—”

“No—I need not—you don’t understand me either—women never do! Why should you get into such a tantrum about nothing?”

Looking up from the quilt she pouted provokingly: “If it hadn’t been for that, perhaps I would have gone on to the Temperance Hotel, after all, as you proposed; for I was beginning to think I did belong to you!”

“Oh, it is of no consequence!” said Jude distantly.

“I thought, of course, that she had never been really your wife since she left you of her own accord years and years ago! My sense of it was, that a parting such as yours from her, and mine from him, ended the marriage.”

“I can’t say more without speaking against her, and I don’t want to do that,” said he. “Yet I must tell you one thing, which would settle the matter in any case. She has married another man—really married him! I knew nothing about it till after the visit we made here.”

“Married another? ... It is a crime—as the world treats it, but does not believe.”

“There—now you are yourself again. Yes, it is a crime—as you don’t hold, but would fearfully concede. But I shall never inform against her! And it is evidently a prick of conscience in her that has led her to urge me to get a divorce, that she may remarry this man legally. So you perceive I shall not be likely to see her again.”

“And you didn’t really know anything of this when you saw her?” said Sue more gently, as she rose.

“I did not. Considering all things, I don’t think you ought to be angry, darling!”

“I am not. But I shan’t go to the Temperance Hotel!”

He laughed. “Never mind!” he said. “So that I am near you, I am comparatively happy. It is more than this earthly wretch called Me deserves—you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom—hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air! Forgive me for being gross, as you call it! Remember that our calling cousins when really strangers was a snare. The enmity of our parents gave a piquancy to you in

my eyes that was intenser even than the novelty of ordinary new acquaintance.”

“Say those pretty lines, then, from Shelley’s ‘Epipsychidion’ as if they meant me!” she solicited, slanting up closer to him as they stood. “Don’t you know them?”

“I know hardly any poetry,” he replied mournfully.

“Don’t you? These are some of them:

There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings far aloft.

* * * * *

A seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman...

Oh it is too flattering, so I won’t go on! But say it’s me! Say it’s me!”

“It is you, dear; exactly like you!”

“Now I forgive you! And you shall kiss me just once there—not very long.” She put the tip of her finger gingerly to her cheek; and he did as commanded. “You do care for me very much, don’t you, in spite of my not—you know?”

“Yes, sweet!” he said with a sigh; and bade her good-night.

VI

In returning to his native town of Shaston as schoolmaster Phillotson had won the interest and awakened the memories of the inhabitants, who, though they did not honour him for his miscellaneous acquirements as he would have been honoured elsewhere, retained for him a sincere regard. When, shortly after his arrival, he brought home a pretty wife—awkwardly pretty for him, if he did not take care, they said—they were glad to have her settle among them.

For some time after her flight from that home Sue's absence did not excite comment. Her place as monitor in the school was taken by another young woman within a few days of her vacating it, which substitution also passed without remark, Sue's services having been of a provisional nature only. When, however, a month had passed, and Phillotson casually admitted to an acquaintance that he did not know where his wife was staying, curiosity began to be aroused; till, jumping to conclusions, people ventured to affirm that Sue had played him false and run away from him. The schoolmaster's growing languor and listlessness over his work gave countenance to the idea.

Though Phillotson had held his tongue as long as he could, except to his friend Gillingham, his honesty and directness would not allow him to do so when misapprehensions as to Sue's conduct spread abroad. On a Monday morning the chairman of the school committee called, and after attending to the business of the school drew Phillotson aside out of earshot of the children.

"You'll excuse my asking, Phillotson, since everybody is talking of it: is this true as to your domestic affairs—that your wife's going away was on no visit, but a secret elopement with a lover? If so, I condole with you."

"Don't," said Phillotson. "There was no secret about it."

"She has gone to visit friends?"

"No."

“Then what has happened?”

“She has gone away under circumstances that usually call for condolence with the husband. But I gave my consent.”

The chairman looked as if he had not apprehended the remark.

“What I say is quite true,” Phillotson continued testily. “She asked leave to go away with her lover, and I let her. Why shouldn’t I? A woman of full age, it was a question of her own conscience—not for me. I was not her gaoler. I can’t explain any further. I don’t wish to be questioned.”

The children observed that much seriousness marked the faces of the two men, and went home and told their parents that something new had happened about Mrs. Phillotson. Then Phillotson’s little maidservant, who was a schoolgirl just out of her standards, said that Mr. Phillotson had helped in his wife’s packing, had offered her what money she required, and had written a friendly letter to her young man, telling him to take care of her. The chairman of committee thought the matter over, and talked to the other managers of the school, till a request came to Phillotson to meet them privately. The meeting lasted a long time, and at the end the school-master came home, looking as usual pale and worn. Gillingham was sitting in his house awaiting him.

“Well; it is as you said,” observed Phillotson, flinging himself down wearily in a chair. “They have requested me to send in my resignation on account of my scandalous conduct in giving my tortured wife her liberty—or, as they call it, condoning her adultery. But I shan’t resign!”

“I think I would.”

“I won’t. It is no business of theirs. It doesn’t affect me in my public capacity at all. They may expel me if they like.”

“If you make a fuss it will get into the papers, and you’ll never get appointed to another school. You see, they have to consider what you did as done by a teacher of youth—and its effects as such upon the morals of the town; and, to ordinary opinion, your position is indefensible. You must let me say that.”

To this good advice, however, Phillotson would not listen.

“I don’t care,” he said. “I don’t go unless I am turned out. And for this reason; that by resigning I acknowledge I have acted wrongly by her; when

I am more and more convinced every day that in the sight of Heaven and by all natural, straightforward humanity, I have acted rightly.”

Gillingham saw that his rather headstrong friend would not be able to maintain such a position as this; but he said nothing further, and in due time—indeed, in a quarter of an hour—the formal letter of dismissal arrived, the managers having remained behind to write it after Phillotson’s withdrawal. The latter replied that he should not accept dismissal; and called a public meeting, which he attended, although he looked so weak and ill that his friend implored him to stay at home. When he stood up to give his reasons for contesting the decision of the managers he advanced them firmly, as he had done to his friend, and contended, moreover, that the matter was a domestic theory which did not concern them. This they over-ruled, insisting that the private eccentricities of a teacher came quite within their sphere of control, as it touched the morals of those he taught. Phillotson replied that he did not see how an act of natural charity could injure morals.

All the respectable inhabitants and well-to-do fellow-natives of the town were against Phillotson to a man. But, somewhat to his surprise, some dozen or more champions rose up in his defence as from the ground.

It has been stated that Shaston was the anchorage of a curious and interesting group of itinerants, who frequented the numerous fairs and markets held up and down Wessex during the summer and autumn months. Although Phillotson had never spoken to one of these gentlemen they now nobly led the forlorn hope in his defence. The body included two cheap Jacks, a shooting-gallery proprietor and the ladies who loaded the guns, a pair of boxing-masters, a steam-roundabout manager, two travelling broom-makers, who called themselves widows, a gingerbread-stall keeper, a swing-boat owner, and a “test-your-strength” man.

This generous phalanx of supporters, and a few others of independent judgment, whose own domestic experiences had been not without vicissitude, came up and warmly shook hands with Phillotson; after which they expressed their thoughts so strongly to the meeting that issue was joined, the result being a general scuffle, wherein a black board was split, three panes of the school windows were broken, an inkbottle was spilled over a town-councillor’s shirt front, a churchwarden was dealt such a topper with the map of Palestine that his head went right through Samaria, and many black eyes and bleeding noses were given, one of which, to

everybody's horror, was the venerable incumbent's, owing to the zeal of an emancipated chimney-sweep, who took the side of Phillotson's party. When Phillotson saw the blood running down the rector's face he deplored almost in groans the untoward and degrading circumstances, regretted that he had not resigned when called upon, and went home so ill that next morning he could not leave his bed.

The farcical yet melancholy event was the beginning of a serious illness for him; and he lay in his lonely bed in the pathetic state of mind of a middle-aged man who perceives at length that his life, intellectual and domestic, is tending to failure and gloom. Gillingham came to see him in the evenings, and on one occasion mentioned Sue's name.

"She doesn't care anything about me!" said Phillotson. "Why should she?"

"She doesn't know you are ill."

"So much the better for both of us."

"Where are her lover and she living?"

"At Melchester—I suppose; at least he was living there some time ago."

When Gillingham reached home he sat and reflected, and at last wrote an anonymous line to Sue, on the bare chance of its reaching her, the letter being enclosed in an envelope addressed to Jude at the diocesan capital. Arriving at that place it was forwarded to Marygreen in North Wessex, and thence to Aldbrickham by the only person who knew his present address—the widow who had nursed his aunt.

Three days later, in the evening, when the sun was going down in splendour over the lowlands of Blackmoor, and making the Shaston windows like tongues of fire to the eyes of the rustics in that vale, the sick man fancied that he heard somebody come to the house, and a few minutes after there was a tap at the bedroom door. Phillotson did not speak; the door was hesitatingly opened, and there entered—Sue.

She was in light spring clothing, and her advent seemed ghostly—like the flitting in of a moth. He turned his eyes upon her, and flushed; but appeared to check his primary impulse to speak.

"I have no business here," she said, bending her frightened face to him. "But I heard you were ill—very ill; and—and as I know that you recognize other feelings between man and woman than physical love, I have come."

“I am not very ill, my dear friend. Only unwell.”

“I didn’t know that; and I am afraid that only a severe illness would have justified my coming!”

“Yes... yes. And I almost wish you had not come! It is a little too soon—that’s all I mean. Still, let us make the best of it. You haven’t heard about the school, I suppose?”

“No—what about it?”

“Only that I am going away from here to another place. The managers and I don’t agree, and we are going to part—that’s all.”

Sue did not for a moment, either now or later, suspect what troubles had resulted to him from letting her go; it never once seemed to cross her mind, and she had received no news whatever from Shaston. They talked on slight and ephemeral subjects, and when his tea was brought up he told the amazed little servant that a cup was to be set for Sue. That young person was much more interested in their history than they supposed, and as she descended the stairs she lifted her eyes and hands in grotesque amazement. While they sipped Sue went to the window and thoughtfully said, “It is such a beautiful sunset, Richard.”

“They are mostly beautiful from here, owing to the rays crossing the mist of the vale. But I lose them all, as they don’t shine into this gloomy corner where I lie.”

“Wouldn’t you like to see this particular one? It is like heaven opened.”

“Ah yes! But I can’t.”

“I’ll help you to.”

“No—the bedstead can’t be shifted.”

“But see how I mean.”

She went to where a swing-glass stood, and taking it in her hands carried it to a spot by the window where it could catch the sunshine, moving the glass till the beams were reflected into Phillotson’s face.

“There—you can see the great red sun now!” she said. “And I am sure it will cheer you—I do so hope it will!” She spoke with a childlike, repentant kindness, as if she could not do too much for him.

Phillotson smiled sadly. “You are an odd creature!” he murmured as the sun glowed in his eyes. “The idea of your coming to see me after what has

passed!”

“Don’t let us go back upon that!” she said quickly. “I have to catch the omnibus for the train, as Jude doesn’t know I have come; he was out when I started; so I must return home almost directly. Richard, I am so very glad you are better. You don’t hate me, do you? You have been such a kind friend to me!”

“I am glad to know you think so,” said Phillotson huskily. “No. I don’t hate you!”

It grew dusk quickly in the gloomy room during their intermittent chat, and when candles were brought and it was time to leave she put her hand in his or rather allowed it to flit through his; for she was significantly light in touch. She had nearly closed the door when he said, “Sue!” He had noticed that, in turning away from him, tears were on her face and a quiver in her lip.

It was bad policy to recall her—he knew it while he pursued it. But he could not help it. She came back.

“Sue,” he murmured, “do you wish to make it up, and stay? I’ll forgive you and condone everything!”

“Oh you can’t, you can’t!” she said hastily. “You can’t condone it now!”

“*He* is your husband now, in effect, you mean, of course?”

“You may assume it. He is obtaining a divorce from his wife Arabella.”

“His wife! It is altogether news to me that he has a wife.”

“It was a bad marriage.”

“Like yours.”

“Like mine. He is not doing it so much on his own account as on hers. She wrote and told him it would be a kindness to her, since then she could marry and live respectably. And Jude has agreed.”

“A wife... A kindness to her. Ah, yes; a kindness to her to release her altogether... But I don’t like the sound of it. I can forgive, Sue.”

“No, no! You can’t have me back now I have been so wicked—as to do what I have done!”

There had arisen in Sue’s face that incipient fright which showed itself whenever he changed from friend to husband, and which made her adopt

any line of defence against marital feeling in him. "I *must* go now. I'll come again—may I?"

"I don't ask you to go, even now. I ask you to stay."

"I thank you, Richard; but I must. As you are not so ill as I thought, I *cannot* stay!"

"She's his—his from lips to heel!" said Phillotson; but so faintly that in closing the door she did not hear it. The dread of a reactionary change in the schoolmaster's sentiments, coupled, perhaps, with a faint shamefacedness at letting even him know what a slipshod lack of thoroughness, from a man's point of view, characterized her transferred allegiance, prevented her telling him of her, thus far, incomplete relations with Jude; and Phillotson lay writhing like a man in hell as he pictured the prettily dressed, maddening compound of sympathy and averseness who bore his name, returning impatiently to the home of her lover.

Gillingham was so interested in Phillotson's affairs, and so seriously concerned about him, that he walked up the hill-side to Shaston two or three times a week, although, there and back, it was a journey of nine miles, which had to be performed between tea and supper, after a hard day's work in school. When he called on the next occasion after Sue's visit his friend was downstairs, and Gillingham noticed that his restless mood had been supplanted by a more fixed and composed one.

"She's been here since you called last," said Phillotson.

"Not Mrs. Phillotson?"

"Yes."

"Ah! You have made it up?"

"No... She just came, patted my pillow with her little white hand, played the thoughtful nurse for half an hour, and went away."

"Well—I'm hanged! A little hussy!"

"What do you say?"

"Oh—nothing!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what a tantalizing, capricious little woman! If she were not your wife—"

“She is not; she’s another man’s except in name and law. And I have been thinking—it was suggested to me by a conversation I had with her—that, in kindness to her, I ought to dissolve the legal tie altogether; which, singularly enough, I think I can do, now she has been back, and refused my request to stay after I said I had forgiven her. I believe that fact would afford me opportunity of doing it, though I did not see it at the moment. What’s the use of keeping her chained on to me if she doesn’t belong to me? I know—I feel absolutely certain—that she would welcome my taking such a step as the greatest charity to her. For though as a fellow-creature she sympathizes with, and pities me, and even weeps for me, as a husband she cannot endure me—she loathes me—there’s no use in mincing words—she loathes me, and my only manly, and dignified, and merciful course is to complete what I have begun... And for worldly reasons, too, it will be better for her to be independent. I have hopelessly ruined my prospects because of my decision as to what was best for us, though she does not know it; I see only dire poverty ahead from my feet to the grave; for I can be accepted as teacher no more. I shall probably have enough to do to make both ends meet during the remainder of my life, now my occupation’s gone; and I shall be better able to bear it alone. I may as well tell you that what has suggested my letting her go is some news she brought me—the news that Fawley is doing the same.”

“Oh—he had a spouse, too? A queer couple, these lovers!”

“Well—I don’t want your opinion on that. What I was going to say is that my liberating her can do her no possible harm, and will open up a chance of happiness for her which she has never dreamt of hitherto. For then they’ll be able to marry, as they ought to have done at first.”

Gillingham did not hurry to reply. “I may disagree with your motive,” he said gently, for he respected views he could not share. “But I think you are right in your determination—if you can carry it out. I doubt, however, if you can.”

Part Fifth

AT ALDBRICKHAM AND ELSEWHERE

“Thy aerial part, and all the fiery parts which are mingled in thee, though by nature they have an upward tendency, still in obedience to the disposition of the universe they are overpowered here in the compound mass the body.”—M. ANTONINUS (Long).

I

How Gillingham's doubts were disposed of will most quickly appear by passing over the series of dreary months and incidents that followed the events of the last chapter, and coming on to a Sunday in the February of the year following.

Sue and Jude were living in Aldbrickham, in precisely the same relations that they had established between themselves when she left Shaston to join him the year before. The proceedings in the law-courts had reached their consciousness, but as a distant sound and an occasional missive which they hardly understood.

They had met, as usual, to breakfast together in the little house with Jude's name on it, that he had taken at fifteen pounds a year, with three-pounds-ten extra for rates and taxes, and furnished with his aunt's ancient and lumbering goods, which had cost him about their full value to bring all the way from Marygreen. Sue kept house, and managed everything.

As he entered the room this morning Sue held up a letter she had just received.

"Well; and what is it about?" he said after kissing her.

"That the decree *nisi* in the case of Phillotson *versus* Phillotson and Fawley, pronounced six months ago, has just been made absolute."

"Ah," said Jude, as he sat down.

The same concluding incident in Jude's suit against Arabella had occurred about a month or two earlier. Both cases had been too insignificant to be reported in the papers, further than by name in a long list of other undefended cases.

"Now then, Sue, at any rate, you can do what you like!" He looked at his sweetheart curiously.

"Are we—you and I—just as free now as if we had never married at all?"

“Just as free—except, I believe, that a clergyman may object personally to remarry you, and hand the job on to somebody else.”

“But I wonder—do you think it is really so with us? I know it is generally. But I have an uncomfortable feeling that my freedom has been obtained under false pretences!”

“How?”

“Well—if the truth about us had been known, the decree wouldn’t have been pronounced. It is only, is it, because we have made no defence, and have led them into a false supposition? Therefore is my freedom lawful, however proper it may be?”

“Well—why did you let it be under false pretences? You have only yourself to blame,” he said mischievously.

“Jude—don’t! You ought not to be touchy about that still. You must take me as I am.”

“Very well, darling: so I will. Perhaps you were right. As to your question, we were not obliged to prove anything. That was their business. Anyhow we are living together.”

“Yes. Though not in their sense.”

“One thing is certain, that however the decree may be brought about, a marriage is dissolved when it is dissolved. There is this advantage in being poor obscure people like us—that these things are done for us in a rough and ready fashion. It was the same with me and Arabella. I was afraid her criminal second marriage would have been discovered, and she punished; but nobody took any interest in her—nobody inquired, nobody suspected it. If we’d been patented nobilities we should have had infinite trouble, and days and weeks would have been spent in investigations.”

By degrees Sue acquired her lover’s cheerfulness at the sense of freedom, and proposed that they should take a walk in the fields, even if they had to put up with a cold dinner on account of it. Jude agreed, and Sue went upstairs and prepared to start, putting on a joyful coloured gown in observance of her liberty; seeing which Jude put on a lighter tie.

“Now we’ll strut arm and arm,” he said, “like any other engaged couple. We’ve a legal right to.”

They rambled out of the town, and along a path over the low-lying lands that bordered it, though these were frosty now, and the extensive seed-fields

were bare of colour and produce. The pair, however, were so absorbed in their own situation that their surroundings were little in their consciousness.

“Well, my dearest, the result of all this is that we can marry after a decent interval.”

“Yes; I suppose we can,” said Sue, without enthusiasm.

“And aren’t we going to?”

“I don’t like to say no, dear Jude; but I feel just the same about it now as I have done all along. I have just the same dread lest an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents.”

“Still, what can we do? I do love you, as you know, Sue.”

“I know it abundantly. But I think I would much rather go on living always as lovers, as we are living now, and only meeting by day. It is so much sweeter—for the woman at least, and when she is sure of the man. And henceforward we needn’t be so particular as we have been about appearances.”

“Our experiences of matrimony with others have not been encouraging, I own,” said he, with some gloom; “either owing to our own dissatisfied, unpractical natures, or by our misfortune. But we two—”

“Should be two dissatisfied ones linked together, which would be twice as bad as before... I think I should begin to be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you—Ugh, how horrible and sordid! Although, as you are, free, I trust you more than any other man in the world.”

“No, no—don’t say I should change!” he expostulated; yet there was misgiving in his own voice also.

“Apart from ourselves, and our unhappy peculiarities, it is foreign to a man’s nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person’s lover. There would be a much likelier chance of his doing it if he were told not to love. If the marriage ceremony consisted in an oath and signed contract between the parties to cease loving from that day forward, in consideration of personal possession being given, and to avoid each other’s society as much as possible in public, there would be more loving couples than there are now. Fancy the secret meetings between the

perjuring husband and wife, the denials of having seen each other, the clambering in at bedroom windows, and the hiding in closets! There'd be little cooling then."

"Yes; but admitting this, or something like it, to be true, you are not the only one in the world to see it, dear little Sue. People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort. No doubt my father and mother, and your father and mother, saw it, if they at all resembled us in habits of observation. But then they went and married just the same, because they had ordinary passions. But you, Sue, are such a phantasmal, bodiless creature, one who—if you'll allow me to say it—has so little animal passion in you, that you can act upon reason in the matter, when we poor unfortunate wretches of grosser substance can't."

"Well," she sighed, "you've owned that it would probably end in misery for us. And I am not so exceptional a woman as you think. Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes—a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without."

Jude fell back upon his old complaint—that, intimate as they were, he had never once had from her an honest, candid declaration that she loved or could love him. "I really fear sometimes that you cannot," he said, with a dubiousness approaching anger. "And you are so reticent. I know that women are taught by other women that they must never admit the full truth to a man. But the highest form of affection is based on full sincerity on both sides. Not being men, these women don't know that in looking back on those he has had tender relations with, a man's heart returns closest to her who was the soul of truth in her conduct. The better class of man, even if caught by airy affectations of dodging and parrying, is not retained by them. A Nemesis attends the woman who plays the game of elusiveness too often, in the utter contempt for her that, sooner or later, her old admirers feel; under which they allow her to go unlamented to her grave."

Sue, who was regarding the distance, had acquired a guilty look; and she suddenly replied in a tragic voice: "I don't think I like you to-day so well as I did, Jude!"

"Don't you? Why?"

“Oh, well—you are not nice—too sermony. Though I suppose I am so bad and worthless that I deserve the utmost rigour of lecturing!”

“No, you are not bad. You are a dear. But as slippery as an eel when I want to get a confession from you.”

“Oh yes, I am bad, and obstinate, and all sorts! It is no use your pretending I am not! People who are good don’t want scolding as I do... But now that I have nobody but you, and nobody to defend me, it is very hard that I mustn’t have my own way in deciding how I’ll live with you, and whether I’ll be married or no!”

“Sue, my own comrade and sweetheart, I don’t want to force you either to marry or to do the other thing—of course I don’t! It is too wicked of you to be so pettish! Now we won’t say any more about it, and go on just the same as we have done; and during the rest of our walk we’ll talk of the meadows only, and the floods, and the prospect of the farmers this coming year.”

After this the subject of marriage was not mentioned by them for several days, though living as they were with only a landing between them it was constantly in their minds. Sue was assisting Jude very materially now: he had latterly occupied himself on his own account in working and lettering headstones, which he kept in a little yard at the back of his little house, where in the intervals of domestic duties she marked out the letters full size for him, and blacked them in after he had cut them. It was a lower class of handicraft than were his former performances as a cathedral mason, and his only patrons were the poor people who lived in his own neighbourhood, and knew what a cheap man this “Jude Fawley: Monumental Mason” (as he called himself on his front door) was to employ for the simple memorials they required for their dead. But he seemed more independent than before, and it was the only arrangement under which Sue, who particularly wished to be no burden on him, could render any assistance.

II

It was an evening at the end of the month, and Jude had just returned home from hearing a lecture on ancient history in the public hall not far off. When he entered, Sue, who had been keeping indoors during his absence, laid out supper for him. Contrary to custom she did not speak. Jude had taken up some illustrated paper, which he perused till, raising his eyes, he saw that her face was troubled.

“Are you depressed, Sue?” he said.

She paused a moment. “I have a message for you,” she answered.

“Somebody has called?”

“Yes. A woman.” Sue’s voice quavered as she spoke, and she suddenly sat down from her preparations, laid her hands in her lap, and looked into the fire. “I don’t know whether I did right or not!” she continued. “I said you were not at home, and when she said she would wait, I said I thought you might not be able to see her.”

“Why did you say that, dear? I suppose she wanted a headstone. Was she in mourning?”

“No. She wasn’t in mourning, and she didn’t want a headstone; and I thought you couldn’t see her.” Sue looked critically and imploringly at him.

“But who was she? Didn’t she say?”

“No. She wouldn’t give her name. But I know who she was—I think I do! It was Arabella!”

“Heaven save us! What should Arabella come for? What made you think it was she?”

“Oh, I can hardly tell. But I know it was! I feel perfectly certain it was—by the light in her eyes as she looked at me. She was a fleshy, coarse woman.”

“Well—I should not have called Arabella coarse exactly, except in speech, though she may be getting so by this time under the duties of the

public house. She was rather handsome when I knew her.”

“Handsome! But yes!—so she is!”

“I think I heard a quiver in your little mouth. Well, waiving that, as she is nothing to me, and virtuously married to another man, why should she come troubling us?”

“Are you sure she’s married? Have you definite news of it?”

“No—not definite news. But that was why she asked me to release her. She and the man both wanted to lead a proper life, as I understood.”

“Oh Jude—it was, it *was* Arabella!” cried Sue, covering her eyes with her hand. “And I am so miserable! It seems such an ill omen, whatever she may have come for. You could not possibly see her, could you?”

“I don’t really think I could. It would be so very painful to talk to her now—for her as much as for me. However, she’s gone. Did she say she would come again?”

“No. But she went away very reluctantly.”

Sue, whom the least thing upset, could not eat any supper, and when Jude had finished his he prepared to go to bed. He had no sooner raked out the fire, fastened the doors, and got to the top of the stairs than there came a knock. Sue instantly emerged from her room, which she had but just entered.

“There she is again!” Sue whispered in appalled accents.

“How do you know?”

“She knocked like that last time.”

They listened, and the knocking came again. No servant was kept in the house, and if the summons were to be responded to one of them would have to do it in person. “I’ll open a window,” said Jude. “Whoever it is cannot be expected to be let in at this time.”

He accordingly went into his bedroom and lifted the sash. The lonely street of early retiring workpeople was empty from end to end save of one figure—that of a woman walking up and down by the lamp a few yards off.

“Who’s there?” he asked.

“Is that Mr. Fawley?” came up from the woman, in a voice which was unmistakably Arabella’s.

Jude replied that it was.

“Is it she?” asked Sue from the door, with lips apart.

“Yes, dear,” said Jude. “What do you want, Arabella?” he inquired.

“I beg your pardon, Jude, for disturbing you,” said Arabella humbly. “But I called earlier—I wanted particularly to see you to-night, if I could. I am in trouble, and have nobody to help me!”

“In trouble, are you?”

“Yes.”

There was a silence. An inconvenient sympathy seemed to be rising in Jude’s breast at the appeal. “But aren’t you married?” he said.

Arabella hesitated. “No, Jude, I am not,” she returned. “He wouldn’t, after all. And I am in great difficulty. I hope to get another situation as barmaid soon. But it takes time, and I really am in great distress because of a sudden responsibility that’s been sprung upon me from Australia; or I wouldn’t trouble you—believe me I wouldn’t. I want to tell you about it.”

Sue remained at gaze, in painful tension, hearing every word, but speaking none.

“You are not really in want of money, Arabella?” he asked, in a distinctly softened tone.

“I have enough to pay for the night’s lodging I have obtained, but barely enough to take me back again.”

“Where are you living?”

“In London still.” She was about to give the address, but she said, “I am afraid somebody may hear, so I don’t like to call out particulars of myself so loud. If you could come down and walk a little way with me towards the Prince Inn, where I am staying to-night, I would explain all. You may as well, for old time’s sake!”

“Poor thing! I must do her the kindness of hearing what’s the matter, I suppose,” said Jude in much perplexity. “As she’s going back to-morrow it can’t make much difference.”

“But you can go and see her to-morrow, Jude! Don’t go now, Jude!” came in plaintive accents from the doorway. “Oh, it is only to entrap you, I know it is, as she did before! Don’t go, dear! She is such a low-passioned woman—I can see it in her shape, and hear it in her voice!”

“But I shall go,” said Jude. “Don’t attempt to detain me, Sue. God knows I love her little enough now, but I don’t want to be cruel to her.” He turned to the stairs.

“But she’s not your wife!” cried Sue distractedly. “And I—”

“And you are not either, dear, yet,” said Jude.

“Oh, but are you going to her? Don’t! Stay at home! Please, please stay at home, Jude, and not go to her, now she’s not your wife any more than I!”

“Well, she is, rather more than you, come to that,” he said, taking his hat determinedly. “I’ve wanted you to be, and I’ve waited with the patience of Job, and I don’t see that I’ve got anything by my self-denial. I shall certainly give her something, and hear what it is she is so anxious to tell me; no man could do less!”

There was that in his manner which she knew it would be futile to oppose. She said no more, but, turning to her room as meekly as a martyr, heard him go downstairs, unbolt the door, and close it behind him. With a woman’s disregard of her dignity when in the presence of nobody but herself, she also trotted down, sobbing articulately as she went. She listened. She knew exactly how far it was to the inn that Arabella had named as her lodging. It would occupy about seven minutes to get there at an ordinary walking pace; seven to come back again. If he did not return in fourteen minutes he would have lingered. She looked at the clock. It was twenty-five minutes to eleven. He *might* enter the inn with Arabella, as they would reach it before closing time; she might get him to drink with her; and Heaven only knew what disasters would befall him then.

In a still suspense she waited on. It seemed as if the whole time had nearly elapsed when the door was opened again, and Jude appeared.

Sue gave a little ecstatic cry. “Oh, I knew I could trust you!—how good you are!”—she began.

“I can’t find her anywhere in this street, and I went out in my slippers only. She has walked on, thinking I’ve been so hard-hearted as to refuse her requests entirely, poor woman. I’ve come back for my boots, as it is beginning to rain.”

“Oh, but why should you take such trouble for a woman who has served you so badly!” said Sue in a jealous burst of disappointment.

“But, Sue, she’s a woman, and I once cared for her; and one can’t be a brute in such circumstances.”

“She isn’t your wife any longer!” exclaimed Sue, passionately excited. “You *mustn’t* go out to find her! It isn’t right! You *can’t* join her, now she’s a stranger to you. How can you forget such a thing, my dear, dear one!”

“She seems much the same as ever—an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow-creature,” he said, continuing to pull on his boots. “What those legal fellows have been playing at in London makes no difference in my real relations to her. If she was my wife while she was away in Australia with another husband, she’s my wife now.”

“But she wasn’t! That’s just what I hold! There’s the absurdity!— Well—you’ll come straight back, after a few minutes, won’t you, dear? She is too low, too coarse for you to talk to long, Jude, and was always!”

“Perhaps I am coarse too, worse luck! I have the germs of every human infirmity in me, I verily believe—that was why I saw it was so preposterous of me to think of being a curate. I have cured myself of drunkenness I think; but I never know in what new form a suppressed vice will break out in me! I do love you, Sue, though I have danced attendance on you so long for such poor returns! All that’s best and noblest in me loves you, and your freedom from everything that’s gross has elevated me, and enabled me to do what I should never have dreamt myself capable of, or any man, a year or two ago. It is all very well to preach about self-control, and the wickedness of coercing a woman. But I should just like a few virtuous people who have condemned me in the past, about Arabella and other things, to have been in my tantalizing position with you through these late weeks!—they’d believe, I think, that I have exercised some little restraint in always giving in to your wishes—living here in one house, and not a soul between us.”

“Yes, you have been good to me, Jude; I know you have, my dear protector.”

“Well—Arabella has appealed to me for help. I must go out and speak to her, Sue, at least!”

“I can’t say any more!—Oh, if you must, you must!” she said, bursting out into sobs that seemed to tear her heart. “I have nobody but you, Jude, and you are deserting me! I didn’t know you were like this—I can’t bear it, I can’t! If she were yours it would be different!”

“Or if you were.”

“Very well then—if I must I must. Since you will have it so, I agree! I will be. Only I didn’t mean to! And I didn’t want to marry again, either! ... But, yes—I agree, I agree! I do love you. I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run, living like this!”

She ran across and flung her arms round his neck. “I am not a cold-natured, sexless creature, am I, for keeping you at such a distance? I am sure you don’t think so! Wait and see! I do belong to you, don’t I? I give in!”

“And I’ll arrange for our marriage to-morrow, or as soon as ever you wish.”

“Yes, Jude.”

“Then I’ll let her go,” said he, embracing Sue softly. “I do feel that it would be unfair to you to see her, and perhaps unfair to her. She is not like you, my darling, and never was: it is only bare justice to say that. Don’t cry any more. There; and there; and there!” He kissed her on one side, and on the other, and in the middle, and rebolted the front door.

The next morning it was wet.

“Now, dear,” said Jude gaily at breakfast; “as this is Saturday I mean to call about the banns at once, so as to get the first publishing done to-morrow, or we shall lose a week. Banns will do? We shall save a pound or two.”

Sue absently agreed to banns. But her mind for the moment was running on something else. A glow had passed away from her, and depression sat upon her features.

“I feel I was wickedly selfish last night!” she murmured. “It was sheer unkindness in me—or worse—to treat Arabella as I did. I didn’t care about her being in trouble, and what she wished to tell you! Perhaps it was really something she was justified in telling you. That’s some more of my badness, I suppose! Love has its own dark morality when rivalry enters in—at least, mine has, if other people’s hasn’t... I wonder how she got on? I hope she reached the inn all right, poor woman.”

“Oh yes: she got on all right,” said Jude placidly.

“I hope she wasn’t shut out, and that she hadn’t to walk the streets in the rain. Do you mind my putting on my waterproof and going to see if she got

in? I've been thinking of her all the morning."

"Well—is it necessary? You haven't the least idea how Arabella is able to shift for herself. Still, darling, if you want to go and inquire you can."

There was no limit to the strange and unnecessary penances which Sue would meekly undertake when in a contrite mood; and this going to see all sorts of extraordinary persons whose relation to her was precisely of a kind that would have made other people shun them was her instinct ever, so that the request did not surprise him.

"And when you come back," he added, "I'll be ready to go about the banns. You'll come with me?"

Sue agreed, and went off under cloak and umbrella letting Jude kiss her freely, and returning his kisses in a way she had never done before. Times had decidedly changed. "The little bird is caught at last!" she said, a sadness showing in her smile.

"No—only nested," he assured her.

She walked along the muddy street till she reached the public house mentioned by Arabella, which was not so very far off. She was informed that Arabella had not yet left, and in doubt how to announce herself so that her predecessor in Jude's affections would recognize her, she sent up word that a friend from Spring Street had called, naming the place of Jude's residence. She was asked to step upstairs, and on being shown into a room found that it was Arabella's bedroom, and that the latter had not yet risen. She halted on the turn of her toe till Arabella cried from the bed, "Come in and shut the door," which Sue accordingly did.

Arabella lay facing the window, and did not at once turn her head: and Sue was wicked enough, despite her penitence, to wish for a moment that Jude could behold her forerunner now, with the daylight full upon her. She may have seemed handsome enough in profile under the lamps, but a frowsiness was apparent this morning; and the sight of her own fresh charms in the looking-glass made Sue's manner bright, till she reflected what a meanly sexual emotion this was in her, and hated herself for it.

"I've just looked in to see if you got back comfortably last night, that's all," she said gently. "I was afraid afterwards that you might have met with any mishap?"

“Oh—how stupid this is! I thought my visitor was—your friend—your husband—Mrs. Fawley, as I suppose you call yourself?” said Arabella, flinging her head back upon the pillows with a disappointed toss, and ceasing to retain the dimple she had just taken the trouble to produce.

“Indeed I don’t,” said Sue.

“Oh, I thought you might have, even if he’s not really yours. Decency is decency, any hour of the twenty-four.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Sue stiffly. “He is mine, if you come to that!”

“He wasn’t yesterday.”

Sue coloured roseate, and said, “How do you know?”

“From your manner when you talked to me at the door. Well, my dear, you’ve been quick about it, and I expect my visit last night helped it on—ha-ha! But I don’t want to get him away from you.”

Sue looked out at the rain, and at the dirty toilet-cover, and at the detached tail of Arabella’s hair hanging on the looking-glass, just as it had done in Jude’s time; and wished she had not come. In the pause there was a knock at the door, and the chambermaid brought in a telegram for “Mrs. Cartlett.”

Arabella opened it as she lay, and her ruffled look disappeared.

“I am much obliged to you for your anxiety about me,” she said blandly when the maid had gone; “but it is not necessary you should feel it. My man finds he can’t do without me after all, and agrees to stand by the promise to marry again over here that he has made me all along. See here! This is in answer to one from me.” She held out the telegram for Sue to read, but Sue did not take it. “He asks me to come back. His little corner public in Lambeth would go to pieces without me, he says. But he isn’t going to knock me about when he has had a drop, any more after we are spliced by English law than before! ... As for you, I should coax Jude to take me before the parson straight off, and have done with it, if I were in your place. I say it as a friend, my dear.”

“He’s waiting to, any day,” returned Sue, with frigid pride.

“Then let him, in Heaven’s name. Life with a man is more businesslike after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you,

which you can't otherwise, unless he half-runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noddle with a poker. And if he bolts away from you—I say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there's never any knowing what a man med do—you'll have the sticks o' furniture, and won't be looked upon as a thief. I shall marry my man over again, now he's willing, as there was a little flaw in the first ceremony. In my telegram last night which this is an answer to, I told him I had almost made it up with Jude; and that frightened him, I expect! Perhaps I should quite have done it if it hadn't been for you," she said laughing; "and then how different our histories might have been from to-day! Never such a tender fool as Jude is if a woman seems in trouble, and coaxes him a bit! Just as he used to be about birds and things. However, as it happens, it is just as well as if I had made it up, and I forgive you. And, as I say, I'd advise you to get the business legally done as soon as possible. You'll find it an awful bother later on if you don't."

"I have told you he is asking me to marry him—to make our natural marriage a legal one," said Sue, with yet more dignity. "It was quite by my wish that he didn't the moment I was free."

"Ah, yes—you are a oneyer too, like myself," said Arabella, eyeing her visitor with humorous criticism. "Bolted from your first, didn't you, like me?"

"Good morning!—I must go," said Sue hastily.

"And I, too, must up and off!" replied the other, springing out of bed so suddenly that the soft parts of her person shook. Sue jumped aside in trepidation. "Lord, I am only a woman—not a six-foot sojer! ... Just a moment, dear," she continued, putting her hand on Sue's arm. "I really did want to consult Jude on a little matter of business, as I told him. I came about that more than anything else. Would he run up to speak to me at the station as I am going? You think not. Well, I'll write to him about it. I didn't want to write it, but never mind—I will."

III

When Sue reached home Jude was awaiting her at the door to take the initial step towards their marriage. She clasped his arm, and they went along silently together, as true comrades oft-times do. He saw that she was preoccupied, and forbore to question her.

“Oh Jude—I’ve been talking to her,” she said at last. “I wish I hadn’t! And yet it is best to be reminded of things.”

“I hope she was civil.”

“Yes. I—I can’t help liking her—just a little bit! She’s not an ungenerous nature; and I am so glad her difficulties have all suddenly ended.” She explained how Arabella had been summoned back, and would be enabled to retrieve her position. “I was referring to our old question. What Arabella has been saying to me has made me feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is—a sort of trap to catch a man—I can’t bear to think of it. I wish I hadn’t promised to let you put up the banns this morning!”

“Oh, don’t mind me. Any time will do for me. I thought you might like to get it over quickly, now.”

“Indeed, I don’t feel any more anxious now than I did before. Perhaps with any other man I might be a little anxious; but among the very few virtues possessed by your family and mine, dear, I think I may set staunchness. So I am not a bit frightened about losing you, now I really am yours and you really are mine. In fact, I am easier in my mind than I was, for my conscience is clear about Richard, who now has a right to his freedom. I felt we were deceiving him before.”

“Sue, you seem when you are like this to be one of the women of some grand old civilization, whom I used to read about in my bygone, wasted, classical days, rather than a denizen of a mere Christian country. I almost expect you to say at these times that you have just been talking to some friend whom you met in the Via Sacra, about the latest news of Octavia or

Livia; or have been listening to Aspasia's eloquence, or have been watching Praxiteles chiselling away at his latest Venus, while Phryne made complaint that she was tired of posing."

They had now reached the house of the parish clerk. Sue stood back, while her lover went up to the door. His hand was raised to knock when she said: "Jude!"

He looked round.

"Wait a minute, would you mind?"

He came back to her.

"Just let us think," she said timidly. "I had such a horrid dream one night! ... And Arabella—"

"What did Arabella say to you?" he asked.

"Oh, she said that when people were tied up you could get the law of a man better if he beat you—and how when couples quarrelled... Jude, do you think that when you must have me with you by law, we shall be so happy as we are now? The men and women of our family are very generous when everything depends upon their goodwill, but they always kick against compulsion. Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?"

"Upon my word, love, you are beginning to frighten me, too, with all this foreboding! Well, let's go back and think it over."

Her face brightened. "Yes—so we will!" said she. And they turned from the clerk's door, Sue taking his arm and murmuring as they walked on homeward:

Can you keep the bee from ranging,
Or the ring-dove's neck from changing?
No! Nor fetter'd love...

They thought it over, or postponed thinking. Certainly they postponed action, and seemed to live on in a dreamy paradise. At the end of a fortnight or three weeks matters remained unadvanced, and no banns were announced to the ears of any Aldbrickham congregation.

Whilst they were postponing and postponing thus a letter and a newspaper arrived before breakfast one morning from Arabella. Seeing the handwriting Jude went up to Sue's room and told her, and as soon as she was dressed she hastened down. Sue opened the newspaper; Jude the letter. After glancing at the paper she held across the first page to him with her finger on a paragraph; but he was so absorbed in his letter that he did not turn awhile.

"Look!" said she.

He looked and read. The paper was one that circulated in South London only, and the marked advertisement was simply the announcement of a marriage at St. John's Church, Waterloo Road, under the names, "CARTLETT —DONN"; the united pair being Arabella and the inn-keeper.

"Well, it is satisfactory," said Sue complacently. "Though, after this, it seems rather low to do likewise, and I am glad. However, she is provided for now in a way, I suppose, whatever her faults, poor thing. It is nicer that we are able to think that, than to be uneasy about her. I ought, too, to write to Richard and ask him how he is getting on, perhaps?"

But Jude's attention was still absorbed. Having merely glanced at the announcement he said in a disturbed voice: "Listen to this letter. What shall I say or do?"

THE THREE HORNS, LAMBETH.

DEAR JUDE (I won't be so distant as to call you Mr. Fawley),
—I send to-day a newspaper, from which useful document you will learn that I was married over again to Cartlett last Tuesday. So that business is settled right and tight at last. But what I write about more particular is that private affair I wanted to speak to you on when I came down to Aldbrickham. I couldn't very well tell it to your lady friend, and should much have liked to let you know it by word of mouth, as I could have explained better than by letter. The fact is, Jude, that, though I have never informed you before, there was a boy born of our marriage, eight months after I left you, when I was at Sydney, living with my father and mother. All that is easily provable. As I had separated from

you before I thought such a thing was going to happen, and I was over there, and our quarrel had been sharp, I did not think it convenient to write about the birth. I was then looking out for a good situation, so my parents took the child, and he has been with them ever since. That was why I did not mention it when I met you in Christminster, nor at the law proceedings. He is now of an intelligent age, of course, and my mother and father have lately written to say that, as they have rather a hard struggle over there, and I am settled comfortably here, they don't see why they should be encumbered with the child any longer, his parents being alive. I would have him with me here in a moment, but he is not old enough to be of any use in the bar nor will be for years and years, and naturally Cartlett might think him in the way. They have, however, packed him off to me in charge of some friends who happened to be coming home, and I must ask you to take him when he arrives, for I don't know what to do with him. He is lawfully yours, that I solemnly swear. If anybody says he isn't, call them brimstone liars, for my sake. Whatever I may have done before or afterwards, I was honest to you from the time we were married till I went away, and I remain, yours, &c.,

ARABELLA CARTLETT.

Sue's look was one of dismay. "What will you do, dear?" she asked faintly.

Jude did not reply, and Sue watched him anxiously, with heavy breaths.

"It hits me hard!" said he in an under-voice. "It *may* be true! I can't make it out. Certainly, if his birth was exactly when she says, he's mine. I cannot think why she didn't tell me when I met her at Christminster, and came on here that evening with her! ... Ah—I do remember now that she said something about having a thing on her mind that she would like me to know, if ever we lived together again."

"The poor child seems to be wanted by nobody!" Sue replied, and her eyes filled.

Jude had by this time come to himself. "What a view of life he must have, mine or not mine!" he said. "I must say that, if I were better off, I should not stop for a moment to think whose he might be. I would take him and bring him up. The beggarly question of parentage—what is it, after all? What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people's, is, like class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom."

Sue jumped up and kissed Jude with passionate devotion. "Yes—so it is, dearest! And we'll have him here! And if he isn't yours it makes it all the better. I do hope he isn't—though perhaps I ought not to feel quite that! If he isn't, I should like so much for us to have him as an adopted child!"

"Well, you must assume about him what is most pleasing to you, my curious little comrade!" he said. "I feel that, anyhow, I don't like to leave the unfortunate little fellow to neglect. Just think of his life in a Lambeth pothouse, and all its evil influences, with a parent who doesn't want him, and has, indeed, hardly seen him, and a stepfather who doesn't know him. 'Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived!' That's what the boy—*my* boy, perhaps, will find himself saying before long!"

"Oh no!"

"As I was the petitioner, I am really entitled to his custody, I suppose."

"Whether or no, we must have him. I see that. I'll do the best I can to be a mother to him, and we can afford to keep him somehow. I'll work harder. I wonder when he'll arrive?"

"In the course of a few weeks, I suppose."

"I wish—When shall we have courage to marry, Jude?"

"Whenever you have it, I think I shall. It remains with you entirely, dear. Only say the word, and it's done."

"Before the boy comes?"

"Certainly."

"It would make a more natural home for him, perhaps," she murmured.

Jude thereupon wrote in purely formal terms to request that the boy should be sent on to them as soon as he arrived, making no remark whatever on the surprising nature of Arabella's information, nor vouchsafing a single word of opinion on the boy's paternity, nor on whether, had he known all this, his conduct towards her would have been quite the same.

In the down-train that was timed to reach Aldbrickham station about ten o'clock the next evening, a small, pale child's face could be seen in the gloom of a third-class carriage. He had large, frightened eyes, and wore a white woollen cravat, over which a key was suspended round his neck by a piece of common string: the key attracting attention by its occasional shine in the lamplight. In the band of his hat his half-ticket was stuck. His eyes remained mostly fixed on the back of the seat opposite, and never turned to the window even when a station was reached and called. On the other seat were two or three passengers, one of them a working woman who held a basket on her lap, in which was a tabby kitten. The woman opened the cover now and then, whereupon the kitten would put out its head, and indulge in playful antics. At these the fellow-passengers laughed, except the solitary boy bearing the key and ticket, who, regarding the kitten with his saucer eyes, seemed mutely to say: "All laughing comes from misapprehension. Rightly looked at, there is no laughable thing under the sun."

Occasionally, at a stoppage, the guard would look into the compartment and say to the boy, "All right, my man. Your box is safe in the van." The boy would say, "Yes," without animation, would try to smile, and fail.

He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices. A ground-swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to lift the child in this his morning-life, when his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of Time, and appeared not to care about what it saw.

When the other travellers closed their eyes, which they did one by one—even the kitten curling itself up in the basket, weary of its too circumscribed play—the boy remained just as before. He then seemed to be doubly awake, like an enslaved and dwarfed divinity, sitting passive and regarding his companions as if he saw their whole rounded lives rather than their immediate figures.

This was Arabella's boy. With her usual carelessness, she had postponed writing to Jude about him till the eve of his landing, when she could absolutely postpone no longer, though she had known for weeks of his approaching arrival, and had, as she truly said, visited Aldbrickham mainly to reveal the boy's existence and his near home-coming to Jude. This very day on which she had received her former husband's answer at some time in the afternoon, the child reached the London Docks, and the family in whose charge he had come, having put him into a cab for Lambeth and directed the cabman to his mother's house, bade him good-bye, and went their way.

On his arrival at the Three Horns, Arabella had looked him over with an expression that was as good as saying, "You are very much what I expected you to be," had given him a good meal, a little money, and, late as it was getting, dispatched him to Jude by the next train, wishing her husband Cartlett, who was out, not to see him.

The train reached Aldbrickham, and the boy was deposited on the lonely platform beside his box. The collector took his ticket, and, with a meditative sense of the unfitness of things, asked him where he was going by himself at that time of night.

"Going to Spring Street," said the little one impassively.

"Why, that's a long way from here; a'most out in the country; and the folks will be gone to bed."

"I've got to go there."

"You must have a fly for your box."

"No. I must walk."

"Oh well: you'd better leave your box here and send for it. There's a 'bus goes half-way, but you'll have to walk the rest."

"I am not afraid."

"Why didn't your friends come to meet 'ee?"

"I suppose they didn't know I was coming."

"Who is your friends?"

"Mother didn't wish me to say."

"All I can do, then, is to take charge of this. Now walk as fast as you can."

Saying nothing further the boy came out into the street, looking round to see that nobody followed or observed him. When he had walked some little distance he asked for the street of his destination. He was told to go straight on quite into the outskirts of the place.

The child fell into a steady mechanical creep which had in it an impersonal quality—the movement of the wave, or of the breeze, or of the cloud. He followed his directions literally, without an inquiring gaze at anything. It could have been seen that the boy's ideas of life were different from those of the local boys. Children begin with detail, and learn up to the general; they begin with the contiguous, and gradually comprehend the universal. The boy seemed to have begun with the generals of life, and never to have concerned himself with the particulars. To him the houses, the willows, the obscure fields beyond, were apparently regarded not as brick residences, pollards, meadows; but as human dwellings in the abstract, vegetation, and the wide dark world.

He found the way to the little lane, and knocked at the door of Jude's house. Jude had just retired to bed, and Sue was about to enter her chamber adjoining when she heard the knock and came down.

“Is this where Father lives?” asked the child.

“Who?”

“Mr. Fawley, that's his name.”

Sue ran up to Jude's room and told him, and he hurried down as soon as he could, though to her impatience he seemed long.

“What—is it he—so soon?” she asked as Jude came.

She scrutinized the child's features, and suddenly went away into the little sitting-room adjoining. Jude lifted the boy to a level with himself, keenly regarded him with gloomy tenderness, and telling him he would have been met if they had known of his coming so soon, set him provisionally in a chair whilst he went to look for Sue, whose supersensitiveness was disturbed, as he knew. He found her in the dark, bending over an arm-chair. He enclosed her with his arm, and putting his face by hers, whispered, “What's the matter?”

“What Arabella says is true—true! I see you in him!”

“Well: that's one thing in my life as it should be, at any rate.”

“But the other half of him is—*she*! And that’s what I can’t bear! But I ought to—I’ll try to get used to it; yes, I ought!”

“Jealous little Sue! I withdraw all remarks about your sexlessness. Never mind! Time may right things... And Sue, darling; I have an idea! We’ll educate and train him with a view to the university. What I couldn’t accomplish in my own person perhaps I can carry out through him? They are making it easier for poor students now, you know.”

“Oh you dreamer!” said she, and holding his hand returned to the child with him. The boy looked at her as she had looked at him. “Is it you who’s my *real* mother at last?” he inquired.

“Why? Do I look like your father’s wife?”

“Well, yes; ’cept he seems fond of you, and you of him. Can I call you Mother?”

Then a yearning look came over the child and he began to cry. Sue thereupon could not refrain from instantly doing likewise, being a harp which the least wind of emotion from another’s heart could make to vibrate as readily as a radical stir in her own.

“You may call me Mother, if you wish to, my poor dear!” she said, bending her cheek against his to hide her tears.

“What’s this round your neck?” asked Jude with affected calmness.

“The key of my box that’s at the station.”

They bustled about and got him some supper, and made him up a temporary bed, where he soon fell asleep. Both went and looked at him as he lay.

“He called you Mother two or three times before he dropped off,” murmured Jude. “Wasn’t it odd that he should have wanted to!”

“Well—it was significant,” said Sue. “There’s more for us to think about in that one little hungry heart than in all the stars of the sky... I suppose, dear, we must pluck up courage, and get that ceremony over? It is no use struggling against the current, and I feel myself getting intertwined with my kind. Oh Jude, you’ll love me dearly, won’t you, afterwards? I do want to be kind to this child, and to be a mother to him; and our adding the legal form to our marriage might make it easier for me.”

IV

Their next and second attempt thereat was more deliberately made, though it was begun on the morning following the singular child's arrival at their home.

Him they found to be in the habit of sitting silent, his quaint and weird face set, and his eyes resting on things they did not see in the substantial world.

"His face is like the tragic mask of Melpomene," said Sue. "What is your name, dear? Did you tell us?"

"Little Father Time is what they always called me. It is a nickname; because I look so aged, they say."

"And you talk so, too," said Sue tenderly. "It is strange, Jude, that these preternaturally old boys almost always come from new countries. But what were you christened?"

"I never was."

"Why was that?"

"Because, if I died in damnation, 'twould save the expense of a Christian funeral."

"Oh—your name is not Jude, then?" said his father with some disappointment.

The boy shook his head. "Never heard on it."

"Of course not," said Sue quickly; "since she was hating you all the time!"

"We'll have him christened," said Jude; and privately to Sue: "The day we are married." Yet the advent of the child disturbed him.

Their position lent them shyness, and having an impression that a marriage at a superintendent registrar's office was more private than an ecclesiastical one, they decided to avoid a church this time. Both Sue and Jude together went to the office of the district to give notice: they had

become such companions that they could hardly do anything of importance except in each other's company.

Jude Fawley signed the form of notice, Sue looking over his shoulder and watching his hand as it traced the words. As she read the four-square undertaking, never before seen by her, into which her own and Jude's names were inserted, and by which that very volatile essence, their love for each other, was supposed to be made permanent, her face seemed to grow painfully apprehensive. "Names and Surnames of the Parties"—(they were to be parties now, not lovers, she thought). "Condition"—(a horrid idea)—"Rank or Occupation"—"Age"—"Dwelling at"—"Length of Residence"—"Church or Building in which the Marriage is to be solemnized"—"District and County in which the Parties respectively dwell."

"It spoils the sentiment, doesn't it!" she said on their way home. "It seems making a more sordid business of it even than signing the contract in a vestry. There is a little poetry in a church. But we'll try to get through with it, dearest, now."

"We will. 'For what man is he that hath betrothed a wife and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.' So said the Jewish law-giver."

"How you know the Scriptures, Jude! You really ought to have been a parson. I can only quote profane writers!"

During the interval before the issuing of the certificate, Sue, in her housekeeping errands, sometimes walked past the office, and furtively glancing in saw affixed to the wall the notice of the purposed clinch to their union. She could not bear its aspect. Coming after her previous experience of matrimony, all the romance of their attachment seemed to be starved away by placing her present case in the same category. She was usually leading little Father Time by the hand, and fancied that people thought him hers, and regarded the intended ceremony as the patching up of an old error.

Meanwhile Jude decided to link his present with his past in some slight degree by inviting to the wedding the only person remaining on earth who was associated with his early life at Marygreen—the aged widow Mrs. Edlin, who had been his great-aunt's friend and nurse in her last illness. He hardly expected that she would come; but she did, bringing singular presents, in the form of apples, jam, brass snuffers, an ancient pewter dish, a

warming-pan, and an enormous bag of goose feathers towards a bed. She was allotted the spare room in Jude's house, whither she retired early, and where they could hear her through the ceiling below, honestly saying the Lord's Prayer in a loud voice, as the Rubric directed.

As, however, she could not sleep, and discovered that Sue and Jude were still sitting up—it being in fact only ten o'clock—she dressed herself again and came down, and they all sat by the fire till a late hour—Father Time included; though, as he never spoke, they were hardly conscious of him.

“Well, I bain't set against marrying as your great-aunt was,” said the widow. “And I hope 'twill be a jocund wedding for ye in all respects this time. Nobody can hope it more, knowing what I do of your families, which is more, I suppose, than anybody else now living. For they have been unlucky that way, God knows.”

Sue breathed uneasily.

“They was always good-hearted people, too—wouldn't kill a fly if they knowed it,” continued the wedding guest. “But things happened to thwart 'em, and if everything wasn't vitty they were upset. No doubt that's how he that the tale is told of came to do what 'a did—if he *were* one of your family.”

“What was that?” said Jude.

“Well—that tale, ye know; he that was gibbeted just on the brow of the hill by the Brown House—not far from the milestone between Marygreen and Alfredston, where the other road branches off. But Lord, 'twas in my grandfather's time; and it medn' have been one of your folk at all.”

“I know where the gibbet is said to have stood, very well,” murmured Jude. “But I never heard of this. What—did this man—my ancestor and Sue's—kill his wife?”

“'Twer not that exactly. She ran away from him, with their child, to her friends; and while she was there the child died. He wanted the body, to bury it where his people lay, but she wouldn't give it up. Her husband then came in the night with a cart, and broke into the house to steal the coffin away; but he was caught, and being obstinate, wouldn't tell what he broke in for. They brought it in burglary, and that's why he was hanged and gibbeted on Brown House Hill. His wife went mad after he was dead. But it medn't be true that he belonged to ye more than to me.”

A small slow voice rose from the shade of the fireside, as if out of the earth: "If I was you, Mother, I wouldn't marry Father!" It came from little Time, and they started, for they had forgotten him.

"Oh, it is only a tale," said Sue cheerfully.

After this exhilarating tradition from the widow on the eve of the solemnization they rose, and, wishing their guest good-night, retired.

The next morning Sue, whose nervousness intensified with the hours, took Jude privately into the sitting-room before starting. "Jude, I want you to kiss me, as a lover, incorporeally," she said, tremulously nestling up to him, with damp lashes. "It won't be ever like this any more, will it? I wish we hadn't begun the business. But I suppose we must go on. How horrid that story was last night! It spoilt my thoughts of to-day. It makes me feel as if a tragic doom overhung our family, as it did the house of Atreus."

"Or the house of Jeroboam," said the quondam theologian.

"Yes. And it seems awful temerity in us two to go marrying! I am going to vow to you in the same words I vowed in to my other husband, and you to me in the same as you used to your other wife; regardless of the deterrent lesson we were taught by those experiments!"

"If you are uneasy I am made unhappy," said he. "I had hoped you would feel quite joyful. But if you don't, you don't. It is no use pretending. It is a dismal business to you, and that makes it so to me!"

"It is unpleasantly like that other morning—that's all," she murmured. "Let us go on now."

They started arm in arm for the office aforesaid, no witness accompanying them except the Widow Edlin. The day was chilly and dull, and a clammy fog blew through the town from "Royal-tower'd Thame." On the steps of the office there were the muddy foot-marks of people who had entered, and in the entry were damp umbrellas. Within the office several persons were gathered, and our couple perceived that a marriage between a soldier and a young woman was just in progress. Sue, Jude, and the widow stood in the background while this was going on, Sue reading the notices of marriage on the wall. The room was a dreary place to two of their temperament, though to its usual frequenters it doubtless seemed ordinary enough. Law-books in musty calf covered one wall, and elsewhere were post-office directories, and other books of reference. Papers in packets tied

with red tape were pigeon-holed around, and some iron safes filled a recess, while the bare wood floor was, like the door-step, stained by previous visitors.

The soldier was sullen and reluctant: the bride sad and timid; she was soon, obviously, to become a mother, and she had a black eye. Their little business was soon done, and the twain and their friends straggled out, one of the witnesses saying casually to Jude and Sue in passing, as if he had known them before: "See the couple just come in? Ha, ha! That fellow is just out of gaol this morning. She met him at the gaol gates, and brought him straight here. She's paying for everything."

Sue turned her head and saw an ill-favoured man, closely cropped, with a broad-faced, pock-marked woman on his arm, ruddy with liquor and the satisfaction of being on the brink of a gratified desire. They jocosely saluted the outgoing couple, and went forward in front of Jude and Sue, whose diffidence was increasing. The latter drew back and turned to her lover, her mouth shaping itself like that of a child about to give way to grief:

"Jude—I don't like it here! I wish we hadn't come! The place gives me the horrors: it seems so unnatural as the climax of our love! I wish it had been at church, if it had to be at all. It is not so vulgar there!"

"Dear little girl," said Jude. "How troubled and pale you look!"

"It must be performed here now, I suppose?"

"No—perhaps not necessarily."

He spoke to the clerk, and came back. "No—we need not marry here or anywhere, unless we like, even now," he said. "We can be married in a church, if not with the same certificate with another he'll give us, I think. Anyhow, let us go out till you are calmer, dear, and I too, and talk it over."

They went out stealthily and guiltily, as if they had committed a misdemeanour, closing the door without noise, and telling the widow, who had remained in the entry, to go home and await them; that they would call in any casual passers as witnesses, if necessary. When in the street they turned into an unfrequented side alley where they walked up and down as they had done long ago in the market-house at Melchester.

"Now, darling, what shall we do? We are making a mess of it, it strikes me. Still, *anything* that pleases you will please me."

“But Jude, dearest, I am worrying you! You wanted it to be there, didn’t you?”

“Well, to tell the truth, when I got inside I felt as if I didn’t care much about it. The place depressed me almost as much as it did you—it was ugly. And then I thought of what you had said this morning as to whether we ought.”

They walked on vaguely, till she paused, and her little voice began anew: “It seems so weak, too, to vacillate like this! And yet how much better than to act rashly a second time... How terrible that scene was to me! The expression in that flabby woman’s face, leading her on to give herself to that gaol-bird, not for a few hours, as she would, but for a lifetime, as she must. And the other poor soul—to escape a nominal shame which was owing to the weakness of her character, degrading herself to the real shame of bondage to a tyrant who scorned her—a man whom to avoid for ever was her only chance of salvation... This is our parish church, isn’t it? This is where it would have to be, if we did it in the usual way? A service or something seems to be going on.”

Jude went up and looked in at the door. “Why—it is a wedding here too,” he said. “Everybody seems to be on our tack to-day.”

Sue said she supposed it was because Lent was just over, when there was always a crowd of marriages. “Let us listen,” she said, “and find how it feels to us when performed in a church.”

They stepped in, and entered a back seat, and watched the proceedings at the altar. The contracting couple appeared to belong to the well-to-do middle class, and the wedding altogether was of ordinary prettiness and interest. They could see the flowers tremble in the bride’s hand, even at that distance, and could hear her mechanical murmur of words whose meaning her brain seemed to gather not at all under the pressure of her self-consciousness. Sue and Jude listened, and severally saw themselves in time past going through the same form of self-committal.

“It is not the same to her, poor thing, as it would be to me doing it over again with my present knowledge,” Sue whispered. “You see, they are fresh to it, and take the proceedings as a matter of course. But having been awakened to its awful solemnity as we have, or at least as I have, by experience, and to my own too squeamish feelings perhaps sometimes, it really does seem immoral in me to go and undertake the same thing again

with open eyes. Coming in here and seeing this has frightened me from a church wedding as much as the other did from a registry one... We are a weak, tremulous pair, Jude, and what others may feel confident in I feel doubts of—my being proof against the sordid conditions of a business contract again!”

Then they tried to laugh, and went on debating in whispers the object-lesson before them. And Jude said he also thought they were both too thin-skinned—that they ought never to have been born—much less have come together for the most preposterous of all joint ventures for *them*—matrimony.

His betrothed shuddered; and asked him earnestly if he indeed felt that they ought not to go in cold blood and sign that life-undertaking again? “It is awful if you think we have found ourselves not strong enough for it, and knowing this, are proposing to perjure ourselves,” she said.

“I fancy I do think it—since you ask me,” said Jude. “Remember I’ll do it if you wish, own darling.” While she hesitated he went on to confess that, though he thought they ought to be able to do it, he felt checked by the dread of incompetency just as she did—from their peculiarities, perhaps, because they were unlike other people. “We are horribly sensitive; that’s really what’s the matter with us, Sue!” he declared.

“I fancy more are like us than we think!”

“Well, I don’t know. The intention of the contract is good, and right for many, no doubt; but in our case it may defeat its own ends because we are the queer sort of people we are—folk in whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness.”

Sue still held that there was not much queer or exceptional in them: that all were so. “Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that’s all. In fifty, a hundred, years the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we. They will see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now, as

Shapes like our own selves hideously multiplied,

and will be afraid to reproduce them.”

“What a terrible line of poetry! ... though I have felt it myself about my fellow-creatures, at morbid times.”

Thus they murmured on, till Sue said more brightly:

“Well—the general question is not our business, and why should we plague ourselves about it? However different our reasons are, we come to the same conclusion: that for us particular two, an irrevocable oath is risky. Then, Jude, let us go home without killing our dream! Yes? How good you are, my friend: you give way to all my whims!”

“They accord very much with my own.”

He gave her a little kiss behind a pillar while the attention of everybody present was taken up in observing the bridal procession entering the vestry; and then they came outside the building. By the door they waited till two or three carriages, which had gone away for a while, returned, and the new husband and wife came into the open daylight. Sue sighed.

“The flowers in the bride’s hand are sadly like the garland which decked the heifers of sacrifice in old times!”

“Still, Sue, it is no worse for the woman than for the man. That’s what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim; just as a woman in a crowd will abuse the man who crushes against her, when he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him.”

“Yes—some are like that, instead of uniting with the man against the common enemy, coercion.” The bride and bridegroom had by this time driven off, and the two moved away with the rest of the idlers. “No—don’t let’s do it,” she continued. “At least, just now.”

They reached home, and passing the window arm in arm saw the widow looking out at them. “Well,” cried their guest when they entered, “I said to myself when I zeed ye coming so loving up to the door, ‘They made up their minds at last, then!’”

They briefly hinted that they had not.

“What—and ha’n’t ye really done it? Chok’ it all, that I should have lived to see a good old saying like ‘marry in haste and repent at leisure’ spoiled like this by you two! ’Tis time I got back again to Marygreen—sakes if tidden—if this is what the new notions be leading us to! Nobody thought o’ being afeard o’ matrimony in my time, nor of much else but a cannon-ball or empty cupboard! Why when I and my poor man were married we thought no more o’t than of a game o’ dubs!”

“Don’t tell the child when he comes in,” whispered Sue nervously. “He’ll think it has all gone on right, and it will be better that he should not be surprised and puzzled. Of course it is only put off for reconsideration. If we are happy as we are, what does it matter to anybody?”

V

The purpose of a chronicler of moods and deeds does not require him to express his personal views upon the grave controversy above given. That the twain were happy—between their times of sadness—was indubitable. And when the unexpected apparition of Jude's child in the house had shown itself to be no such disturbing event as it had looked, but one that brought into their lives a new and tender interest of an ennobling and unselfish kind, it rather helped than injured their happiness.

To be sure, with such pleasing anxious beings as they were, the boy's coming also brought with it much thought for the future, particularly as he seemed at present to be singularly deficient in all the usual hopes of childhood. But the pair tried to dismiss, for a while at least, a too strenuously forward view.

There is in Upper Wessex an old town of nine or ten thousand souls; the town may be called Stoke-Barehills. It stands with its gaunt, unattractive, ancient church, and its new red brick suburb, amid the open, chalk-soiled cornlands, near the middle of an imaginary triangle which has for its three corners the towns of Aldbrickham and Wintoncester, and the important military station of Quartershot. The great western highway from London passes through it, near a point where the road branches into two, merely to unite again some twenty miles further westward. Out of this bifurcation and reunion there used to arise among wheeled travellers, before railway days, endless questions of choice between the respective ways. But the question is now as dead as the scot-and-lot freeholder, the road waggoner, and the mail coachman who disputed it; and probably not a single inhabitant of Stoke-Barehills is now even aware that the two roads which part in his town ever meet again; for nobody now drives up and down the great western highway dally.

The most familiar object in Stoke-Barehills nowadays is its cemetery, standing among some picturesque mediæval ruins beside the railway; the modern chapels, modern tombs, and modern shrubs having a look of

intrusiveness amid the crumbling and ivy-covered decay of the ancient walls.

On a certain day, however, in the particular year which has now been reached by this narrative—the month being early June—the features of the town excite little interest, though many visitors arrive by the trains; some down-trains, in especial, nearly emptying themselves here. It is the week of the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, whose vast encampment spreads over the open outskirts of the town like the tents of an investing army. Rows of marquees, huts, booths, pavilions, arcades, porticoes—every kind of structure short of a permanent one—cover the green field for the space of a square half-mile, and the crowds of arrivals walk through the town in a mass, and make straight for the exhibition ground. The way thereto is lined with shows, stalls, and hawkers on foot, who make a market-place of the whole roadway to the show proper, and lead some of the improvident to lighten their pockets appreciably before they reach the gates of the exhibition they came expressly to see.

It is the popular day, the shilling day, and of the fast arriving excursion trains two from different directions enter the two contiguous railway stations at almost the same minute. One, like several which have preceded it, comes from London: the other by a cross-line from Aldbrickham; and from the London train alights a couple; a short, rather bloated man, with a globular stomach and small legs, resembling a top on two pegs, accompanied by a woman of rather fine figure and rather red face, dressed in black material, and covered with beads from bonnet to skirt, that made her glisten as if clad in chain-mail.

They cast their eyes around. The man was about to hire a fly as some others had done, when the woman said, “Don’t be in such a hurry, Cartlett. It isn’t so very far to the show-yard. Let us walk down the street into the place. Perhaps I can pick up a cheap bit of furniture or old china. It is years since I was here—never since I lived as a girl at Aldbrickham, and used to come across for a trip sometimes with my young man.”

“You can’t carry home furniture by excursion train,” said, in a thick voice, her husband, the landlord of The Three Horns, Lambeth; for they had both come down from the tavern in that “excellent, densely populated, gin-drinking neighbourhood,” which they had occupied ever since the advertisement in those words had attracted them thither. The configuration

of the landlord showed that he, too, like his customers, was becoming affected by the liquors he retailed.

“Then I’ll get it sent, if I see any worth having,” said his wife.

They sauntered on, but had barely entered the town when her attention was attracted by a young couple leading a child, who had come out from the second platform, into which the train from Aldbrickham had steamed. They were walking just in front of the inn-keepers.

“Sakes alive!” said Arabella.

“What’s that?” said Cartlett.

“Who do you think that couple is? Don’t you recognize the man?”

“No.”

“Not from the photos I have showed you?”

“Is it Fawley?”

“Yes—of course.”

“Oh, well. I suppose he was inclined for a little sight-seeing like the rest of us.” Cartlett’s interest in Jude whatever it might have been when Arabella was new to him, had plainly flagged since her charms and her idiosyncrasies, her supernumerary hair-coils, and her optional dimples, were becoming as a tale that is told.

Arabella so regulated her pace and her husband’s as to keep just in the rear of the other three, which it was easy to do without notice in such a stream of pedestrians. Her answers to Cartlett’s remarks were vague and slight, for the group in front interested her more than all the rest of the spectacle.

“They are rather fond of one another and of their child, seemingly,” continued the publican.

“*Their* child! ’Tisn’t their child,” said Arabella with a curious, sudden covetousness. “They haven’t been married long enough for it to be theirs!”

But although the smouldering maternal instinct was strong enough in her to lead her to quash her husband’s conjecture, she was not disposed on second thoughts to be more candid than necessary. Mr. Cartlett had no other idea than that his wife’s child by her first husband was with his grandparents at the Antipodes.

“Oh I suppose not. She looks quite a girl.”

“They are only lovers, or lately married, and have the child in charge, as anybody can see.”

All continued to move ahead. The unwitting Sue and Jude, the couple in question, had determined to make this agricultural exhibition within twenty miles of their own town the occasion of a day's excursion which should combine exercise and amusement with instruction, at small expense. Not regardful of themselves alone, they had taken care to bring Father Time, to try every means of making him kindle and laugh like other boys, though he was to some extent a hindrance to the delightfully unreserved intercourse in their pilgrimages which they so much enjoyed. But they soon ceased to consider him an observer, and went along with that tender attention to each other which the shyest can scarcely disguise, and which these, among entire strangers as they imagined, took less trouble to disguise than they might have done at home. Sue, in her new summer clothes, flexible and light as a bird, her little thumb stuck up by the stem of her white cotton sunshade, went along as if she hardly touched ground, and as if a moderately strong puff of wind would float her over the hedge into the next field. Jude, in his light grey holiday-suit, was really proud of her companionship, not more for her external attractiveness than for her sympathetic words and ways. That complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost the two parts of a single whole.

The pair with their charge passed through the turnstiles, Arabella and her husband not far behind them. When inside the enclosure the publican's wife could see that the two ahead began to take trouble with the youngster, pointing out and explaining the many objects of interest, alive and dead; and a passing sadness would touch their faces at their every failure to disturb his indifference.

“How she sticks to him!” said Arabella. “Oh no—I fancy they are not married, or they wouldn't be so much to one another as that... I wonder!”

“But I thought you said he did marry her?”

“I heard he was going to—that's all, going to make another attempt, after putting it off once or twice... As far as they themselves are concerned they are the only two in the show. I should be ashamed of making myself so silly if I were he!”

“I don’t see as how there’s anything remarkable in their behaviour. I should never have noticed their being in love, if you hadn’t said so.”

“You never see anything,” she rejoined. Nevertheless Cartlett’s view of the lovers’ or married pair’s conduct was undoubtedly that of the general crowd, whose attention seemed to be in no way attracted by what Arabella’s sharpened vision discerned.

“He’s charmed by her as if she were some fairy!” continued Arabella. “See how he looks round at her, and lets his eyes rest on her. I am inclined to think that she don’t care for him quite so much as he does for her. She’s not a particular warm-hearted creature to my thinking, though she cares for him pretty middling much—as much as she’s able to; and he could make her heart ache a bit if he liked to try—which he’s too simple to do. There—now they are going across to the cart-horse sheds. Come along.”

“I don’t want to see the cart-horses. It is no business of ours to follow these two. If we have come to see the show let us see it in our own way, as they do in theirs.”

“Well—suppose we agree to meet somewhere in an hour’s time—say at that refreshment tent over there, and go about independent? Then you can look at what you choose to, and so can I.”

Cartlett was not loath to agree to this, and they parted—he proceeding to the shed where malting processes were being exhibited, and Arabella in the direction taken by Jude and Sue. Before, however, she had regained their wake a laughing face met her own, and she was confronted by Anny, the friend of her girlhood.

Anny had burst out in hearty laughter at the mere fact of the chance encounter. “I am still living down there,” she said, as soon as she was composed. “I am soon going to be married, but my intended couldn’t come up here to-day. But there’s lots of us come by excursion, though I’ve lost the rest of ’em for the present.”

“Have you met Jude and his young woman, or wife, or whatever she is? I saw ’em by now.”

“No. Not a glimpse of un for years!”

“Well, they are close by here somewhere. Yes—there they are—by that grey horse!”

“Oh, that’s his present young woman—wife did you say? Has he married again?”

“I don’t know.”

“She’s pretty, isn’t she!”

“Yes—nothing to complain of; or jump at. Not much to depend on, though; a slim, fidgety little thing like that.”

“He’s a nice-looking chap, too! You ought to ha’ stuck to un, Arabella.”

“I don’t know but I ought,” murmured she.

Anny laughed. “That’s you, Arabella! Always wanting another man than your own.”

“Well, and what woman don’t I should like to know? As for that body with him—she don’t know what love is—at least what I call love! I can see in her face she don’t.”

“And perhaps, Abby dear, you don’t know what she calls love.”

“I’m sure I don’t wish to! ... Ah—they are making for the art department. I should like to see some pictures myself. Suppose we go that way?— Why, if all Wessex isn’t here, I verily believe! There’s Dr. Vilbert. Haven’t seen him for years, and he’s not looking a day older than when I used to know him. How do you do, Physician? I was just saying that you don’t look a day older than when you knew me as a girl.”

“Simply the result of taking my own pills regular, ma’am. Only two and threepence a box—warranted efficacious by the Government stamp. Now let me advise you to purchase the same immunity from the ravages of time by following my example? Only two-and-three.”

The physician had produced a box from his waistcoat pocket, and Arabella was induced to make the purchase.

“At the same time,” continued he, when the pills were paid for, “you have the advantage of me, Mrs.— Surely not Mrs. Fawley, once Miss Donn, of the vicinity of Marygreen?”

“Yes. But Mrs. Cartlett now.”

“Ah—you lost him, then? Promising young fellow! A pupil of mine, you know. I taught him the dead languages. And believe me, he soon knew nearly as much as I.”

“I lost him; but not as you think,” said Arabella dryly. “The lawyers untied us. There he is, look, alive and lusty; along with that young woman, entering the art exhibition.”

“Ah—dear me! Fond of her, apparently.”

“They *say* they are cousins.”

“Cousinship is a great convenience to their feelings, I should say?”

“Yes. So her husband thought, no doubt, when he divorced her... Shall we look at the pictures, too?”

The trio followed across the green and entered. Jude and Sue, with the child, unaware of the interest they were exciting, had gone up to a model at one end of the building, which they regarded with considerable attention for a long while before they went on. Arabella and her friends came to it in due course, and the inscription it bore was: “Model of Cardinal College, Christminster; by J. Fawley and S. F. M. Bridehead.”

“Admiring their own work,” said Arabella. “How like Jude—always thinking of colleges and Christminster, instead of attending to his business!”

They glanced cursorily at the pictures, and proceeded to the band-stand. When they had stood a little while listening to the music of the military performers, Jude, Sue, and the child came up on the other side. Arabella did not care if they should recognize her; but they were too deeply absorbed in their own lives, as translated into emotion by the military band, to perceive her under her beaded veil. She walked round the outside of the listening throng, passing behind the lovers, whose movements had an unexpected fascination for her to-day. Scrutinizing them narrowly from the rear she noticed that Jude’s hand sought Sue’s as they stood, the two standing close together so as to conceal, as they supposed, this tacit expression of their mutual responsiveness.

“Silly fools—like two children!” Arabella whispered to herself morosely, as she rejoined her companions, with whom she preserved a preoccupied silence.

Anny meanwhile had jokingly remarked to Vilbert on Arabella’s hankering interest in her first husband.

“Now,” said the physician to Arabella, apart; “do you want anything such as this, Mrs. Cartlett? It is not compounded out of my regular

pharmacopœia, but I am sometimes asked for such a thing.” He produced a small phial of clear liquid. “A love-philtre, such as was used by the ancients with great effect. I found it out by study of their writings, and have never known it to fail.”

“What is it made of?” asked Arabella curiously.

“Well—a distillation of the juices of doves’ hearts—otherwise pigeons’—is one of the ingredients. It took nearly a hundred hearts to produce that small bottle full.”

“How do you get pigeons enough?”

“To tell a secret, I get a piece of rock-salt, of which pigeons are inordinately fond, and place it in a dovecot on my roof. In a few hours the birds come to it from all points of the compass—east, west, north, and south—and thus I secure as many as I require. You use the liquid by contriving that the desired man shall take about ten drops of it in his drink. But remember, all this is told you because I gather from your questions that you mean to be a purchaser. You must keep faith with me?”

“Very well—I don’t mind a bottle—to give some friend or other to try it on her young man.” She produced five shillings, the price asked, and slipped the phial in her capacious bosom. Saying presently that she was due at an appointment with her husband, she sauntered away towards the refreshment bar, Jude, his companion, and the child having gone on to the horticultural tent, where Arabella caught a glimpse of them standing before a group of roses in bloom.

She waited a few minutes observing them, and then proceeded to join her spouse with no very amiable sentiments. She found him seated on a stool by the bar, talking to one of the gaily dressed maids who had served him with spirits.

“I should think you had enough of this business at home!” Arabella remarked gloomily. “Surely you didn’t come fifty miles from your own bar to stick in another? Come, take me round the show, as other men do their wives! Dammy, one would think you were a young bachelor, with nobody to look after but yourself!”

“But we agreed to meet here; and what could I do but wait?”

“Well, now we have met, come along,” she returned, ready to quarrel with the sun for shining on her. And they left the tent together, this pot-

bellied man and florid woman, in the antipathetic, recriminatory mood of the average husband and wife of Christendom.

In the meantime the more exceptional couple and the boy still lingered in the pavilion of flowers—an enchanted palace to their appreciative taste—Sue’s usually pale cheeks reflecting the pink of the tinted roses at which she gazed; for the gay sights, the air, the music, and the excitement of a day’s outing with Jude had quickened her blood and made her eyes sparkle with vivacity. She adored roses, and what Arabella had witnessed was Sue detaining Jude almost against his will while she learnt the names of this variety and that, and put her face within an inch of their blooms to smell them.

“I should like to push my face quite into them—the dears!” she had said. “But I suppose it is against the rules to touch them—isn’t it, Jude?”

“Yes, you baby,” said he: and then playfully gave her a little push, so that her nose went among the petals.

“The policeman will be down on us, and I shall say it was my husband’s fault!”

Then she looked up at him, and smiled in a way that told so much to Arabella.

“Happy?” he murmured.

She nodded.

“Why? Because you have come to the great Wessex Agricultural Show—or because *we* have come?”

“You are always trying to make me confess to all sorts of absurdities. Because I am improving my mind, of course, by seeing all these steam-ploughs, and threshing-machines, and chaff-cutters, and cows, and pigs, and sheep.”

Jude was quite content with a baffle from his ever evasive companion. But when he had forgotten that he had put the question, and because he no longer wished for an answer, she went on: “I feel that we have returned to Greek joyousness, and have blinded ourselves to sickness and sorrow, and have forgotten what twenty-five centuries have taught the race since their time, as one of your Christminster luminaries says... There is one immediate shadow, however—only one.” And she looked at the aged child,

whom, though they had taken him to everything likely to attract a young intelligence, they had utterly failed to interest.

He knew what they were saying and thinking. "I am very, very sorry, Father and Mother," he said. "But please don't mind!—I can't help it. I should like the flowers very very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd be all withered in a few days!"

VI

The unnoticed lives that the pair had hitherto led began, from the day of the suspended wedding onwards, to be observed and discussed by other persons than Arabella. The society of Spring Street and the neighbourhood generally did not understand, and probably could not have been made to understand, Sue and Jude's private minds, emotions, positions, and fears. The curious facts of a child coming to them unexpectedly, who called Jude "Father," and Sue "Mother," and a hitch in a marriage ceremony intended for quietness to be performed at a registrar's office, together with rumours of the undefended cases in the law-courts, bore only one translation to plain minds.

Little Time—for though he was formally turned into "Jude," the apt nickname stuck to him—would come home from school in the evening, and repeat inquiries and remarks that had been made to him by the other boys; and cause Sue, and Jude when he heard them, a great deal of pain and sadness.

The result was that shortly after the attempt at the registrar's the pair went off—to London it was believed—for several days, hiring somebody to look to the boy. When they came back they let it be understood indirectly, and with total indifference and weariness of mien, that they were legally married at last. Sue, who had previously been called Mrs. Bridehead now openly adopted the name of Mrs. Fawley. Her dull, cowed, and listless manner for days seemed to substantiate all this.

But the mistake (as it was called) of their going away so secretly to do the business, kept up much of the mystery of their lives; and they found that they made not such advances with their neighbours as they had expected to do thereby. A living mystery was not much less interesting than a dead scandal.

The baker's lad and the grocer's boy, who at first had used to lift their hats gallantly to Sue when they came to execute their errands, in these days

no longer took the trouble to render her that homage, and the neighbouring artizans' wives looked straight along the pavement when they encountered her.

Nobody molested them, it is true; but an oppressive atmosphere began to encircle their souls, particularly after their excursion to the show, as if that visit had brought some evil influence to bear on them. And their temperaments were precisely of a kind to suffer from this atmosphere, and to be indisposed to lighten it by vigorous and open statements. Their apparent attempt at reparation had come too late to be effective.

The headstone and epitaph orders fell off: and two or three months later, when autumn came, Jude perceived that he would have to return to journey-work again, a course all the more unfortunate just now, in that he had not as yet cleared off the debt he had unavoidably incurred in the payment of the law-costs of the previous year.

One evening he sat down to share the common meal with Sue and the child as usual. "I am thinking," he said to her, "that I'll hold on here no longer. The life suits us, certainly; but if we could get away to a place where we are unknown, we should be lighter hearted, and have a better chance. And so I am afraid we must break it up here, however awkward for you, poor dear!"

Sue was always much affected at a picture of herself as an object of pity, and she saddened.

"Well—I am not sorry," said she presently. "I am much depressed by the way they look at me here. And you have been keeping on this house and furniture entirely for me and the boy! You don't want it yourself, and the expense is unnecessary. But whatever we do, wherever we go, you won't take him away from me, Jude dear? I could not let him go now! The cloud upon his young mind makes him so pathetic to me; I do hope to lift it some day! And he loves me so. You won't take him away from me?"

"Certainly I won't, dear little girl! We'll get nice lodgings, wherever we go. I shall be moving about probably—getting a job here and a job there."

"I shall do something too, of course, till—till— Well, now I can't be useful in the lettering it behoves me to turn my hand to something else."

"Don't hurry about getting employment," he said regretfully. "I don't want you to do that. I wish you wouldn't, Sue. The boy and yourself are

enough for you to attend to.”

There was a knock at the door, and Jude answered it. Sue could hear the conversation:

“Is Mr. Fawley at home? ... Biles and Willis, the building contractors, sent me to know if you’ll undertake the relettering of the ten commandments in a little church they’ve been restoring lately in the country near here.”

Jude reflected, and said he could undertake it.

“It is not a very artistic job,” continued the messenger. “The clergyman is a very old-fashioned chap, and he has refused to let anything more be done to the church than cleaning and repairing.”

“Excellent old man!” said Sue to herself, who was sentimentally opposed to the horrors of over-restoration.

“The Ten Commandments are fixed to the east end,” the messenger went on, “and they want doing up with the rest of the wall there, since he won’t have them carted off as old materials belonging to the contractor in the usual way of the trade.”

A bargain as to terms was struck, and Jude came indoors. “There, you see,” he said cheerfully. “One more job yet, at any rate, and you can help in it—at least you can try. We shall have all the church to ourselves, as the rest of the work is finished.”

Next day Jude went out to the church, which was only two miles off. He found that what the contractor’s clerk had said was true. The tables of the Jewish law towered sternly over the utensils of Christian grace, as the chief ornament of the chancel end, in the fine dry style of the last century. And as their framework was constructed of ornamental plaster they could not be taken down for repair. A portion, crumbled by damp, required renewal; and when this had been done, and the whole cleansed, he began to renew the lettering. On the second morning Sue came to see what assistance she could render, and also because they liked to be together.

The silence and emptiness of the building gave her confidence, and, standing on a safe low platform erected by Jude, which she was nevertheless timid at mounting, she began painting in the letters of the first Table while he set about mending a portion of the second. She was quite pleased at her powers; she had acquired them in the days she painted

illuminated texts for the church-fitting shop at Christminster. Nobody seemed likely to disturb them; and the pleasant twitter of birds, and rustle of October leafage, came in through an open window, and mingled with their talk.

They were not, however, to be left thus snug and peaceful for long. About half-past twelve there came footsteps on the gravel without. The old vicar and his churchwarden entered, and, coming up to see what was being done, seemed surprised to discover that a young woman was assisting. They passed on into an aisle, at which time the door again opened, and another figure entered—a small one, that of little Time, who was crying. Sue had told him where he might find her between school-hours, if he wished. She came down from her perch, and said, “What’s the matter, my dear?”

“I couldn’t stay to eat my dinner in school, because they said—” He described how some boys had taunted him about his nominal mother, and Sue, grieved, expressed her indignation to Jude aloft. The child went into the churchyard, and Sue returned to her work. Meanwhile the door had opened again, and there shuffled in with a businesslike air the white-aproned woman who cleaned the church. Sue recognized her as one who had friends in Spring Street, whom she visited. The church-cleaner looked at Sue, gaped, and lifted her hands; she had evidently recognized Jude’s companion as the latter had recognized her. Next came two ladies, and after talking to the charwoman they also moved forward, and as Sue stood reaching upward, watched her hand tracing the letters, and critically regarded her person in relief against the white wall, till she grew so nervous that she trembled visibly.

They went back to where the others were standing, talking in undertones: and one said—Sue could not hear which—“She’s his wife, I suppose?”

“Some say Yes: some say No,” was the reply from the charwoman.

“Not? Then she ought to be, or somebody’s—that’s very clear!”

“They’ve only been married a very few weeks, whether or no.”

“A strange pair to be painting the Two Tables! I wonder Biles and Willis could think of such a thing as hiring those!”

The churchwarden supposed that Biles and Willis knew of nothing wrong, and then the other, who had been talking to the old woman, explained what she meant by calling them strange people.

The probable drift of the subdued conversation which followed was made plain by the churchwarden breaking into an anecdote, in a voice that everybody in the church could hear, though obviously suggested by the present situation:

“Well, now, it is a curious thing, but my grandfather told me a strange tale of a most immoral case that happened at the painting of the Commandments in a church out by Gaymead—which is quite within a walk of this one. In them days Commandments were mostly done in gilt letters on a black ground, and that’s how they were out where I say, before the owld church was rebuiled. It must have been somewhere about a hundred years ago that them Commandments wanted doing up just as ours do here, and they had to get men from Aldbrickham to do ’em. Now they wished to get the job finished by a particular Sunday, so the men had to work late Saturday night, against their will, for overtime was not paid then as ’tis now. There was no true religion in the country at that date, neither among pa’sons, clerks, nor people, and to keep the men up to their work the vicar had to let ’em have plenty of drink during the afternoon. As evening drawed on they sent for some more themselves; rum, by all account. It got later and later, and they got more and more fuddled, till at last they went a-putting their rum-bottle and rummers upon the communion table, and drawed up a trestle or two, and sate round comfortable and poured out again right hearty bumpers. No sooner had they tossed off their glasses than, so the story goes, they fell down senseless, one and all. How long they bode so they didn’t know, but when they came to themselves there was a terrible thunder-storm a-raging, and they seemed to see in the gloom a dark figure with very thin legs and a curious voot, a-standing on the ladder, and finishing their work. When it got daylight they could see that the work was really finished, and couldn’t at all mind finishing it themselves. They went home, and the next thing they heard was that a great scandal had been caused in the church that Sunday morning, for when the people came and service began, all saw that the Ten Commandments wez painted with the ‘nots’ left out. Decent people wouldn’t attend service there for a long time, and the Bishop had to be sent for to reconsecrate the church. That’s the tradition as I used to hear it as a child. You must take it for what it is wo’th, but this case to-day has reminded me o’t, as I say.”

The visitors gave one more glance, as if to see whether Jude and Sue had left the “nots” out likewise, and then severally left the church, even the old

woman at last. Sue and Jude, who had not stopped working, sent back the child to school, and remained without speaking; till, looking at her narrowly, he found she had been crying silently.

“Never mind, comrade!” he said. “I know what it is!”

“I can’t *bear* that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless, and actually become immoral!”

“Never be cast down! It was only a funny story.”

“Ah, but we suggested it! I am afraid I have done you mischief, Jude, instead of helping you by coming!”

To have suggested such a story was certainly not very exhilarating, in a serious view of their position. However, in a few minutes Sue seemed to see that their position this morning had a ludicrous side, and wiping her eyes she laughed.

“It is droll, after all,” she said, “that we two, of all people, with our queer history, should happen to be here painting the Ten Commandments! You a reprobate, and I—in my condition... O dear!” ... And with her hand over her eyes she laughed again silently and intermittently, till she was quite weak.

“That’s better,” said Jude gaily. “Now we are right again, aren’t we, little girl!”

“Oh but it is serious, all the same!” she sighed as she took up the brush and righted herself. “But do you see they don’t think we are married? They *won’t* believe it! It is extraordinary!”

“I don’t care whether they think so or not,” said Jude. “I shan’t take any more trouble to make them.”

They sat down to lunch—which they had brought with them not to hinder time—and having eaten it, were about to set to work anew when a man entered the church, and Jude recognized in him the contractor Willis. He beckoned to Jude, and spoke to him apart.

“Here—I’ve just had a complaint about this,” he said, with rather breathless awkwardness. “I don’t wish to go into the matter—as of course I didn’t know what was going on—but I am afraid I must ask you and her to

leave off, and let somebody else finish this! It is best, to avoid all unpleasantness. I'll pay you for the week, all the same."

Jude was too independent to make any fuss; and the contractor paid him, and left. Jude picked up his tools, and Sue cleansed her brush. Then their eyes met.

"How could we be so simple as to suppose we might do this!" said she, dropping to her tragic note. "Of course we ought not—I ought not—to have come!"

"I had no idea that anybody was going to intrude into such a lonely place and see us!" Jude returned. "Well, it can't be helped, dear; and of course I wouldn't wish to injure Willis's trade-connection by staying." They sat down passively for a few minutes, proceeded out of the church, and overtaking the boy pursued their thoughtful way to Aldbrickham.

Fawley had still a pretty zeal in the cause of education, and, as was natural with his experiences, he was active in furthering "equality of opportunity" by any humble means open to him. He had joined an Artizans' Mutual Improvement Society established in the town about the time of his arrival there; its members being young men of all creeds and denominations, including Churchmen, Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Positivists, and others—Agnostics had scarcely been heard of at this time—their one common wish to enlarge their minds forming a sufficiently close bond of union. The subscription was small, and the room homely; and Jude's activity, uncustomary acquirements, and, above all, singular intuition on what to read and how to set about it—begotten of his years of struggle against malignant stars—had led to his being placed on the committee.

A few evenings after his dismissal from the church repairs, and before he had obtained any more work to do, he went to attend a meeting of the aforesaid committee. It was late when he arrived: all the others had come, and as he entered they looked dubiously at him, and hardly uttered a word of greeting. He guessed that something bearing on himself had been either discussed or mooted. Some ordinary business was transacted, and it was disclosed that the number of subscriptions had shown a sudden falling off for that quarter. One member—a really well-meaning and upright man—began speaking in enigmas about certain possible causes: that it behoved them to look well into their constitution; for if the committee were not

respected, and had not at least, in their differences, a common standard of *conduct*, they would bring the institution to the ground. Nothing further was said in Jude's presence, but he knew what this meant; and turning to the table wrote a note resigning his office there and then.

Thus the supersensitive couple were more and more impelled to go away. And then bills were sent in, and the question arose, what could Jude do with his great-aunt's heavy old furniture, if he left the town to travel he knew not whither? This, and the necessity of ready money, compelled him to decide on an auction, much as he would have preferred to keep the venerable goods.

The day of the sale came on; and Sue for the last time cooked her own, the child's, and Jude's breakfast in the little house he had furnished. It chanced to be a wet day; moreover Sue was unwell, and not wishing to desert her poor Jude in such gloomy circumstances, for he was compelled to stay awhile, she acted on the suggestion of the auctioneer's man, and ensconced herself in an upper room, which could be emptied of its effects, and so kept closed to the bidders. Here Jude discovered her; and with the child, and their few trunks, baskets, and bundles, and two chairs and a table that were not in the sale, the two sat in meditative talk.

Footsteps began stamping up and down the bare stairs, the comers inspecting the goods, some of which were of so quaint and ancient a make as to acquire an adventitious value as art. Their door was tried once or twice, and to guard themselves against intrusion Jude wrote "Private" on a scrap of paper, and stuck it upon the panel.

They soon found that, instead of the furniture, their own personal histories and past conduct began to be discussed to an unexpected and intolerable extent by the intending bidders. It was not till now that they really discovered what a fools' paradise of supposed unrecognition they had been living in of late. Sue silently took her companion's hand, and with eyes on each other they heard these passing remarks—the quaint and mysterious personality of Father Time being a subject which formed a large ingredient in the hints and innuendoes. At length the auction began in the room below, whence they could hear each familiar article knocked down, the highly prized ones cheaply, the unconsidered at an unexpected price.

"People don't understand us," he sighed heavily. "I am glad we have decided to go."

“The question is, where to?”

“It ought to be to London. There one can live as one chooses.”

“No—not London, dear! I know it well. We should be unhappy there.”

“Why?”

“Can’t you think?”

“Because Arabella is there?”

“That’s the chief reason.”

“But in the country I shall always be uneasy lest there should be some more of our late experience. And I don’t care to lessen it by explaining, for one thing, all about the boy’s history. To cut him off from his past I have determined to keep silence. I am sickened of ecclesiastical work now; and I shouldn’t like to accept it, if offered me!”

“You ought to have learnt classic. Gothic is barbaric art, after all. Pugin was wrong, and Wren was right. Remember the interior of Christminster Cathedral—almost the first place in which we looked in each other’s faces. Under the picturesqueness of those Norman details one can see the grotesque childishness of uncouth people trying to imitate the vanished Roman forms, remembered by dim tradition only.”

“Yes—you have half-converted me to that view by what you have said before. But one can work, and despise what one does. I must do something, if not church-gothic.”

“I wish we could both follow an occupation in which personal circumstances don’t count,” she said, smiling up wistfully. “I am as disqualified for teaching as you are for ecclesiastical art. You must fall back upon railway stations, bridges, theatres, music-halls, hotels—everything that has no connection with conduct.”

“I am not skilled in those... I ought to take to bread-baking. I grew up in the baking business with aunt, you know. But even a baker must be conventional, to get customers.”

“Unless he keeps a cake and gingerbread stall at markets and fairs, where people are gloriously indifferent to everything except the quality of the goods.”

Their thoughts were diverted by the voice of the auctioneer: “Now this antique oak settle—a unique example of old English furniture, worthy the

attention of all collectors!”

“That was my great-grandfather’s,” said Jude. “I wish we could have kept the poor old thing!”

One by one the articles went, and the afternoon passed away. Jude and the other two were getting tired and hungry, but after the conversation they had heard they were shy of going out while the purchasers were in their line of retreat. However, the later lots drew on, and it became necessary to emerge into the rain soon, to take on Sue’s things to their temporary lodging.

“Now the next lot: two pairs of pigeons, all alive and plump—a nice pie for somebody for next Sunday’s dinner!”

The impending sale of these birds had been the most trying suspense of the whole afternoon. They were Sue’s pets, and when it was found that they could not possibly be kept, more sadness was caused than by parting from all the furniture. Sue tried to think away her tears as she heard the trifling sum that her dears were deemed to be worth advanced by small stages to the price at which they were finally knocked down. The purchaser was a neighbouring poulterer, and they were unquestionably doomed to die before the next market day.

Noting her dissembled distress Jude kissed her, and said it was time to go and see if the lodgings were ready. He would go on with the boy, and fetch her soon.

When she was left alone she waited patiently, but Jude did not come back. At last she started, the coast being clear, and on passing the poulterer’s shop, not far off, she saw her pigeons in a hamper by the door. An emotion at sight of them, assisted by the growing dusk of evening, caused her to act on impulse, and first looking around her quickly, she pulled out the peg which fastened down the cover, and went on. The cover was lifted from within, and the pigeons flew away with a clatter that brought the chagrined poulterer cursing and swearing to the door.

Sue reached the lodging trembling, and found Jude and the boy making it comfortable for her. “Do the buyers pay before they bring away the things?” she asked breathlessly.

“Yes, I think. Why?”

“Because, then, I’ve done such a wicked thing!” And she explained, in bitter contrition.

“I shall have to pay the poulterer for them, if he doesn’t catch them,” said Jude. “But never mind. Don’t fret about it, dear.”

“It was so foolish of me! Oh why should Nature’s law be mutual butchery!”

“Is it so, Mother?” asked the boy intently.

“Yes!” said Sue vehemently.

“Well, they must take their chance, now, poor things,” said Jude. “As soon as the sale-account is wound up, and our bills paid, we go.”

“Where do we go to?” asked Time, in suspense.

“We must sail under sealed orders, that nobody may trace us... We mustn’t go to Alfredston, or to Melchester, or to Shaston, or to Christminster. Apart from those we may go anywhere.”

“Why mustn’t we go there, Father?”

“Because of a cloud that has gathered over us; though ‘we have wronged no man, corrupted no man, defrauded no man!’ Though perhaps we have ‘done that which was right in our own eyes.’”

VII

From that week Jude Fawley and Sue walked no more in the town of Aldbrickham.

Whither they had gone nobody knew, chiefly because nobody cared to know. Any one sufficiently curious to trace the steps of such an obscure pair might have discovered without great trouble that they had taken advantage of his adaptive craftsmanship to enter on a shifting, almost nomadic, life, which was not without its pleasantness for a time.

Wherever Jude heard of free-stone work to be done, thither he went, choosing by preference places remote from his old haunts and Sue's. He laboured at a job, long or briefly, till it was finished; and then moved on.

Two whole years and a half passed thus. Sometimes he might have been found shaping the mullions of a country mansion, sometimes setting the parapet of a town-hall, sometimes ashlaring an hotel at Sandbourne, sometimes a museum at Casterbridge, sometimes as far down as Exonbury, sometimes at Stoke-Barehills. Later still he was at Kennetbridge, a thriving town not more than a dozen miles south of Marygreen, this being his nearest approach to the village where he was known; for he had a sensitive dread of being questioned as to his life and fortunes by those who had been acquainted with him during his ardent young manhood of study and promise, and his brief and unhappy married life at that time.

At some of these places he would be detained for months, at others only a few weeks. His curious and sudden antipathy to ecclesiastical work, both episcopal and nonconformist, which had risen in him when suffering under a smarting sense of misconception, remained with him in cold blood, less from any fear of renewed censure than from an ultra-conscientiousness which would not allow him to seek a living out of those who would disapprove of his ways; also, too, from a sense of inconsistency between his former dogmas and his present practice, hardly a shred of the beliefs with which he had first gone up to Christminster now remaining with him. He

was mentally approaching the position which Sue had occupied when he first met her.

On a Saturday evening in May, nearly three years after Arabella's recognition of Sue and himself at the agricultural show, some of those who there encountered each other met again.

It was the spring fair at Kennetbridge, and, though this ancient trade-meeting had much dwindled from its dimensions of former times, the long straight street of the borough presented a lively scene about midday. At this hour a light trap, among other vehicles, was driven into the town by the north road, and up to the door of a temperance inn. There alighted two women, one the driver, an ordinary country person, the other a finely built figure in the deep mourning of a widow. Her sombre suit, of pronounced cut, caused her to appear a little out of place in the medley and bustle of a provincial fair.

"I will just find out where it is, Anny," said the widow-lady to her companion, when the horse and cart had been taken by a man who came forward: "and then I'll come back, and meet you here; and we'll go in and have something to eat and drink. I begin to feel quite a sinking."

"With all my heart," said the other. "Though I would sooner have put up at the Chequers or The Jack. You can't get much at these temperance houses."

"Now, don't you give way to gluttonous desires, my child," said the woman in weeds reprovingly. "This is the proper place. Very well: we'll meet in half an hour, unless you come with me to find out where the site of the new chapel is?"

"I don't care to. You can tell me."

The companions then went their several ways, the one in crape walking firmly along with a mien of disconnection from her miscellaneous surroundings. Making inquiries she came to a hoarding, within which were excavations denoting the foundations of a building; and on the boards without one or two large posters announcing that the foundation-stone of the chapel about to be erected would be laid that afternoon at three o'clock by a London preacher of great popularity among his body.

Having ascertained thus much the immensely weeded widow retraced her steps, and gave herself leisure to observe the movements of the fair. By and

by her attention was arrested by a little stall of cakes and ginger-breads, standing between the more pretentious erections of trestles and canvas. It was covered with an immaculate cloth, and tended by a young woman apparently unused to the business, she being accompanied by a boy with an octogenarian face, who assisted her.

“Upon my—senses!” murmured the widow to herself. “His wife Sue—if she is so!” She drew nearer to the stall. “How do you do, Mrs. Fawley?” she said blandly.

Sue changed colour and recognized Arabella through the crape veil.

“How are you, Mrs. Cartlett?” she said stiffly. And then perceiving Arabella’s garb her voice grew sympathetic in spite of herself. “What?—you have lost—”

“My poor husband. Yes. He died suddenly, six weeks ago, leaving me none too well off, though he was a kind husband to me. But whatever profit there is in public-house keeping goes to them that brew the liquors, and not to them that retail ’em... And you, my little old man! You don’t know me, I expect?”

“Yes, I do. You be the woman I thought wer my mother for a bit, till I found you wasn’t,” replied Father Time, who had learned to use the Wessex tongue quite naturally by now.

“All right. Never mind. I am a friend.”

“Juey,” said Sue suddenly, “go down to the station platform with this tray—there’s another train coming in, I think.”

When he was gone Arabella continued: “He’ll never be a beauty, will he, poor chap! Does he know I am his mother really?”

“No. He thinks there is some mystery about his parentage—that’s all. Jude is going to tell him when he is a little older.”

“But how do you come to be doing this? I am surprised.”

“It is only a temporary occupation—a fancy of ours while we are in a difficulty.”

“Then you are living with him still?”

“Yes.”

“Married?”

“Of course.”

“Any children?”

“Two.”

“And another coming soon, I see.”

Sue writhed under the hard and direct questioning, and her tender little mouth began to quiver.

“Lord—I mean goodness gracious—what is there to cry about? Some folks would be proud enough!”

“It is not that I am ashamed—not as you think! But it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world—so presumptuous—that I question my right to do it sometimes!”

“Take it easy, my dear... But you don’t tell me why you do such a thing as this? Jude used to be a proud sort of chap—above any business almost, leave alone keeping a standing.”

“Perhaps my husband has altered a little since then. I am sure he is not proud now!” And Sue’s lips quivered again. “I am doing this because he caught a chill early in the year while putting up some stonework of a music-hall, at Quartershot, which he had to do in the rain, the work having to be executed by a fixed day. He is better than he was; but it has been a long, weary time! We have had an old widow friend with us to help us through it; but she’s leaving soon.”

“Well, I am respectable too, thank God, and of a serious way of thinking since my loss. Why did you choose to sell gingerbreads?”

“That’s a pure accident. He was brought up to the baking business, and it occurred to him to try his hand at these, which he can make without coming out of doors. We call them Christminster cakes. They are a great success.”

“I never saw any like ’em. Why, they are windows and towers, and pinnacles! And upon my word they are very nice.” She had helped herself, and was unceremoniously munching one of the cakes.

“Yes. They are reminiscences of the Christminster Colleges. Traceried windows, and cloisters, you see. It was a whim of his to do them in pastry.”

“Still harping on Christminster—even in his cakes!” laughed Arabella. “Just like Jude. A ruling passion. What a queer fellow he is, and always will be!”

Sue sighed, and she looked her distress at hearing him criticized.

“Don’t you think he is? Come now; you do, though you are so fond of him!”

“Of course Christminster is a sort of fixed vision with him, which I suppose he’ll never be cured of believing in. He still thinks it a great centre of high and fearless thought, instead of what it is, a nest of commonplace schoolmasters whose characteristic is timid obsequiousness to tradition.”

Arabella was quizzing Sue with more regard of how she was speaking than of what she was saying. “How odd to hear a woman selling cakes talk like that!” she said. “Why don’t you go back to school-keeping?”

She shook her head. “They won’t have me.”

“Because of the divorce, I suppose?”

“That and other things. And there is no reason to wish it. We gave up all ambition, and were never so happy in our lives till his illness came.”

“Where are you living?”

“I don’t care to say.”

“Here in Kennetbridge?”

Sue’s manner showed Arabella that her random guess was right.

“Here comes the boy back again,” continued Arabella. “My boy and Jude’s!”

Sue’s eyes darted a spark. “You needn’t throw that in my face!” she cried.

“Very well—though I half-feel as if I should like to have him with me! ... But Lord, I don’t want to take him from ’ee—ever I should sin to speak so profane—though I should think you must have enough of your own! He’s in very good hands, that I know; and I am not the woman to find fault with what the Lord has ordained. I’ve reached a more resigned frame of mind.”

“Indeed! I wish I had been able to do so.”

“You should try,” replied the widow, from the serene heights of a soul conscious not only of spiritual but of social superiority. “I make no boast of my awakening, but I’m not what I was. After Cartlett’s death I was passing the chapel in the street next ours, and went into it for shelter from a shower of rain. I felt a need of some sort of support under my loss, and, as ’twas righter than gin, I took to going there regular, and found it a great comfort. But I’ve left London now, you know, and at present I am living at

Alfredston, with my friend Anny, to be near my own old country. I'm not come here to the fair to-day. There's to be the foundation-stone of a new chapel laid this afternoon by a popular London preacher, and I drove over with Anny. Now I must go back to meet her."

Then Arabella wished Sue good-bye, and went on.

VIII

In the afternoon Sue and the other people bustling about Kennetbridge fair could hear singing inside the placarded hoarding farther down the street. Those who peeped through the opening saw a crowd of persons in broadcloth, with hymn-books in their hands, standing round the excavations for the new chapel-walls. Arabella Cartlett and her weeds stood among them. She had a clear, powerful voice, which could be distinctly heard with the rest, rising and falling to the tune, her inflated bosom being also seen doing likewise.

It was two hours later on the same day that Anny and Mrs. Cartlett, having had tea at the Temperance Hotel, started on their return journey across the high and open country which stretches between Kennetbridge and Alfredston. Arabella was in a thoughtful mood; but her thoughts were not of the new chapel, as Anny at first surmised.

“No—it is something else,” at last said Arabella sullenly. “I came here to-day never thinking of anybody but poor Cartlett, or of anything but spreading the Gospel by means of this new tabernacle they’ve begun this afternoon. But something has happened to turn my mind another way quite. Anny, I’ve heard of un again, and I’ve seen *her!*”

“Who?”

“I’ve heard of Jude, and I’ve seen his wife. And ever since, do what I will, and though I sung the hymns wi’ all my strength, I have not been able to help thinking about ’n; which I’ve no right to do as a chapel member.”

“Can’t ye fix your mind upon what was said by the London preacher to-day, and try to get rid of your wandering fancies that way?”

“I do. But my wicked heart will ramble off in spite of myself!”

“Well—I know what it is to have a wanton mind o’ my own, too! If you on’y knew what I do dream sometimes o’ nights quite against my wishes, you’d say I had my struggles!” (Anny, too, had grown rather serious of late, her lover having jilted her.)

“What shall I do about it?” urged Arabella morbidly.

“You could take a lock of your late-lost husband’s hair, and have it made into a mourning brooch, and look at it every hour of the day.”

“I haven’t a morsel!—and if I had ’twould be no good... After all that’s said about the comforts of this religion, I wish I had Jude back again!”

“You must fight valiant against the feeling, since he’s another’s. And I’ve heard that another good thing for it, when it afflicts voluptuous widows, is to go to your husband’s grave in the dusk of evening, and stand a long while a-bowed down.”

“Pooh! I know as well as you what I should do; only I don’t do it!”

They drove in silence along the straight road till they were within the horizon of Marygreen, which lay not far to the left of their route. They came to the junction of the highway and the cross-lane leading to that village, whose church-tower could be seen athwart the hollow. When they got yet farther on, and were passing the lonely house in which Arabella and Jude had lived during the first months of their marriage, and where the pig-killing had taken place, she could control herself no longer.

“He’s more mine than hers!” she burst out. “What right has she to him, I should like to know! I’d take him from her if I could!”

“Fie, Abby! And your husband only six weeks gone! Pray against it!”

“Be damned if I do! Feelings are feelings! I won’t be a creeping hypocrite any longer—so there!”

Arabella had hastily drawn from her pocket a bundle of tracts which she had brought with her to distribute at the fair, and of which she had given away several. As she spoke she flung the whole remainder of the packet into the hedge. “I’ve tried that sort o’ physic and have failed wi’ it. I must be as I was born!”

“Hush! You be excited, dear! Now you come along home quiet, and have a cup of tea, and don’t let us talk about un no more. We won’t come out this road again, as it leads to where he is, because it inflames ’ee so. You’ll be all right again soon.”

Arabella did calm herself down by degrees; and they crossed the ridge-way. When they began to descend the long, straight hill, they saw plodding along in front of them an elderly man of spare stature and thoughtful gait. In his hand he carried a basket; and there was a touch of slovenliness in his

attire, together with that indefinable something in his whole appearance which suggested one who was his own housekeeper, purveyor, confidant, and friend, through possessing nobody else at all in the world to act in those capacities for him. The remainder of the journey was down-hill, and guessing him to be going to Alfredston they offered him a lift, which he accepted.

Arabella looked at him, and looked again, till at length she spoke. "If I don't mistake I am talking to Mr. Phillotson?"

The wayfarer faced round and regarded her in turn. "Yes; my name is Phillotson," he said. "But I don't recognize you, ma'am."

"I remember you well enough when you used to be schoolmaster out at Marygreen, and I one of your scholars. I used to walk up there from Cresscombe every day, because we had only a mistress down at our place, and you taught better. But you wouldn't remember me as I should you?—Arabella Donn."

He shook his head. "No," he said politely, "I don't recall the name. And I should hardly recognize in your present portly self the slim school child no doubt you were then."

"Well, I always had plenty of flesh on my bones. However, I am staying down here with some friends at present. You know, I suppose, who I married?"

"No."

"Jude Fawley—also a scholar of yours—at least a night scholar—for some little time, I think? And known to you afterwards, if I am not mistaken."

"Dear me, dear me," said Phillotson, starting out of his stiffness. "*You* Fawley's wife? To be sure—he had a wife! And he—I understood—"

"Divorced her—as you did yours—perhaps for better reasons."

"Indeed?"

"Well—he med have been right in doing it—right for both; for I soon married again, and all went pretty straight till my husband died lately. But you—you were decidedly wrong!"

"No," said Phillotson, with sudden testiness. "I would rather not talk of this, but—I am convinced I did only what was right, and just, and moral. I

have suffered for my act and opinions, but I hold to them; though her loss was a loss to me in more ways than one!”

“You lost your school and good income through her, did you not?”

“I don’t care to talk of it. I have recently come back here—to Marygreen. I mean.”

“You are keeping the school there again, just as formerly?”

The pressure of a sadness that would out unsealed him. “I am there,” he replied. “Just as formerly, no. Merely on sufferance. It was a last resource—a small thing to return to after my move upwards, and my long indulged hopes—a returning to zero, with all its humiliations. But it is a refuge. I like the seclusion of the place, and the vicar having known me before my so-called eccentric conduct towards my wife had ruined my reputation as a schoolmaster, he accepted my services when all other schools were closed against me. However, although I take fifty pounds a year here after taking above two hundred elsewhere, I prefer it to running the risk of having my old domestic experiences raked up against me, as I should do if I tried to make a move.”

“Right you are. A contented mind is a continual feast. She has done no better.”

“She is not doing well, you mean?”

“I met her by accident at Kennetbridge this very day, and she is anything but thriving. Her husband is ill, and she anxious. You made a fool of a mistake about her, I tell ’ee again, and the harm you did yourself by dirtying your own nest serves you right, excusing the liberty.”

“How?”

“She was innocent.”

“But nonsense! They did not even defend the case!”

“That was because they didn’t care to. She was quite innocent of what obtained you your freedom, at the time you obtained it. I saw her just afterwards, and proved it to myself completely by talking to her.”

Phillotson grasped the edge of the spring-cart, and appeared to be much stressed and worried by the information. “Still—she wanted to go,” he said.

“Yes. But you shouldn’t have let her. That’s the only way with these fanciful women that chaw high—innocent or guilty. She’d have come round

in time. We all do! Custom does it! It's all the same in the end! However, I think she's fond of her man still—whatever he med be of her. You were too quick about her. *I* shouldn't have let her go! I should have kept her chained on—her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women. Besides, you've got the laws on your side. Moses knew. Don't you call to mind what he says?"

"Not for the moment, ma'am, I regret to say."

"Call yourself a schoolmaster! I used to think o't when they read it in church, and I was carrying on a bit. 'Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity.' Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi' it! Haw haw! Well; she's got her deserts now."

"Yes," said Phillotson, with biting sadness. "Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would!"

"Well—don't you forget to try it next time, old man."

"I cannot answer you, madam. I have never known much of womankind."

They had now reached the low levels bordering Alfredston, and passing through the outskirts approached a mill, to which Phillotson said his errand led him; whereupon they drew up, and he alighted, bidding them good-night in a preoccupied mood.

In the meantime Sue, though remarkably successful in her cake-selling experiment at Kennetbridge fair, had lost the temporary brightness which had begun to sit upon her sadness on account of that success. When all her "Christminster" cakes had been disposed of she took upon her arm the empty basket, and the cloth which had covered the standing she had hired, and giving the other things to the boy left the street with him. They followed a lane to a distance of half a mile, till they met an old woman carrying a child in short clothes, and leading a toddler in the other hand.

Sue kissed the children, and said, "How is he now?"

"Still better!" returned Mrs. Edlin cheerfully. "Before you are upstairs again your husband will be well enough—don't 'ee trouble."

They turned, and came to some old, dun-tiled cottages with gardens and fruit-trees. Into one of these they entered by lifting the latch without knocking, and were at once in the general living-room. Here they greeted

Jude, who was sitting in an arm-chair, the increased delicacy of his normally delicate features, and the childishly expectant look in his eyes, being alone sufficient to show that he had been passing through a severe illness.

“What—you have sold them all?” he said, a gleam of interest lighting up his face.

“Yes. Arcades, gables, east windows and all.” She told him the pecuniary results, and then hesitated. At last, when they were left alone, she informed him of the unexpected meeting with Arabella, and the latter’s widowhood.

Jude was discomposed. “What—is she living here?” he said.

“No; at Alfredston,” said Sue.

Jude’s countenance remained clouded. “I thought I had better tell you?” she continued, kissing him anxiously.

“Yes... Dear me! Arabella not in the depths of London, but down here! It is only a little over a dozen miles across the country to Alfredston. What is she doing there?”

She told him all she knew. “She has taken to chapel-going,” Sue added; “and talks accordingly.”

“Well,” said Jude, “perhaps it is for the best that we have almost decided to move on. I feel much better to-day, and shall be well enough to leave in a week or two. Then Mrs. Edlin can go home again—dear faithful old soul—the only friend we have in the world!”

“Where do you think to go to?” Sue asked, a troublousness in her tones.

Then Jude confessed what was in his mind. He said it would surprise her, perhaps, after his having resolutely avoided all the old places for so long. But one thing and another had made him think a great deal of Christminster lately, and, if she didn’t mind, he would like to go back there. Why should they care if they were known? It was oversensitive of them to mind so much. They could go on selling cakes there, for that matter, if he couldn’t work. He had no sense of shame at mere poverty; and perhaps he would be as strong as ever soon, and able to set up stone-cutting for himself there.

“Why should you care so much for Christminster?” she said pensively. “Christminster cares nothing for you, poor dear!”

“Well, I do, I can’t help it. I love the place—although I know how it hates all men like me—the so-called self-taught—how it scorns our laboured acquisitions, when it should be the first to respect them; how it sneers at our false quantities and mispronunciations, when it should say, I see you want help, my poor friend! ... Nevertheless, it is the centre of the universe to me, because of my early dream: and nothing can alter it. Perhaps it will soon wake up, and be generous. I pray so! ... I should like to go back to live there—perhaps to die there! In two or three weeks I might, I think. It will then be June, and I should like to be there by a particular day.”

His hope that he was recovering proved so far well grounded that in three weeks they had arrived in the city of many memories; were actually treading its pavements, receiving the reflection of the sunshine from its wasting walls.

Part Sixth
AT CHRISTMINSTER AGAIN

“... And she humbled her body greatly, and all the places of her joy she filled with her torn hair.”—ESTHER (Apoc.).

*“There are two who decline, a woman and I,
And enjoy our death in the darkness here.”*

—R. BROWNING.

I

On their arrival the station was lively with straw-hatted young men, welcoming young girls who bore a remarkable family likeness to their welcomers, and who were dressed up in the brightest and lightest of raiment.

“The place seems gay,” said Sue. “Why—it is Remembrance Day!—Jude—how sly of you—you came to-day on purpose!”

“Yes,” said Jude quietly, as he took charge of the small child, and told Arabella’s boy to keep close to them, Sue attending to their own eldest. “I thought we might as well come to-day as on any other.”

“But I am afraid it will depress you!” she said, looking anxiously at him up and down.

“Oh, I mustn’t let it interfere with our business; and we have a good deal to do before we shall be settled here. The first thing is lodgings.”

Having left their luggage and his tools at the station they proceeded on foot up the familiar street, the holiday people all drifting in the same direction. Reaching the Fourways they were about to turn off to where accommodation was likely to be found when, looking at the clock and the hurrying crowd, Jude said: “Let us go and see the procession, and never mind the lodgings just now. We can get them afterwards.”

“Oughtn’t we to get a house over our heads first?” she asked.

But his soul seemed full of the anniversary, and together they went down Chief Street, their smallest child in Jude’s arms, Sue leading her little girl, and Arabella’s boy walking thoughtfully and silently beside them. Crowds of pretty sisters in airy costumes, and meekly ignorant parents who had known no college in their youth, were under convoy in the same direction by brothers and sons bearing the opinion written large on them that no properly qualified human beings had lived on earth till they came to grace it here and now.

“My failure is reflected on me by every one of those young fellows,” said Jude. “A lesson on presumption is awaiting me to-day!—Humiliation Day for me! ... If you, my dear darling, hadn’t come to my rescue, I should have gone to the dogs with despair!”

She saw from his face that he was getting into one of his tempestuous, self-harrowing moods. “It would have been better if we had gone at once about our own affairs, dear,” she answered. “I am sure this sight will awaken old sorrows in you, and do no good!”

“Well—we are near; we will see it now,” said he.

They turned in on the left by the church with the Italian porch, whose helical columns were heavily draped with creepers, and pursued the lane till there arose on Jude’s sight the circular theatre with that well-known lantern above it, which stood in his mind as the sad symbol of his abandoned hopes, for it was from that outlook that he had finally surveyed the City of Colleges on the afternoon of his great meditation, which convinced him at last of the futility of his attempt to be a son of the university.

To-day, in the open space stretching between this building and the nearest college, stood a crowd of expectant people. A passage was kept clear through their midst by two barriers of timber, extending from the door of the college to the door of the large building between it and the theatre.

“Here is the place—they are just going to pass!” cried Jude in sudden excitement. And pushing his way to the front he took up a position close to the barrier, still hugging the youngest child in his arms, while Sue and the others kept immediately behind him. The crowd filled in at their back, and fell to talking, joking, and laughing as carriage after carriage drew up at the lower door of the college, and solemn stately figures in blood-red robes began to alight. The sky had grown overcast and livid, and thunder rumbled now and then.

Father Time shuddered. “It do seem like the Judgment Day!” he whispered.

“They are only learned Doctors,” said Sue.

While they waited big drops of rain fell on their heads and shoulders, and the delay grew tedious. Sue again wished not to stay.

“They won’t be long now,” said Jude, without turning his head.

But the procession did not come forth, and somebody in the crowd, to pass the time, looked at the façade of the nearest college, and said he wondered what was meant by the Latin inscription in its midst. Jude, who stood near the inquirer, explained it, and finding that the people all round him were listening with interest, went on to describe the carving of the frieze (which he had studied years before), and to criticize some details of masonry in other college fronts about the city.

The idle crowd, including the two policemen at the doors, stared like the Lycaonians at Paul, for Jude was apt to get too enthusiastic over any subject in hand, and they seemed to wonder how the stranger should know more about the buildings of their town than they themselves did; till one of them said: "Why, I know that man; he used to work here years ago—Jude Fawley, that's his name! Don't you mind he used to be nicknamed Tutor of St. Slums, d'ye mind?—because he aimed at that line o' business? He's married, I suppose, then, and that's his child he's carrying. Taylor would know him, as he knows everybody."

The speaker was a man named Jack Stagg, with whom Jude had formerly worked in repairing the college masonries; Tinker Taylor was seen to be standing near. Having his attention called the latter cried across the barriers to Jude: "You've honoured us by coming back again, my friend!"

Jude nodded.

"An' you don't seem to have done any great things for yourself by going away?"

Jude assented to this also.

"Except found more mouths to fill!" This came in a new voice, and Jude recognized its owner to be Uncle Joe, another mason whom he had known.

Jude replied good-humouredly that he could not dispute it; and from remark to remark something like a general conversation arose between him and the crowd of idlers, during which Tinker Taylor asked Jude if he remembered the Apostles' Creed in Latin still, and the night of the challenge in the public house.

"But Fortune didn't lie that way?" threw in Joe. "Yer powers wasn't enough to carry 'ee through?"

"Don't answer them any more!" entreated Sue.

“I don’t think I like Christminster!” murmured little Time mournfully, as he stood submerged and invisible in the crowd.

But finding himself the centre of curiosity, quizzing, and comment, Jude was not inclined to shrink from open declarations of what he had no great reason to be ashamed of; and in a little while was stimulated to say in a loud voice to the listening throng generally:

“It is a difficult question, my friends, for any young man—that question I had to grapple with, and which thousands are weighing at the present moment in these uprising times—whether to follow uncritically the track he finds himself in, without considering his aptness for it, or to consider what his aptness or bent may be, and re-shape his course accordingly. I tried to do the latter, and I failed. But I don’t admit that my failure proved my view to be a wrong one, or that my success would have made it a right one; though that’s how we appraise such attempts nowadays—I mean, not by their essential soundness, but by their accidental outcomes. If I had ended by becoming like one of these gentlemen in red and black that we saw dropping in here by now, everybody would have said: ‘See how wise that young man was, to follow the bent of his nature!’ But having ended no better than I began they say: ‘See what a fool that fellow was in following a freak of his fancy!’

“However it was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten. It takes two or three generations to do what I tried to do in one; and my impulses—affections—vices perhaps they should be called—were too strong not to hamper a man without advantages; who should be as cold-blooded as a fish and as selfish as a pig to have a really good chance of being one of his country’s worthies. You may ridicule me—I am quite willing that you should—I am a fit subject, no doubt. But I think if you knew what I have gone through these last few years you would rather pity me. And if they knew”—he nodded towards the college at which the dons were severally arriving—“it is just possible they would do the same.”

“He do look ill and worn-out, it is true!” said a woman.

Sue’s face grew more emotional; but though she stood close to Jude she was screened.

“I may do some good before I am dead—be a sort of success as a frightful example of what not to do; and so illustrate a moral story,” continued Jude, beginning to grow bitter, though he had opened serenely

enough. "I was, perhaps, after all, a paltry victim to the spirit of mental and social restlessness that makes so many unhappy in these days!"

"Don't tell them that!" whispered Sue with tears, at perceiving Jude's state of mind. "You weren't that. You struggled nobly to acquire knowledge, and only the meanest souls in the world would blame you!"

Jude shifted the child into a more easy position on his arm, and concluded: "And what I appear, a sick and poor man, is not the worst of me. I am in a chaos of principles—groping in the dark—acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago when I came here first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am. I doubt if I have anything more for my present rule of life than following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best. There, gentlemen, since you wanted to know how I was getting on, I have told you. Much good may it do you! I cannot explain further here. I perceive there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas: what it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine—if, indeed, they ever discover it—at least in our time. 'For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?—and who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?'"

"Hear, hear," said the populace.

"Well preached!" said Tinker Taylor. And privately to his neighbours: "Why, one of them jobbing pa'sons swarming about here, that takes the services when our head reverends want a holiday, wouldn't ha' discoursed such doctrine for less than a guinea down. Hey? I'll take my oath not one o' 'em would! And then he must have had it wrote down for 'n. And this only a working-man!"

As a sort of objective commentary on Jude's remarks there drove up at this moment with a belated Doctor, robed and panting, a cab whose horse failed to stop at the exact point required for setting down the hirer, who jumped out and entered the door. The driver, alighting, began to kick the animal in the belly.

"If that can be done," said Jude, "at college gates in the most religious and educational city in the world, what shall we say as to how far we've got?"

“Order!” said one of the policemen, who had been engaged with a comrade in opening the large doors opposite the college. “Keep yer tongue quiet, my man, while the procession passes.” The rain came on more heavily, and all who had umbrellas opened them. Jude was not one of these, and Sue only possessed a small one, half sunshade. She had grown pale, though Jude did not notice it then.

“Let us go on, dear,” she whispered, endeavouring to shelter him. “We haven’t any lodgings yet, remember, and all our things are at the station; and you are by no means well yet. I am afraid this wet will hurt you!”

“They are coming now. Just a moment, and I’ll go!” said he.

A peal of six bells struck out, human faces began to crowd the windows around, and the procession of heads of houses and new Doctors emerged, their red and black gowned forms passing across the field of Jude’s vision like inaccessible planets across an object-glass.

As they went their names were called by knowing informants, and when they reached the old round theatre of Wren a cheer rose high.

“Let’s go that way!” cried Jude, and though it now rained steadily he seemed not to know it, and took them round to the theatre. Here they stood upon the straw that was laid to drown the discordant noise of wheels, where the quaint and frost-eaten stone busts encircling the building looked with pallid grimness on the proceedings, and in particular at the bedraggled Jude, Sue, and their children, as at ludicrous persons who had no business there.

“I wish I could get in!” he said to her fervidly. “Listen—I may catch a few words of the Latin speech by staying here; the windows are open.”

However, beyond the peals of the organ, and the shouts and hurrahs between each piece of oratory, Jude’s standing in the wet did not bring much Latin to his intelligence more than, now and then, a sonorous word in *um* or *ibus*.

“Well—I’m an outsider to the end of my days!” he sighed after a while. “Now I’ll go, my patient Sue. How good of you to wait in the rain all this time—to gratify my infatuation! I’ll never care any more about the infernal cursed place, upon my soul I won’t! But what made you tremble so when we were at the barrier? And how pale you are, Sue!”

“I saw Richard amongst the people on the other side.”

“Ah—did you!”

“He is evidently come up to Jerusalem to see the festival like the rest of us: and on that account is probably living not so very far away. He had the same hankering for the university that you had, in a milder form. I don’t think he saw me, though he must have heard you speaking to the crowd. But he seemed not to notice.”

“Well—suppose he did. Your mind is free from worries about him now, my Sue?”

“Yes, I suppose so. But I am weak. Although I know it is all right with our plans, I felt a curious dread of him; an awe, or terror, of conventions I don’t believe in. It comes over me at times like a sort of creeping paralysis, and makes me so sad!”

“You are getting tired, Sue. Oh—I forgot, darling! Yes, we’ll go on at once.”

They started in quest of the lodging, and at last found something that seemed to promise well, in Mildew Lane—a spot which to Jude was irresistible—though to Sue it was not so fascinating—a narrow lane close to the back of a college, but having no communication with it. The little houses were darkened to gloom by the high collegiate buildings, within which life was so far removed from that of the people in the lane as if it had been on opposite sides of the globe; yet only a thickness of wall divided them. Two or three of the houses had notices of rooms to let, and the newcomers knocked at the door of one, which a woman opened.

“Ah—listen!” said Jude suddenly, instead of addressing her.

“What?”

“Why the bells—what church can that be? The tones are familiar.”

Another peal of bells had begun to sound out at some distance off.

“I don’t know!” said the landlady tartly. “Did you knock to ask that?”

“No; for lodgings,” said Jude, coming to himself.

The householder scrutinized Sue’s figure a moment. “We haven’t any to let,” said she, shutting the door.

Jude looked discomfited, and the boy distressed. “Now, Jude,” said Sue, “let me try. You don’t know the way.”

They found a second place hard by; but here the occupier, observing not only Sue, but the boy and the small children, said civilly, “I am sorry to say

we don't let where there are children"; and also closed the door.

The small child squared its mouth and cried silently, with an instinct that trouble loomed. The boy sighed. "I don't like Christminster!" he said. "Are the great old houses gaols?"

"No; colleges," said Jude; "which perhaps you'll study in some day."

"I'd rather not!" the boy rejoined.

"Now we'll try again," said Sue. "I'll pull my cloak more round me... Leaving Kennetbridge for this place is like coming from Caiaphas to Pilate! ... How do I look now, dear?"

"Nobody would notice it now," said Jude.

There was one other house, and they tried a third time. The woman here was more amiable; but she had little room to spare, and could only agree to take in Sue and the children if her husband could go elsewhere. This arrangement they perforce adopted, in the stress from delaying their search till so late. They came to terms with her, though her price was rather high for their pockets. But they could not afford to be critical till Jude had time to get a more permanent abode; and in this house Sue took possession of a back room on the second floor with an inner closet-room for the children. Jude stayed and had a cup of tea; and was pleased to find that the window commanded the back of another of the colleges. Kissing all four he went to get a few necessaries and look for lodgings for himself.

When he was gone the landlady came up to talk a little with Sue, and gather something of the circumstances of the family she had taken in. Sue had not the art of prevarication, and, after admitting several facts as to their late difficulties and wanderings, she was startled by the landlady saying suddenly:

"Are you really a married woman?"

Sue hesitated; and then impulsively told the woman that her husband and herself had each been unhappy in their first marriages, after which, terrified at the thought of a second irrevocable union, and lest the conditions of the contract should kill their love, yet wishing to be together, they had literally not found the courage to repeat it, though they had attempted it two or three times. Therefore, though in her own sense of the words she was a married woman, in the landlady's sense she was not.

The housewife looked embarrassed, and went downstairs. Sue sat by the window in a reverie, watching the rain. Her quiet was broken by the noise of someone entering the house, and then the voices of a man and woman in conversation in the passage below. The landlady's husband had arrived, and she was explaining to him the incoming of the lodgers during his absence.

His voice rose in sudden anger. "Now who wants such a woman here? and perhaps a confinement! ... Besides, didn't I say I wouldn't have children? The hall and stairs fresh painted, to be kicked about by them! You must have known all was not straight with 'em—coming like that. Taking in a family when I said a single man."

The wife expostulated, but, as it seemed, the husband insisted on his point; for presently a tap came to Sue's door, and the woman appeared.

"I am sorry to tell you, ma'am," she said, "that I can't let you have the room for the week after all. My husband objects; and therefore I must ask you to go. I don't mind your staying over to-night, as it is getting late in the afternoon; but I shall be glad if you can leave early in the morning."

Though she knew that she was entitled to the lodging for a week, Sue did not wish to create a disturbance between the wife and husband, and she said she would leave as requested. When the landlady had gone Sue looked out of the window again. Finding that the rain had ceased she proposed to the boy that, after putting the little ones to bed, they should go out and search about for another place, and bespeak it for the morrow, so as not to be so hard-driven then as they had been that day.

Therefore, instead of unpacking her boxes, which had just been sent on from the station by Jude, they sallied out into the damp though not unpleasant streets, Sue resolving not to disturb her husband with the news of her notice to quit while he was perhaps worried in obtaining a lodging for himself. In the company of the boy she wandered into this street and into that; but though she tried a dozen different houses she fared far worse alone than she had fared in Jude's company, and could get nobody to promise her a room for the following day. Every householder looked askance at such a woman and child inquiring for accommodation in the gloom.

"I ought not to be born, ought I?" said the boy with misgiving.

Thoroughly tired at last Sue returned to the place where she was not welcome, but where at least she had temporary shelter. In her absence Jude

had left his address; but knowing how weak he still was she adhered to her determination not to disturb him till the next day.

II

Sue sat looking at the bare floor of the room, the house being little more than an old intramural cottage, and then she regarded the scene outside the uncurtained window. At some distance opposite, the outer walls of Sarcophagus College—silent, black, and windowless—threw their four centuries of gloom, bigotry, and decay into the little room she occupied, shutting out the moonlight by night and the sun by day. The outlines of Rubric College also were discernible beyond the other, and the tower of a third farther off still. She thought of the strange operation of a simple-minded man's ruling passion, that it should have led Jude, who loved her and the children so tenderly, to place them here in this depressing purlieu, because he was still haunted by his dream. Even now he did not distinctly hear the freezing negative that those scholared walls had echoed to his desire.

The failure to find another lodging, and the lack of room in this house for his father, had made a deep impression on the boy—a brooding undemonstrative horror seemed to have seized him. The silence was broken by his saying: "Mother, *what* shall we do to-morrow!"

"I don't know!" said Sue despondently. "I am afraid this will trouble your father."

"I wish Father was quite well, and there had been room for him! Then it wouldn't matter so much! Poor Father!"

"It wouldn't!"

"Can I do anything?"

"No! All is trouble, adversity, and suffering!"

"Father went away to give us children room, didn't he?"

"Partly."

"It would be better to be out o' the world than in it, wouldn't it?"

"It would almost, dear."

“’Tis because of us children, too, isn’t it, that you can’t get a good lodging?”

“Well—people do object to children sometimes.”

“Then if children make so much trouble, why do people have ’em?”

“Oh—because it is a law of nature.”

“But we don’t ask to be born?”

“No indeed.”

“And what makes it worse with me is that you are not my real mother, and you needn’t have had me unless you liked. I oughtn’t to have come to ’ee—that’s the real truth! I troubled ’em in Australia, and I trouble folk here. I wish I hadn’t been born!”

“You couldn’t help it, my dear.”

“I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to ’em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about!”

Sue did not reply. She was doubtfully pondering how to treat this too reflective child.

She at last concluded that, so far as circumstances permitted, she would be honest and candid with one who entered into her difficulties like an aged friend.

“There is going to be another in our family soon,” she hesitatingly remarked.

“How?”

“There is going to be another baby.”

“What!” The boy jumped up wildly. “Oh God, Mother, you’ve never a-sent for another; and such trouble with what you’ve got!”

“Yes, I have, I am sorry to say!” murmured Sue, her eyes glistening with suspended tears.

The boy burst out weeping. “Oh you don’t care, you don’t care!” he cried in bitter reproach. “How *ever* could you, Mother, be so wicked and cruel as this, when you needn’t have done it till we was better off, and Father well! To bring us all into *more* trouble! No room for us, and Father a-forced to go away, and we turned out to-morrow; and yet you be going to have another

of us soon! ... 'Tis done o' purpose!—'tis—'tis!" He walked up and down sobbing.

"Y-you must forgive me, little Jude!" she pleaded, her bosom heaving now as much as the boy's. "I can't explain—I will when you are older. It does seem—as if I had done it on purpose, now we are in these difficulties! I can't explain, dear! But it—is not quite on purpose—I can't help it!"

"Yes it is—it must be! For nobody would interfere with us, like that, unless you agreed! I won't forgive you, ever, ever! I'll never believe you care for me, or Father, or any of us any more!"

He got up, and went away into the closet adjoining her room, in which a bed had been spread on the floor. There she heard him say: "If we children was gone there'd be no trouble at all!"

"Don't think that, dear," she cried, rather peremptorily. "But go to sleep!"

The following morning she awoke at a little past six, and decided to get up and run across before breakfast to the inn which Jude had informed her to be his quarters, to tell him what had happened before he went out. She arose softly, to avoid disturbing the children, who, as she knew, must be fatigued by their exertions of yesterday.

She found Jude at breakfast in the obscure tavern he had chosen as a counterpoise to the expense of her lodging: and she explained to him her homelessness. He had been so anxious about her all night, he said. Somehow, now it was morning, the request to leave the lodgings did not seem such a depressing incident as it had seemed the night before, nor did even her failure to find another place affect her so deeply as at first. Jude agreed with her that it would not be worth while to insist upon her right to stay a week, but to take immediate steps for removal.

"You must all come to this inn for a day or two," he said. "It is a rough place, and it will not be so nice for the children, but we shall have more time to look round. There are plenty of lodgings in the suburbs—in my old quarter of Beersheba. Have breakfast with me now you are here, my bird. You are sure you are well? There will be plenty of time to get back and prepare the children's meal before they wake. In fact, I'll go with you."

She joined Jude in a hasty meal, and in a quarter of an hour they started together, resolving to clear out from Sue's too respectable lodging immediately. On reaching the place and going upstairs she found that all

was quiet in the children's room, and called to the landlady in timorous tones to please bring up the tea-kettle and something for their breakfast. This was perfunctorily done, and producing a couple of eggs which she had brought with her she put them into the boiling kettle, and summoned Jude to watch them for the youngsters, while she went to call them, it being now about half-past eight o'clock.

Jude stood bending over the kettle, with his watch in his hand, timing the eggs, so that his back was turned to the little inner chamber where the children lay. A shriek from Sue suddenly caused him to start round. He saw that the door of the room, or rather closet—which had seemed to go heavily upon its hinges as she pushed it back—was open, and that Sue had sunk to the floor just within it. Hastening forward to pick her up he turned his eyes to the little bed spread on the boards; no children were there. He looked in bewilderment round the room. At the back of the door were fixed two hooks for hanging garments, and from these the forms of the two youngest children were suspended, by a piece of box-cord round each of their necks, while from a nail a few yards off the body of little Jude was hanging in a similar manner. An overturned chair was near the elder boy, and his glazed eyes were slanted into the room; but those of the girl and the baby boy were closed.

Half-paralyzed by the strange and consummate horror of the scene, he let Sue lie, cut the cords with his pocket-knife and threw the three children on the bed; but the feel of their bodies in the momentary handling seemed to say that they were dead. He caught up Sue, who was in fainting fits, and put her on the bed in the other room, after which he breathlessly summoned the landlady and ran out for a doctor.

When he got back Sue had come to herself, and the two helpless women, bending over the children in wild efforts to restore them, and the triplet of little corpses, formed a sight which overthrew his self-command. The nearest surgeon came in, but, as Jude had inferred, his presence was superfluous. The children were past saving, for though their bodies were still barely cold it was conjectured that they had been hanging more than an hour. The probability held by the parents later on, when they were able to reason on the case, was that the elder boy, on waking, looked into the outer room for Sue, and, finding her absent, was thrown into a fit of aggravated despondency that the events and information of the evening before had

induced in his morbid temperament. Moreover a piece of paper was found upon the floor, on which was written, in the boy's hand, with the bit of lead pencil that he carried:

Done because we are too menny.

At sight of this Sue's nerves utterly gave way, an awful conviction that her discourse with the boy had been the main cause of the tragedy, throwing her into a convulsive agony which knew no abatement. They carried her away against her wish to a room on the lower floor; and there she lay, her slight figure shaken with her gasps, and her eyes staring at the ceiling, the woman of the house vainly trying to soothe her.

They could hear from this chamber the people moving about above, and she implored to be allowed to go back, and was only kept from doing so by the assurance that, if there were any hope, her presence might do harm, and the reminder that it was necessary to take care of herself lest she should endanger a coming life. Her inquiries were incessant, and at last Jude came down and told her there was no hope. As soon as she could speak she informed him what she had said to the boy, and how she thought herself the cause of this.

"No," said Jude. "It was in his nature to do it. The Doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us—boys of a sort unknown in the last generation—the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live. He's an advanced man, the Doctor: but he can give no consolation to—"

Jude had kept back his own grief on account of her; but he now broke down; and this stimulated Sue to efforts of sympathy which in some degree distracted her from her poignant self-reproach. When everybody was gone, she was allowed to see the children.

The boy's face expressed the whole tale of their situation. On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died.

When the house was silent, and they could do nothing but await the coroner's inquest, a subdued, large, low voice spread into the air of the room from behind the heavy walls at the back.

"What is it?" said Sue, her spasmodic breathing suspended.

"The organ of the college chapel. The organist practising I suppose. It's the anthem from the seventy-third Psalm; 'Truly God is loving unto Israel.'"

She sobbed again. "Oh, oh my babies! They had done no harm! Why should they have been taken away, and not I!"

There was another stillness—broken at last by two persons in conversation somewhere without.

"They are talking about us, no doubt!" moaned Sue. "'We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men!'"

Jude listened—"No—they are not talking of us," he said. "They are two clergymen of different views, arguing about the eastward position. Good God—the eastward position, and all creation groaning!"

Then another silence, till she was seized with another uncontrollable fit of grief. "There is something external to us which says, 'You shan't!' First it said, 'You shan't learn!' Then it said, 'You shan't labour!' Now it says, 'You shan't love!'"

He tried to soothe her by saying, "That's bitter of you, darling."

"But it's true!"

Thus they waited, and she went back again to her room. The baby's frock, shoes, and socks, which had been lying on a chair at the time of his death, she would not now have removed, though Jude would fain have got them out of her sight. But whenever he touched them she implored him to let them lie, and burst out almost savagely at the woman of the house when she also attempted to put them away.

Jude dreaded her dull apathetic silences almost more than her paroxysms. "Why don't you speak to me, Jude?" she cried out, after one of these. "Don't turn away from me! I can't *bear* the loneliness of being out of your looks!"

"There, dear; here I am," he said, putting his face close to hers.

“Yes... Oh, my comrade, our perfect union—our two-in-oneness—is now stained with blood!”

“Shadowed by death—that’s all.”

“Ah; but it was I who incited him really, though I didn’t know I was doing it! I talked to the child as one should only talk to people of mature age. I said the world was against us, that it was better to be out of life than in it at this price; and he took it literally. And I told him I was going to have another child. It upset him. Oh how bitterly he upbraided me!”

“Why did you do it, Sue?”

“I can’t tell. It was that I wanted to be truthful. I couldn’t bear deceiving him as to the facts of life. And yet I wasn’t truthful, for with a false delicacy I told him too obscurely.—Why was I half-wiser than my fellow-women? And not entirely wiser! Why didn’t I tell him pleasant untruths, instead of half-realities? It was my want of self-control, so that I could neither conceal things nor reveal them!”

“Your plan might have been a good one for the majority of cases; only in our peculiar case it chanced to work badly perhaps. He must have known sooner or later.”

“And I was just making my baby darling a new frock; and now I shall never see him in it, and never talk to him any more! ... My eyes are so swollen that I can scarcely see; and yet little more than a year ago I called myself happy! We went about loving each other too much—indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other! We said—do you remember?—that we would make a virtue of joy. I said it was Nature’s intention, Nature’s law and *raison d’être* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us—instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word!”

She sank into a quiet contemplation, till she said, “It is best, perhaps, that they should be gone.—Yes—I see it is! Better that they should be plucked fresh than stay to wither away miserably!”

“Yes,” replied Jude. “Some say that the elders should rejoice when their children die in infancy.”

“But they don’t know! ... Oh my babies, my babies, could you be alive now! You may say the boy wished to be out of life, or he wouldn’t have

done it. It was not unreasonable for him to die: it was part of his incurably sad nature, poor little fellow! But then the others—my *own* children and yours!”

Again Sue looked at the hanging little frock and at the socks and shoes; and her figure quivered like a string. “I am a pitiable creature,” she said, “good neither for earth nor heaven any more! I am driven out of my mind by things! What ought to be done?” She stared at Jude, and tightly held his hand.

“Nothing can be done,” he replied. “Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue.”

She paused. “Yes! Who said that?” she asked heavily.

“It comes in the chorus of the *Agamemnon*. It has been in my mind continually since this happened.”

“My poor Jude—how you’ve missed everything!—you more than I, for I did get you! To think you should know that by your unassisted reading, and yet be in poverty and despair!”

After such momentary diversions her grief would return in a wave.

The jury duly came and viewed the bodies, the inquest was held; and next arrived the melancholy morning of the funeral. Accounts in the newspapers had brought to the spot curious idlers, who stood apparently counting the window-panes and the stones of the walls. Doubt of the real relations of the couple added zest to their curiosity. Sue had declared that she would follow the two little ones to the grave, but at the last moment she gave way, and the coffins were quietly carried out of the house while she was lying down. Jude got into the vehicle, and it drove away, much to the relief of the landlord, who now had only Sue and her luggage remaining on his hands, which he hoped to be also clear of later on in the day, and so to have freed his house from the exasperating notoriety it had acquired during the week through his wife’s unlucky admission of these strangers. In the afternoon he privately consulted with the owner of the house, and they agreed that if any objection to it arose from the tragedy which had occurred there they would try to get its number changed.

When Jude had seen the two little boxes—one containing little Jude, and the other the two smallest—deposited in the earth he hastened back to Sue, who was still in her room, and he therefore did not disturb her just then.

Feeling anxious, however, he went again about four o'clock. The woman thought she was still lying down, but returned to him to say that she was not in her bedroom after all. Her hat and jacket, too, were missing: she had gone out. Jude hurried off to the public house where he was sleeping. She had not been there. Then bethinking himself of possibilities he went along the road to the cemetery, which he entered, and crossed to where the interments had recently taken place. The idlers who had followed to the spot by reason of the tragedy were all gone now. A man with a shovel in his hands was attempting to earth in the common grave of the three children, but his arm was held back by an expostulating woman who stood in the half-filled hole. It was Sue, whose coloured clothing, which she had never thought of changing for the mourning he had bought, suggested to the eye a deeper grief than the conventional garb of bereavement could express.

"He's filling them in, and he shan't till I've seen my little ones again!" she cried wildly when she saw Jude. "I want to see them once more. Oh Jude—please Jude—I want to see them! I didn't know you would let them be taken away while I was asleep! You said perhaps I should see them once more before they were screwed down; and then you didn't, but took them away! Oh Jude, you are cruel to me too!"

"She's been wanting me to dig out the grave again, and let her get to the coffins," said the man with the spade. "She ought to be took home, by the look o' her. She is hardly responsible, poor thing, seemingly. Can't dig 'em up again now, ma'am. Do ye go home with your husband, and take it quiet, and thank God that there'll be another soon to swage yer grief."

But Sue kept asking piteously: "Can't I see them once more—just once! Can't I? Only just one little minute, Jude? It would not take long! And I should be so glad, Jude! I will be so good, and not disobey you ever any more, Jude, if you will let me? I would go home quietly afterwards, and not want to see them any more! Can't I? Why can't I?"

Thus she went on. Jude was thrown into such acute sorrow that he almost felt he would try to get the man to accede. But it could do no good, and might make her still worse; and he saw that it was imperative to get her home at once. So he coaxed her, and whispered tenderly, and put his arm round her to support her; till she helplessly gave in, and was induced to leave the cemetery.

He wished to obtain a fly to take her back in, but economy being so imperative she deprecated his doing so, and they walked along slowly, Jude in black crape, she in brown and red clothing. They were to have gone to a new lodging that afternoon, but Jude saw that it was not practicable, and in course of time they entered the now hated house. Sue was at once got to bed, and the Doctor sent for.

Jude waited all the evening downstairs. At a very late hour the intelligence was brought to him that a child had been prematurely born, and that it, like the others, was a corpse.

III

Sue was convalescent, though she had hoped for death, and Jude had again obtained work at his old trade. They were in other lodgings now, in the direction of Beersheba, and not far from the Church of Ceremonies—Saint Silas.

They would sit silent, more bodeful of the direct antagonism of things than of their insensate and stolid obstructiveness. Vague and quaint imaginings had haunted Sue in the days when her intellect scintillated like a star, that the world resembled a stanza or melody composed in a dream; it was wonderfully excellent to the half-aroused intelligence, but hopelessly absurd at the full waking; that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity. But affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorphous; and those ideas were now exchanged for a sense of Jude and herself fleeing from a persecutor.

“We must conform!” she said mournfully. “All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!”

“It is only against man and senseless circumstance,” said Jude.

“True!” she murmured. “What have I been thinking of! I am getting as superstitious as a savage! ... But whoever or whatever our foe may be, I am cowed into submission. I have no more fighting strength left; no more enterprise. I am beaten, beaten! ... ‘We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men!’ I am always saying that now.”

“I feel the same!”

“What shall we do? You are in work now; but remember, it may only be because our history and relations are not absolutely known... Possibly, if

they knew our marriage had not been formalized they would turn you out of your job as they did at Aldbrickham!”

“I hardly know. Perhaps they would hardly do that. However, I think that we ought to make it legal now—as soon as you are able to go out.”

“You think we ought?”

“Certainly.”

And Jude fell into thought. “I have seemed to myself lately,” he said, “to belong to that vast band of men shunned by the virtuous—the men called seducers. It amazes me when I think of it! I have not been conscious of it, or of any wrongdoing towards you, whom I love more than myself. Yet I am one of those men! I wonder if any other of them are the same purblind, simple creatures as I? ... Yes, Sue—that’s what I am. I seduced you... You were a distinct type—a refined creature, intended by Nature to be left intact. But I couldn’t leave you alone!”

“No, no, Jude!” she said quickly. “Don’t reproach yourself with being what you are not. If anybody is to blame it is I.”

“I supported you in your resolve to leave Phillotson; and without me perhaps you wouldn’t have urged him to let you go.”

“I should have, just the same. As to ourselves, the fact of our not having entered into a legal contract is the saving feature in our union. We have thereby avoided insulting, as it were, the solemnity of our first marriages.”

“Solemnity?” Jude looked at her with some surprise, and grew conscious that she was not the Sue of their earlier time.

“Yes,” she said, with a little quiver in her words, “I have had dreadful fears, a dreadful sense of my own insolence of action. I have thought—that I am still his wife!”

“Whose?”

“Richard’s.”

“Good God, dearest!—why?”

“Oh I can’t explain! Only the thought comes to me.”

“It is your weakness—a sick fancy, without reason or meaning! Don’t let it trouble you.”

Sue sighed uneasily.

As a set-off against such discussions as these there had come an improvement in their pecuniary position, which earlier in their experience would have made them cheerful. Jude had quite unexpectedly found good employment at his old trade almost directly he arrived, the summer weather suiting his fragile constitution; and outwardly his days went on with that monotonous uniformity which is in itself so grateful after vicissitude. People seemed to have forgotten that he had ever shown any awkward aberrancies, and he daily mounted to the parapets and copings of colleges he could never enter, and renewed the crumbling freestones of mullioned windows he would never look from, as if he had known no wish to do otherwise.

There was this change in him; that he did not often go to any service at the churches now. One thing troubled him more than any other; that Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite directions since the tragedy: events which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs, and dogmas, had not operated in the same manner on Sue's. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected, though he did not now.

On a particular Sunday evening he came in rather late. She was not at home, but she soon returned, when he found her silent and meditative.

“What are you thinking of, little woman?” he asked curiously.

“Oh I can't tell clearly! I have thought that we have been selfish, careless, even impious, in our courses, you and I. Our life has been a vain attempt at self-delight. But self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh—the terrible flesh—the curse of Adam!”

“Sue!” he murmured. “What has come over you?”

“We ought to be continually sacrificing ourselves on the altar of duty! But I have always striven to do what has pleased me. I well deserved the scourging I have got! I wish something would take the evil right out of me, and all my monstrous errors, and all my sinful ways!”

“Sue—my own too suffering dear!—there's no evil woman in you. Your natural instincts are perfectly healthy; not quite so impassioned, perhaps, as I could wish; but good, and dear, and pure. And as I have often said, you are absolutely the most ethereal, least sensual woman I ever knew to exist without inhuman sexlessness. Why do you talk in such a changed way? We

have not been selfish, except when no one could profit by our being otherwise. You used to say that human nature was noble and long-suffering, not vile and corrupt, and at last I thought you spoke truly. And now you seem to take such a much lower view!”

“I want a humble heart; and a chastened mind; and I have never had them yet!”

“You have been fearless, both as a thinker and as a feeler, and you deserved more admiration than I gave. I was too full of narrow dogmas at that time to see it.”

“Don’t say that, Jude! I wish my every fearless word and thought could be rooted out of my history. Self-renunciation—that’s everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much. I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that’s in me!”

“Hush!” he said, pressing her little face against his breast as if she were an infant. “It is bereavement that has brought you to this! Such remorse is not for you, my sensitive plant, but for the wicked ones of the earth—who never feel it!”

“I ought not to stay like this,” she murmured, when she had remained in the position a long while.

“Why not?”

“It is indulgence.”

“Still on the same tack! But is there anything better on earth than that we should love one another?”

“Yes. It depends on the sort of love; and yours—ours—is the wrong.”

“I won’t have it, Sue! Come, when do you wish our marriage to be signed in a vestry?”

She paused, and looked up uneasily. “Never,” she whispered.

Not knowing the whole of her meaning he took the objection serenely, and said nothing. Several minutes elapsed, and he thought she had fallen asleep; but he spoke softly, and found that she was wide awake all the time. She sat upright and sighed.

“There is a strange, indescribable perfume or atmosphere about you tonight, Sue,” he said. “I mean not only mentally, but about your clothes, also. A sort of vegetable scent, which I seem to know, yet cannot remember.”

“It is incense.”

“Incense?”

“I have been to the service at St. Silas’, and I was in the fumes of it.”

“Oh—St. Silas.”

“Yes. I go there sometimes.”

“Indeed. You go there!”

“You see, Jude, it is lonely here in the weekday mornings, when you are at work, and I think and think of—of my—” She stopped till she could control the lumpiness of her throat. “And I have taken to go in there, as it is so near.”

“Oh well—of course, I say nothing against it. Only it is odd, for you. They little think what sort of chiel is amang them!”

“What do you mean, Jude?”

“Well—a sceptic, to be plain.”

“How can you pain me so, dear Jude, in my trouble! Yet I know you didn’t mean it. But you ought not to say that.”

“I won’t. But I am much surprised!”

“Well—I want to tell you something else, Jude. You won’t be angry, will you? I have thought of it a good deal since my babies died. I don’t think I ought to be your wife—or as your wife—any longer.”

“What? ... But you *are*!”

“From your point of view; but—”

“Of course we were afraid of the ceremony, and a good many others would have been in our places, with such strong reasons for fears. But experience has proved how we misjudged ourselves, and overrated our infirmities; and if you are beginning to respect rites and ceremonies, as you seem to be, I wonder you don’t say it shall be carried out instantly? You certainly *are* my wife, Sue, in all but law. What do you mean by what you said?”

“I don’t think I am!”

“Not? But suppose we *had* gone through the ceremony? Would you feel that you were then?”

“No. I should not feel even then that I was. I should feel worse than I do now.”

“Why so—in the name of all that’s perverse, my dear?”

“Because I am Richard’s.”

“Ah—you hinted that absurd fancy to me before!”

“It was only an impression with me then; I feel more and more convinced as time goes on that—I belong to him, or to nobody.”

“My good heavens—how we are changing places!”

“Yes. Perhaps so.”

Some few days later, in the dusk of the summer evening, they were sitting in the same small room downstairs, when a knock came to the front door of the carpenter’s house where they were lodging, and in a few moments there was a tap at the door of their room. Before they could open it the comer did so, and a woman’s form appeared.

“Is Mr. Fawley here?”

Jude and Sue started as he mechanically replied in the affirmative, for the voice was Arabella’s.

He formally requested her to come in, and she sat down in the window bench, where they could distinctly see her outline against the light; but no characteristic that enabled them to estimate her general aspect and air. Yet something seemed to denote that she was not quite so comfortably circumstanced, nor so bouncingly attired, as she had been during Cartlett’s lifetime.

The three attempted an awkward conversation about the tragedy, of which Jude had felt it to be his duty to inform her immediately, though she had never replied to his letter.

“I have just come from the cemetery,” she said. “I inquired and found the child’s grave. I couldn’t come to the funeral—thank you for inviting me all the same. I read all about it in the papers, and I felt I wasn’t wanted... No—I couldn’t come to the funeral,” repeated Arabella, who, seeming utterly unable to reach the ideal of a catastrophic manner, fumbled with iterations. “But I am glad I found the grave. As ’tis your trade, Jude, you’ll be able to put up a handsome stone to ’em.”

“I shall put up a headstone,” said Jude drearily.

“He was my child, and naturally I feel for him.”

“I hope so. We all did.”

“The others that weren’t mine I didn’t feel so much for, as was natural.”

“Of course.”

A sigh came from the dark corner where Sue sat.

“I had often wished I had mine with me,” continued Mrs. Cartlett. “Perhaps ’twouldn’t have happened then! But of course I didn’t wish to take him away from your wife.”

“I am not his wife,” came from Sue.

The unexpectedness of her words struck Jude silent.

“Oh, I beg your pardon, I’m sure,” said Arabella. “I thought you were!”

Jude had known from the quality of Sue’s tone that her new and transcendental views lurked in her words; but all except their obvious meaning was, naturally, missed by Arabella. The latter, after evincing that she was struck by Sue’s avowal, recovered herself, and went on to talk with placid bluntness about “her” boy, for whom, though in his lifetime she had shown no care at all, she now exhibited a ceremonial mournfulness that was apparently sustaining to the conscience. She alluded to the past, and in making some remark appealed again to Sue. There was no answer: Sue had invisibly left the room.

“She said she was not your wife?” resumed Arabella in another voice. “Why should she do that?”

“I cannot inform you,” said Jude shortly.

“She is, isn’t she? She once told me so.”

“I don’t criticize what she says.”

“Ah—I see! Well, my time is up. I am staying here to-night, and thought I could do no less than call, after our mutual affliction. I am sleeping at the place where I used to be barmaid, and to-morrow I go back to Alfredston. Father is come home again, and I am living with him.”

“He has returned from Australia?” said Jude with languid curiosity.

“Yes. Couldn’t get on there. Had a rough time of it. Mother died of dys—what do you call it—in the hot weather, and Father and two of the young ones have just got back. He has got a cottage near the old place, and for the present I am keeping house for him.”

Jude's former wife had maintained a stereotyped manner of strict good breeding even now that Sue was gone, and limited her stay to a number of minutes that should accord with the highest respectability. When she had departed Jude, much relieved, went to the stairs and called Sue—feeling anxious as to what had become of her.

There was no answer, and the carpenter who kept the lodgings said she had not come in. Jude was puzzled, and became quite alarmed at her absence, for the hour was growing late. The carpenter called his wife, who conjectured that Sue might have gone to St. Silas' church, as she often went there.

“Surely not at this time o' night?” said Jude. “It is shut.”

“She knows somebody who keeps the key, and she has it whenever she wants it.”

“How long has she been going on with this?”

“Oh, some few weeks, I think.”

Jude went vaguely in the direction of the church, which he had never once approached since he lived out that way years before, when his young opinions were more mystical than they were now. The spot was deserted, but the door was certainly unfastened; he lifted the latch without noise, and pushing to the door behind him, stood absolutely still inside. The prevalent silence seemed to contain a faint sound, explicable as a breathing, or a sobbing, which came from the other end of the building. The floor-cloth deadened his footsteps as he moved in that direction through the obscurity, which was broken only by the faintest reflected night-light from without.

High overhead, above the chancel steps, Jude could discern a huge, solidly constructed Latin cross—as large, probably, as the original it was designed to commemorate. It seemed to be suspended in the air by invisible wires; it was set with large jewels, which faintly glimmered in some weak ray caught from outside, as the cross swayed to and fro in a silent and scarcely perceptible motion. Underneath, upon the floor, lay what appeared to be a heap of black clothes, and from this was repeated the sobbing that he had heard before. It was his Sue's form, prostrate on the paving.

“Sue!” he whispered.

Something white disclosed itself; she had turned up her face.

“What—do you want with me here, Jude?” she said almost sharply. “You shouldn’t come! I wanted to be alone! Why did you intrude here?”

“How can you ask!” he retorted in quick reproach, for his full heart was wounded to its centre at this attitude of hers towards him. “Why do I come? Who has a right to come, I should like to know, if I have not! I, who love you better than my own self—better—far better—than you have loved me! What made you leave me to come here alone?”

“Don’t criticize me, Jude—I can’t bear it!—I have often told you so. You must take me as I am. I am a wretch—broken by my distractions! I couldn’t *bear* it when Arabella came—I felt so utterly miserable I had to come away. She seems to be your wife still, and Richard to be my husband!”

“But they are nothing to us!”

“Yes, dear friend, they are. I see marriage differently now. My babies have been taken from me to show me this! Arabella’s child killing mine was a judgement—the right slaying the wrong. What, shall I do! I am such a vile creature—too worthless to mix with ordinary human beings!”

“This is terrible!” said Jude, verging on tears. “It is monstrous and unnatural for you to be so remorseful when you have done no wrong!”

“Ah—you don’t know my badness!”

He returned vehemently: “I do! Every atom and dreg of it! You make me hate Christianity, or mysticism, or Sacerdotalism, or whatever it may be called, if it’s that which has caused this deterioration in you. That a woman-poet, a woman-seer, a woman whose soul shone like a diamond—whom all the wise of the world would have been proud of, if they could have known you—should degrade herself like this! I am glad I had nothing to do with Divinity—damn glad—if it’s going to ruin you in this way!”

“You are angry, Jude, and unkind to me, and don’t see how things are.”

“Then come along home with me, dearest, and perhaps I shall. I am overburdened—and you, too, are unhinged just now.” He put his arm round her and lifted her; but though she came, she preferred to walk without his support.

“I don’t dislike you, Jude,” she said in a sweet and imploring voice. “I love you as much as ever! Only—I ought not to love you—any more. Oh I must not any more!”

“I can’t own it.”

“But I have made up my mind that I am not your wife! I belong to him—I sacramentally joined myself to him for life. Nothing can alter it!”

“But surely we are man and wife, if ever two people were in this world? Nature’s own marriage it is, unquestionably!”

“But not Heaven’s. Another was made for me there, and ratified eternally in the church at Melchester.”

“Sue, Sue—affliction has brought you to this unreasonable state! After converting me to your views on so many things, to find you suddenly turn to the right—about like this—for no reason whatever, confounding all you have formerly said through sentiment merely! You root out of me what little affection and reverence I had left in me for the Church as an old acquaintance... What I can’t understand in you is your extraordinary blindness now to your old logic. Is it peculiar to you, or is it common to woman? Is a woman a thinking unit at all, or a fraction always wanting its integer? How you argued that marriage was only a clumsy contract—which it is—how you showed all the objections to it—all the absurdities! If two and two made four when we were happy together, surely they make four now? I can’t understand it, I repeat!”

“Ah, dear Jude; that’s because you are like a totally deaf man observing people listening to music. You say ‘What are they regarding? Nothing is there.’ But something is.”

“That is a hard saying from you; and not a true parallel! You threw off old husks of prejudices, and taught me to do it; and now you go back upon yourself. I confess I am utterly stultified in my estimate of you.”

“Dear friend, my only friend, don’t be hard with me! I can’t help being as I am, I am convinced I am right—that I see the light at last. But oh, how to profit by it!”

They walked along a few more steps till they were outside the building and she had returned the key. “Can this be the girl,” said Jude when she came back, feeling a slight renewal of elasticity now that he was in the open street; “can this be the girl who brought the pagan deities into this most Christian city?—who mimicked Miss Fontover when she crushed them with her heel?—quoted Gibbon, and Shelley, and Mill? Where are dear Apollo, and dear Venus now!”

“Oh don’t, don’t be so cruel to me, Jude, and I so unhappy!” she sobbed. “I can’t bear it! I was in error—I cannot reason with you. I was wrong—proud in my own conceit! Arabella’s coming was the finish. Don’t satirize me: it cuts like a knife!”

He flung his arms round her and kissed her passionately there in the silent street, before she could hinder him. They went on till they came to a little coffee-house. “Jude,” she said with suppressed tears, “would you mind getting a lodging here?”

“I will—if, if you really wish? But do you? Let me go to our door and understand you.”

He went and conducted her in. She said she wanted no supper, and went in the dark upstairs and struck a light. Turning she found that Jude had followed her, and was standing at the chamber door. She went to him, put her hand in his, and said “Good-night.”

“But Sue! Don’t we live here?”

“You said you would do as I wished!”

“Yes. Very well! ... Perhaps it was wrong of me to argue distastefully as I have done! Perhaps as we couldn’t conscientiously marry at first in the old-fashioned way, we ought to have parted. Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think we could act as pioneers!”

“I am so glad you see that much, at any rate. I never deliberately meant to do as I did. I slipped into my false position through jealousy and agitation!”

“But surely through love—you loved me?”

“Yes. But I wanted to let it stop there, and go on always as mere lovers; until—”

“But people in love couldn’t live for ever like that!”

“Women could: men can’t, because they—won’t. An average woman is in this superior to an average man—that she never instigates, only responds. We ought to have lived in mental communion, and no more.”

“I was the unhappy cause of the change, as I have said before! ... Well, as you will! ... But human nature can’t help being itself.”

“Oh yes—that’s just what it has to learn—self-mastery.”

“I repeat—if either were to blame it was not you but I.”

“No—it was I. Your wickedness was only the natural man’s desire to possess the woman. Mine was not the reciprocal wish till envy stimulated me to oust Arabella. I had thought I ought in charity to let you approach me—that it was damnably selfish to torture you as I did my other friend. But I shouldn’t have given way if you hadn’t broken me down by making me fear you would go back to her... But don’t let us say any more about it! Jude, will you leave me to myself now?”

“Yes... But Sue—my wife, as you are!” he burst out; “my old reproach to you was, after all, a true one. You have never loved me as I love you—never—never! Yours is not a passionate heart—your heart does not burn in a flame! You are, upon the whole, a sort of fay, or sprite—not a woman!”

“At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women’s morals almost more than unbridled passion—the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it may do the man—was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened. And then—I don’t know how it was—I couldn’t bear to let you go—possibly to Arabella again—and so I got to love you, Jude. But you see, however fondly it ended, it began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you.”

“And now you add to your cruelty by leaving me!”

“Ah—yes! The further I flounder, the more harm I do!”

“O Sue!” said he with a sudden sense of his own danger. “Do not do an immoral thing for moral reasons! You have been my social salvation. Stay with me for humanity’s sake! You know what a weak fellow I am. My two arch-enemies you know—my weakness for womankind and my impulse to strong liquor. Don’t abandon me to them, Sue, to save your own soul only! They have been kept entirely at a distance since you became my guardian-angel! Since I have had you I have been able to go into any temptations of the sort, without risk. Isn’t my safety worth a little sacrifice of dogmatic principle? I am in terror lest, if you leave me, it will be with me another case of the pig that was washed turning back to his wallowing in the mire!”

Sue burst out weeping. “Oh, but you must not, Jude! You won’t! I’ll pray for you night and day!”

“Well—never mind; don’t grieve,” said Jude generously. “I did suffer, God knows, about you at that time; and now I suffer again. But perhaps not

so much as you. The woman mostly gets the worst of it in the long run!”

“She does.”

“Unless she is absolutely worthless and contemptible. And this one is not that, anyhow!”

Sue drew a nervous breath or two. “She is—I fear! ... Now Jude—good-night,—please!”

“I mustn’t stay?—Not just once more? As it has been so many times—O Sue, my wife, why not?”

“No—no—not wife! ... I am in your hands, Jude—don’t tempt me back now I have advanced so far!”

“Very well. I do your bidding. I owe that to you, darling, in penance for how I overruled it at the first time. My God, how selfish I was! Perhaps—perhaps I spoilt one of the highest and purest loves that ever existed between man and woman! ... Then let the veil of our temple be rent in two from this hour!”

He went to the bed, removed one of the pair of pillows thereon, and flung it to the floor.

Sue looked at him, and bending over the bed-rail wept silently. “You don’t see that it is a matter of conscience with me, and not of dislike to you!” she brokenly murmured. “Dislike to you! But I can’t say any more—it breaks my heart—it will be undoing all I have begun! Jude—good-night!”

“Good-night,” he said, and turned to go.

“Oh but you shall kiss me!” said she, starting up. “I can’t—bear—!”

He clasped her, and kissed her weeping face as he had scarcely ever done before, and they remained in silence till she said, “Good-bye, good-bye!” And then gently pressing him away she got free, trying to mitigate the sadness by saying: “We’ll be dear friends just the same, Jude, won’t we? And we’ll see each other sometimes—yes!—and forget all this, and try to be as we were long ago?”

Jude did not permit himself to speak, but turned and descended the stairs.

IV

The man whom Sue, in her mental *volte-face*, was now regarding as her inseparable husband, lived still at Marygreen.

On the day before the tragedy of the children, Phillotson had seen both her and Jude as they stood in the rain at Christminster watching the procession to the theatre. But he had said nothing of it at the moment to his companion Gillingham, who, being an old friend, was staying with him at the village aforesaid, and had, indeed, suggested the day's trip to Christminster.

"What are you thinking of?" said Gillingham, as they went home. "The university degree you never obtained?"

"No, no," said Phillotson gruffly. "Of somebody I saw to-day." In a moment he added, "Susanna."

"I saw her, too."

"You said nothing."

"I didn't wish to draw your attention to her. But, as you did see her, you should have said: 'How d'ye do, my dear-that-was?'"

"Ah, well. I might have. But what do you think of this: I have good reason for supposing that she was innocent when I divorced her—that I was all wrong. Yes, indeed! Awkward, isn't it?"

"She has taken care to set you right since, anyhow, apparently."

"H'm. That's a cheap sneer. I ought to have waited, unquestionably."

At the end of the week, when Gillingham had gone back to his school near Shaston, Phillotson, as was his custom, went to Alfredston market; ruminating again on Arabella's intelligence as he walked down the long hill which he had known before Jude knew it, though his history had not beaten so intensely upon its incline. Arrived in the town he bought his usual weekly local paper; and when he had sat down in an inn to refresh himself for the five miles' walk back, he pulled the paper from his pocket and read

awhile. The account of the “strange suicide of a stone-mason’s children” met his eye.

Unimpassioned as he was, it impressed him painfully, and puzzled him not a little, for he could not understand the age of the elder child being what it was stated to be. However, there was no doubt that the newspaper report was in some way true.

“Their cup of sorrow is now full!” he said: and thought and thought of Sue, and what she had gained by leaving him.

Arabella having made her home at Alfredston, and the schoolmaster coming to market there every Saturday, it was not wonderful that in a few weeks they met again—the precise time being just after her return from Christminster, where she had stayed much longer than she had at first intended, keeping an interested eye on Jude, though Jude had seen no more of her. Phillotson was on his way homeward when he encountered Arabella, and she was approaching the town.

“You like walking out this way, Mrs. Cartlett?” he said.

“I’ve just begun to again,” she replied. “It is where I lived as maid and wife, and all the past things of my life that are interesting to my feelings are mixed up with this road. And they have been stirred up in me too, lately; for I’ve been visiting at Christminster. Yes; I’ve seen Jude.”

“Ah! How do they bear their terrible affliction?”

“In a ve-ry strange way—ve-ry strange! She don’t live with him any longer. I only heard of it as a certainty just before I left; though I had thought things were drifting that way from their manner when I called on them.”

“Not live with her husband? Why, I should have thought ’twould have united them more.”

“He’s not her husband, after all. She has never really married him although they have passed as man and wife so long. And now, instead of this sad event making ’em hurry up, and get the thing done legally, she’s took in a queer religious way, just as I was in my affliction at losing Cartlett, only hers is of a more ’sterical sort than mine. And she says, so I was told, that she’s your wife in the eye of Heaven and the Church—yours only; and can’t be anybody else’s by any act of man.”

“Ah—indeed? ... Separated, have they!”

“You see, the eldest boy was mine—”

“Oh—yours!”

“Yes, poor little fellow—born in lawful wedlock, thank God. And perhaps she feels, over and above other things, that I ought to have been in her place. I can’t say. However, as for me, I am soon off from here. I’ve got Father to look after now, and we can’t live in such a hum-drum place as this. I hope soon to be in a bar again at Christminster, or some other big town.”

They parted. When Phillotson had ascended the hill a few steps he stopped, hastened back, and called her.

“What is, or was, their address?”

Arabella gave it.

“Thank you. Good afternoon.”

Arabella smiled grimly as she resumed her way, and practised dimple-making all along the road from where the pollard willows begin to the old almshouses in the first street of the town.

Meanwhile Phillotson ascended to Marygreen, and for the first time during a lengthened period he lived with a forward eye. On crossing under the large trees of the green to the humble schoolhouse to which he had been reduced he stood a moment, and pictured Sue coming out of the door to meet him. No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go. He had been knocked about from pillar to post at the hands of the virtuous almost beyond endurance; he had been nearly starved, and was now dependent entirely upon the very small stipend from the school of this village (where the parson had got ill-spoken of for befriending him). He had often thought of Arabella’s remarks that he should have been more severe with Sue, that her recalcitrant spirit would soon have been broken. Yet such was his obstinate and illogical disregard of opinion, and of the principles in which he had been trained, that his convictions on the rightness of his course with his wife had not been disturbed.

Principles which could be subverted by feeling in one direction were liable to the same catastrophe in another. The instincts which had allowed him to give Sue her liberty now enabled him to regard her as none the worse for her life with Jude. He wished for her still, in his curious way, if he

did not love her, and, apart from policy, soon felt that he would be gratified to have her again as his, always provided that she came willingly.

But artifice was necessary, he had found, for stemming the cold and inhumane blast of the world's contempt. And here were the materials ready made. By getting Sue back and remarrying her on the respectable plea of having entertained erroneous views of her, and gained his divorce wrongfully, he might acquire some comfort, resume his old courses, perhaps return to the Shaston school, if not even to the Church as a licentiate.

He thought he would write to Gillingham to inquire his views, and what he thought of his, Phillotson's, sending a letter to her. Gillingham replied, naturally, that now she was gone it were best to let her be, and considered that if she were anybody's wife she was the wife of the man to whom she had borne three children and owed such tragical adventures. Probably, as his attachment to her seemed unusually strong, the singular pair would make their union legal in course of time, and all would be well, and decent, and in order.

"But they won't—Sue won't!" exclaimed Phillotson to himself. "Gillingham is so matter of fact. She's affected by Christminster sentiment and teaching. I can see her views on the indissolubility of marriage well enough, and I know where she got them. They are not mine; but I shall make use of them to further mine."

He wrote a brief reply to Gillingham. "I know I am entirely wrong, but I don't agree with you. As to her having lived with and had three children by him, my feeling is (though I can advance no logical or moral defence of it, on the old lines) that it has done little more than finish her education. I shall write to her, and learn whether what that woman said is true or no."

As he had made up his mind to do this before he had written to his friend, there had not been much reason for writing to the latter at all. However, it was Phillotson's way to act thus.

He accordingly addressed a carefully considered epistle to Sue, and, knowing her emotional temperament, threw a Rhadamanthine strictness into the lines here and there, carefully hiding his heterodox feelings, not to frighten her. He stated that, it having come to his knowledge that her views had considerably changed, he felt compelled to say that his own, too, were largely modified by events subsequent to their parting. He would not

conceal from her that passionate love had little to do with his communication. It arose from a wish to make their lives, if not a success, at least no such disastrous failure as they threatened to become, through his acting on what he had considered at the time a principle of justice, charity, and reason.

To indulge one's instinctive and uncontrolled sense of justice and right, was not, he had found, permitted with impunity in an old civilization like ours. It was necessary to act under an acquired and cultivated sense of the same, if you wished to enjoy an average share of comfort and honour; and to let crude loving kindness take care of itself.

He suggested that she should come to him there at Marygreen.

On second thoughts he took out the last paragraph but one; and having rewritten the letter he dispatched it immediately, and in some excitement awaited the issue.

A few days after a figure moved through the white fog which enveloped the Beersheba suburb of Christminster, towards the quarter in which Jude Fawley had taken up his lodging since his division from Sue. A timid knock sounded upon the door of his abode.

It was evening—so he was at home; and by a species of divination he jumped up and rushed to the door himself.

“Will you come out with me? I would rather not come in. I want to—to talk with you—and to go with you to the cemetery.”

It had been in the trembling accents of Sue that these words came. Jude put on his hat. “It is dreary for you to be out,” he said. “But if you prefer not to come in, I don't mind.”

“Yes—I do. I shall not keep you long.”

Jude was too much affected to go on talking at first; she, too, was now such a mere cluster of nerves that all initiatory power seemed to have left her, and they proceeded through the fog like Acherontic shades for a long while, without sound or gesture.

“I want to tell you,” she presently said, her voice now quick, now slow, “so that you may not hear of it by chance. I am going back to Richard. He has—so magnanimously—agreed to forgive all.”

“Going back? How can you go—”

“He is going to marry me again. That is for form’s sake, and to satisfy the world, which does not see things as they are. But of course I *am* his wife already. Nothing has changed that.”

He turned upon her with an anguish that was well-nigh fierce.

“But you are *my* wife! Yes, you are. You know it. I have always regretted that feint of ours in going away and pretending to come back legally married, to save appearances. I loved you, and you loved me; and we closed with each other; and that made the marriage. We still love—you as well as I—*know* it, Sue! Therefore our marriage is not cancelled.”

“Yes; I know how you see it,” she answered with despairing self-suppression. “But I am going to marry him again, as it would be called by you. Strictly speaking you, too—don’t mind my saying it, Jude!—you should take back—Arabella.”

“I should? Good God—what next! But how if you and I had married legally, as we were on the point of doing?”

“I should have felt just the same—that ours was not a marriage. And I would go back to Richard without repeating the sacrament, if he asked me. But ‘the world and its ways have a certain worth’ (I suppose), therefore I concede a repetition of the ceremony... Don’t crush all the life out of me by satire and argument, I implore you! I was strongest once, I know, and perhaps I treated you cruelly. But Jude, return good for evil! I am the weaker now. Don’t retaliate upon me, but be kind. Oh be kind to me—a poor wicked woman who is trying to mend!”

He shook his head hopelessly, his eyes wet. The blow of her bereavement seemed to have destroyed her reasoning faculty. The once keen vision was dimmed. “All wrong, all wrong!” he said huskily. “Error—perversity! It drives me out of my senses. Do you care for him? Do you love him? You know you don’t! It will be a fanatic prostitution—God forgive me, yes—that’s what it will be!”

“I don’t love him—I must, must, own it, in deepest remorse! But I shall try to learn to love him by obeying him.”

Jude argued, urged, implored; but her conviction was proof against all. It seemed to be the one thing on earth on which she was firm, and that her firmness in this had left her tottering in every other impulse and wish she possessed.

“I have been considerate enough to let you know the whole truth, and to tell it you myself,” she said in cut tones; “that you might not consider yourself slighted by hearing of it at second hand. I have even owned the extreme fact that I do not love him. I did not think you would be so rough with me for doing so! I was going to ask you...”

“To give you away?”

“No. To send—my boxes to me—if you would. But I suppose you won’t.”

“Why, of course I will. What—isn’t he coming to fetch you—to marry you from here? He won’t condescend to do that?”

“No—I won’t let him. I go to him voluntarily, just as I went away from him. We are to be married at his little church at Marygreen.”

She was so sadly sweet in what he called her wrong-headedness that Jude could not help being moved to tears more than once for pity of her. “I never knew such a woman for doing impulsive penances, as you, Sue! No sooner does one expect you to go straight on, as the one rational proceeding, than you double round the corner!”

“Ah, well; let that go! ... Jude, I must say good-bye! But I wanted you to go to the cemetery with me. Let our farewell be there—beside the graves of those who died to bring home to me the error of my views.”

They turned in the direction of the place, and the gate was opened to them on application. Sue had been there often, and she knew the way to the spot in the dark. They reached it, and stood still.

“It is here—I should like to part,” said she.

“So be it!”

“Don’t think me hard because I have acted on conviction. Your generous devotion to me is unparalleled, Jude! Your worldly failure, if you have failed, is to your credit rather than to your blame. Remember that the best and greatest among mankind are those who do themselves no worldly good. Every successful man is more or less a selfish man. The devoted fail... ‘Charity seeketh not her own.’”

“In that chapter we are at one, ever beloved darling, and on it we’ll part friends. Its verses will stand fast when all the rest that you call religion has passed away!”

“Well—don’t discuss it. Good-bye, Jude; my fellow-sinner, and kindest friend!”

“Good-bye, my mistaken wife. Good-bye!”

V

The next afternoon the familiar Christminster fog still hung over all things. Sue's slim shape was only just discernible going towards the station.

Jude had no heart to go to his work that day. Neither could he go anywhere in the direction by which she would be likely to pass. He went in an opposite one, to a dreary, strange, flat scene, where boughs dripped, and coughs and consumption lurked, and where he had never been before.

"Sue's gone from me—gone!" he murmured miserably.

She in the meantime had left by the train, and reached Alfredston Road, where she entered the steam-tram and was conveyed into the town. It had been her request to Phillotson that he should not meet her. She wished, she said, to come to him voluntarily, to his very house and hearthstone.

It was Friday evening, which had been chosen because the schoolmaster was disengaged at four o'clock that day till the Monday morning following. The little car she hired at the Bear to drive her to Marygreen set her down at the end of the lane, half a mile from the village, by her desire, and preceded her to the schoolhouse with such portion of her luggage as she had brought. On its return she encountered it, and asked the driver if he had found the master's house open. The man informed her that he had, and that her things had been taken in by the schoolmaster himself.

She could now enter Marygreen without exciting much observation. She crossed by the well and under the trees to the pretty new school on the other side, and lifted the latch of the dwelling without knocking. Phillotson stood in the middle of the room, awaiting her, as requested.

"I've come, Richard," said she, looking pale and shaken, and sinking into a chair. "I cannot believe—you forgive your—wife!"

"Everything, darling Susanna," said Phillotson.

She started at the endearment, though it had been spoken advisedly without fervour. Then she nerved herself again.

“My children—are dead—and it is right that they should be! I am glad—almost. They were sin-begotten. They were sacrificed to teach me how to live! Their death was the first stage of my purification. That’s why they have not died in vain! ... You will take me back?”

He was so stirred by her pitiful words and tone that he did more than he had meant to do. He bent and kissed her cheek.

Sue imperceptibly shrank away, her flesh quivering under the touch of his lips.

Phillotson’s heart sank, for desire was renascent in him. “You still have an aversion to me!”

“Oh no, dear—I have been driving through the damp, and I was chilly!” she said, with a hurried smile of apprehension. “When are we going to have the marriage? Soon?”

“To-morrow morning, early, I thought—if you really wish. I am sending round to the vicar to let him know you are come. I have told him all, and he highly approves—he says it will bring our lives to a triumphant and satisfactory issue. But—are you sure of yourself? It is not too late to refuse now if—you think you can’t bring yourself to it, you know?”

“Yes, yes, I can! I want it done quick. Tell him, tell him at once! My strength is tried by the undertaking—I can’t wait long!”

“Have something to eat and drink then, and go over to your room at Mrs. Edlin’s. I’ll tell the vicar half-past eight to-morrow, before anybody is about—if that’s not too soon for you? My friend Gillingham is here to help us in the ceremony. He’s been good enough to come all the way from Shaston at great inconvenience to himself.”

Unlike a woman in ordinary, whose eye is so keen for material things, Sue seemed to see nothing of the room they were in, or any detail of her environment. But on moving across the parlour to put down her muff she uttered a little “Oh!” and grew paler than before. Her look was that of the condemned criminal who catches sight of his coffin.

“What?” said Phillotson.

The flap of the bureau chanced to be open, and in placing her muff upon it her eye had caught a document which lay there. “Oh—only a—funny surprise!” she said, trying to laugh away her cry as she came back to the table.

“Ah! Yes,” said Phillotson. “The licence... It has just come.”

Gillingham now joined them from his room above, and Sue nervously made herself agreeable to him by talking on whatever she thought likely to interest him, except herself, though that interested him most of all. She obediently ate some supper, and prepared to leave for her lodging hard by. Phillotson crossed the green with her, bidding her good-night at Mrs. Edlin’s door.

The old woman accompanied Sue to her temporary quarters, and helped her to unpack. Among other things she laid out a night-gown tastefully embroidered.

“Oh—I didn’t know *that* was put in!” said Sue quickly. “I didn’t mean it to be. Here is a different one.” She handed a new and absolutely plain garment, of coarse and unbleached calico.

“But this is the prettiest,” said Mrs. Edlin. “That one is no better than very sackcloth o’ Scripture!”

“Yes—I meant it to be. Give me the other.”

She took it, and began rending it with all her might, the tears resounding through the house like a screech-owl.

“But my dear, dear!—whatever...”

“It is adulterous! It signifies what I don’t feel—I bought it long ago—to please Jude. It must be destroyed!”

Mrs. Edlin lifted her hands, and Sue excitedly continued to tear the linen into strips, laying the pieces in the fire.

“You med ha’ give it to me!” said the widow. “It do make my heart ache to see such pretty open-work as that a-burned by the flames—not that ornamental night-rails can be much use to a’ ould ’ooman like I. My days for such be all past and gone!”

“It is an accursed thing—it reminds me of what I want to forget!” Sue repeated. “It is only fit for the fire.”

“Lord, you be too strict! What do ye use such words for, and condemn to hell your dear little innocent children that’s lost to ’ee! Upon my life I don’t call that religion!”

Sue flung her face upon the bed, sobbing. “Oh, don’t, don’t! That kills me!” She remained shaken with her grief, and slipped down upon her

knees.

“I’ll tell ’ee what—you ought not to marry this man again!” said Mrs. Edlin indignantly. “You are in love wi’ t’ other still!”

“Yes I must—I am his already!”

“Pshoo! You be t’ other man’s. If you didn’t like to commit yourselves to the binding vow again, just at first, ’twas all the more credit to your consciences, considering your reasons, and you med ha’ lived on, and made it all right at last. After all, it concerned nobody but your own two selves.”

“Richard says he’ll have me back, and I’m bound to go! If he had refused, it might not have been so much my duty to—give up Jude. But—” She remained with her face in the bed-clothes, and Mrs. Edlin left the room.

Phillotson in the interval had gone back to his friend Gillingham, who still sat over the supper-table. They soon rose, and walked out on the green to smoke awhile. A light was burning in Sue’s room, a shadow moving now and then across the blind.

Gillingham had evidently been impressed with the indefinable charm of Sue, and after a silence he said, “Well: you’ve all but got her again at last. She can’t very well go a second time. The pear has dropped into your hand.”

“Yes! ... I suppose I am right in taking her at her word. I confess there seems a touch of selfishness in it. Apart from her being what she is, of course, a luxury for a fogley like me, it will set me right in the eyes of the clergy and orthodox laity, who have never forgiven me for letting her go. So I may get back in some degree into my old track.”

“Well—if you’ve got any sound reason for marrying her again, do it now in God’s name! I was always against your opening the cage-door and letting the bird go in such an obviously suicidal way. You might have been a school inspector by this time, or a reverend, if you hadn’t been so weak about her.”

“I did myself irreparable damage—I know it.”

“Once you’ve got her housed again, stick to her.”

Phillotson was more evasive to-night. He did not care to admit clearly that his taking Sue to him again had at bottom nothing to do with repentance of letting her go, but was, primarily, a human instinct flying in the face of custom and profession. He said, “Yes—I shall do that. I know

woman better now. Whatever justice there was in releasing her, there was little logic, for one holding my views on other subjects.”

Gillingham looked at him, and wondered whether it would ever happen that the reactionary spirit induced by the world’s sneers and his own physical wishes would make Phillotson more orthodoxly cruel to her than he had erstwhile been informally and perversely kind.

“I perceive it won’t do to give way to impulse,” Phillotson resumed, feeling more and more every minute the necessity of acting up to his position. “I flew in the face of the Church’s teaching; but I did it without malice prepense. Women are so strange in their influence that they tempt you to misplaced kindness. However, I know myself better now. A little judicious severity, perhaps...”

“Yes; but you must tighten the reins by degrees only. Don’t be too strenuous at first. She’ll come to any terms in time.”

The caution was unnecessary, though Phillotson did not say so. “I remember what my vicar at Shaston said, when I left after the row that was made about my agreeing to her elopement. ‘The only thing you can do to retrieve your position and hers is to admit your error in not restraining her with a wise and strong hand, and to get her back again if she’ll come, and be firm in the future.’ But I was so headstrong at that time that I paid no heed. And that after the divorce she should have thought of doing so I did not dream.”

The gate of Mrs. Edlin’s cottage clicked, and somebody began crossing in the direction of the school. Phillotson said “Good-night.”

“Oh, is that Mr. Phillotson,” said Mrs. Edlin. “I was going over to see ’ee. I’ve been upstairs with her, helping her to unpack her things; and upon my word, sir, I don’t think this ought to be!”

“What—the wedding?”

“Yes. She’s forcing herself to it, poor dear little thing; and you’ve no notion what she’s suffering. I was never much for religion nor against it, but it can’t be right to let her do this, and you ought to persuade her out of it. Of course everybody will say it was very good and forgiving of ’ee to take her to ’ee again. But for my part I don’t.”

“It’s her wish, and I am willing,” said Phillotson with grave reserve, opposition making him illogically tenacious now. “A great piece of laxity

will be rectified.”

“I don’t believe it. She’s his wife if anybody’s. She’s had three children by him, and he loves her dearly; and it’s a wicked shame to egg her on to this, poor little quivering thing! She’s got nobody on her side. The one man who’d be her friend the obstinate creature won’t allow to come near her. What first put her into this mood o’ mind, I wonder!”

“I can’t tell. Not I certainly. It is all voluntary on her part. Now that’s all I have to say.” Phillotson spoke stiffly. “You’ve turned round, Mrs. Edlin. It is unseemly of you!”

“Well, I knowed you’d be affronted at what I had to say; but I don’t mind that. The truth’s the truth.”

“I’m not affronted, Mrs. Edlin. You’ve been too kind a neighbour for that. But I must be allowed to know what’s best for myself and Susanna. I suppose you won’t go to church with us, then?”

“No. Be hanged if I can... I don’t know what the times be coming to! Matrimony have growed to be that serious in these days that one really do feel afeard to move in it at all. In my time we took it more careless; and I don’t know that we was any the worse for it! When I and my poor man were jined in it we kept up the junketing all the week, and drunk the parish dry, and had to borrow half a crown to begin housekeeping!”

When Mrs. Edlin had gone back to her cottage Phillotson spoke moodily. “I don’t know whether I ought to do it—at any rate quite so rapidly.”

“Why?”

“If she is really compelling herself to this against her instincts—merely from this new sense of duty or religion—I ought perhaps to let her wait a bit.”

“Now you’ve got so far you ought not to back out of it. That’s my opinion.”

“I can’t very well put it off now; that’s true. But I had a qualm when she gave that little cry at sight of the licence.”

“Now, never you have qualms, old boy. I mean to give her away to-morrow morning, and you mean to take her. It has always been on my conscience that I didn’t urge more objections to your letting her go, and now we’ve got to this stage I shan’t be content if I don’t help you to set the matter right.”

Phillotson nodded, and seeing how staunch his friend was, became more frank. "No doubt when it gets known what I've done I shall be thought a soft fool by many. But they don't know Sue as I do. Though so elusive, hers is such an honest nature at bottom that I don't think she has ever done anything against her conscience. The fact of her having lived with Fawley goes for nothing. At the time she left me for him she thought she was quite within her right. Now she thinks otherwise."

The next morning came, and the self-sacrifice of the woman on the altar of what she was pleased to call her principles was acquiesced in by these two friends, each from his own point of view. Phillotson went across to the Widow Edlin's to fetch Sue a few minutes after eight o'clock. The fog of the previous day or two on the low-lands had travelled up here by now, and the trees on the green caught armfuls, and turned them into showers of big drops. The bride was waiting, ready; bonnet and all on. She had never in her life looked so much like the lily her name connoted as she did in that pallid morning light. Chastened, world-weary, remorseful, the strain on her nerves had preyed upon her flesh and bones, and she appeared smaller in outline than she had formerly done, though Sue had not been a large woman in her days of rudest health.

"Prompt," said the schoolmaster, magnanimously taking her hand. But he checked his impulse to kiss her, remembering her start of yesterday, which unpleasantly lingered in his mind.

Gillingham joined them, and they left the house, Widow Edlin continuing steadfast in her refusal to assist in the ceremony.

"Where is the church?" said Sue. She had not lived there for any length of time since the old church was pulled down, and in her preoccupation forgot the new one.

"Up here," said Phillotson; and presently the tower loomed large and solemn in the fog. The vicar had already crossed to the building, and when they entered he said pleasantly: "We almost want candles."

"You do—wish me to be yours, Richard?" gasped Sue in a whisper.

"Certainly, dear; above all things in the world."

Sue said no more; and for the second or third time he felt he was not quite following out the humane instinct which had induced him to let her go.

There they stood, five altogether: the parson, the clerk, the couple, and Gillingham; and the holy ordinance was resolemnized forthwith. In the nave of the edifice were two or three villagers, and when the clergyman came to the words, "What God hath joined," a woman's voice from among these was heard to utter audibly:

"God hath jined indeed!"

It was like a re-enactment by the ghosts of their former selves of the similar scene which had taken place at Melchester years before. When the books were signed the vicar congratulated the husband and wife on having performed a noble, and righteous, and mutually forgiving act. "All's well that ends well," he said smiling. "May you long be happy together, after thus having been 'saved as by fire.'"

They came down the nearly empty building, and crossed to the schoolhouse. Gillingham wanted to get home that night, and left early. He, too, congratulated the couple. "Now," he said in parting from Phillotson, who walked out a little way, "I shall be able to tell the people in your native place a good round tale; and they'll all say 'Well done,' depend on it."

When the schoolmaster got back Sue was making a pretence of doing some housewifery as if she lived there. But she seemed timid at his approach, and compunction wrought on him at sight of it.

"Of course, my dear, I shan't expect to intrude upon your personal privacy any more than I did before," he said gravely. "It is for our good socially to do this, and that's its justification, if it was not my reason." Sue brightened a little.

VI

The place was the door of Jude's lodging in the out-skirts of Christminster—far from the precincts of St. Silas' where he had formerly lived, which saddened him to sickness. The rain was coming down. A woman in shabby black stood on the doorstep talking to Jude, who held the door in his hand.

"I am lonely, destitute, and houseless—that's what I am! Father has turned me out of doors after borrowing every penny I'd got, to put it into his business, and then accusing me of laziness when I was only waiting for a situation. I am at the mercy of the world! If you can't take me and help me, Jude, I must go to the workhouse, or to something worse. Only just now two undergraduates winked at me as I came along. 'Tis hard for a woman to keep virtuous where there's so many young men!"

The woman in the rain who spoke thus was Arabella, the evening being that of the day after Sue's remarriage with Phillotson.

"I am sorry for you, but I am only in lodgings," said Jude coldly.

"Then you turn me away?"

"I'll give you enough to get food and lodging for a few days."

"Oh, but can't you have the kindness to take me in? I cannot endure going to a public house to lodge; and I am so lonely. Please, Jude, for old times' sake!"

"No, no," said Jude hastily. "I don't want to be reminded of those things; and if you talk about them I shall not help you."

"Then I suppose I must go!" said Arabella. She bent her head against the doorpost and began sobbing.

"The house is full," said Jude. "And I have only a little extra room to my own—not much more than a closet—where I keep my tools, and templates, and the few books I have left!"

"That would be a palace for me!"

“There is no bedstead in it.”

“A bit of a bed could be made on the floor. It would be good enough for me.”

Unable to be harsh with her, and not knowing what to do, Jude called the man who let the lodgings, and said this was an acquaintance of his in great distress for want of temporary shelter.

“You may remember me as barmaid at the Lamb and Flag formerly?” spoke up Arabella. “My father has insulted me this afternoon, and I’ve left him, though without a penny!”

The householder said he could not recall her features. “But still, if you are a friend of Mr. Fawley’s we’ll do what we can for a day or two—if he’ll make himself answerable?”

“Yes, yes,” said Jude. “She has really taken me quite unawares; but I should wish to help her out of her difficulty.” And an arrangement was ultimately come to under which a bed was to be thrown down in Jude’s lumber-room, to make it comfortable for Arabella till she could get out of the strait she was in—not by her own fault, as she declared—and return to her father’s again.

While they were waiting for this to be done Arabella said: “You know the news, I suppose?”

“I guess what you mean; but I know nothing.”

“I had a letter from Anny at Alfredston to-day. She had just heard that the wedding was to be yesterday: but she didn’t know if it had come off.”

“I don’t wish to talk of it.”

“No, no: of course you don’t. Only it shows what kind of woman—”

“Don’t speak of her I say! She’s a fool! And she’s an angel, too, poor dear!”

“If it’s done, he’ll have a chance of getting back to his old position, by everybody’s account, so Anny says. All his well-wishers will be pleased, including the bishop himself.”

“Do spare me, Arabella.”

Arabella was duly installed in the little attic, and at first she did not come near Jude at all. She went to and fro about her own business, which, when they met for a moment on the stairs or in the passage, she informed him was

that of obtaining another place in the occupation she understood best. When Jude suggested London as affording the most likely opening in the liquor trade, she shook her head. “No—the temptations are too many,” she said. “Any humble tavern in the country before that for me.”

On the Sunday morning following, when he breakfasted later than on other days, she meekly asked him if she might come in to breakfast with him, as she had broken her teapot, and could not replace it immediately, the shops being shut.

“Yes, if you like,” he said indifferently.

While they sat without speaking she suddenly observed: “You seem all in a brood, old man. I’m sorry for you.”

“I am all in a brood.”

“It is about her, I know. It’s no business of mine, but I could find out all about the wedding—if it really did take place—if you wanted to know.”

“How could you?”

“I wanted to go to Alfredston to get a few things I left there. And I could see Anny, who’ll be sure to have heard all about it, as she has friends at Marygreen.”

Jude could not bear to acquiesce in this proposal; but his suspense pitted itself against his discretion, and won in the struggle. “You can ask about it if you like,” he said. “I’ve not heard a sound from there. It must have been very private, if—they have married.”

“I am afraid I haven’t enough cash to take me there and back, or I should have gone before. I must wait till I have earned some.”

“Oh—I can pay the journey for you,” he said impatiently. And thus his suspense as to Sue’s welfare, and the possible marriage, moved him to dispatch for intelligence the last emissary he would have thought of choosing deliberately.

Arabella went, Jude requesting her to be home not later than by the seven o’clock train. When she had gone he said: “Why should I have charged her to be back by a particular time! She’s nothing to me—nor the other neither!”

But having finished work he could not help going to the station to meet Arabella, dragged thither by feverish haste to get the news she might bring,

and know the worst. Arabella had made dimples most successfully all the way home, and when she stepped out of the railway carriage she smiled. He merely said “Well?” with the very reverse of a smile.

“They are married.”

“Yes—of course they are!” he returned. She observed, however, the hard strain upon his lip as he spoke.

“Anny says she has heard from Belinda, her relation out at Marygreen, that it was very sad, and curious!”

“How do you mean sad? She wanted to marry him again, didn’t she? And he her!”

“Yes—that was it. She wanted to in one sense, but not in the other. Mrs. Edlin was much upset by it all, and spoke out her mind at Phillotson. But Sue was that excited about it that she burnt her best embroidery that she’d worn with you, to blot you out entirely. Well—if a woman feels like it, she ought to do it. I commend her for it, though others don’t.” Arabella sighed. “She felt he was her only husband, and that she belonged to nobody else in the sight of God A’mighty while he lived. Perhaps another woman feels the same about herself, too!” Arabella sighed again.

“I don’t want any cant!” exclaimed Jude.

“It isn’t cant,” said Arabella. “I feel exactly the same as she!”

He closed that issue by remarking abruptly: “Well—now I know all I wanted to know. Many thanks for your information. I am not going back to my lodgings just yet.” And he left her straightway.

In his misery and depression Jude walked to well-nigh every spot in the city that he had visited with Sue; thence he did not know whither, and then thought of going home to his usual evening meal. But having all the vices of his virtues, and some to spare, he turned into a public house, for the first time during many months. Among the possible consequences of her marriage Sue had not dwelt on this.

Arabella, meanwhile, had gone back. The evening passed, and Jude did not return. At half-past nine Arabella herself went out, first proceeding to an outlying district near the river where her father lived, and had opened a small and precarious pork-shop lately.

“Well,” she said to him, “for all your rowing me that night, I’ve called in, for I have something to tell you. I think I shall get married and settled again.

Only you must help me: and you can do no less, after what I've stood 'ee."

"I'll do anything to get thee off my hands!"

"Very well. I am now going to look for my young man. He's on the loose I'm afraid, and I must get him home. All I want you to do to-night is not to fasten the door, in case I should want to sleep here, and should be late."

"I thought you'd soon get tired of giving yourself airs and keeping away!"

"Well—don't do the door. That's all I say."

She then sallied out again, and first hastening back to Jude's to make sure that he had not returned, began her search for him. A shrewd guess as to his probable course took her straight to the tavern which Jude had formerly frequented, and where she had been barmaid for a brief term. She had no sooner opened the door of the "Private Bar" than her eyes fell upon him—sitting in the shade at the back of the compartment, with his eyes fixed on the floor in a blank stare. He was drinking nothing stronger than ale just then. He did not observe her, and she entered and sat beside him.

Jude looked up, and said without surprise: "You've come to have something, Arabella? ... I'm trying to forget her: that's all! But I can't; and I am going home." She saw that he was a little way on in liquor, but only a little as yet.

"I've come entirely to look for you, dear boy. You are not well. Now you must have something better than that." Arabella held up her finger to the barmaid. "You shall have a liqueur—that's better fit for a man of education than beer. You shall have maraschino, or curaçao dry or sweet, or cherry brandy. I'll treat you, poor chap!"

"I don't care which! Say cherry brandy... Sue has served me badly, very badly. I didn't expect it of Sue! I stuck to her, and she ought to have stuck to me. I'd have sold my soul for her sake, but she wouldn't risk hers a jot for me. To save her own soul she lets mine go damn! ... But it isn't her fault, poor little girl—I am sure it isn't!"

How Arabella had obtained money did not appear, but she ordered a liqueur each, and paid for them. When they had drunk these Arabella suggested another; and Jude had the pleasure of being, as it were, personally conducted through the varieties of spirituous delectation by one who knew the landmarks well. Arabella kept very considerably in the rear

of Jude; but though she only sipped where he drank, she took as much as she could safely take without losing her head—which was not a little, as the crimson upon her countenance showed.

Her tone towards him to-night was uniformly soothing and cajoling; and whenever he said “I don’t care what happens to me,” a thing he did continually, she replied, “But I do very much!” The closing hour came, and they were compelled to turn out; whereupon Arabella put her arm round his waist, and guided his unsteady footsteps.

When they were in the streets she said: “I don’t know what our landlord will say to my bringing you home in this state. I expect we are fastened out, so that he’ll have to come down and let us in.”

“I don’t know—I don’t know.”

“That’s the worst of not having a home of your own. I tell you, Jude, what we had best do. Come round to my father’s—I made it up with him a bit to-day. I can let you in, and nobody will see you at all; and by to-morrow morning you’ll be all right.”

“Anything—anywhere,” replied Jude. “What the devil does it matter to me?”

They went along together, like any other fuddling couple, her arm still round his waist, and his, at last, round hers; though with no amatory intent; but merely because he was weary, unstable, and in need of support.

“This—is th’ Martyrs’—burning-place,” he stammered as they dragged across a broad street. “I remember—in old Fuller’s *Holy State*—and I am reminded of it—by our passing by here—old Fuller in his *Holy State* says, that at the burning of Ridley, Doctor Smith—preached sermon, and took as his text ‘*Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*’—Often think of it as I pass here. Ridley was a—”

“Yes. Exactly. Very thoughtful of you, deary, even though it hasn’t much to do with our present business.”

“Why, yes it has! I’m giving my body to be burned! But—ah you don’t understand!—it wants Sue to understand such things! And I was her seducer—poor little girl! And she’s gone—and I don’t care about myself! Do what you like with me! ... And yet she did it for conscience’ sake, poor little Sue!”

“Hang her!—I mean, I think she was right,” hiccuped Arabella. “I’ve my feelings too, like her; and I feel I belong to you in Heaven’s eye, and to nobody else, till death us do part! It is—hic—never too late—hic to mend!”

They had reached her father’s house, and she softly unfastened the door, groping about for a light within.

The circumstances were not altogether unlike those of their entry into the cottage at Cresscombe, such a long time before. Nor were perhaps Arabella’s motives. But Jude did not think of that, though she did.

“I can’t find the matches, dear,” she said when she had fastened up the door. “But never mind—this way. As quiet as you can, please.”

“It is as dark as pitch,” said Jude.

“Give me your hand, and I’ll lead you. That’s it. Just sit down here, and I’ll pull off your boots. I don’t want to wake him.”

“Who?”

“Father. He’d make a row, perhaps.”

She pulled off his boots. “Now,” she whispered, “take hold of me—never mind your weight. Now—first stair, second stair—”

“But—are we out in our old house by Marygreen?” asked the stupefied Jude. “I haven’t been inside it for years till now! Hey? And where are my books? That’s what I want to know?”

“We are at my house, dear, where there’s nobody to spy out how ill you are. Now—third stair, fourth stair—that’s it. Now we shall get on.”

VII

Arabella was preparing breakfast in the downstairs back room of this small, recently hired tenement of her father's. She put her head into the little pork-shop in front, and told Mr. Donn it was ready. Donn, endeavouring to look like a master pork-butcher, in a greasy blue blouse, and with a strap round his waist from which a steel dangled, came in promptly.

"You must mind the shop this morning," he said casually. "I've to go and get some inwards and half a pig from Lumsdon, and to call elsewhere. If you live here you must put your shoulder to the wheel, at least till I get the business started!"

"Well, for to-day I can't say." She looked deedly into his face. "I've got a prize upstairs."

"Oh? What's that?"

"A husband—almost."

"No!"

"Yes. It's Jude. He's come back to me."

"Your old original one? Well, I'm damned!"

"Well, I always did like him, that I will say."

"But how does he come to be up there?" said Donn, humour-struck, and nodding to the ceiling.

"Don't ask inconvenient questions, Father. What we've to do is to keep him here till he and I are—as we were."

"How was that?"

"Married."

"Ah... Well it is the rummest thing I ever heard of—marrying an old husband again, and so much new blood in the world! He's no catch, to my thinking. I'd have had a new one while I was about it."

“It isn’t rum for a woman to want her old husband back for respectability, though for a man to want his old wife back—well, perhaps it is funny, rather!” And Arabella was suddenly seized with a fit of loud laughter, in which her father joined more moderately.

“Be civil to him, and I’ll do the rest,” she said when she had recovered seriousness. “He told me this morning that his head ached fit to burst, and he hardly seemed to know where he was. And no wonder, considering how he mixed his drink last night. We must keep him jolly and cheerful here for a day or two, and not let him go back to his lodging. Whatever you advance I’ll pay back to you again. But I must go up and see how he is now, poor deary.”

Arabella ascended the stairs, softly opened the door of the first bedroom, and peeped in. Finding that her shorn Samson was asleep she entered to the bedside and stood regarding him. The fevered flush on his face from the debauch of the previous evening lessened the fragility of his ordinary appearance, and his long lashes, dark brows, and curly back hair and beard against the white pillow completed the physiognomy of one whom Arabella, as a woman of rank passions, still felt it worth while to recapture, highly important to recapture as a woman straitened both in means and in reputation. Her ardent gaze seemed to affect him; his quick breathing became suspended, and he opened his eyes.

“How are you now, dear?” said she. “It is I—Arabella.”

“Ah!—where—oh yes, I remember! You gave me shelter... I am stranded—ill—demoralized—damn bad! That’s what I am!”

“Then do stay here. There’s nobody in the house but father and me, and you can rest till you are thoroughly well. I’ll tell them at the stoneworks that you are knocked up.”

“I wonder what they are thinking at the lodgings!”

“I’ll go round and explain. Perhaps you had better let me pay up, or they’ll think we’ve run away?”

“Yes. You’ll find enough money in my pocket there.”

Quite indifferent, and shutting his eyes because he could not bear the daylight in his throbbing eye-balls, Jude seemed to doze again. Arabella took his purse, softly left the room, and putting on her outdoor things went off to the lodgings she and he had quitted the evening before.

Scarcely half an hour had elapsed ere she reappeared round the corner, walking beside a lad wheeling a truck on which were piled all Jude's household possessions, and also the few of Arabella's things which she had taken to the lodging for her short sojourn there. Jude was in such physical pain from his unfortunate break-down of the previous night, and in such mental pain from the loss of Sue and from having yielded in his half-somnolent state to Arabella, that when he saw his few chattels unpacked and standing before his eyes in this strange bedroom, intermixed with woman's apparel, he scarcely considered how they had come there, or what their coming signalized.

"Now," said Arabella to her father downstairs, "we must keep plenty of good liquor going in the house these next few days. I know his nature, and if he once gets into that fearfully low state that he does get into sometimes, he'll never do the honourable thing by me in this world, and I shall be left in the lurch. He must be kept cheerful. He has a little money in the savings bank, and he has given me his purse to pay for anything necessary. Well, that will be the licence; for I must have that ready at hand, to catch him the moment he's in the humour. You must pay for the liquor. A few friends, and a quiet convivial party would be the thing, if we could get it up. It would advertise the shop, and help me too."

"That can be got up easy enough by anybody who'll afford victuals and drink... Well yes—it would advertise the shop—that's true."

Three days later, when Jude had recovered somewhat from the fearful throbbing of his eyes and brain, but was still considerably confused in his mind by what had been supplied to him by Arabella during the interval—to keep him, jolly, as she expressed it—the quiet convivial gathering, suggested by her, to wind Jude up to the striking point, took place.

Donn had only just opened his miserable little pork and sausage shop, which had as yet scarce any customers; nevertheless that party advertised it well, and the Donns acquired a real notoriety among a certain class in Christminster who knew not the colleges, nor their works, nor their ways. Jude was asked if he could suggest any guest in addition to those named by Arabella and her father, and in a saturnine humour of perfect recklessness mentioned Uncle Joe, and Stagg, and the decayed auctioneer, and others whom he remembered as having been frequenters of the well-known tavern during his bout therein years before. He also suggested Freckles and Bower

o' Bliss. Arabella took him at his word so far as the men went, but drew the line at the ladies.

Another man they knew, Tinker Taylor, though he lived in the same street, was not invited; but as he went homeward from a late job on the evening of the party, he had occasion to call at the shop for trotters. There were none in, but he was promised some the next morning. While making his inquiry Taylor glanced into the back room, and saw the guests sitting round, card-playing, and drinking, and otherwise enjoying themselves at Donn's expense. He went home to bed, and on his way out next morning wondered how the party went off. He thought it hardly worth while to call at the shop for his provisions at that hour, Donn and his daughter being probably not up, if they caroused late the night before. However, he found in passing that the door was open, and he could hear voices within, though the shutters of the meat-stall were not down. He went and tapped at the sitting-room door, and opened it.

"Well—to be sure!" he said, astonished.

Hosts and guests were sitting card-playing, smoking, and talking, precisely as he had left them eleven hours earlier; the gas was burning and the curtains drawn, though it had been broad daylight for two hours out of doors.

"Yes!" cried Arabella, laughing. "Here we are, just the same. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, oughtn't we? But it is a sort of housewarming, you see; and our friends are in no hurry. Come in, Mr. Taylor, and sit down."

The tinker, or rather reduced ironmonger, was nothing loath, and entered and took a seat. "I shall lose a quarter, but never mind," he said. "Well, really, I could hardly believe my eyes when I looked in! It seemed as if I was flung back again into last night, all of a sudden."

"So you are. Pour out for Mr. Taylor."

He now perceived that she was sitting beside Jude, her arm being round his waist. Jude, like the rest of the company, bore on his face the signs of how deeply he had been indulging.

"Well, we've been waiting for certain legal hours to arrive, to tell the truth," she continued bashfully, and making her spirituous crimson look as much like a maiden blush as possible. "Jude and I have decided to make up

matters between us by tying the knot again, as we find we can't do without one another after all. So, as a bright notion, we agreed to sit on till it was late enough, and go and do it off-hand."

Jude seemed to pay no great heed to what she was announcing, or indeed to anything whatever. The entrance of Taylor infused fresh spirit into the company, and they remained sitting, till Arabella whispered to her father: "Now we may as well go."

"But the parson don't know?"

"Yes, I told him last night that we might come between eight and nine, as there were reasons of decency for doing it as early and quiet as possible; on account of it being our second marriage, which might make people curious to look on if they knew. He highly approved."

"Oh very well, I'm ready," said her father, getting up and shaking himself.

"Now, old darling," she said to Jude. "Come along, as you promised."

"When did I promise anything?" asked he, whom she had made so tipsy by her special knowledge of that line of business as almost to have made him sober again—or to seem so to those who did not know him.

"Why!" said Arabella, affecting dismay. "You've promised to marry me several times as we've sat here to-night. These gentlemen have heard you."

"I don't remember it," said Jude doggedly. "There's only one woman—but I won't mention her in this Capharnaum!"

Arabella looked towards her father. "Now, Mr. Fawley be honourable," said Donn. "You and my daughter have been living here together these three or four days, quite on the understanding that you were going to marry her. Of course I shouldn't have had such goings on in my house if I hadn't understood that. As a point of honour you must do it now."

"Don't say anything against my honour!" enjoined Jude hotly, standing up. "I'd marry the W—— of Babylon rather than do anything dishonourable! No reflection on you, my dear. It is a mere rhetorical figure—what they call in the books, hyperbole."

"Keep your figures for your debts to friends who shelter you," said Donn.

"If I am bound in honour to marry her—as I suppose I am—though how I came to be here with her I know no more than a dead man—marry her I

will, so help me God! I have never behaved dishonourably to a woman or to any living thing. I am not a man who wants to save himself at the expense of the weaker among us!”

“There—never mind him, deary,” said she, putting her cheek against Jude’s. “Come up and wash your face, and just put yourself tidy, and off we’ll go. Make it up with Father.”

They shook hands. Jude went upstairs with her, and soon came down looking tidy and calm. Arabella, too, had hastily arranged herself, and accompanied by Donn away they went.

“Don’t go,” she said to the guests at parting. “I’ve told the little maid to get the breakfast while we are gone; and when we come back we’ll all have some. A good strong cup of tea will set everybody right for going home.”

When Arabella, Jude, and Donn had disappeared on their matrimonial errand the assembled guests yawned themselves wider awake, and discussed the situation with great interest. Tinker Taylor, being the most sober, reasoned the most lucidly.

“I don’t wish to speak against friends,” he said. “But it do seem a rare curiosity for a couple to marry over again! If they couldn’t get on the first time when their minds were limp, they won’t the second, by my reckoning.”

“Do you think he’ll do it?”

“He’s been put upon his honour by the woman, so he med.”

“He’d hardly do it straight off like this. He’s got no licence nor anything.”

“She’s got that, bless you. Didn’t you hear her say so to her father?”

“Well,” said Tinker Taylor, relighting his pipe at the gas-jet. “Take her all together, limb by limb, she’s not such a bad-looking piece—particular by candlelight. To be sure, halfpence that have been in circulation can’t be expected to look like new ones from the mint. But for a woman that’s been knocking about the four hemispheres for some time, she’s passable enough. A little bit thick in the flitch perhaps: but I like a woman that a puff o’ wind won’t blow down.”

Their eyes followed the movements of the little girl as she spread the breakfast-cloth on the table they had been using, without wiping up the slops of the liquor. The curtains were undrawn, and the expression of the house made to look like morning. Some of the guests, however, fell asleep

in their chairs. One or two went to the door, and gazed along the street more than once. Tinker Taylor was the chief of these, and after a time he came in with a leer on his face.

“By Gad, they are coming! I think the deed’s done!”

“No,” said Uncle Joe, following him in. “Take my word, he turned rusty at the last minute. They are walking in a very unusual way; and that’s the meaning of it!”

They waited in silence till the wedding-party could be heard entering the house. First into the room came Arabella boisterously; and her face was enough to show that her strategy had succeeded.

“Mrs. Fawley, I presume?” said Tinker Taylor with mock courtesy.

“Certainly. Mrs. Fawley again,” replied Arabella blandly, pulling off her glove and holding out her left hand. “There’s the padlock, see... Well, he was a very nice, gentlemanly man indeed. I mean the clergyman. He said to me as gentle as a babe when all was done: ‘Mrs. Fawley, I congratulate you heartily,’ he says. ‘For having heard your history, and that of your husband, I think you have both done the right and proper thing. And for your past errors as a wife, and his as a husband, I think you ought now to be forgiven by the world, as you have forgiven each other,’ says he. Yes; he was a very nice, gentlemanly man. ‘The Church don’t recognize divorce in her dogma, strictly speaking,’ he says: ‘and bear in mind the words of the service in your goings out and your comings in: What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.’ Yes; he was a very nice, gentlemanly man... But, Jude, my dear, you were enough to make a cat laugh! You walked that straight, and held yourself that steady, that one would have thought you were going ’prentice to a judge; though I knew you were seeing double all the time, from the way you fumbled with my finger.”

“I said I’d do anything to—save a woman’s honour,” muttered Jude. “And I’ve done it!”

“Well now, old deary, come along and have some breakfast.”

“I want—some—more whisky,” said Jude stolidly.

“Nonsense, dear. Not now! There’s no more left. The tea will take the muddle out of our heads, and we shall be as fresh as larks.”

“All right. I’ve—married you. She said I ought to marry you again, and I have straightway. It is true religion! Ha—ha—ha!”

VIII

Michaelmas came and passed, and Jude and his wife, who had lived but a short time in her father's house after their remarriage, were in lodgings on the top floor of a dwelling nearer to the centre of the city.

He had done a few days' work during the two or three months since the event, but his health had been indifferent, and it was now precarious. He was sitting in an arm-chair before the fire, and coughed a good deal.

"I've got a bargain for my trouble in marrying thee over again!" Arabella was saying to him. "I shall have to keep 'ee entirely—that's what 'twill come to! I shall have to make black-pot and sausages, and hawk 'em about the street, all to support an invalid husband I'd no business to be saddled with at all. Why didn't you keep your health, deceiving one like this? You were well enough when the wedding was!"

"Ah, yes!" said he, laughing acridly. "I have been thinking of my foolish feeling about the pig you and I killed during our first marriage. I feel now that the greatest mercy that could be vouchsafed to me would be that something should serve me as I served that animal."

This was the sort of discourse that went on between them every day now. The landlord of the lodging, who had heard that they were a queer couple, had doubted if they were married at all, especially as he had seen Arabella kiss Jude one evening when she had taken a little cordial; and he was about to give them notice to quit, till by chance overhearing her one night haranguing Jude in rattling terms, and ultimately flinging a shoe at his head, he recognized the note of genuine wedlock; and concluding that they must be respectable, said no more.

Jude did not get any better, and one day he requested Arabella, with considerable hesitation, to execute a commission for him. She asked him indifferently what it was.

"To write to Sue."

"What in the name—do you want me to write to her for?"

“To ask how she is, and if she’ll come to see me, because I’m ill, and should like to see her—once again.”

“It is like you to insult a lawful wife by asking such a thing!”

“It is just in order not to insult you that I ask you to do it. You know I love Sue. I don’t wish to mince the matter—there stands the fact: I love her. I could find a dozen ways of sending a letter to her without your knowledge. But I wish to be quite above-board with you, and with her husband. A message through you asking her to come is at least free from any odour of intrigue. If she retains any of her old nature at all, she’ll come.”

“You’ve no respect for marriage whatever, or its rights and duties!”

“What *does* it matter what my opinions are—a wretch like me! Can it matter to anybody in the world who comes to see me for half an hour—here with one foot in the grave! ... Come, please write, Arabella!” he pleaded. “Repay my candour by a little generosity!”

“I should think *not*!”

“Not just once?—Oh do!” He felt that his physical weakness had taken away all his dignity.

“What do you want *her* to know how you are for? She don’t want to see ’ee. She’s the rat that forsook the sinking ship!”

“Don’t, don’t!”

“And I stuck to un—the more fool I! Have that strumpet in the house indeed!”

Almost as soon as the words were spoken Jude sprang from the chair, and before Arabella knew where she was he had her on her back upon a little couch which stood there, he kneeling above her.

“Say another word of that sort,” he whispered, “and I’ll kill you—here and now! I’ve everything to gain by it—my own death not being the least part. So don’t think there’s no meaning in what I say!”

“What do you want me to do?” gasped Arabella.

“Promise never to speak of her.”

“Very well. I do.”

“I take your word,” he said scornfully as he loosened her. “But what it is worth I can’t say.”

“You couldn’t kill the pig, but you could kill me!”

“Ah—there you have me! No—I couldn’t kill you—even in a passion. Taunt away!”

He then began coughing very much, and she estimated his life with an appraiser’s eye as he sank back ghastly pale. “I’ll send for her,” Arabella murmured, “if you’ll agree to my being in the room with you all the time she’s here.”

The softer side of his nature, the desire to see Sue, made him unable to resist the offer even now, provoked as he had been; and he replied breathlessly: “Yes, I agree. Only send for her!”

In the evening he inquired if she had written.

“Yes,” she said; “I wrote a note telling her you were ill, and asking her to come to-morrow or the day after. I haven’t posted it yet.”

The next day Jude wondered if she really did post it, but would not ask her; and foolish Hope, that lives on a drop and a crumb, made him restless with expectation. He knew the times of the possible trains, and listened on each occasion for sounds of her.

She did not come; but Jude would not address Arabella again thereon. He hoped and expected all the next day; but no Sue appeared; neither was there any note of reply. Then Jude decided in the privacy of his mind that Arabella had never posted hers, although she had written it. There was something in her manner which told it. His physical weakness was such that he shed tears at the disappointment when she was not there to see. His suspicions were, in fact, well founded. Arabella, like some other nurses, thought that your duty towards your invalid was to pacify him by any means short of really acting upon his fancies.

He never said another word to her about his wish or his conjecture. A silent, undiscerned resolve grew up in him, which gave him, if not strength, stability and calm. One midday when, after an absence of two hours, she came into the room, she beheld the chair empty.

Down she flopped on the bed, and sitting, meditated. “Now where the devil is my man gone to!” she said.

A driving rain from the north-east had been falling with more or less intermission all the morning, and looking from the window at the dripping spouts it seemed impossible to believe that any sick man would have

ventured out to almost certain death. Yet a conviction possessed Arabella that he had gone out, and it became a certainty when she had searched the house. "If he's such a fool, let him be!" she said. "I can do no more."

Jude was at that moment in a railway train that was drawing near to Alfredston, oddly swathed, pale as a monumental figure in alabaster, and much stared at by other passengers. An hour later his thin form, in the long great-coat and blanket he had come with, but without an umbrella, could have been seen walking along the five-mile road to Marygreen. On his face showed the determined purpose that alone sustained him, but to which his weakness afforded a sorry foundation. By the up-hill walk he was quite blown, but he pressed on; and at half-past three o'clock stood by the familiar well at Marygreen. The rain was keeping everybody indoors; Jude crossed the green to the church without observation, and found the building open. Here he stood, looking forth at the school, whence he could hear the usual sing-song tones of the little voices that had not learnt Creation's groan.

He waited till a small boy came from the school—one evidently allowed out before hours for some reason or other. Jude held up his hand, and the child came.

"Please call at the schoolhouse and ask Mrs. Phillotson if she will be kind enough to come to the church for a few minutes."

The child departed, and Jude heard him knock at the door of the dwelling. He himself went further into the church. Everything was new, except a few pieces of carving preserved from the wrecked old fabric, now fixed against the new walls. He stood by these: they seemed akin to the perished people of that place who were his ancestors and Sue's.

A light footstep, which might have been accounted no more than an added drip to the rainfall, sounded in the porch, and he looked round.

"Oh—I didn't think it was you! I didn't—Oh, Jude!" A hysterical catch in her breath ended in a succession of them. He advanced, but she quickly recovered and went back.

"Don't go—don't go!" he implored. "This is my last time! I thought it would be less intrusive than to enter your house. And I shall never come again. Don't then be unmerciful. Sue, Sue! We are acting by the letter; and 'the letter killeth'!"

“I’ll stay—I won’t be unkind!” she said, her mouth quivering and her tears flowing as she allowed him to come closer. “But why did you come, and do this wrong thing, after doing such a right thing as you have done?”

“What right thing?”

“Marrying Arabella again. It was in the Alfredston paper. She has never been other than yours, Jude—in a proper sense. And therefore you did so well—Oh so well!—in recognizing it—and taking her to you again.”

“God above—and is that all I’ve come to hear? If there is anything more degrading, immoral, unnatural, than another in my life, it is this meretricious contract with Arabella which has been called doing the right thing! And you too—you call yourself Phillotson’s wife! *His* wife! You are mine.”

“Don’t make me rush away from you—I can’t bear much! But on this point I am decided.”

“I cannot understand how you did it—how you think it—I cannot!”

“Never mind that. He is a kind husband to me—And I—I’ve wrestled and struggled, and fasted, and prayed. I have nearly brought my body into complete subjection. And you mustn’t—will you—wake—”

“Oh you darling little fool; where is your reason? You seem to have suffered the loss of your faculties! I would argue with you if I didn’t know that a woman in your state of feeling is quite beyond all appeals to her brains. Or is it that you are humbugging yourself, as so many women do about these things; and don’t actually believe what you pretend to, and only are indulging in the luxury of the emotion raised by an affected belief?”

“Luxury! How can you be so cruel!”

“You dear, sad, soft, most melancholy wreck of a promising human intellect that it has ever been my lot to behold! Where is your scorn of convention gone? I *would* have died game!”

“You crush, almost insult me, Jude! Go away from me!” She turned off quickly.

“I will. I would never come to see you again, even if I had the strength to come, which I shall not have any more. Sue, Sue, you are not worth a man’s love!”

Her bosom began to go up and down. "I can't endure you to say that!" she burst out, and her eye resting on him a moment, she turned back impulsively. "Don't, don't scorn me! Kiss me, oh kiss me lots of times, and say I am not a coward and a contemptible humbug—I can't bear it!" She rushed up to him and, with her mouth on his, continued: "I must tell you—oh I must—my darling Love! It has been—only a church marriage—an apparent marriage I mean! He suggested it at the very first!"

"How?"

"I mean it is a nominal marriage only. It hasn't been more than that at all since I came back to him!"

"Sue!" he said. Pressing her to him in his arms, he bruised her lips with kisses. "If misery can know happiness, I have a moment's happiness now! Now, in the name of all you hold holy, tell me the truth, and no lie. You do love me still?"

"I do! You know it too well! ... But I *mustn't* do this! I mustn't kiss you back as I would!"

"But do!"

"And yet you are so dear!—and you look so ill—"

"And so do you! There's one more, in memory of our dead little children—yours and mine!"

The words struck her like a blow, and she bent her head. "I *mustn't*—I *can't* go on with this!" she gasped presently. "But there, there, darling; I give you back your kisses; I do, I do! ... And now I'll *hate* myself for ever for my sin!"

"No—let me make my last appeal. Listen to this! We've both remarried out of our senses. I was made drunk to do it. You were the same. I was gin-drunk; you were creed-drunk. Either form of intoxication takes away the nobler vision... Let us then shake off our mistakes, and run away together!"

"No; again no! ... Why do you tempt me so far, Jude! It is too merciless! ... But I've got over myself now. Don't follow me—don't look at me. Leave me, for pity's sake!"

She ran up the church to the east end, and Jude did as she requested. He did not turn his head, but took up his blanket, which she had not seen, and went straight out. As he passed the end of the church she heard his coughs mingling with the rain on the windows, and in a last instinct of human

affection, even now unsubdued by her fetters, she sprang up as if to go and succour him. But she knelt down again, and stopped her ears with her hands till all possible sound of him had passed away.

He was by this time at the corner of the green, from which the path ran across the fields in which he had scared rooks as a boy. He turned and looked back, once, at the building which still contained Sue; and then went on, knowing that his eyes would light on that scene no more.

There are cold spots up and down Wessex in autumn and winter weather; but the coldest of all when a north or east wind is blowing is the crest of the down by the Brown House, where the road to Alfredston crosses the old Ridgeway. Here the first winter sleets and snows fall and lie, and here the spring frost lingers last unthawed. Here in the teeth of the north-east wind and rain Jude now pursued his way, wet through, the necessary slowness of his walk from lack of his former strength being insufficient to maintain his heat. He came to the milestone, and, raining as it was, spread his blanket and lay down there to rest. Before moving on he went and felt at the back of the stone for his own carving. It was still there; but nearly obliterated by moss. He passed the spot where the gibbet of his ancestor and Sue's had stood, and descended the hill.

It was dark when he reached Alfredston, where he had a cup of tea, the deadly chill that began to creep into his bones being too much for him to endure fasting. To get home he had to travel by a steam tram-car, and two branches of railway, with much waiting at a junction. He did not reach Christminster till ten o'clock.

IX

On the platform stood Arabella. She looked him up and down.

“You’ve been to see her?” she asked.

“I have,” said Jude, literally tottering with cold and lassitude.

“Well, now you’d best march along home.”

The water ran out of him as he went, and he was compelled to lean against the wall to support himself while coughing.

“You’ve done for yourself by this, young man,” said she. “I don’t know whether you know it.”

“Of course I do. I meant to do for myself.”

“What—to commit suicide?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, I’m blest! Kill yourself for a woman.”

“Listen to me, Arabella. You think you are the stronger; and so you are, in a physical sense, now. You could push me over like a nine-pin. You did not send that letter the other day, and I could not resent your conduct. But I am not so weak in another way as you think. I made up my mind that a man confined to his room by inflammation of the lungs, a fellow who had only two wishes left in the world, to see a particular woman, and then to die, could neatly accomplish those two wishes at one stroke by taking this journey in the rain. That I’ve done. I have seen her for the last time, and I’ve finished myself—put an end to a feverish life which ought never to have been begun!”

“Lord—you do talk lofty! Won’t you have something warm to drink?”

“No thank you. Let’s get home.”

They went along by the silent colleges, and Jude kept stopping.

“What are you looking at?”

“Stupid fancies. I see, in a way, those spirits of the dead again, on this my last walk, that I saw when I first walked here!”

“What a curious chap you are!”

“I seem to see them, and almost hear them rustling. But I don’t revere all of them as I did then. I don’t believe in half of them. The theologians, the apologists, and their kin the metaphysicians, the high-handed statesmen, and others, no longer interest me. All that has been spoilt for me by the grind of stern reality!”

The expression of Jude’s corpselike face in the watery lamplight was indeed as if he saw people where there was nobody. At moments he stood still by an archway, like one watching a figure walk out; then he would look at a window like one discerning a familiar face behind it. He seemed to hear voices, whose words he repeated as if to gather their meaning.

“They seem laughing at me!”

“Who?”

“Oh—I was talking to myself! The phantoms all about here, in the college archways, and windows. They used to look friendly in the old days, particularly Addison, and Gibbon, and Johnson, and Dr. Browne, and Bishop Ken—”

“Come along do! Phantoms! There’s neither living nor dead hereabouts except a damn policeman! I never saw the streets emptier.”

“Fancy! The Poet of Liberty used to walk here, and the great Dissector of Melancholy there!”

“I don’t want to hear about ’em! They bore me.”

“Walter Raleigh is beckoning to me from that lane—Wycliffe—Harvey—Hooker—Arnold—and a whole crowd of Tractarian Shades—”

“I *don’t want* to know their names, I tell you! What do I care about folk dead and gone? Upon my soul you are more sober when you’ve been drinking than when you have not!”

“I must rest a moment,” he said; and as he paused, holding to the railings, he measured with his eye the height of a college front. “This is old Rubric. And that Sarcophagus; and up that lane Crozier and Tudor: and all down there is Cardinal with its long front, and its windows with lifted eyebrows, representing the polite surprise of the university at the efforts of such as I.”

“Come along, and I’ll treat you!”

“Very well. It will help me home, for I feel the chilly fog from the meadows of Cardinal as if death-claws were grabbing me through and through. As Antigone said, I am neither a dweller among men nor ghosts. But, Arabella, when I am dead, you’ll see my spirit flitting up and down here among these!”

“Pooh! You mayn’t die after all. You are tough enough yet, old man.”

It was night at Marygreen, and the rain of the afternoon showed no sign of abatement. About the time at which Jude and Arabella were walking the streets of Christminster homeward, the Widow Edlin crossed the green, and opened the back door of the schoolmaster’s dwelling, which she often did now before bedtime, to assist Sue in putting things away.

Sue was muddling helplessly in the kitchen, for she was not a good housewife, though she tried to be, and grew impatient of domestic details.

“Lord love ’ee, what do ye do that yourself for, when I’ve come o’ purpose! You knew I should come.”

“Oh—I don’t know—I forgot! No, I didn’t forget. I did it to discipline myself. I have scrubbed the stairs since eight o’clock. I *must* practise myself in my household duties. I’ve shamefully neglected them!”

“Why should ye? He’ll get a better school, perhaps be a parson, in time, and you’ll keep two servants. ’Tis a pity to spoil them pretty hands.”

“Don’t talk of my pretty hands, Mrs. Edlin. This pretty body of mine has been the ruin of me already!”

“Pshoo—you’ve got no body to speak of! You put me more in mind of a sperrit. But there seems something wrong to-night, my dear. Husband cross?”

“No. He never is. He’s gone to bed early.”

“Then what is it?”

“I cannot tell you. I have done wrong to-day. And I want to eradicate it... Well—I will tell you this—Jude has been here this afternoon, and I find I still love him—oh, grossly! I cannot tell you more.”

“Ah!” said the widow. “I told ’ee how ’twould be!”

“But it shan’t be! I have not told my husband of his visit; it is not necessary to trouble him about it, as I never mean to see Jude any more. But

I am going to make my conscience right on my duty to Richard—by doing a penance—the ultimate thing. I must!”

“I wouldn’t—since he agrees to it being otherwise, and it has gone on three months very well as it is.”

“Yes—he agrees to my living as I choose; but I feel it is an indulgence I ought not to exact from him. It ought not to have been accepted by me. To reverse it will be terrible—but I must be more just to him. O why was I so unheroic!”

“What is it you don’t like in him?” asked Mrs. Edlin curiously.

“I cannot tell you. It is something... I cannot say. The mournful thing is, that nobody would admit it as a reason for feeling as I do; so that no excuse is left me.”

“Did you ever tell Jude what it was?”

“Never.”

“I’ve heard strange tales o’ husbands in my time,” observed the widow in a lowered voice. “They say that when the saints were upon the earth devils used to take husbands’ forms o’ nights, and get poor women into all sorts of trouble. But I don’t know why that should come into my head, for it is only a tale... What a wind and rain it is to-night! Well—don’t be in a hurry to alter things, my dear. Think it over.”

“No, no! I’ve screwed my weak soul up to treating him more courteously—and it must be now—at once—before I break down!”

“I don’t think you ought to force your nature. No woman ought to be expected to.”

“It is my duty. I will drink my cup to the dregs!”

Half an hour later when Mrs. Edlin put on her bonnet and shawl to leave, Sue seemed to be seized with vague terror.

“No—no—don’t go, Mrs. Edlin,” she implored, her eyes enlarged, and with a quick nervous look over her shoulder.

“But it is bedtime, child.”

“Yes, but—there’s the little spare room—my room that was. It is quite ready. Please stay, Mrs. Edlin!—I shall want you in the morning.”

“Oh well—I don’t mind, if you wish. Nothing will happen to my four old walls, whether I be there or no.”

She then fastened up the doors, and they ascended the stairs together.

“Wait here, Mrs. Edlin,” said Sue. “I’ll go into my old room a moment by myself.”

Leaving the widow on the landing Sue turned to the chamber which had been hers exclusively since her arrival at Marygreen, and pushing to the door knelt down by the bed for a minute or two. She then arose, and taking her night-gown from the pillow undressed and came out to Mrs. Edlin. A man could be heard snoring in the room opposite. She wished Mrs. Edlin good-night, and the widow entered the room that Sue had just vacated.

Sue unlatched the other chamber door, and, as if seized with faintness, sank down outside it. Getting up again she half opened the door, and said “Richard.” As the word came out of her mouth she visibly shuddered.

The snoring had quite ceased for some time, but he did not reply. Sue seemed relieved, and hurried back to Mrs. Edlin’s chamber. “Are you in bed, Mrs. Edlin?” she asked.

“No, dear,” said the widow, opening the door. “I be old and slow, and it takes me a long while to un-ray. I han’t unlaced my jumps yet.”

“I—don’t hear him! And perhaps—perhaps—”

“What, child?”

“Perhaps he’s dead!” she gasped. “And then—I should be *free*, and I could go to Jude! ... Ah—no—I forgot *her*—and God!”

“Let’s go and hearken. No—he’s snoring again. But the rain and the wind is so loud that you can hardly hear anything but between whiles.”

Sue had dragged herself back. “Mrs. Edlin, good-night again! I am sorry I called you out.” The widow retreated a second time.

The strained, resigned look returned to Sue’s face when she was alone. “I must do it—I must! I must drink to the dregs!” she whispered. “Richard!” she said again.

“Hey—what? Is that you, Susanna?”

“Yes.”

“What do you want? Anything the matter? Wait a moment.” He pulled on some articles of clothing, and came to the door. “Yes?”

“When we were at Shaston I jumped out of the window rather than that you should come near me. I have never reversed that treatment till now—

when I have come to beg your pardon for it, and ask you to let me in.”

“Perhaps you only think you ought to do this? I don’t wish you to come against your impulses, as I have said.”

“But I beg to be admitted.” She waited a moment, and repeated, “I beg to be admitted! I have been in error—even to-day. I have exceeded my rights. I did not mean to tell you, but perhaps I ought. I sinned against you this afternoon.”

“How?”

“I met Jude! I didn’t know he was coming. And—”

“Well?”

“I kissed him, and let him kiss me.”

“Oh—the old story!”

“Richard, I didn’t know we were going to kiss each other till we did!”

“How many times?”

“A good many. I don’t know. I am horrified to look back on it, and the least I can do after it is to come to you like this.”

“Come—this is pretty bad, after what I’ve done! Anything else to confess?”

“No.” She had been intending to say: “I called him my darling Love.” But, as a contrite woman always keeps back a little, that portion of the scene remained untold. She went on: “I am never going to see him any more. He spoke of some things of the past, and it overcame me. He spoke of—the children. But, as I have said, I am glad—almost glad I mean—that they are dead, Richard. It blots out all that life of mine!”

“Well—about not seeing him again any more. Come—you really mean this?” There was something in Phillotson’s tone now which seemed to show that his three months of remarriage with Sue had somehow not been so satisfactory as his magnanimity or amative patience had anticipated.

“Yes, yes!”

“Perhaps you’ll swear it on the New Testament?”

“I will.”

He went back to the room and brought out a little brown Testament. “Now then: So help you God!”

She swore.

“Very good!”

“Now I supplicate you, Richard, to whom I belong, and whom I wish to honour and obey, as I vowed, to let me in.”

“Think it over well. You know what it means. Having you back in the house was one thing—this another. So think again.”

“I have thought—I wish this!”

“That’s a complaisant spirit—and perhaps you are right. With a lover hanging about, a half-marriage should be completed. But I repeat my reminder this third and last time.”

“It is my wish! ... O God!”

“What did you say ‘O God’ for?”

“I don’t know!”

“Yes you do! But ...” He gloomily considered her thin and fragile form a moment longer as she crouched before him in her night-clothes. “Well, I thought it might end like this,” he said presently. “I owe you nothing, after these signs; but I’ll take you in at your word, and forgive you.”

He put his arm round her to lift her up. Sue started back.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, speaking for the first time sternly. “You shrink from me again?—just as formerly!”

“No, Richard—I—I—was not thinking—”

“You wish to come in here?”

“Yes.”

“You still bear in mind what it means?”

“Yes. It is my duty!”

Placing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry.

Mrs. Edlin had by this time undressed, and was about to get into bed when she said to herself: “Ah—perhaps I’d better go and see if the little thing is all right. How it do blow and rain!”

The widow went out on the landing, and saw that Sue had disappeared. “Ah! Poor soul! Weddings be funerals ’a b’lieve nowadays. Fifty-five years

ago, come Fall, since my man and I married! Times have changed since then!”

X

Despite himself Jude recovered somewhat, and worked at his trade for several weeks. After Christmas, however, he broke down again.

With the money he had earned he shifted his lodgings to a yet more central part of the town. But Arabella saw that he was not likely to do much work for a long while, and was cross enough at the turn affairs had taken since her remarriage to him. "I'm hanged if you haven't been clever in this last stroke!" she would say, "to get a nurse for nothing by marrying me!"

Jude was absolutely indifferent to what she said, and indeed, often regarded her abuse in a humorous light. Sometimes his mood was more earnest, and as he lay he often rambled on upon the defeat of his early aims.

"Every man has some little power in some one direction," he would say. "I was never really stout enough for the stone trade, particularly the fixing. Moving the blocks always used to strain me, and standing the trying draughts in buildings before the windows are in always gave me colds, and I think that began the mischief inside. But I felt I could do one thing if I had the opportunity. I could accumulate ideas, and impart them to others. I wonder if the founders had such as I in their minds—a fellow good for nothing else but that particular thing? ... I hear that soon there is going to be a better chance for such helpless students as I was. There are schemes afoot for making the university less exclusive, and extending its influence. I don't know much about it. And it is too late, too late for me! Ah—and for how many worthier ones before me!"

"How you keep a-mumbling!" said Arabella. "I should have thought you'd have got over all that craze about books by this time. And so you would, if you'd had any sense to begin with. You are as bad now as when we were first married."

On one occasion while soliloquizing thus he called her "Sue" unconsciously.

“I wish you’d mind who you are talking to!” said Arabella indignantly. “Calling a respectable married woman by the name of that—” She remembered herself and he did not catch the word.

But in the course of time, when she saw how things were going, and how very little she had to fear from Sue’s rivalry, she had a fit of generosity. “I suppose you want to see your—Sue?” she said. “Well, I don’t mind her coming. You can have her here if you like.”

“I don’t wish to see her again.”

“Oh—that’s a change!”

“And don’t tell her anything about me—that I’m ill, or anything. She has chosen her course. Let her go!”

One day he received a surprise. Mrs. Edlin came to see him, quite on her own account. Jude’s wife, whose feelings as to where his affections were centred had reached absolute indifference by this time, went out, leaving the old woman alone with Jude. He impulsively asked how Sue was, and then said bluntly, remembering what Sue had told him: “I suppose they are still only husband and wife in name?”

Mrs. Edlin hesitated. “Well, no—it’s different now. She’s begun it quite lately—all of her own free will.”

“When did she begin?” he asked quickly.

“The night after you came. But as a punishment to her poor self. He didn’t wish it, but she insisted.”

“Sue, my Sue—you darling fool—this is almost more than I can endure! ... Mrs. Edlin—don’t be frightened at my rambling—I’ve got to talk to myself lying here so many hours alone—she was once a woman whose intellect was to mine like a star to a benzoline lamp: who saw all *my* superstitions as cobwebs that she could brush away with a word. Then bitter affliction came to us, and her intellect broke, and she veered round to darkness. Strange difference of sex, that time and circumstance, which enlarge the views of most men, narrow the views of women almost invariably. And now the ultimate horror has come—her giving herself like this to what she loathes, in her enslavement to forms! She, so sensitive, so shrinking, that the very wind seemed to blow on her with a touch of deference... As for Sue and me when we were at our own best, long ago—when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless—the time was not

ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us. And so the resistance they met with brought reaction in her, and recklessness and ruin on me! ... There—this, Mrs. Edlin, is how I go on to myself continually, as I lie here. I must be boring you awfully.”

“Not at all, my dear boy. I could hearken to ’ee all day.”

As Jude reflected more and more on her news, and grew more restless, he began in his mental agony to use terribly profane language about social conventions, which started a fit of coughing. Presently there came a knock at the door downstairs. As nobody answered it Mrs. Edlin herself went down.

The visitor said blandly: “The Doctor.” The lanky form was that of Physician Vilbert, who had been called in by Arabella.

“How is my patient at present?” asked the physician.

“Oh bad—very bad! Poor chap, he got excited, and do blasphemous terribly, since I let out some gossip by accident—the more to my blame. But there—you must excuse a man in suffering for what he says, and I hope God will forgive him.”

“Ah. I’ll go up and see him. Mrs. Fawley at home?”

“She’s not in at present, but she’ll be here soon.”

Vilbert went; but though Jude had hitherto taken the medicines of that skilful practitioner with the greatest indifference whenever poured down his throat by Arabella, he was now so brought to bay by events that he vented his opinion of Vilbert in the physician’s face, and so forcibly, and with such striking epithets, that Vilbert soon scurried downstairs again. At the door he met Arabella, Mrs. Edlin having left. Arabella inquired how he thought her husband was now, and seeing that the Doctor looked ruffled, asked him to take something. He assented.

“I’ll bring it to you here in the passage,” she said. “There’s nobody but me about the house to-day.”

She brought him a bottle and a glass, and he drank.

Arabella began shaking with suppressed laughter. “What is this, my dear?” he asked, smacking his lips.

“Oh—a drop of wine—and something in it.” Laughing again she said: “I poured your own love-philtre into it, that you sold me at the agricultural

show, don't you re-member?"

"I do, I do! Clever woman! But you must be prepared for the consequences." Putting his arm round her shoulders he kissed her there and then.

"Don't don't," she whispered, laughing good-humouredly. "My man will hear."

She let him out of the house, and as she went back she said to herself: "Well! Weak women must provide for a rainy day. And if my poor fellow upstairs do go off—as I suppose he will soon—it's well to keep chances open. And I can't pick and choose now as I could when I was younger. And one must take the old if one can't get the young."

XI

The last pages to which the chronicler of these lives would ask the reader's attention are concerned with the scene in and out of Jude's bedroom when leafy summer came round again.

His face was now so thin that his old friends would hardly have known him. It was afternoon, and Arabella was at the looking-glass curling her hair, which operation she performed by heating an umbrella-stay in the flame of a candle she had lighted, and using it upon the flowing lock. When she had finished this, practised a dimple, and put on her things, she cast her eyes round upon Jude. He seemed to be sleeping, though his position was an elevated one, his malady preventing him lying down.

Arabella, hatted, gloved, and ready, sat down and waited, as if expecting some one to come and take her place as nurse.

Certain sounds from without revealed that the town was in festivity, though little of the festival, whatever it might have been, could be seen here. Bells began to ring, and the notes came into the room through the open window, and travelled round Jude's head in a hum. They made her restless, and at last she said to herself: "Why ever doesn't Father come?"

She looked again at Jude, critically gauged his ebbing life, as she had done so many times during the late months, and glancing at his watch, which was hung up by way of timepiece, rose impatiently. Still he slept, and coming to a resolution she slipped from the room, closed the door noiselessly, and descended the stairs. The house was empty. The attraction which moved Arabella to go abroad had evidently drawn away the other inmates long before.

It was a warm, cloudless, enticing day. She shut the front door, and hastened round into Chief Street, and when near the theatre could hear the notes of the organ, a rehearsal for a coming concert being in progress. She entered under the archway of Oldgate College, where men were putting up awnings round the quadrangle for a ball in the hall that evening. People

who had come up from the country for the day were picnicking on the grass, and Arabella walked along the gravel paths and under the aged limes. But finding this place rather dull she returned to the streets, and watched the carriages drawing up for the concert, numerous Dons and their wives, and undergraduates with gay female companions, crowding up likewise. When the doors were closed, and the concert began, she moved on.

The powerful notes of that concert rolled forth through the swinging yellow blinds of the open windows, over the housetops, and into the still air of the lanes. They reached so far as to the room in which Jude lay; and it was about this time that his cough began again and awakened him.

As soon as he could speak he murmured, his eyes still closed: "A little water, please."

Nothing but the deserted room received his appeal, and he coughed to exhaustion again—saying still more feebly: "Water—some water—Sue—Arabella!"

The room remained still as before. Presently he gasped again: "Throat—water—Sue—darling—drop of water—please—oh please!"

No water came, and the organ notes, faint as a bee's hum, rolled in as before.

While he remained, his face changing, shouts and hurrahs came from somewhere in the direction of the river.

"Ah—yes! The Remembrance games," he murmured. "And I here. And Sue defiled!"

The hurrahs were repeated, drowning the faint organ notes. Jude's face changed more: he whispered slowly, his parched lips scarcely moving:

"Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man-child conceived."

("Hurrah!")

"Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein."

("Hurrah!")

"Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? ... For now should I have lain still and been quiet. I

should have slept: then had I been at rest!”

(“Hurrah!”)

“There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor... The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?”

Meanwhile Arabella, in her journey to discover what was going on, took a short cut down a narrow street and through an obscure nook into the quad of Cardinal. It was full of bustle, and brilliant in the sunlight with flowers and other preparations for a ball here also. A carpenter nodded to her, one who had formerly been a fellow-workman of Jude’s. A corridor was in course of erection from the entrance to the hall staircase, of gay red and buff bunting. Waggon-loads of boxes containing bright plants in full bloom were being placed about, and the great staircase was covered with red cloth. She nodded to one workman and another, and ascended to the hall on the strength of their acquaintance, where they were putting down a new floor and decorating for the dance.

The cathedral bell close at hand was sounding for five o’clock service.

“I should not mind having a spin there with a fellow’s arm round my waist,” she said to one of the men. “But Lord, I must be getting home again—there’s a lot to do. No dancing for me!”

When she reached home she was met at the door by Stagg, and one or two other of Jude’s fellow stoneworkers. “We are just going down to the river,” said the former, “to see the boat-bumping. But we’ve called round on our way to ask how your husband is.”

“He’s sleeping nicely, thank you,” said Arabella.

“That’s right. Well now, can’t you give yourself half an hour’s relaxation, Mrs. Fawley, and come along with us? ’Twould do you good.”

“I should like to go,” said she. “I’ve never seen the boat-racing, and I hear it is good fun.”

“Come along!”

“How I *wish* I could!” She looked longingly down the street. “Wait a minute, then. I’ll just run up and see how he is now. Father is with him, I believe; so I can most likely come.”

They waited, and she entered. Downstairs the inmates were absent as before, having, in fact, gone in a body to the river where the procession of boats was to pass. When she reached the bedroom she found that her father had not even now come.

“Why couldn’t he have been here!” she said impatiently. “He wants to see the boats himself—that’s what it is!”

However, on looking round to the bed she brightened, for she saw that Jude was apparently sleeping, though he was not in the usual half-elevated posture necessitated by his cough. He had slipped down, and lay flat. A second glance caused her to start, and she went to the bed. His face was quite white, and gradually becoming rigid. She touched his fingers; they were cold, though his body was still warm. She listened at his chest. All was still within. The bumping of near thirty years had ceased.

After her first appalled sense of what had happened, the faint notes of a military or other brass band from the river reached her ears; and in a provoked tone she exclaimed, “To think he should die just now! Why did he die just now!” Then meditating another moment or two she went to the door, softly closed it as before, and again descended the stairs.

“Here she is!” said one of the workmen. “We wondered if you were coming after all. Come along; we must be quick to get a good place... Well, how is he? Sleeping well still? Of course, we don’t want to drag ’ee away if —”

“Oh yes—sleeping quite sound. He won’t wake yet,” she said hurriedly.

They went with the crowd down Cardinal Street, where they presently reached the bridge, and the gay barges burst upon their view. Thence they passed by a narrow slit down to the riverside path—now dusty, hot, and thronged. Almost as soon as they had arrived the grand procession of boats began; the oars smacking with a loud kiss on the face of the stream, as they were lowered from the perpendicular.

“Oh, I say—how jolly! I’m glad I’ve come,” said Arabella. “And—it can’t hurt my husband—my being away.”

On the opposite side of the river, on the crowded barges, were gorgeous nosegays of feminine beauty, fashionably arrayed in green, pink, blue, and white. The blue flag of the boat club denoted the centre of interest, beneath which a band in red uniform gave out the notes she had already heard in the

death-chamber. Collegians of all sorts, in canoes with ladies, watching keenly for “our” boat, darted up and down. While she regarded the lively scene somebody touched Arabella in the ribs, and looking round she saw Vilbert.

“That philtre is operating, you know!” he said with a leer. “Shame on ’ee to wreck a heart so!”

“I shan’t talk of love to-day.”

“Why not? It is a general holiday.”

She did not reply. Vilbert’s arm stole round her waist, which act could be performed unobserved in the crowd. An arch expression overspread Arabella’s face at the feel of the arm, but she kept her eyes on the river as if she did not know of the embrace.

The crowd surged, pushing Arabella and her friends sometimes nearly into the river, and she would have laughed heartily at the horse-play that succeeded, if the imprint on her mind’s eye of a pale, statuesque countenance she had lately gazed upon had not sobered her a little.

The fun on the water reached the acme of excitement; there were immersions, there were shouts: the race was lost and won, the pink and blue and yellow ladies retired from the barges, and the people who had watched began to move.

“Well—it’s been awfully good,” cried Arabella. “But I think I must get back to my poor man. Father is there, so far as I know; but I had better get back.”

“What’s your hurry?”

“Well, I must go... Dear, dear, this is awkward!”

At the narrow gangway where the people ascended from the riverside path to the bridge the crowd was literally jammed into one hot mass—Arabella and Vilbert with the rest; and here they remained motionless, Arabella exclaiming, “Dear, dear!” more and more impatiently; for it had just occurred to her mind that if Jude were discovered to have died alone an inquest might be deemed necessary.

“What a fidget you are, my love,” said the physician, who, being pressed close against her by the throng, had no need of personal effort for contact. “Just as well have patience: there’s no getting away yet!”

It was nearly ten minutes before the wedged multitude moved sufficiently to let them pass through. As soon as she got up into the street Arabella hastened on, forbidding the physician to accompany her further that day. She did not go straight to her house; but to the abode of a woman who performed the last necessary offices for the poorer dead; where she knocked.

“My husband has just gone, poor soul,” she said. “Can you come and lay him out?”

Arabella waited a few minutes; and the two women went along, elbowing their way through the stream of fashionable people pouring out of Cardinal meadow, and being nearly knocked down by the carriages.

“I must call at the sexton’s about the bell, too,” said Arabella. “It is just round here, isn’t it? I’ll meet you at my door.”

By ten o’clock that night Jude was lying on the bedstead at his lodging covered with a sheet, and straight as an arrow. Through the partly opened window the joyous throb of a waltz entered from the ball-room at Cardinal.

Two days later, when the sky was equally cloudless, and the air equally still, two persons stood beside Jude’s open coffin in the same little bedroom. On one side was Arabella, on the other the Widow Edlin. They were both looking at Jude’s face, the worn old eyelids of Mrs. Edlin being red.

“How beautiful he is!” said she.

“Yes. He’s a ’andsome corpse,” said Arabella.

The window was still open to ventilate the room, and it being about noontide the clear air was motionless and quiet without. From a distance came voices; and an apparent noise of persons stamping.

“What’s that?” murmured the old woman.

“Oh, that’s the Doctors in the theatre, conferring Honorary degrees on the Duke of Hamptshire and a lot more illustrious gents of that sort. It’s Remembrance Week, you know. The cheers come from the young men.”

“Aye; young and strong-lunged! Not like our poor boy here.”

An occasional word, as from some one making a speech, floated from the open windows of the theatre across to this quiet corner, at which there seemed to be a smile of some sort upon the marble features of Jude; while the old, superseded, Delphin editions of Virgil and Horace, and the dog-

eared Greek Testament on the neighbouring shelf, and the few other volumes of the sort that he had not parted with, roughened with stone-dust where he had been in the habit of catching them up for a few minutes between his labours, seemed to pale to a sickly cast at the sounds. The bells struck out joyously; and their reverberations travelled round the bed-room.

Arabella's eyes removed from Jude to Mrs. Edlin. "D'ye think she will come?" she asked.

"I could not say. She swore not to see him again."

"How is she looking?"

"Tired and miserable, poor heart. Years and years older than when you saw her last. Quite a staid, worn woman now. 'Tis the man—she can't stomach un, even now!"

"If Jude had been alive to see her, he would hardly have cared for her any more, perhaps."

"That's what we don't know... Didn't he ever ask you to send for her, since he came to see her in that strange way?"

"No. Quite the contrary. I offered to send, and he said I was not to let her know how ill he was."

"Did he forgive her?"

"Not as I know."

"Well—poor little thing, 'tis to be believed she's found forgiveness somewhere! She said she had found peace!"

"She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true!" said Arabella. "She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!"

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THE BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT, *C. Sean,*

AUTHOR OF

“LOVE’S CONFLICT,” “A PASSING MADNESS,” ETC.

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THE BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE.

CHAPTER I.

It was the magic hour of dining. The long Digue of Heyst was almost deserted; so was the strip of loose, yellow sand which skirted its base, and all the *tables d'hôtes* were filling fast. Henri, the youngest waiter of the Hôtel Lion d'Or, was standing on the steps between the two great gilded lions, which stood rampant on either side the portals, vigorously ringing a loud and discordant bell to summons the stragglers, whilst the ladies, who were waiting the commencement of dinner in the little salon to the side, stopped their ears to dull its clamour. Philippe and Jules were busy, laying white cloths and glasses, etc., on the marble tables in the open balcony, outside the *salle à manger*, where strangers to the Hotel might dine *à la carte*, if they chose. Inside, the long, narrow tables, were decorated with dusty geraniums and fuchsias, whilst each cruet stand had a small bunch of dirty artificial flowers tied to its handle. But the visitors to the Lion d'Or, who were mostly English, were too eager for their evening meal, to cavil at their surroundings. The Baroness Gobelli, with her husband on one

side, and her son on the other, was the first to seat herself at table. The Baroness always appeared with the soup, for she had observed that the first comers received a more generous helping than those who came in last. No such anxiety occupied the minds of Mrs. Pullen and her friend Miss Leyton, who sat opposite to the Baroness and her family. They did not care sufficiently for the *potage aux croutons*, which usually formed the beginning of the *table d'hôte* dinner. The long tables were soon filled with a motley crew of English, Germans, and Belgians, all chattering, especially the foreigners, as fast as their tongues could travel. Amongst them was a sprinkling of children, mostly unruly and ill-behaved, who had to be called to order every now and then, which made Miss Leyton's lip curl with disgust. Just opposite to her, and next to Mr. Bobby Bates, the Baroness's son by her first marriage, and whom she always treated as if he had been a boy of ten years old, was an unoccupied chair, turned up against the table to signify that it was engaged.

"I wonder if that is for the German Princess of whom Madame Lamont is so fond of talking," whispered Elinor Leyton to Mrs. Pullen, "she said this morning that she expected her this afternoon."

"O! surely not!" replied her friend, "I do not know much about royalties, but I should think a Princess would hardly dine at a public *table d'hôte*."

"O! a German Princess! what is that?" said Miss Leyton, with a curled lip again, for she was a daughter of Lord Walthamstowe, and thought very little of any aristocracy, except that of her own country.

As she spoke, however, the chair opposite was

sharply pulled into place, and a young lady seated herself on it, and looked boldly (though not brazenly) up and down the tables, and at her neighbours on each side of her. She was a remarkable-looking girl—more remarkable, perhaps, than beautiful, for her beauty did not strike one at first sight. Her figure was tall but slight and lissom. It looked almost boneless as she swayed easily from side to side of her chair. Her skin was colourless but clear. Her eyes were long-shaped, dark, and narrow, with heavy lids and thick black lashes which lay upon her cheeks. Her brows were arched and delicately pencilled, and her nose was straight and small. Not so her mouth however, which was large, with lips of a deep blood colour, displaying small white teeth. To crown all, her head was covered with a mass of soft, dull, blue-black hair, which was twisted in careless masses about the nape of her neck, and looked as if it was unaccustomed to comb or hairpin. She was dressed very simply in a white cambric frock, but there was not a woman present, who had not discovered in five minutes, that the lace with which it was profusely trimmed, was costly Valenciennes, and that it was clasped at her throat with brilliants. The new-comer did not seem in the least abashed by the numbers of eyes which were turned upon her, but bore the scrutiny very calmly, smiling in a sort of furtive way at everybody, until the *entrées* were handed round, when she rivetted all her attention upon the contents of her plate. Miss Leyton thought she had never seen any young person devour her food with so much avidity and enjoyment. She could not help watching her. The Baroness Gobelli, who was a very coarse feeder, scattering her

food over her plate and not infrequently over the table cloth as well, was nothing compared to the young stranger. It was not so much that she ate rapidly and with evident appetite, but that she kept her eyes fixed upon her food, as if she feared someone might deprive her of it. As soon as her plate was empty, she called sharply to the waiter in French, and ordered him to get her some more.

"That's right, my dear!" exclaimed the Baroness, nodding her huge head, and smiling broadly at the newcomer; "make 'em bring you more! It's an excellent dish, that! I'll 'ave some more myself!"

As Philippe deposited the last helping of the *entrée* on the young lady's plate, the Baroness thrust hers beneath his nose.

"'Ere!" she said, "bring three more 'elpings for the Baron and Bobby and me!"

The man shook his head to intimate that the dish was finished, but the Baroness was not to be put off with a flimsy excuse. She commenced to make a row. Few meals passed without a squabble of some sort, between the Hotel servants and this terrible woman.

"Now we are in for it again!" murmured Miss Leyton into Mrs. Pullen's ear. The waiter brought a different *entrée*, but the Baroness insisted upon having a second helping of *tête de veau aux champignons*.

"*Il n'y a plus, Madame!*" asseverated Philippe, with a gesture of deprecation.

"What does 'e say?" demanded the Baroness, who was not good at French.

"There is no more, mein tear!" replied her husband, with a strong German accent.

“Confound their impudence!” exclaimed his wife with a heated countenance, “’ere, send Monsieur ’ere at once! I’ll soon see if we’re not to ’ave enough to eat in ’is beastly Hotel!”

All the ladies who understood what she said, looked horrified at such language, but that was of no consequence to Madame Gobelli, who continued to call out at intervals for “Monsieur” until she found the dinner was coming to an end without her, and thought it would be more politic to attend to business and postpone her feud till a more convenient occasion. The Baroness Gobelli was a mystery to most people in the Hotel. She was an enormous woman of the elephant build, with a large, flat face and clumsy hands and feet. Her skin was coarse, so was her hair, so were her features. The only things which redeemed an otherwise repulsive face, were a pair of good-humoured, though cunning blue eyes and a set of firm, white teeth. Who the Baroness had originally been, no one could quite make out. It was evident that she must have sprung from some low origin from her lack of education and breeding, yet she spoke familiarly of aristocratic names, even of Royal ones, and appeared to be acquainted with their families and homes. There was a floating rumour that she had been old Mr. Bates’s cook before he married her, and when he left her a widow with an only child and a considerable fortune, the little German Baron had thought that her money was a fair equivalent for her personality. She was exceedingly vulgar, and when roused, exceedingly vituperative, but she possessed a rough good humour when pleased, and a large amount of natural shrewdness, which stood her instead of cleverness. But

she was an unscrupulous liar, and rather boasted of the fact than otherwise. Having plenty of money at her command, she was used to take violent fancies to people—taking them up suddenly, loading them with presents and favours for as long as it pleased her, and then dropping them as suddenly, without why or wherefore—even insulting them if she could not shake them off without doing so. The Baron was completely under her thumb; more than that; he was servile in her presence, which astonished those people, who did not know that amongst her other arrogant insistences, the Baroness laid claim to holding intercourse with certain supernatural and invisible beings, who had the power to wreak vengeance on all those who offended her. This fear it was, combined with the fact that she had all the money and kept the strings of the bag pretty close where he was concerned, that made the Baron wait upon his wife's wishes as if he were her slave. Perhaps the softest spot in the Baroness's heart was kept for her sickly and uninteresting son, Bobby Bates, whom she treated, nevertheless, with the roughness of a tigress for her cub. She kept him still more under her surveillance than she did her husband, and Bobby, though he had attained his nineteenth year, dared not say Bo! to a goose, in presence of his Mamma. As the cheese was handed round, Elinor Leyton rose from her seat with an impatient gesture.

“Do let us get out of this atmosphere, Margaret!” she said in a low tone. “I really cannot stand it any longer!”

The two ladies left the table, and went out beyond the balcony, to where a number of painted iron chairs and tables were placed on the Digue, for the accommo-

dation of passing wayfarers, who might wish to rest awhile and quench their thirst with *limonade* or lager beer.

"I wonder who that girl is!" remarked Mrs. Pullen as soon as they were out of hearing. "I don't know whether I like her or not, but there is something rather distinguished-looking about her!"

"Do you think so?" said Miss Leyton, "I thought she only distinguished herself by eating like a cormorant! I never saw anyone in society gobble her food in such a manner! She made me positively sick!"

"Was it as bad as that?" replied the more quiet Mrs. Pullen, in an indifferent manner. Her eyes were attracted just then by the perambulator which contained her baby, and she rose to meet it.

"How is she, Nurse?" she asked as anxiously as if she had not parted from the infant an hour before. "Has she been awake all the time?"

"Yes, Ma'am, and looking about her like anything! But she seems inclined to sleep now! I thought it was about time to take her in!"

"O! no! not on such a warm, lovely evening! If she does go to sleep in the open air, it will do her no harm. Leave her with me! I want you to go indoors, and find out the name of the young lady who sat opposite to me at dinner to-day, Philippe understands English. He will tell you!"

"Why on earth do you want to know?" demanded Miss Leyton, as the servant disappeared.

"O! I don't know! I feel a little curious, that is all! She seems so young to be by herself!"

Elinor Leyton answered nothing, but walked across the Digue and stood, looking out over the sea. She was

anticipating the arrival of her *fiancé*, Captain Ralph Pullen of the Limerick Rangers, but he had delayed his coming to join them, and she began to find Heyst rather dull.

The visitors of the Lion d'Or had finished their meal by this time, and were beginning to reassemble on the Digue, preparatory to taking a stroll before they turned into one of the many *cafés-chantants*, which were situated at stated intervals in front of the sea. Amongst them came the Baroness Gobelli, leaning heavily on a thick stick with one hand, and her husband's shoulder with the other. The couple presented an extraordinary appearance, as they perambulated slowly up and down the Digue.

She—with her great height and bulk, towering a head above her companion, whilst he—with a full-sized torso, and short legs—a large hat crammed down upon his forehead, and no neck to speak of, so that the brim appeared to rest upon his shoulders—was a ludicrous figure, as he walked beside his wife, bending under the weight of her support. But yet, she was actually proud of him. Notwithstanding his ill-shaped figure, the Baron possessed one of those mild German faces, with pale watery blue eyes, a long nose, and hair and beard of a reddish-golden colour, which entitled him, in the estimation of some people, to be called a handsome man, and the Baroness was never tired of informing the public that his head and face had once been drawn for that of some celebrated saint.

Her own appearance was really comical, for though she had plenty of means, her want of taste, or indifference to dress, made everyone stare at her as she passed.

On the present occasion, she wore a silk gown which had cost seventeen shillings a yard, with a costly velvet cloak, a bonnet which might have been rescued from the dustbin, and cotton gloves with all her fingers out. She shook her thick walking-stick in Miss Leyton's face as she passed by her, and called out loud enough for everyone to hear: "And when is the handsome Captain coming to join you, Miss Leyton, eh? Take care he ain't running after some other gal! 'When pensive I thought on my L.O.V.E.' Ha! ha! ha!"

Elinor flushed a delicate pink but did not turn her head, nor take any notice of her tormentor. She detested the Baroness with a perfectly bitter hatred, and her proud cold nature revolted from her coarseness and familiarity.

"Tied to your brat again!" cried the Baroness, as she passed Margaret Pullen who was moving the perambulator gently to and fro by the handle, so as to keep her infant asleep; "why didn't you put it in the tub as soon as it was born? It would 'ave saved you a heap of trouble! I often wish I had done so by that devil Bobby! 'Ere, where are you, Bobby?"

"I'm close behind you, Mamma!" replied the simple looking youth.

"Well! don't you get running away from your father and me, and winking at the gals! There's time enough for that, ain't there, Gustave?" she concluded, addressing the Baron.

"Come along, Robert, and mind what your mother tells you!" said the Herr Baron with his guttural German accent, as the extraordinary trio pursued their way down.

the Digue, the Baroness making audible remarks on everybody she met, as they went.

Margaret Pullen sat where they had left her, moving about the perambulator, whilst her eyes, like Elinor's, were fixed upon the tranquil water. The August sun had now quite disappeared, and the indescribably faint and unpleasant odour, which is associated with the dunes of Heyst, had begun to make itself apparent. A still languor had crept over everything, and there were indications of a thunderstorm in the air. She was thinking of her husband, Colonel Arthur Pullen, the elder brother of Miss Leyton's *fiancé*, who was toiling out in India for baby and herself. It had been a terrible blow to Margaret, to let him go out alone after only one year of happy wedded life, but the expected advent of her little daughter at the time, had prohibited her undertaking so long a journey and she had been compelled to remain behind. And now baby was six months old, and Colonel Pullen hoped to be home by Christmas, so had advised her to wait for his return. But her thoughts were sad sometimes, notwithstanding.

Events happen so unexpectedly in this world—who could say for certain that she and her husband would ever meet again—that Arthur would ever see his little girl, or that she should live to place her in her father's arms? But such a state of feeling was morbid, she knew, and she generally made an effort to shake it off. The nurse, returning with the information she had sent her to acquire, roused her from her reverie.

“If you please, Ma'am, the young lady's name is Brandt, and Philippe says she came from London!”

"English! I should never have guessed it!" observed Mrs. Pullen, "She speaks French so well."

"Shall I take the baby now, Ma'am?"

"Yes! Wheel her along the Digue. I shall come and meet you by and by!"

As the servant obeyed her orders, she called to Miss Leyton.

"Elinor! come here!"

"What is it?" asked Miss Leyton, seating herself beside her.

"The new girl's name is Brandt and she comes from England! Would you have believed it?"

"I did not take sufficient interest in her to make any speculations on the subject. I only observed that she had a mouth from ear to ear, and ate like a pig! What does it concern us, where she comes from?"

At that moment, a Mrs. Montague, who, with her husband, was conveying a family of nine children over to Brussels, under the mistaken impression, that they would be able to live cheaper there than in England, came down the Hotel steps with half a dozen of them, clinging to her skirts, and went straight up to Margaret Pullen.

"O! Mrs. Pullen! What is that young lady's name, who sat opposite to you at dinner? Everybody is asking! I hear she is enormously rich, and travelling alone. Did you see the lace on her dress? Real Valenciennes, and the diamond rings she wore! Frederick says they must be worth a lot of money. She must be someone of consequence I should imagine!"

"On the contrary, my nurse tells me she is English and her name is Brandt. Has she no friends here?"

"Madame Lamont says she arrived in company with another girl, but they are located at different parts of the Hotel. It seems very strange, does it not?"

"And it sounds very improper!" interposed Elinor Leyton, "I should say the less we have to say to her, the better! You never know what acquaintances you may make in a place like this! When I look up and down the *table d'hôte* menagerie sometimes, it makes me quite ill!"

"Does it?" rejoined Mrs. Montague, "I think it's so amusing! That Baroness Gobelli, for instance——"

"Don't mention her before me!" cried Miss Leyton, in a tone of disgust, "the woman is not fit for civilised society!"

"She is rather common, certainly, and strange in her behaviour," said Mrs. Montague, "but she is very good-natured. She gave my little Edward a louis yesterday. I felt quite ashamed to let him take it!"

"That just proves her vulgarity," exclaimed Elinor Leyton, who had not a sixpence to give away, herself, "it shows that she thinks her money will atone for all her other shortcomings! She gave that Miss Taylor who left last week, a valuable brooch off her own throat. And poor payment too, for all the dirty things she made her do and the ridicule she poured upon her. I daresay this *nouveau riche* will try to curry favour with us by the same means."

At that moment, the girl under discussion, Miss Brandt, appeared on the balcony, which was only raised a few feet above where they sat. She wore the same dress she had at dinner, with the addition of a little fleecy shawl about her shoulders. She stood smiling,

and looking at the ladies (who had naturally dropped all discussion about her) for a few moments, and then she ventured to descend the steps between the rampant gilded lions, and almost timidly, as it seemed, took up a position near them. Mrs. Pullen felt that she could not be so discourteous as to take no notice whatever of the new-comer, and so, greatly to Miss Leyton's disgust, she uttered quietly, "Good evening!"

It was quite enough for Miss Brandt. She drew nearer with smiles mantling over her face.

"Good evening! Isn't it lovely here?—so soft and warm, something like the Island, but so much fresher!"

She looked up and down the Digue, now crowded with a multitude of visitors, and drew in her breath with a long sigh of content.

"How gay and happy they all seem, and how happy I am too! Do you know, if I had my will, what I should like to do?" she said, addressing Mrs. Pullen.

"No! indeed!"

"I should like to tear up and down this road as hard as ever I could, throwing my arms over my head and screaming aloud!"

The ladies exchanged glances of astonishment, but Margaret Pullen could not forbear smiling as she asked their new acquaintance the reason why.

"O! because I am free—free at last, after ten long years of imprisonment! I am telling you the truth, I am indeed, and you would feel just the same if you had been shut up in a horrid Convent ever since you were eleven years old!"

At the word "convent", the national Protestant horror immediately spread itself over the faces of the three

other ladies; Mrs. Montague gathered her flock about her and took them out of the way of possible contamination, though she would have much preferred to hear the rest of Miss Brandt's story, and Elinor Leyton moved her chair further away. But Margaret Pullen was interested and encouraged the girl to proceed.

"In a convent! I suppose then you are a Roman Catholic!"

Harriet Brandt suddenly opened her slumbrous eyes.

"I don't think so! I'm not quite sure what I am! Of course I've had any amount of religion crammed down my throat in the Convent, and I had to follow their prayers, whilst there, but I don't believe my parents were Catholics! But it does not signify, I am my own mistress now. I can be what I like!"

"You have been so unfortunate then as to lose your parents!"

"O! yes! years ago, that is why my guardian, Mr. Trawler, placed me in the Convent for my education. And I've been there for ten years! Is it not a shame? I'm twenty-one now! That's why I'm free! You see," the girl went on confidentially, "my parents left me everything, and as soon as I came of age I entered into possession of it. My guardian, Mr. Trawler, who lives in Jamaica,—did I tell you that I've come from Jamaica?—thought I should live with him and his wife, when I left the Convent, and pay them for my keep, but I refused. They had kept me too tight! I wanted to see the world and life—it was what I had been looking forward to—so as soon as my affairs were settled, I left the West Indies and came over here!"

"They said you came from England in the Hotel!"

"So I did! The steamer came to London and I stayed there a week before I came on here!"

"But you are too young to travel about by yourself, Miss Brandt! English young ladies never do so!" said Mrs. Pullen.

"I'm not by myself, exactly! Olga Brimont, who was in the Convent with me, came too. But she is ill, so she's upstairs. She has come to her brother who is in Brussels, and we travelled together. We had the same cabin on board the steamer, and Olga was very ill. One night the doctor thought she was going to die! I stayed with her all the time. I used to sit up with her at night, but it did her no good. We stopped in London because we wanted to buy some dresses and things, but she was not able to go out, and I had to go alone. Her brother is away from Brussels at present so he wrote her to stay in Heyst till he could fetch her, and as I had nowhere particular to go, I came with her! And she is better already! She has been fast asleep all the afternoon!"

"And what will you do when your friend leaves you?" asked Mrs. Pullen.

"O! I don't know! Travel about, I suppose! I shall go wherever it may please me!"

"Are you not going to take a walk this evening?" demanded Elinor Leyton in a low voice of her friend, wishing to put a stop to the conversation.

"Certainly! I told nurse I would join her and baby by-and-by!"

"Shall I fetch your hat then?" enquired Miss Leyton, as she rose to go up to their apartments.

"Yes! if you will, dear, please, and my velvet cape, in case it should turn chilly!"

"I will fetch mine too!" cried Miss Brandt, jumping up with alacrity. "I may go with you, mayn't I? I'll just tell Olga that I'm going out and be down again in five minutes!" and without waiting for an answer, she was gone.

"See what you have brought upon us!" remarked Elinor in a vexed tone.

"Well! it was not my fault," replied Margaret, "and after all, what does it signify? It is only a little act of courtesy to an unprotected girl. I don't dislike her, Elinor! She is very familiar and communicative, but fancy what it must be like to find herself her own mistress, and with money at her command, after ten years' seclusion within the four walls of a convent! It is enough to turn the head of any girl. I think it would be very churlish to refuse to be friendly with her!"

"Well! I hope it may turn out all right! But you must remember how Ralph cautioned us against making any acquaintances in a foreign hotel."

"But I am not under Ralph's orders, though you may be, and I should not care to go entirely by the advice of so very fastidious and exclusive a gentleman as he is! My Arthur would never find fault with me, I am sure, for being friendly with a young unmarried girl."

"Anyway, Margaret, let me entreat you not to discuss my private affairs with this new *protégée* of yours. I don't want to see her saucer eyes goggling over the news of my engagement to your brother-in-law!"

"Certainly I will not, since you ask it! But you hardly

expect to keep it a secret when Ralph comes down here, do you?"

"Why not? Why need anyone know more than that he is your husband's brother?"

"I expect they know a good deal more now," said Margaret, laughing. "The news that you are the Honourable Elinor Leyton and that your father is Baron Walthamstowe, was known all over Heyst the second day we were here. And I have no doubt it has been succeeded by the interesting intelligence that you are engaged to marry Captain Pullen. You cannot keep servants' tongues from wagging, you know!"

"I suppose not!" replied Elinor, with a *moue* of contempt. "However, they will learn no more through me or Ralph. We are not 'Arry and 'Arriet' to sit on the Digue with our arms round each other's waists."

"Still—there are signs and symptoms," said Margaret, laughing.

"There will be none with us!" rejoined Miss Leyton, indignantly, as Harriet Brandt, with a black lace hat on, trimmed with yellow roses, and a little fichu tied carelessly across her bosom, ran lightly down the steps to join them.

CHAPTER II.

THE Digue was crowded by that time. All Heyst had turned out to enjoy the evening air and to partake in the gaiety of the place. A band was playing on the movable orchestra, which was towed by three skinny little donkeys, day after day, from one end of the Digue to the other. To-night, it was its turn to be in the

middle, where a large company of people was sitting on green painted chairs that cost ten centimes for hire each, whilst children danced, or ran madly round and round its base. Everyone had changed his, or her, seaside garb for more fashionable array—even the children were robed in white frocks and gala hats—and the whole scene was gay and festive. Harriet Brandt ran from one side to the other of the Digue, as though she also had been a child. Everything she saw seemed to astonish and delight her. First, she was gazing out over the calm and placid water—and next, she was exclaiming at the bits of rubbish in the shape of embroidered baskets, or painted shells, exhibited in the shop windows, which were side by side with the private houses and hotels, forming a long line of buildings fronting the water.

She kept on declaring that she wanted to buy that or this, and lamenting she had not brought more money with her.

“You will have plenty of opportunities to select and purchase what you want to-morrow,” said Mrs. Pullen, “and you will be better able to judge what they are like. They look better under the gas than they do by daylight, I can assure you, Miss Brandt!”

“O! but they are lovely—delightful!” replied the girl, enthusiastically, “I never saw anything so pretty before! Do look at that little doll in a bathing costume, with her cap in one hand, her sponge in the other! She is charming—unique! *Tout ce qu’il y a de plus beau!*”

She spoke French perfectly, and when she spoke English, it was with a slightly foreign accent, that greatly enhanced its charm. It made Mrs. Pullen observe:

"You are more used to speaking French than English, Miss Brandt!"

"Yes! We always spoke French in the Convent, and it is in general use in the Island. But I thought—I hoped—that I spoke English like an Englishwoman! I *am* an Englishwoman, you know!"

"Are you? I was not quite sure! Brandt sounds rather German!"

"No! my father was English, his name was Henry Brandt, and my mother was a Miss Carey—daughter of one of the Justices of Barbadoes!"

"O! indeed!" replied Mrs. Pullen. She did not know what else to say. The subject was of no interest to her! At that moment they encountered the nurse and perambulator, and she naturally stopped to speak to her baby.

The sight of the infant seemed to drive Miss Brandt wild.

"O! is that your baby, Mrs. Pullen, is that really your baby?" she exclaimed excitedly, "you never told me you had one. O! the darling! the sweet dear little angel! I love little white babies! I adore them. They are so sweet and fresh and clean—so different from the little niggers who smell so nasty, you can't touch them! We never saw a baby in the Convent, and so few English children live to grow up in Jamaica! O! let me hold her! let me carry her! I *must!*"

She was about to seize the infant in her arms, when the mother interposed.

"No, Miss Brandt, please, not this evening! She is but half awake, and has arrived at that age when she

is frightened of strangers. Another time perhaps, when she has become used to you, but not now!"

"But I will be so careful of her, pretty dear!" persisted the girl, "I will nurse her so gently, that she will fall to sleep again in my arms. Come! my little love, come!" she continued to the baby, who pouted her lips and looked as if she were going to cry.

"Leave her alone!" exclaimed Elinor Leyton in a sharp voice. "Do you not hear what Mrs. Pullen says—that you are not to touch her!"

She spoke so acridly, that gentle Margaret Pullen felt grieved for the look of dismay that darted into Harriet Brandt's face on hearing it.

"O! I am sorry—I didn't mean—" she stammered, with a side glance at Margaret.

"Of course you did not mean anything but what was kind," said Mrs. Pullen, "Miss Leyton perfectly understands that, and when baby is used to you, I daresay she will be very grateful for your attentions. But to-night she is sleepy and tired, and, perhaps, a little cross. Take her home, Nurse," she went on, "and put her to bed! Good-night, my sweet!" and the perambulator passed them and was gone.

An awkward silence ensued between the three women after this little incident. Elinor Leyton walked somewhat apart from her companions, as if she wished to avoid all further controversy, whilst Margaret Pullen sought some way by which to atone for her friend's rudeness to the young stranger. Presently they came across one of the *cafés chantants* which are attached to the seaside hotels, and which was brilliantly lighted up. A large awning was spread outside, to shelter some

dozens of chairs and tables, most of which were already occupied. The windows of the hotel salon had been thrown wide open, to accommodate some singers and musicians, who advanced in turn and stood on the threshold to amuse the audience. As they approached the scene, a tenor in evening dress was singing a love song, whilst the musicians accompanied his voice from the salon, and the occupants of the chairs were listening with rapt attention.

"How charming! how delightful!" cried Harriet Brandt, as they reached the spot, "I never saw anything like this in the Island!"

"You appear never to have seen anything!" remarked Miss Leyton, with a sneer. Miss Brandt glanced apologetically at Mrs. Pullen.

"How could I see anything, when I was in the Convent?" she said, "I know there are places of entertainment in the Island, but I was never allowed to go to any. And in London, there was no one for me to go with! I should so much like to go in there," indicating the *café*. "Will you come with me, both of you I mean, and I will pay for everything! I have plenty of money, you know!"

"There is nothing to pay, my dear, unless you call for refreshment," was Margaret's reply. "Yes, I will go with you certainly, if you so much wish it! Elinor, you won't mind, will you?"

But Miss Leyton was engaged talking to a Monsieur and Mademoiselle Vieuxtemps—an old brother and sister, resident in the Lion d'Or—who had stopped to wish her Good-evening! They were dear, good old people, but rather monotonous and dull, and Elinor had

more than once ridiculed their manner of talking and voted them the most terrible bores. Mrs. Pullen concluded therefore, that she would get rid of them as soon as courtesy permitted her to do so, and follow her. With a smile and a bow therefore, to the Vieuxtemps, she pushed her way through the crowd with Harriet Brandt, to where she perceived that three seats were vacant, and took possession of them. They were not good seats for hearing or seeing, being to one side of the salon, and quite in the shadow, but the place was so full that she saw no chance of getting any others. As soon as they were seated, the waiter came round for orders, and it was with difficulty that Mrs. Pullen prevented her companion purchasing sufficient liqueurs and cakes to serve double the number of their company.

"You must allow me to pay for myself, Miss Brandt," she said gravely, "or I will never accompany you anywhere again!"

"But I have lots of money," pleaded the girl, "much more than I know what to do with—it would be a pleasure to me, it would indeed!"

But Mrs. Pullen was resolute, and three *limonades* only were placed upon their table. Elinor Leyton had not yet made her appearance, and Mrs. Pullen kept craning her neck over the other seats to see where she might be, without success.

"She cannot have missed us!" she observed, "I wonder if she can have continued her walk with the Vieuxtemps!"

"O! what does it signify?" said Harriet, drawing her chair closer to that of Mrs. Pullen, "we can do very well without her. I don't think she's very nice, do you?"

"You must not speak of Miss Leyton like that to me, Miss Brandt," remonstrated Margaret, gently, "because—she is a great friend of our family."

She had been going to say, "Because she will be my sister-in-law before long," but remembered Elinor's request in time, and substituted the other sentence.

"I don't think she's very kind, though," persisted the other.

"It is only her manner, Miss Brandt! She does not mean anything by it!"

"But you are so different," said the girl as she crept still closer, "I could see it when you smiled at me at dinner. I knew I should like you at once. And I want you to like me too—so much! It has been the dream of my life to have some friends. That is why I would not stay in Jamaica. I don't like the people there! I want friends—real friends!"

"But you must have had plenty of friends of your own age in the Convent."

"That shows you don't know anything about a convent! It's the very last place where they will let you make a friend—they're afraid lest you should tell each other too much! The convent I was in was an Ursuline order, and even the nuns were obliged to walk three and three, never two, together, lest they should have secrets between them. As for us girls, we were never left alone for a single minute! There was always a sister with us, even at night, walking up and down between the rows of beds, pretending to read her prayers, but with her eyes on us the whole time and her ears open to catch what we said. I suppose they were afraid we should talk about lovers. I think girls do talk about

them when they can, more in convents than in other places, though they have never had any. It would be so dreadful to be like the poor nuns, and never have a lover to the end of one's days, wouldn't it?"

"You would not fancy being a nun then, Miss Brandt!"

"*I*—Oh! dear no! I would rather be dead, twenty times over! But they didn't like my coming out at all. They did try so hard to persuade me to remain with them for ever! One of them, Sister Féodore, told me I must never talk even with gentlemen, if I could avoid it—that they were all wicked and nothing they said was true, and if I trusted them, they would only laugh at me afterwards for my pains. But I don't believe that, do you?"

"Certainly not!" replied Margaret warmly. "The sister who told you so knew nothing about men. My dear husband is more like an angel than a man, and there are many like him. You mustn't believe such nonsense, Miss Brandt! I am sure you never heard your parents say such a silly thing!"

"O! my father and mother! I never remember hearing them say anything!" replied Miss Brandt. She had crept closer and closer to Mrs. Pullen as she spoke, and now encircled her waist with her arm, and leaned her head upon her shoulder. It was not a position that Margaret liked, nor one she would have expected from a woman on so short an acquaintance, but she did not wish to appear unkind by telling Miss Brandt to move further away. The poor girl was evidently quite unused to the ways and customs of Society, she seemed moreover very friendless and dependent—so Margaret laid her solecism down to ignorance and let her head rest

where she had placed it, resolving inwardly meanwhile that she would not subject herself to be treated in so familiar a manner again.

"Don't you remember your parents then?" she asked her presently.

"Hardly! I saw so little of them," said Miss Brandt, "my father was a great doctor and scientist, I believe, and I am not quite sure if he knew that he had a daughter!"

"O! my dear, what nonsense!"

"But it is true, Mrs. Pullen! He was always shut up in his laboratory, and I was not allowed to go near that part of the house. I suppose he was very clever and all that—but he was too much engaged in making experiments to take any notice of me, and I am sure I never wanted to see him!"

"How very sad! But you had your mother to turn to for consolation and company, whilst she lived, surely?"

"O! my mother!" echoed Harriet, carelessly. "Yes! my mother! Well! I don't think I knew much more of her either. The ladies in Jamaica get very lazy, you know, and keep a good deal to their own rooms. The person there I loved best of all, was old Pete, the overseer!"

"The overseer!"

"Of the estate and niggers, you know! We had plenty of niggers on the coffee plantation, regular African fellows, with woolly heads and blubber lips, and yellow whites to their eyes. When I was a little thing of four years old, Pete used to let me whip the little niggers for a treat, when they had done anything wrong. It used

to make me laugh to see them wriggle their legs under the whip and cry!"

"O! don't, Miss Brandt!" exclaimed Margaret Pullen, in a voice of pain.

"It's true, but they deserved it, you know, the little wretches, always thieving or lying or something! I've seen a woman whipped to death, because she wouldn't work. We think nothing of that sort of thing, over there. Still—you can't wonder that I was glad to get out of the Island. But I loved old Pete, and if he had been alive when I left, I would have brought him to England with me. He used to carry me for miles through the jungle on his back,—out in the fresh mornings and the cool, dewy eves. I had a pony to ride, but I never went anywhere, without his hand upon my bridle rein. He was always so afraid lest I should come to any harm. I don't think anybody else cared. Pete was the only creature who ever loved me, and when I think of Jamaica, I remember my old nigger servant as the one friend I had there!"

"It is very, very sad!" was all that Mrs. Pullen could say.

She had become fainter and fainter, as the girl leaned against her with her head upon her breast. Some sensation which she could not define, nor account for—some feeling which she had never experienced before—had come over her and made her head reel. She felt as if something or someone, were drawing all her life away. She tried to disengage herself from the girl's clasp, but Harriet Brandt seemed to come after her, like a coiling snake, till she could stand it no longer, and faintly exclaiming:

"Miss Brandt! let go of me, please! I feel ill!" she rose and tried to make her way between the crowded tables, towards the open air. As she stumbled along, she came against (to her great relief) her friend, Elinor Leyton.

"O! Elinor!" she gasped, "I don't know what is the matter with me! I feel so strange, so light-headed! Do take me home!"

Miss Leyton dragged her through the audience, and made her sit down on a bench, facing the sea.

"Why! what's the matter?" demanded Harriet Brandt, who had made her way after them, "is Mrs. Pullen ill?"

"So it appears," replied Miss Leyton, coldly, "but how it happened, you should know better than myself! I suppose it is very warm in there!"

"No! no! I do not think so," said Margaret, with a bewildered air, "we had chairs close to the side. And Miss Brandt was telling me of her life in Jamaica, when such an extraordinary sensation came over me! I can't describe it! it was just as if I had been scooped hollow!"

At this description, Harriet Brandt burst into a loud laugh, but Elinor frowned her down.

"It may seem a laughing matter to you, Miss Brandt," she said, in the same cold tone, "but it is none to me. Mrs. Pullen is far from strong, and her health is not to be trifled with. However, I shall not let her out of my sight again."

"Don't make a fuss about it, Elinor," pleaded her friend, "it was my own fault, if anyone's. I think there must be a thunderstorm in the air, I have felt so oppressed all the evening. Or is the smell from the dunes

worse than usual? Perhaps I ate something at dinner that disagreed with me!"

"I cannot understand it at all," replied Miss Leyton, "you are not used to fainting, or being suddenly attacked in any way. However, if you feel able to walk, let us go back to the Hotel. Miss Brandt will doubtless find someone to finish the evening with!"

Harriet was just about to reply that she knew no one but themselves, and to offer to take Mrs. Pullen's arm on the other side, when Elinor Leyton cut her short.

"No! thank you, Miss Brandt! Mrs. Pullen would, I am sure, prefer to return to the Hotel alone with me! You can easily join the Vieuxtemps or any other of the visitors to the Lion d'Or. There is not much ceremony observed amongst the English at these foreign places. It would be better perhaps if there were a little more! Come, Margaret, take my arm, and we will walk as slowly as you like! But I shall not be comfortable until I see you safe in your own room!"

So the two ladies moved off together, leaving Harriet Brandt standing disconsolately on the Digue, watching their departure. Mrs. Pullen had uttered a faint Good-night to her, but had made no suggestion that she should walk back with them, and it seemed to the girl as if they both, in some measure, blamed her for the illness of her companion. What had she done, she asked herself, as she reviewed what had passed between them, that could in any way account for Mrs. Pullen's illness? She liked her so much—so very much—she had so hoped she was going to be her friend—she would have done anything and given anything sooner than put her to inconvenience in any way. As the two ladies

moved slowly out of sight, Harriet turned sadly and walked the other way. She felt lonely and disappointed. She knew no one to speak to, and there was a cold empty feeling in her breast, as though, in losing her hold on Margaret Pullen, she had lost something on which she had depended. Something of her feeling must have communicated itself to Margaret Pullen, for after a minute or two she stopped and said,

"I don't half like leaving Miss Brandt by herself, Elinor! She is very young to be wandering about a town by night and alone!"

"Nonsense!" returned Miss Leyton, shortly, "a young lady who can make the voyage from Jamaica to Heyst on her own account, knocking about in London for a week on the way, is surely competent to walk back to the Hotel without your assistance. I should say that Miss Brandt was a very independent young woman!"

"Perhaps, by nature, but she has been shut up in a convent for the best part of her life, and that is not considered to be a good preparation for fighting one's way through the world!"

"She'll be able to fight her own battles, never fear!" was Elinor's reply.

Just then they encountered Bobby Bates, who lifted his cap as he hurried past them.

"Where are you going so fast, Mr. Bates?" said Elinor Leyton.

"I am going back to the Hotel to fetch Mamma's fur boa!" he answered.

They were passing a lighted lamp at the time, and she noticed that the lad's eyes were red, and his features bore traces of distress.

"Are you ill?" she enquired quickly, "or in any trouble?"

He halted for a minute in his stride.

"No! no! not exactly," he said in a low voice, and then, as if the words came from him against his will, he went on, "But O! I do wish someone would speak to Mamma about the way she treats me. It's cruel—to strike me with her stick before all those people, as if I were a baby, and to call me such names! Even the servant William laughs at me! Do all mothers do the same, Miss Leyton? Ought a man to stand it quietly?"

"Decidedly not!" cried Elinor, without hesitation.

"O! Elinor! remember, she is his mother," remonstrated Margaret, "don't say anything to set him against her!"

"But I was nineteen last birthday," continued the lad, "and sometimes she treats me in such a manner, that I can't bear it! The Baron dare not say a word to her! She swears at him so. Sometimes, I think I will run away and go to sea!"

"No! no! you mustn't do that!" called Miss Leyton after him, as he quickened his footsteps in the direction of the Lion d'Or.

"What an awful woman!" sighed Mrs. Pullen. "Fancy! striking her own son in public, and with that thick stick too. I believe he had been crying!"

"I am *sure* he had," replied her friend, "you can see the poor fellow is half-witted, and very weakly into the bargain. I suppose she has beaten his brains to a pap. What a terrible misfortune to have such a mother! You should hear some of the stories Madame Lamont has to tell of her!"

"But how does she hear them?"

"Through the Baron's servant William, I suppose. He says the Baroness has often taken her stick to him and the other servants, and thinks no more of swearing at them than a trooper! They all hate her. One day, she took up a kitchen cleaver and advanced upon her coachman with it, but he seized her by both arms and set her down upon the fire, whence she was only rescued after being somewhat severely burned!"

"It served her right!" exclaimed Margaret, laughing at the ludicrous idea, "but what a picture she must have presented, seated on the kitchen range! Where can the woman have been raised? What sort of a person can she be?"

"Not what she pretends, Margaret, you may be sure of that! All her fine talk of lords and ladies is so much bunkum. But I pity the poor little Baron, who is, at all events, inoffensive. How can he put up with such a wife! He must feel very much ashamed of her sometimes!"

"And yet he seems devoted to her! He never leaves her side for a moment. He is her walking stick, her fetcher and carrier, and her scribe. I don't believe she can write a letter!"

"And yet she was talking at the *table d'hôte* yesterday of the Duke of This and the Earl of That, and hinting at her having stayed at Osborne and Windsor. Of course they are falsehoods! She has never seen the inside of a palace unless it was in the capacity of a charwoman! Have you observed her hair? It is as coarse as a horse-tail? And her hands! Bobby informed me the other day that his Mamma took nines in gloves! She's not a woman, my dear! She's a female elephant!"

Margaret was laughing still, when they reached the steps of the Lion d'Or.

"You are very naughty and very scandalous, Elinor," she said, "but you have done me a world of good. My unpleasant feelings have quite gone. I am quite capable of continuing our walk if you would like to do so."

"No such thing, Madam," replied Miss Leyton. "I am responsible for your well-doing in Arthur's absence. Upstairs and into bed you go, unless you would like a cup of coffee and a chasse first. That is the only indulgence I can grant you."

But Mrs. Pullen declined the proffered refreshment, and the two ladies sought their rooms in company.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning dawned upon a perfect August day. The sun streamed brightly over every part of Heyst, turning the loose dry yellow sand (from end to end of which not a stone or boulder was to be seen), into a veritable cloth of gold. The patient asses, carrying their white-covered saddles, and tied to stakes, were waiting in a row for hire, whilst some dozen Rosinantes, called by courtesy, horses, were also of the company. The sands were already strewn with children, their short petticoats crammed into a pair of bathing-drawers, and their heads protected by linen hats or bonnets, digging away at the dry sand as if their lives depended on their efforts. The bathing-machines, painted in gay stripes of green, red, blue, or orange, were hauled down, ready for action, and the wooden tents, which can be hired for the

season at any foreign watering place, were being swept out and arranged for the day's use.

Some of the more pretentious ones, belonging to private families, were surmounted by a gilt coronet, the proud possession of the Comte Darblaye, or the Herr Baron Grumplestein—sporting flags moreover of France or Germany, and were screened from the eyes of the vulgar, by lace or muslin curtains, tied up with blue ribbons. On the balcony of the Lion d'Or, where the visitors always took their breakfast, were arranged tables, piled with dishes of crevettes, fresh from the sea, pistolets, and beautiful butter as white and tasteless as cream. It was a delight to breakfast on the open balcony, with the sea breeze blowing in one's face, and in the intervals of eating prawns and bread and butter, or perusing the morning papers, to watch the cheerful scene below.

The Baroness was there, early of course. She, and her husband, and the ill-used Bobby, occupied a table to themselves, whence she addressed her remarks to whomever she chose, whether they wished to listen, or not, and the Baron shelled her crevettes and buttered her pistolets for her. Margaret and Elinor were rather later than usual, for Mrs. Pullen had not passed a good night, and Miss Leyton would not have her disturbed.

Harriet Brandt was there as they appeared, and beside her, a pale, unhealthy-looking young woman, whom she introduced as her friend, and travelling companion, Olga Brimont.

"Olga did not wish to come down. She thought she would lie another day in bed, but I made her get up and dress, and I was right, wasn't I, Mrs. Pullen?"

"I think the fresh air will do Mademoiselle Brimont

more good than the close bedroom, if she is strong enough to stand it!" replied Margaret, with a smile. "I am afraid you are still feeling weak," she continued, to the new-comer.

"I feel better than I did on board the steamer, or in London," said Mademoiselle Brimont. She was an under-sized girl with plain features, and did not shew off to advantage beside her travelling companion.

"Did you suffer so much from sea-sickness? I can sympathise with you, as I am a very bad sailor myself!"

"O! no! Madame, it was not the *mal de mer*. I can hardly tell you what it was. Miss Brandt and I occupied a small cabin together, and perhaps, it was because it was so small, but I did not feel as if I could breathe there—such a terrible oppression as though some one were sitting on my chest—and such a general feeling of emptiness. It was the same in London, though Miss Brandt did all she could for me, indeed she sat up with me all night, till I feared she would be ill herself—but I feel better now! Last night I slept for the first time since leaving Jamaica!"

"That is right! You will soon get well in this lovely air!"

They all sat down at the same table, and commenced to discuss their rolls and coffee. Margaret Pullen, glancing up once, was struck by the look with which Harriet Brandt was regarding her—it was so full of yearning affection—almost of longing to approach her nearer, to hear her speak, to touch her hand! It amused her to observe it! She had heard of cases, in which young unsophisticated girls had taken unaccountable affections for members of their own sex, and trusted she was not

going to form the subject for some such experience on Miss Brandt's part. The idea made her address her conversation more to Mademoiselle Brimont, than to her companion of the evening before.

"I suppose you and Miss Brandt were great friends in the Convent," she said.

"O! no, Madame, we hardly ever saw each other whilst there, except in chapel. There is so much difference in our ages, I am only seventeen, and was in the lower school, whilst Miss Brandt did hardly any lessons during the two last years she spent there. But I was very glad to have her company across to England. My brother would have sent for me last year, if he could have heard of a lady to travel with me!"

"Are you going on to join your brother soon?"

"He says he will fetch me, Madame, as soon as he can be spared from his business. He is my only relation. My parents died, like Miss Brandt's, in the West Indies."

"Well! you must be sure and get your looks back before he arrives!" said Margaret, kindly.

The head waiter now appeared with the letters from England, amongst which was one for Miss Leyton in a firm, manly handwriting, with a regimental crest in blue and gold upon the envelope. Her face did not change in the least as she broke the seal, although it came from her *fiancé*, Captain Ralph Pullen. Elinor Leyton's was an exceptionally cold face, and it matched her disposition. She had attractive features;—a delicate nose, carved as if in ivory—brown eyes, a fair rose-tinted complexion, and a small mouth with thin, firmly closed lips. Her hair was bronze-coloured, and it was always

dressed to perfection. She had a good figure too, with small hands and feet—and she was robed in excellent taste. She was pre-eminently a woman for a man to be proud of as the mistress of his house, and the head of his table. She might be trusted never to say or do an unladylike thing—before all, she was cognisant of the obligations which devolved upon her as the daughter of Lord Walthamstowe and a member of the British aristocracy. But in disposition she was undoubtedly cold, and her *fiancé* had already begun to find it out. Their engagement had come about neither of them quite knew how, but he liked the idea of being connected with an aristocratic family, and she was proud of having won a man, for whom many caps had been pulled in vain. He was considered to be one of the handsomest men of his generation, and she was what people called an unexceptional match for him. She was fond of him in her way, but her way was a strange one. She called the attitude she assumed towards him, a proper and ladylike reserve, but impartial spectators, with stronger feelings, would have deemed it indifference.

However, like the proverbial dog in the manger, whether she valued her rights in Captain Pullen or not, Miss Leyton had no intention of permitting them to be interfered with. She would have died sooner than admit that he was necessary to her happiness,—at the same time she considered it due to her dignity as a woman, never to give in to his wishes, when they opposed her own, and often when they did not.

She displayed no particular enthusiasm when they met, nor distress when they parted—neither was she ever troubled by any qualms lest during their frequent

separations, he should meet some woman whom he might perchance prefer to herself. They were engaged, and when the proper time came they would marry—meanwhile their private affairs concerned no one but themselves. In short, Elinor Leyton was not what is termed “a man’s woman”—all her friends (if she had any) were of her own sex.

Having perused her letter, she refolded and replaced it in its envelope without a glance in the direction of Mrs. Pullen. Margaret thought she had a right to be informed of her brother-in-law’s movements. She had invited Miss Leyton to accompany her to Heyst at his request, and any preparations which might be requisite before he joined them, would have to be made by herself.

“Is that from Ralph? What does he say?” she enquired in a low voice.

“Nothing in particular!”

“But when may we expect him at Heyst?”

“Next week, he says, in time for the *Bataille des Fleurs!*”

“Are you not pleased?”

“Of course I am!” replied Elinor, but without a sparkle or blush.

“O! if it were only my Arthur that were coming!” exclaimed Margaret, fervently, “I should go mad with joy!”

“Then it is just as well perhaps that it is *not* your Arthur!” rejoined her companion, as she put the letter into her pocket.

“Now, Bobby,” announced the strident tones of the Baroness Gobelli from the other side of the balcony, “leave off picking the shrimps! You’ve ’ad more than

enough! Ain't bread and butter good enough for you? What'll you want next?"

"But, Mamma," pleaded the youth, "I've only had a few! I've been shelling Papa's all this time!"

"Put 'em down at once, I say!" reiterated the Baroness, "'ere William, take Bobby's plate away! He's 'ad plenty for this morning!"

"But I haven't begun yet. I'm hungry!" remonstrated Bobby.

"Take 'is plate away!" roared the Baroness. "'Ang it all! Can't you 'ear what I say?"

"Mein tear! mein tear!" ejaculated the Herr Baron in a subdued voice.

"Leave me alone, Gustave! Do you suppose I can't manage my own son? He ain't yours! 'E'd make 'imself ill if I didn't look after him. Take 'is plate away, at once!"

The man-servant William lifted the plate of peeled shrimps and bread and butter from the table, whilst Bobby with a very red face rose from his seat and rushed down the steps to the beach.

"He! he! he!" cackled the Baroness, "that'll teach 'im not to fiddle with 'is food another time! Bobby don't care for an empty belly!"

"What a shame!" murmured Margaret, who was nothing if she was not a mother, "now the poor boy will go without his breakfast."

Presently, William was to be seen sneaking past the Hotel with a parcel in his hands. The Baroness pounced upon him like a cat upon a mouse.

"William!" she cried from the balcony, "what 'ave you got in your 'and?"

"Summat of my own, my lady!"

"Bring it 'ere!"

The man mounted the steps and stood before his mistress. He held a parcel in his hands, wrapped up in a table napkin.

"Open that parcel!" said the Baroness.

"Indeed, my lady, it's only the shrimps as Master Robert left behind him and I thought they would make me a little relish on the sands, my lady!"

"Open that parcel!"

William obeyed, and disclosed the rolls and butter and peeled shrimps just as Bobby had left them.

"You were going to take 'em down to Bobby on the beach!"

"No, indeed, my lady!"

"Confound you, Sir, don't you lie to me!" exclaimed the Baroness, shaking her stick in his face, "I've ways and means of finding out things that you know nothing of! Throw that stuff into the road!"

"But, my lady——"

"Throw it into the road at once, or you may take your month's warning! 'Ang it all! are you the mistress, or am I?"

The servant threw a glance of enquiry in the direction of the Herr Baron but the Herr Baron kept his face well down in his plate, so after a pause, he walked to the side, and shook the contents of the napkin upon the Digue.

"And now don't you try any more of your tricks upon me or I'll thrash you till your own mother won't know you! You leave Bobby alone for the future, or

it'll be the worst day's work you ever did! Remember that!"

"Very good, my lady!" replied William, but as he left the balcony he gave a look at the other occupants, which well conveyed his feelings on the subject.

"I should not be surprised to hear that that woman had been murdered by her servants some day!" said Margaret to Elinor Leyton.

"No! and I should not be sorry! I feel rather like murdering her myself. But let us go down to the sands, Margaret, and try to find the disconsolate Bobby! I'm not afraid of his mother if William is, and if he wants something to eat, I shall give it him!"

They fetched their hats and parasols, and having left the Hotel by a side entrance, found their way down to the sands. It was a pretty sight there, and in some cases, a comical one. The bathing-machines were placed some sixty or more feet from the water, according to the tide, and their occupants, clad in bathing-costumes, had to run the gauntlet of all the eyes upon the beach, as they traversed that distance in order to reach the sea. To some visitors, especially the English ones, this ordeal was rather trying. To watch them open a crevice of the machine door, and regard the expectant crowd with horror;—then after some hesitation, goaded on by the cries of the bathing women that the time was passing, to see them emerge with reluctant feet, sadly conscious of their unclotted condition, and of the unsightly corns and bunions which disfigured their feet—to say nothing of the red and blue tint which their skin had suddenly assumed—was to find it almost impossible to refrain from laughter. The very skinny and knuckle-kneed

ones; the very fat and bulging ones; the little fair men who looked like Bobby's peeled shrimps, and the muscular black and hairy ones who looked like bears escaped from a menagerie,—these types and many others, our ladies could not help being amused at, though they told each other it was very improper all the time. But everybody had to pass through the same ordeal and everybody submitted to it, and tried to laugh off their own humiliation by ridiculing the appearance of their neighbours. Margaret and Elinor were never tired of watching the antics of the Belgians and Germans whilst they were (what they called) bathing. The fuss they made over entering two feet of water—the way in which they gasped and puffed as they caught it up in their hands and rubbed their backs and chests with it—the reluctance with which the ladies were dragged by their masculine partners into the briny, as if they expected to be overwhelmed and drowned by the tiny waves which rippled over their toes, and made them catch their breath. And lastly, when they were convinced there was no danger, to see them, men and women, fat and thin, take hands and dance round in a ring as if they were playing at "Mulberry Bush" was too delightful. But if one bather, generally an Englishman, more daring than his fellows, went in for a good swim, the coast-guardsmen ran along the breakwater, shouting "Gare, gare!" until he came out again.

"They are funnier than ever to-day," remarked Margaret, after awhile, "I wonder what they will say when they see Ralph swimming out next week. They will be frightened to death. All the Pullens are wonderful swimmers. I have seen Anthony Pennell perform feats

in the water that made my blood run cold! And Ralph is famous for his diving!”

The topic did not appear to interest Elinor. She reverted to the subject of Anthony.

“Is that the literary man—the cousin?”

“Yes! Have you not met him?”

“Never!”

“I am sure you would like him! He is such a fine fellow! Not such a ‘beauty man’ as Ralph, perhaps, but quite as tall and stalwart! His last book was a tremendous success!”

“Ralph has never mentioned him to me, though I knew he had a cousin of that name!”

“Well!—if you won’t be offended at my saying so—Ralph has always been a little jealous of Anthony, at least so Arthur says. He outstripped him at school and college, and the feeling had its foundation there. And anyone might be jealous of him now! He has shewn himself to be a genius!”

“I don’t like geniuses as a rule,” replied Elinor, “they are so conceited. I believe that is Bobby Bates sitting out there on the breakwater! I will go and see if he is still hungry!”

“Give the poor boy a couple of francs to get himself a breakfast in one of the restaurants,” said Margaret, “he will enjoy having a little secret from his terrible Mamma!”

She had not been alone long before the nurse came up to her, with the perambulator, piled up with toys, but no baby. Margaret’s fears were excited at once.

“Nurse! nurse, what is the matter? Where is the baby?” she exclaimed in tones of alarm.

"Nothing's the matter, Ma'am! pray don't frighten yourself!" replied the servant, "it's only that the young ladies have got baby, and they've bought her all these toys, and sent me on to tell you that they would be here directly!"

The perambulator was filled with expensive playthings useless for an infant of six months' old. Dolls, woolly sheep, fur cats, and gaily coloured balls with a huge box of chocolates and caramels, were piled one on the top of the other. But Mrs. Pullen's face expressed nothing but annoyance.

"You had no right to let them take her, Nurse—you had no right to let the child out of your sight! Go back at once and bring her here to me! I am exceedingly annoyed about it!"

"Here are the young ladies, Ma'am, and you had better lay your orders on them, yourself, for they wouldn't mind me," said the nurse, somewhat sullenly.

In another minute Harriet Brandt, and Olga Brimont had reached her side, the former panting under the weight of the heavy infant, but with her face scarlet with the excitement of having captured her.

"O! Miss Brandt!" cried Margaret, "you have given me such a fright! You must never take baby away from her nurse again, please! As I told you last night, she is afraid of strangers, and generally cries when they try to take her! Come to me, my little one!" she continued, holding out her arms to the child, "come to mother and tell her all about it!"

But the baby seemed to take no notice of the fond appeal. It had its big eyes fixed upon Miss Brandt's face with a half-awed, half-interested expression.

“O! no! don’t take her away!” said Harriet, eagerly, “she is so good with me! I assure you she is not frightened in the least bit, are you, my little love?” she added, addressing the infant. “And nurse tells me her name is Ethel, so I have ordered them to make her a little gold bangle with ‘Ethel’ on it, and she must wear it for my sake, darling little creature!”

“But, Miss Brandt, you must not buy such expensive things for her, indeed. She is too young to appreciate them, besides I do not like you to spend so much money on her!”

“But why shouldn’t I? What am I to do with my money, if I may not spend it on others?”

“But, such a quantity of toys! Surely, you have not bought all these for my baby!”

“Of course I have! I would have bought the whole shop if it would have pleased her! She likes the colours! Little darling! look how earnestly she gazes at me with her lovely grey eyes, as if she knew what a little beauty I think her! O! you pretty dear! you sweet pink and white baby!”

Mrs. Pullen felt somewhat annoyed as she saw the dolls and furry animals which were strewn upon the sands, at the same time she was flattered by the admiration exhibited of her little daughter, and the endearments lavished upon her. She considered them all well deserved (as what mother would not?)—and it struck her that Harriet Brandt must be a kindhearted, as well as a generous girl to spend so much money on a stranger’s child.

“She certainly does seem wonderfully good with you,” she observed presently, “I never knew her so quiet

with anybody but her nurse or me, before. Isn't it marvellous, Nurse?"

"It is, Ma'am! Baby do seem to take surprisingly to the young lady! And perhaps I might go into the town, as she is so quiet, and get the darning-wool for your stockings!"

"O! no! no! We must not let Miss Brandt get tired of holding her. She is too heavy to be nursed for long!"

"Indeed, indeed she is not!" cried Harriet, "do let me keep her, Mrs. Pullen, whilst nurse goes on her errand. It is the greatest pleasure to me to hold her. I should like never to give her up again!"

Margaret smiled.

"Very well, Nurse, since Miss Brandt is so kind, you can go!"

As the servant disappeared, she said to Harriet,

"Mind! you give her to me directly she makes your arm ache! I am more used to the little torment than you are."

"How can you call her by such a name, even in fun? What would I not give to have a baby of my very own to do what I liked with? I would never part with it, night nor day, I would teach it to love me so much, that it should never be happy out of my sight!"

"But that would be cruel, my dear! Your baby might have to part with you, as you have had to part with your mother!"

At the mention of her mother, something came into Miss Brandt's eyes, which Margaret could not define. It was not anger, nor sorrow, nor remorse. It was a kind of sullen contempt. It was something that made Mrs. Pullen resolve not to allude to the subject again.

The incident made her examine Harriet's eyes more closely than she had done before. They were beautiful in shape and colour, but they did not look like the eyes of a young girl. They were deeply, impenetrably black—with large pellucid pupils, but there was no sparkle nor brightness in them, though they were underlaid by smouldering fires which might burst forth into flame at any moment, and which seemed to stir and kindle and then go out again, when she spoke of anything that interested her. There was an attraction about the girl, which Mrs. Pullen acknowledged, without wishing to give in to. She could not keep her eyes off her! She seemed to hypnotise her as the snake is said to hypnotise the bird, but it was an unpleasant feeling, as if the next moment the smouldering fire would burst forth into flame and overwhelm her. But watching her play with, and hearing her talk to, her baby, Margaret put the idea away from her, and only thought how kindly natured she must be, to take so much trouble for another woman's child. It was not long before Miss Leyton found her way back to them, and as her glance fell upon Harriet Brandt and the baby, she elevated her eyebrows.

"Where is the nurse?" she demanded curtly.

"She has gone to the shops to see if she can get some darning-wool, and Miss Brandt was kind enough to offer to keep baby for her till she returns. And O! Elinor, look what beautiful toys Miss Brandt has bought her! Isn't she too kind?"

"Altogether too kind!" responded Elinor. "By the way, Margaret, I found our friend and transacted the little business we spoke of! But he says his Mamma

has ordered him to remain here, till she comes down to see him bathe, and dry him, I suppose, with her own hands! And do I not descry her fairy feet indenting the sands at this very moment, and bearing down in our direction?"

"You could hardly mistake her for anything else!" replied Mrs. Pullen.

In another minute the Baroness was upon them.

"Hullo," she called out, "you're just in time to see Gustave bathe! He looks lovely in his bathing costume! His legs are as white as your baby's, Mrs. Pullen, and twice as well worth looking at!"

"Mein tear! mein tear!" remonstrated the Baron.

"Don't be a fool, Gustave! You know it's the truth! And the loveliest feet, Miss Leyton! Smaller than yours, I bet. Where's that devil, Bobby? I'm going to give 'im a dousing for his villainy this morning, I can tell you! Once I get 'is 'ead under water, it won't come up again in a hurry! I expect 'e's pretty 'ungry by this time! But 'e don't get a centime out of me for cakes to-day. I'll teach 'im not to stuff 'imself like a pig again. Come, Gustave! 'ere's a machine for you! Get me a chair that I may sit outside it! Now, we'll 'ave some fun," she added, with a wink at Mrs. Pullen.

"Let us move on to the breakwater!" said Margaret to Elinor Leyton, and the whole party got up and walked some little distance off.

"Ah! you don't hoodwink me!" screamed the Baroness after them. "You've got glasses with you, and you're going to 'ave a good squint at Gustave's legs through 'em, I know! You'd better 'ave stayed 'ere, like honest women, and said you enjoyed the sight!"

“O! Margaret!” said Miss Leyton, with a look of horror, “if it had not been for the *Bataille de Fleurs* and the other thing I should have said, for goodness’ sake, let us move on to Ostende or Blankenburghe, with the least possible delay. That woman will be the death of me yet! I’m sure she will!”

Notwithstanding which, they could not help laughing in concert, a little later on, to see the unwilling Bobby dragged down by William to bathe, and as he emerged from his machine, helpless and half naked, to watch his elephantine mother chase him with her stout stick in hand, and failing to catch him in time, slip on the wet sand and flounder in the waves herself, from which plight, it looked very much as though her servant instead of rescuing her, did his best to push her further in, before he dragged her, drenched and disordered, on dry land again.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Baroness Gobelli’s temperament was as inconsistent as her dress. Under the garb of jocose good-humour, which often degenerated to horse-play, she concealed a jealous and vindictive disposition, which would go any lengths, when offended, to revenge itself. She was wont to say that she never forgot, nor forgave an injury, and that when she had her knife (as she termed it) in a man, she knew how to bide her time, but that when the time came, she turned it. These bloodthirsty sentiments, coupled with an asseveration which was constantly on her lips, that when she willed the death of anyone, he died, and that she had powers at her com-

mand of which no one was aware but herself, frightened many timid and ignorant people into trying to propitiate so apparently potent a mortal, and generally kow-tooing before her. To such votaries, so long as they pleased her, Madame Gobelli was used to shew her favour by various gifts of dresses, jewelry, or money, according to their circumstances, for in some cases she was lavishly generous, but she soon tired of her acquaintances and replaced them by fresh favourites.

The hints that she gave forth, regarding herself and her antecedents, were too extraordinary to gain credence except from the most ignorant of her auditors, but the Baroness always spoke in parables, and left no proof of what she meant, to be brought up against her. This proved that if she were clever, she was still more cunning. The hints she occasionally gave of being descended from Royal blood, though on the wrong side of the blanket, and of the connection being acknowledged privately, if not publicly, by the existing members of the reigning family, were received with open mouths by people of her own class, but rejected with scorn by such as were acquainted with those whom she affected to know. It was remarkable also, and only another proof that, whatever her real birth and antecedents, the Baroness Gobelli was unique, that, notwithstanding her desire to be considered noble by birth if not by law, she never shirked the fact that the Baron was in trade—on the contrary she rather made a boast of it, and used to relate stories bringing it into ridicule with the greatest gusto. The fact being that Baron Gobelli was the head of a large firm of export bootmakers, trading in London under the name of Fantaisie et Cie, the

boots and shoes of which, though professedly French, were all manufactured in Germany, where the firm maintained an enormous factory. The Baroness could seldom be in the company of anyone for more than five minutes without asking them where they bought their boots and shoes, and recommending them to Fantaisie et Cie as the best makers in London. She wanted to be first in everything—in popularity, in notice, and in conversation—if she could not attract attention by her personality, she startled people by her vulgarity—if she could not reign supreme by reason of her supposed birth, she would do so by boots and shoes, if nothing else—and if anybody slighted her or appeared to discredit her statements, he or she was immediately marked down for retaliation.

Harriet Brandt had not been many days in Heyst before the Baroness had become jealous of the attention which she paid Mrs. Pullen and her child. She saw that the girl was attractive, she heard that she was rich, and she liked to have pretty and pleasant young people about her when at home—they drew men to the house and reflected a sort of credit upon herself—and she determined to get Harriet away from Margaret Pullen and chain her to her own side instead. The Baroness hated Miss Leyton quite as much as Elinor hated her. She was quick of hearing and very intuitive—she had caught more than one of the young lady's uncomplimentary remarks upon herself, and had divined still more than she had heard. She had observed her sympathy with Bobby also, and that she encouraged him in his boyish rebellion. For all these reasons, she "had her knife" into Miss Leyton, and was waiting her op-

portunity to turn it. And she foresaw—with the assistance perhaps of the Powers of Darkness, of whose acquaintance she was so proud—that she would be enabled to take her revenge on Elinor Leyton through Harriet Brandt.

But her first advances to the latter were suavity itself. She was not going to frighten the girl by shewing her claws, until she had stroked her down the right way with her *pattes de velours*.

She came upon her one morning, as she sat upon the sands, with little Ethel in her arms. The nurse was within speaking distance, busy with her needlework, and the infant seemed so quiet with Miss Brandt and she took such evident pleasure in nursing it, that Mrs. Pullen no longer minded leaving them together, and had gone for a stroll with Miss Leyton along the Digue. So the Baroness found Harriet, comparatively speaking, alone.

“So you’re playing at nursemaid again!” she commenced in her abrupt manner. “You seem to have taken a wonderful fancy to that child!”

“She is such a good little creature,” replied Harriet, “she is no trouble whatever. She sleeps half the day!”

Miss Brandt had a large box of chocolates beside her, into which she continually dipped her hand. Her mouth, too, was stained with the delicate sweetmeat—she was always eating, either fruit or bonbons. She handed the box now, with a timid air, to the Baroness.

“Do you care for chocolate, Madame?” she asked.

The Baroness did not like to be called “Madame” according to the French fashion. She thought it derogated from her dignity. She wished everyone to address her as “my lady,” and considered she was

cheated out of her rights when it was omitted. But she liked chocolate almost as well as Harriet did.

"Thank you! I'll 'ave a few!" she said, grabbing about a dozen in her huge hand at the first venture. "What a liking for candies the Amurricans seem to 'ave introduced into England! I can remember the time when you never saw such a thing as sweets in the palace—I don't think they were allowed—and now they're all over the place. I shouldn't wonder if Her Majesty hasn't a box or two in her private apartments, and as for the Princesses, well!—"

"The Palace!—Her Majesty!"—echoed Miss Brandt, opening her dark eyes very wide.

"As I tell 'em," continued the Baroness, "they won't 'ave a tooth left amongst the lot of 'em soon! What are you staring at?"

"But—but—do you go to the Queen's palace?" demanded Harriet, incredulously, as well she might.

"Not unless I'm sent for, you may take your oath! I ain't fond enough of 'em for all that; besides, Windsor's 'orribly damp and don't suit me at all. But you mustn't go and repeat what I tell you, in the Hotel. It might give offence in high places if I was known to talk of it. You see there's some of 'em has never seen me since I married the Baron! Being in trade, they thought 'e wasn't good enough for me! I've 'eard that when Lady Morton—the dowager Countess, you know—was asked if she 'ad seen me lately, she called out loud enough for the whole room to 'ear, 'Do you mean the woman that married the boot man? No! I 'aven't seen 'er, and I don't mean to either!' Ha! ha! ha! But I can afford to laugh at all that, my dear!"

"But—I don't quite understand!" said Harriet Brandt, with a bewildered look.

"Why! the Baron deals in shoe-leather! 'Aven't you 'eard it? I suppose we've got the largest manufactory in Germany! Covers four acres of ground, I give you my word!"

"Shoe-leather!" again ejaculated Harriet Brandt, not knowing what to say.

"Why, yes! of course all the aristocracy go in for trade now-a-days! It's the fashion! There's the Viscountess Gormsby keeps a bonnet-shop, and Lord Charles Snowe 'as a bakery, and Lady Harrison 'as an old curiosity-shop, and stands about it, dusting tables and chairs, all day! But how can you know anything about it, just coming from the West Indies, and all those 'orrid blacks! Ain't you glad to find yourself amongst Christians again?"

"This is the first time I ever left Jamaica," said Miss Brandt, "I was born there."

"But you won't die there, or I'm much mistaken! You're too good to be wasted on Jamaica! When are you going back to England?"

"Oh! I don't know! I've hardly thought about it yet! Not while Mrs. Pullen stays here, though!"

"Why! you're not tied to 'er apron-string, surely! What's she to you?"

"She is very kind, and I have no friends!" replied Miss Brandt.

The Baroness burst into a coarse laugh.

"You won't want for friends, once you shew your face in England, I can tell you. I'd like to 'ave you at our 'ouse, the Red 'Ouse, we call it. Princess—but there, I mustn't tell you 'er name or it'll go through the

Hotel, and she says things to me that she never means to go further—but she said the other day that she preferred the Red 'Ouse to Windsor! And for comfort, and cheerfulness, so she may!”

“I suppose it is very beautiful then!” observed Harriet.

“You must judge for yourself,” replied the Baroness, with a broad smile, “when you come to London. You’ll be your own mistress there, I suppose, and not so tied as you are here! I call it a shame to keep you dancing attendance on that brat, when there’s a nurse whose business it is to look after ’er!”

“O! but indeed it is my own wish!” said the girl, as she cuddled the sleeping baby to her bosom, and laid her lips in a long kiss upon its little mouth. “I asked leave to nurse her! She loves me and even Nurse cannot get her off to sleep as I can! And it is so beautiful to have something to love you, Madame Gobelli! In the Convent I felt so cold—so lonely! If ever I took a liking to a girl, we were placed in separate rooms! It is what I have longed for—to come out into the world and find someone to be a friend, and to love me, only me, and all for myself!”

Madame Gobelli laughed again.

“Well! you’ve only got to shew those eyes of yours, to get plenty of people to love you, and let you love them in return—that is, if the men count in your estimation of what’s beautiful!”

Harriet raised her eyes and looked at the woman who addressed her!

There was the innocence of Ignorance in them as yet, but the slumbering fire in their depths proved of what her nature would be capable, when it was given

the opportunity to shew itself. Hers was a passionate temperament, yearning to express itself—panting for the love which it had never known—and ready to burst forth like a tree into blossom, directly the sun of Desire and Reciprocity shone upon it. The elder woman, who had not been without her little experiences in her day, recognised the feeling at once, and thought that she would not give a fig for the virtue of any man who was subjected to its influence.

“I don’t think that you’ll confine your attentions to babies long!” quoth the Baroness, as she encountered that glance.

“How do you know?” said her young companion.

“Ah! it’s enough that I *do* know, my dear! I ’ave ways and means of knowing things that I keep to myself! I ’ave friends about me too, who can tell me everything—who can ’elp me, if I choose, to give Life and Fortune to one person, and Trouble and Death to another—and woe to them that offend me, that’s all!”

But if the Baroness expected to impress Miss Brandt with her hints of terror, she was mistaken. Harriet did not seem in the least astonished. She had been brought up by old Pete and the servants on her father’s plantation to believe in witches, and the evil eye, and “Obeah” and the whole cult of Devil worship.

“I know all about that,” she remarked presently, “but you can’t do me either good or harm. I want nothing from you and I never shall!”

“Don’t you be too sure of that!” replied Madame Gobelli, nodding her head. “I’ve brought young women more luck than enough with their lovers before now—yes! and married women into the bargain! If it ’adn’t

been for me, Lady—there! it nearly slipped out, didn't it?—but there's a certain Countess who would never 'ave been a widow and married for the second time to the man of 'er 'eart, if I 'adn't 'elped 'er, and she knows it too! By the way, 'ow do you like Miss Leyton?"

"Not at all," replied Harriet, quickly, "she is not a bit like Mrs. Pullen—so cold and stiff and disagreeable! She hardly ever speaks to me! Is it true that she's the daughter of a lord, as Madame Lamont says, and is it that makes her so proud?"

"She's the daughter of Lord Walthamstowe, but that's nothing. They've got no money. 'Er people live down in the country, quite in a beggarly manner. A gal with a fortune of 'er own, would rank 'eads and 'eads above 'er in Society. There's not much thought of beside money, nowadays, I can tell you!"

"Why does she stay with Mrs. Pullen then? Are they any relation to each other?" demanded Harriet.

"Relation, no! I expect she's just brought 'er 'ere out of charity, and because she couldn't afford to go to the seaside by 'erself!"

She had been about to announce the projected relationship between the two ladies, when a sudden thought struck her. Captain Ralph Pullen was expected to arrive in Heyst in a few days—thus much she had ascertained through the landlady of the Lion d'Or. She knew by repute that he was considered to be one of the handsomest and most conceited men in the Limerick Rangers, a corps which was noted for its good-looking officers. It might be better for the furtherance of her plans against the peace of Miss Leyton's mind, she thought, to keep her engagement to Captain Pullen a secret—at all events,

no one could say it was her business to make it public. She looked in Harriet Brandt's yearning, passionate eyes, and decided that it would be strange if any impressionable young man could be thrown within their influence, without having his fidelity a little shaken, especially if affianced to such a cold, uninteresting "bit of goods" as Elinor Leyton. Like the parrot in the story, though she said nothing, she "thought a deal" and inwardly rumbled with half-suppressed laughter, as she pictured the discomfiture of the latter young lady, if by any chance she should find her *fiancé's* attentions transferred from herself to the little West Indian.

"You seem amused, Madame!" said Harriet presently.

"I was thinking of you, and all the young men who are doomed to be slaughtered by those eyes of yours," said the Baroness. "You'd make mischief enough amongst *my* friends, I bet, if I 'ad you at the Red 'Ouse!"

Harriet felt flattered and consciously pleased. She had never received a compliment in the Convent—no one had ever hinted that she was pretty, and she had had no opportunity of hearing it since.

"Do you think I am handsome then?" she enquired with a heightened colour.

"I think you're a deal worse! I think you're dangerous!" replied her new friend, "and I wouldn't trust you with the Baron any further than I could see you!"

"O! how can you say so?" exclaimed the girl, though she was pleased all the same to hear it said.

"I wouldn't, and that's the truth! Gustave's an awful fellow after the gals. I 'ave to keep a tight 'old

on 'im, I can tell you, and the more you keep out of 'is way, the better I shall be pleased! You'll make a grand match some day, if you're only sharp and keep your eyes open."

"What do you call a grand match?" asked Harriet, as she let the nurse take the sleeping child from her arms without remonstrance.

"Why! a Lord or an Honourable at the very least! since you 'ave money of your own. It's money they're all after in these times, you know—why! we 'ave dooks and markisses marrying all sorts of gals from Amurrica—gals whose fathers made their money in oil, or medicine, or electricity, or any other dodge, so long as they made it! And why shouldn't you do the same as the Amurrican gals? You have money, I know—and a goodish lot, I fancy—" added the Baroness, with her cunning eyes fixed upon the girl as if to read her thoughts.

"O! yes!" replied Harriet, "Mr. Trawler, my trustee, said it was too much for a young woman to have under her own control, but I don't know anything about the value of money, never having had it to spend before. I am to have fifteen hundred pounds every year. Is that a good deal?"

"Quite enough to settle you in life, my dear!" exclaimed the Baroness, who immediately thought what a good thing it would be if Miss Brandt could be persuaded to sink her capital in the boot trade, "and all under your own control too! You are a lucky young woman! I know 'alf-a-dozen lords,—not to say Princes—who would jump at you!"

"Princes!" cried Harriet, unable to believe her ears.

“Certainly! Not English ones of course, but German, which are quite as good after all, for a Prince is a Prince any day! There’s Prince Adalbert of Waxsquiemer, and Prince Harold of Muddlesheim, and Prince Loris of Taxelmein, and ever so many more, and they’re in and out of the Red ’Ouse, twenty times a day! But don’t you be in an ’urry! Don’t take the first that offers, Miss Brandt! Pick and choose! Flirt with whom you like and ’ave your fun, but wait and look about you a bit before you decide!”

The prospect was too dazzling! Harriet Brandt’s magnificent eyes were opened to their widest extent—her cheeks flushed with expectation—both life and light had flashed into her countenance. Her soul was expanding, her nature was awakening—it shone through every feature—the Baroness had had no idea she was so beautiful! And the hungry, yearning look was more accentuated than before—it seemed as if she were on the alert, watching for something, like a panther awaiting the advent of its prey. It was a look that women would have shrunk from, and men welcomed and eagerly responded to.

“I should like to go and see you when I go to England—very much!” she articulated slowly.

“And so you shall, my dear! The Baron and me will be very glad to ’ave you on a visit. And you mustn’t let that capital of yours lie idle, you know! If it’s in your own ’ands, you must make it yield double to what it does now! You consult Gustave! ’E’s a regular business man and knows ’ow many beans make five! ’E’ll tell you what’s best to be done with it—’e’ll be a

good friend to you, and you can trust 'im with everything!"

"Thank you!" replied the girl, but she still seemed to be lost in a kind of reverie. Her gaze was fixed—her full crimson lips were slightly parted—her slender hands kept nervously clasping and unclasping each other.

"Well, you are 'andsome and no mistake!" exclaimed the Baroness. "You remind me a little of the Duchess of Bewlay before she was married! The first wife, I mean—the second is a poor, pale-faced, sandy-'aired creature. ('Ow the Dook can stomach 'er after the other, I can't make out!) The first Duchess's mother was a great flame of my grandfather, the Dook of—however, I mustn't tell you that! It's a State secret, and I might get into trouble at Court! You'd better not say I mentioned it."

But Harriet Brandt was not in a condition to remember or repeat anything. She was lost in a dream of the possibilities of the Future.

The bell for *déjeuner* roused them at last, and brought them to their feet. They resembled each other in one particular . . . they were equally fond of the pleasures of the table.

The little Baron appeared dutifully to afford his clumsy spouse the benefit of his support in climbing the hillocks of shifting sand, which lay between them and the hotel, and Miss Brandt sped swiftly on her way alone.

"I've been 'aving a talk with that gal Brandt," chuckled the Baroness to her husband, "she's a regular green-'orn and swallows everything you tell 'er. I've been stuffing 'er up, that she ought to marry a Prince,

with 'er looks and money, and she quite believes it. But she ain't bad-looking when she colours up, and I expect she's rather a warm customer, and if she takes a fancy to a man, 'e won't well know 'ow to get out of it! And if he tries to, she'll make the fur fly. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Better leave it alone, better leave it alone!" said the stolid German, who had had more than one battle to fight already, on account of his wife's match-making propensities, and considered her quite too clumsy an artificer to engage in so delicate a game.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was a marked difference observable in the manner of Harriet Brandt after her conversation with the Baroness. Hitherto she had been shy and somewhat diffident—the seclusion of her conventual life and its religious teachings had cast a veil, as it were, between her and the outer world, and she had not known how to behave, nor how much she might venture to do, on being first cast upon it. But Madame Gobelli's revelations concerning her beauty and her prospects, had torn the veil aside, and placed a talisman in her hands, against her secret fear.

She was beautiful and dangerous—she might become a Princess if she played her cards well—the knowledge changed the whole face of Nature for her. She became assured, confident, and anticipatory. She began to frequent the company of the Baroness, and without neglecting her first acquaintances, Mrs. Pullen and her baby, spent more time in the Gobelli's private sitting-room

than in the balcony, or public salon, a fact for which Margaret did not hesitate to declare herself grateful.

"I do not know how it is," she confided to Elinor Leyton, "I rather like the girl, and I would not be unkind to her for all the world, but there is something about her that oppresses me. I seem never to have quite lost the sensation she gave me the first evening that she came here. Her company enervates me—I get neuralgia whenever we have been a short time together—and she leaves me in low spirits and more disposed to cry than laugh!"

"And no wonder," said her friend, "considering that she has that detestable school-girl habit of hanging upon one's arm and dragging one down almost to the earth! How you have stood it so long, beats me! Such a delicate woman as you are too. It proves how selfish Miss Brandt must be, not to have seen that she was distressing you!"

"Well! it will take a large amount of expended force to drag Madame Gobelli to the ground," said Margaret, laughing, "so I hope Miss Brandt will direct that portion of her attention to her, and leave me only the residue. Poor girl! she seems to have had so few people to love, or to love her, during her lifetime, that she is glad to practise on anyone who will reciprocate her affection. Did you see the Baroness kissing her this morning?"

"I saw the Baroness scrubbing her beard against Miss Brandt's cheek, if you call that 'kissing'?" replied Elinor. "The Baroness never kisses! I have noticed her salute poor Bobby in the morning exactly in the same manner. I have a curiosity to know if it hurts."

"Why don't you try it?" said Margaret.

"No, thank you! I am not so curious as all that! But the Gobellis and Miss Brandt have evidently struck up a great friendship. She will be the recipient of the Baroness's cast-off trinkets and laces next!"

"She is too well off for that, Elinor! Madame Lamont told me she has a fortune in her own right, of fifteen hundred a year!"

"She will want it all to gild herself with!" said Elinor.

Margaret Pullen looked at Miss Leyton thoughtfully. Did she really mean what she said, or did her jealousy of the West Indian heiress render her capable of uttering untruths? Surely, she must see that Harriet Brandt was handsome—growing handsomer indeed, every day, with the pure sea air tinting her cheeks with a delicate flush like the inside of a shell—and that her beauty, joined to her money, would render her a tempting morsel for the men, and a formidable rival for the women.

"I do not think you would find many people to agree with your opinion, Elinor!" she said after a pause, in answer to Miss Leyton's last remark.

"Well! I think she's altogether odious," replied her friend with a toss of her head, "I thought it the first time I saw her, and I shall think it to the last!"

It was the day that Captain Ralph Pullen was expected to arrive in Heyst and the two ladies were preparing to go to the station to meet him.

"The Baroness has at all events done you one good turn," continued Miss Leyton, "she has delivered you for a few hours from your 'Old Man of the Sea.' What have you been doing with yourself all the morning! I expected you to meet me on the sands, after I had done bathing!"

"I have not stirred out, Elinor. I am uneasy about baby! She does not seem at all well. I have been waiting your return to ask you whether I had not better send for a doctor to see her. But I am not sure if there is such a thing in Heyst!"

"Sure to be, but don't send unless it is absolutely necessary. What is the matter with her?"

The nurse was sitting by the open window with little Ethel on her lap. The infant looked much the same as usual—a little paler perhaps, but in a sound sleep and apparently enjoying it.

"She does not seem ill to me," continued Elinor, "is she in any pain?"

"Not at all, Miss," said the nurse, "and begging the mistress's pardon, I am sure she is frightening herself without cause. Baby is cutting two more teeth, and she feels the heat. That's all!"

"Why are you frightened, Margaret?" asked Miss Leyton.

"Because her sleep is unnatural, I am sure of it," replied Mrs. Pullen, "she slept all yesterday, and has hardly opened her eyes to-day. It is more like torpor than sleep. We can hardly rouse her to take her bottle and you know what a lively, restless little creature she has always been."

"But her teeth," argued Elinor Leyton, "surely her teeth account for everything! I know my sister, Lady Armisdale, says that nothing varies so quickly as teething children—that they're at the point of death one hour and quite well the next, and she has five, so she ought to know!"

"That's quite right, Miss," interposed the nurse, re-

spectfully, "and you can hardly expect the dear child to be lively when she's in pain. She has a little fever on her too! If she were awake, she would only be fretful! I am sure that the best medicine for her is sleep!"

"You hear what Nurse says, Margaret, but if you are nervous, why not send for a doctor to see her! We can ask Madame Lamont as we go downstairs who is the best here, and call on him as we go to the station, or we can telegraph to Bruges for one, if you think it would be better!"

"O! no! no! I will not be foolish! I will try and believe that you and Nurse know better than myself. I will wait at all events until to-morrow."

"Where has baby been this morning?"

"She was with Miss Brandt on the sands, Miss!" replied the nurse.

"Since you are so anxious about Ethel, Margaret, I really wonder that you should trust her with a stranger like Miss Brandt! Perhaps she let the sun beat on her head."

"O! no, Elinor, Nurse was with them all the time. I would not let Miss Brandt or anyone take baby away alone. But she is so good-natured and so anxious to have her, that I don't quite know how to refuse."

"Perhaps she has been stuffing the child with some of her horrid chocolates or caramels. She is gorging them all day long herself!"

"I know my duty too well for that, Miss!" said the nurse resentfully, "I wouldn't have allowed it! The dear baby did not have anything to eat at all."

"Well! you're both on *her* side evidently, so I will say no more," concluded Miss Leyton, "At the same

time if I had a child, I'd sooner trust it to a wild beast than the tender mercies of Miss Brandt. But it's past four o'clock, Margaret! If we are to reach the *entrepôt* in time we must be going!"

Mrs. Pullen hastily assumed her hat and mantle, and prepared to accompany her friend. They had opened the door, and were about to leave the room when a flood of melody suddenly poured into the apartment. It proceeded from a room at the other end of the corridor and was produced by a mandoline most skilfully played. The silvery notes in rills and trills and chords, such as might have been evolved from a fairy harp, arrested the attention of both Miss Leyton and Mrs. Pullen. They had scarcely expressed their wonder and admiration to each other, at the skilful manipulation of the instrument (which evinced such art as they had never heard before except in public) when the strings of the mandoline were accompanied by a young, fresh contralto voice.

"O! hush! hush!" cried Elinor, with her finger on her lip, as the rich mellow strains floated through the corridor, "I don't think I ever heard such a lovely voice before. Whose on earth can it be?"

The words of the song were in Spanish, and the only one they could recognise was the refrain of, "Seralie! Seralie!" But the melody was wild, pathetic, and passionate, and the singer's voice was touching beyond description.

"Some professional must have arrived at the Hotel," said Margaret, "I am sure that is not the singing of an amateur. But I hope she will not practise at night, and keep baby awake!"

Elinor laughed.

"O! you mother!" she said, "I thought you were lamenting just now that your ewe lamb slept too much! For my part, I should like to be lulled to sleep each night by just such strains as those. Listen, Margaret! She has commenced another song. Ah! Gounod's delicious 'Ave Maria.' How beautiful!"

"I don't profess to know much about music," said Margaret, "but it strikes me that the charm of that singing lies more in the voice than the actual delivery. Whoever it is, must be very young!"

"Whoever it proceeds from, it is charming," repeated Elinor. "How Ralph would revel in it! Nothing affects him like music. It is the only thing which makes me regret my inability to play or sing. But I am most curious to learn who the new arrival is. Ah! here is Mademoiselle Brimont!" she continued, as she caught sight of Olga Brimont, slowly mounting the steep staircase, "Mademoiselle, do you happen to know who it is who owns that lovely voice? Mrs. Pullen and I are perfectly enchanted with it!"

Olga Brimont coloured a little. She had never got over her shyness of the English ladies, particularly of the one who spoke so sharply. But she answered at once,

"It is Harriet Brandt! Didn't you know that she sang?"

Miss Leyton took a step backward. Her face expressed the intensest surprise—not to say incredulity.

"Harriet Brandt! Impossible!" she ejaculated.

"Indeed it is she," repeated Olga, "she always sang the solos in the Convent choir. They used to say she had the finest voice in the Island. O! yes, it is Harriet, really."

And she passed on to her own apartment.

"Do *you* believe it?" said Elinor Leyton, turning almost fiercely upon Mrs. Pullen.

"How can I do otherwise," replied Margaret, "in the face of Mademoiselle Brimont's assertion? But it is strange that we have heard nothing of Miss Brandt's talent before!"

"Has she ever mentioned the fact to you, that she could sing?"

"Never! but there has been no opportunity. There is no instrument here, and we have never talked of such a thing! Only fancy her possessing so magnificent a voice! What a gift! She might make her fortune by it if she needed to do so."

"Well! she ought to be able to sing with that mouth of hers," remarked Miss Leyton almost bitterly, as she walked into the corridor. She was unwilling to accord Harriet Brandt the possession of a single good attribute. As the ladies traversed the corridor, they perceived that others had been attracted by the singing as well as themselves, and most of the bedroom doors were open. Mrs. Montague caught Margaret by the sleeve as she passed.

"O! Mrs. Pullen, what a heavenly voice! Whose is it? Fred is just mad to know!"

"It's only that girl Brandt!" replied Elinor roughly, as she tried to escape further questioning.

"Miss Brandt! what, the little West Indian! Mrs. Pullen, is Miss Leyton jesting?"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Montague! Mademoiselle Brimont was our informant," said Margaret.

But at that moment their attention was diverted by

the appearance of Harriet Brandt herself. She looked brilliant. In one hand she carried her mandoline, a lovely little instrument, of sandal-wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl,—her face was flushed with the exertion she had gone through, and her abundant hair was somewhat in disorder. Mrs. Montague pounced on her at once.

“O! Miss Brandt! you are a sly puss! We have all been delighted—enchanted! What do you mean by hiding your light under a bushel in this way? Do come in here for a minute and sing us another song! Major Montague is in ecstasies over your voice!”

“I can’t stop, I can’t indeed!” replied Miss Brandt, evidently pleased with the effect she had produced, “because I am on my way down to dear Madame Gobelli. I promised to sing for her this afternoon. I was only trying my voice to see if it was fit for anything!”

She smiled at Mrs. Pullen as she spoke and added,

“I hope I have not disturbed the darling baby! I thought she would be out this lovely afternoon!”

“O! no! you did not disturb her. We have all been much pleased, and surprised to think that you have never told us that you could sing!”

“How could I tell that anyone would care about it?” replied Harriet, indifferently, with a shrug of her shoulders. “But the Baron is very musical! He has a charming tenor voice. I have promised to accompany him! I mustn’t delay any longer! Good afternoon!”

And she flew down the stairs with her mandoline.

“It is all the dear Baroness and the dear Baron now, you perceive,” remarked Elinor to Mrs. Pullen, as they walked together to the railway-station, “you and the baby are at a discount. Miss Brandt is the sort of

young lady, I fancy, who will follow her own interests wherever they may lead her!"

"You should be the last to complain of her for that, Elinor, since you have tried to get rid of her at any cost," replied her friend.

Captain Ralph Pullen arrived punctually by the train which he had appointed, and greeted his sister-in-law and *fiancée* with marked cordiality.

He was certainly a man to be proud of, as far as outward appearance went. He was acknowledged, by general consent, to be one of the handsomest men in the British Army, and he was fully aware of the fact. He was tall and well built, with good features, almost golden hair; womanish blue eyes, and a long drooping moustache, which he was always caressing with his left hand. He regarded all women with the same languishing, tired-to-death glance, as if the attentions shewn him by the *beau sexe* had been altogether too much for him, and the most he could do now was to regard them with an indolent, worn-out favour, which had had all the excitement, and freshness, and flavour taken out of it long before. Most women would have considered his method of treatment as savouring little short of insult, but Elinor Leyton's nature did not make extravagant demands upon her lover, and so long as he dressed and looked well and paid her the courtesies due from a gentleman to a gentlewoman, she was quite satisfied. Margaret, on the other hand, had seen through her brother-in-law's affectations from the first, and despised him for them. She thought him foolish, vain, and uncompanionable, but she bore with him for Arthur's sake. She would

have welcomed his cousin Anthony Pennell, though, with twice the fervour.

Ralph was looking remarkably well. His light grey suit of tweed was fresh and youthful looking, and the yellow rose in his buttonhole was as dainty as if he had just walked out of his Piccadilly club. He was quite animated (for him) at the idea of spending a short time in Heyst, and actually went the length of informing Elinor that she looked "very fit", and that if it was not so public a place he should kiss her. Miss Leyton coloured faintly at the remark, but she turned her head away and would not let him see that she was sorry the place was so public.

"Heyst seems to have done you both a lot of good," Captain Pullen went on presently, "I am sure you are fatter, Margaret, than when you were in Town. And, by the way, how is the daughter?"

"Not very well, I am sorry to say, Ralph! She is cutting more teeth. Elinor and I were consulting whether we should send for a doctor to see her, only this afternoon."

"By the way, I have good news for you, or you will consider it so. Old Phillips is coming over to join us next week."

"Doctor Phillips, my dear old godfather!" exclaimed Margaret, "O! I *am* glad to hear it! He will set baby to rights at once. But who told you so, Ralph?"

"The old gentleman himself! I met him coming out of his club the other day and told him I was coming over here, and he said he should follow suit as soon as ever he could get away, and I was to tell you to get a room for him by next Monday!"

"I shall feel quite happy about my baby now," said Mrs. Pullen, "I have not much faith in Belgian doctors. Their pharmacopœia is quite different from ours, but Doctor Phillips will see if there is anything wrong with her at once!"

"I hope you will not be disappointed with the Hotel visitors, Ralph," said Elinor, "but they are a terrible set of riff-raff. It is impossible to make friends with any one of them. They are such dreadful people!"

"O! you mustn't class them all together, Elinor," interposed Margaret, "I am sure the Montagues and the Vieuxtemps are nice enough! And *du reste*, there is no occasion for Ralph even to speak to them."

"Of course not," said Captain Pullen, "I have come over for the sake of your company and Margaret's, and have no intention of making the acquaintance of any strangers. When is the *Bataille de Fleurs*? Next week? that's jolly! Old Phillips will be here by that time, and he and Margaret can flirt together, whilst you and I are billing and cooing, eh, Elinor?"

"Don't be vulgar, Ralph," she answered, "you know how I dislike that sort of thing! And we have had so much of it here!"

"What, billing and cooing?" he questioned. But Elinor disdained to make any further remark on the subject.

The appearance of Ralph Pullen at the *table d'hôte* dinner naturally excited a good deal of speculation. The English knew that Mrs. Pullen expected her brother-in-law to stay with her, but the foreigners were all curious to ascertain who the handsome, well-groomed, military-looking stranger might be, who was so familiar with

Mrs. Pullen and her friend. The Baroness was not behind the rest in curiosity and admiration. She was much before them in her determination to gratify her curiosity and make the acquaintance of the new-comer, whose name she guessed, though no introduction had passed between them. She waited through two courses to see if Margaret Pullen would take the initiative, but finding that she addressed all her conversation to Captain Pullen, keeping her face, meanwhile, pertinaciously turned from the party sitting opposite to her, she determined to force her hand.

"Mrs. Pullen!" she cried, in her coarse voice, "when are you going to introduce me to your handsome friend?"

Margaret coloured uneasily and murmured,

"My brother-in-law, Captain Pullen—Madame Gobelli."

"Very glad to see you, Captain," said the Baroness, as Ralph bowed to her in his most approved fashion, "your sister thought she'd keep you all to 'erself, I suppose! But the young ladies of Heyst would soon make mincemeat of Mrs. Pullen if she tried that little game on them. We 'aven't got too many good-looking young men 'ereabouts, I can tell you. Are you going to stay long?"

Captain Pullen murmured something about "uncertain" and "not being quite sure", whilst the Baroness regarded him full in the face with a broad smile on her own. She always had a keen eye for a handsome young man!

"Ah! you'll stay as long as it suits your purpose, won't you? I expect you 'ave your own little game to play, same as most of us! And it's a pretty little game,

too, isn't it, especially when a fellow's young and good-looking and 'as the chink-a-chink, eh?

"I fancy I know some of your brother officers, Mr. Naggett, and Lord Menzies, they belong to the Rangers, don't they?" continued Madame Gobelli, "Prince Adalbert of Waxsquiemer used to bring 'em to the Red 'Ouse! By the way I 'aven't introduced you to my 'usband, Baron Gobelli! Gustave, this is Captain Ralph Pullen, the Colonel's brother, you know. You must 'ave a talk with 'im after dinner! You two would 'it it off first-rate together! Gustave's in the boot trade, you know, Captain Pullen! We trade under the name of Fantaisie et Cie! The best boots and shoes in London, and the largest manufactory, I give you my word! You should get your boots from us. I know you dandy officers are awfully particular about your tootsies. If you'll come and see me in London, I'll take you over the manufactory, and give you a pair. You'll never buy any others, once you've tried 'em!"

Ralph Pullen bowed again, and said he felt certain that Madame was right and he looked forward to the fulfilment of her promise with the keenest anticipation.

Harriet Brandt meanwhile, sitting almost opposite to the stranger, was regarding him from under the thick lashes of her slumbrous eyes, like a lynx watching its prey. She had never seen so good-looking and aristocratic a young man before. His crisp golden hair and drooping moustaches, his fair complexion, blue eyes and chiselled features, were a revelation to her. Would the Princes whom Madame Gobelli had promised she should meet at her house, be anything like him, she wondered—*could* they be as handsome, as perfectly dressed, as

fashionable, as completely at their ease, as the man before her? Every other moment, she was stealing a veiled glance at him—and Captain Pullen was quite aware of the fact. What young man, or woman, is not aware when they are being furtively admired? Ralph Pullen was one of the most conceited of his sex, which is not saying a little—he was *accomblé* with female attentions wherever he went, yet he was not *blasé* with them, so long as he was not called upon to reciprocate in kind. Each time that Harriet's magnetic gaze sought his face, his eyes by some mystical chance were lifted to meet it, and though all four lids were modestly dropped again, their owners did not forget the effect their encounter had left behind it.

"Ave you been round Heyst yet, Captain Pullen," vociferated Madame Gobelli, "and met the Procession? I never saw such rubbish in my life. I laughed fit to burst myself! A lot of children rigged out in blue and white, carrying a doll on a stick, and a crowd of fools following and singing 'ymns. Call that Religion? It's all tommy rot. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Pullen?"

"I cannot say that I do, Madame! I have been taught to respect every religion that is followed with sincerity, whether I agree with its doctrine or not. Besides, I thought the procession you allude to a very pretty sight. Some of the children with their fair hair and wreaths of flowers looked like little angels!"

"O! you're an 'umbug!" exclaimed the Baroness, "you say that just to please these Papists. Not that I wouldn't just as soon be a Papist as a Protestant, but I 'ate cant. I wouldn't 'ave Bobby 'ere, brought up in any religion. Let 'im choose for 'imself when 'e's a

man, I said, but no cant, no 'umbug! I 'ad a governess for 'im once, a dirty little sneak, who thought she'd get the better of me, so she made the boy kneel down each night and say, 'God bless father and mother and all kind friends, and God bless my enemies.' I came on 'em one evening and I 'ad 'im up on his legs in a moment. I won't 'ave it, Bobby, I said, I won't 'ave you telling lies for anyone, and I made 'im repeat after me, 'God bless father and mother and all kind friends, and d—n my enemies.'"

The governess was so angry with me, that she gave warning, he! he! he! But I 'ad my way, and Bobby 'asn't said a prayer since, 'ave you, Bobby?"

"Sometimes, Mamma!" replied the lad in a low voice. Margaret Pullen's kind eyes sought his at once with an encouraging smile.

"Well! you'd better not let me 'ear you, or I'll give you 'what for'. I 'ate 'umbug, don't you, Captain Pullen?"

"Unreservedly, Madame!" replied Ralph in a stifled voice and with an inflamed countenance. He had been trying to conceal his amusement for some time past, greatly to the disgust of Miss Leyton, who would have had him pass by his opposite neighbour's remarks in silent contempt, and the effort had been rather trying. As he spoke, his eyes sought those of Harriet Brandt again, and discovered the sympathy with his distress, lurking in them, coupled with a very evident look of admiration for himself. He looked at her back again—only one look, but it spoke volumes! Captain Pullen had never given such a glance at his *fiancée*, nor received one from her! It is problematical if Elinor

Leyton *could* make a telegraph of her calm brown eyes— if her soul (if indeed she had in that sense a soul at all) ever pierced the bounds of its dwelling-place to look through its windows. As the dessert appeared, Margaret whispered to her brother-in-law,

“If we do not make our escape now, we may not get rid of her all the evening,” at which hint he rose from table, and the trio left the *salle à manger* together. As Margaret descended again, equipped for their evening stroll, she perceived Harriet Brandt in the corridor also ready, and waiting apparently for her. She took her aside at once.

“I cannot ask you to join us in our walk this evening, Miss Brandt,” she said, “because, as it is the first day of my brother’s arrival, we shall naturally have many family topics to discuss together!”

For the first time since their acquaintance, she observed a sullen look creep over Harriet Brandt’s features.

“I am going to walk with the Baron and Baroness, thank you all the same!” she replied to Margaret’s remark, and turning on her heel, she re-entered her room. Margaret did not believe her statement, but she was glad she had had the courage to warn her—she knew it would have greatly annoyed Elinor if the girl she detested had accompanied them on that first evening. The walk proved after all to be a very ordinary one. They paraded up and down the Digue, until they were tired and then they sat down on green chairs and listened to the orchestra whilst Ralph smoked his cigarettes. Elinor was looking her best. She was pleased and mildly excited—her costume became her—and she was presumably enjoying herself, but as far as

her joy in Captain Pullen went, she might have been walking with her father or her brother. The conscious looks that had passed between him and Harriet Brandt were utterly wanting.

They began by talking of home, of Elinor's family, and the last news that Margaret had received from Arthur—and then went on to discuss the visitors to the Hotel. Miss Leyton waxed loud in her denunciation of the Baroness and her familiar vulgarity—she deplored the ill fate that had placed them in such close proximity at the *table d'hôte*, and hoped that Ralph would not hesitate to change his seat if the annoyance became too great. She had warned him, she said, of what he might expect by joining them at Heyst.

"My dear girl," he replied, "pray don't distress yourself! In the first place I know a great deal more about foreign hotels than you do, and knew exactly what I might expect to encounter, and in the second, I don't mind it in the least—in fact, I like it, it amuses me, I think the Baroness is quite a character, and look forward to cultivating her acquaintance with the keenest anticipations."

"O! *don't*, Ralph, pray don't!" exclaimed Miss Leyton, fastidiously, "the woman is beneath contempt! I should be exceedingly annoyed if you permitted her to get at all intimate with you."

"Why not, if it amuses him?" demanded Margaret, laughing, "for my part, I agree with Ralph, that her very vulgarity makes her most amusing as a change, and it is not as if we were likely to be thrown in her way when we return to England!"

"She is a *rara avis*," cried Captain Pullen en-

thusiastically, "she certainly must know some good people if men like Naggett and Menzies have been at her house, and yet the way she advertises her boots and shoes is too delicious! O! dear yes! I cannot consent to cut the Baroness Gobelli! I am half in love with her already!"

Elinor Leyton made a gesture of disgust.

"And you—who are considered to be one of the most select and fastidious men in Town," she said, "I wonder at you!"

Then he made a bad matter worse, by saying,

"By the way, Margaret, who was that beautiful girl who sat on the opposite side of the table?"

"The *what*," exclaimed Elinor Leyton, ungrammatically, as she turned round upon the Digue and confronted him.

"He means Miss Brandt!" interposed Margaret, hastily, "many people think that she is handsome!"

"No one could think otherwise," responded Ralph. "Is she Spanish?"

"O! no; her parents were English. She comes from Jamaica!"

"Ah! a drop of Creole blood in her then, I daresay! You never see such eyes in an English face!"

"What's the matter with her eyes?" asked Elinor sharply.

"They're very large and dark, you know, Elinor!" said Mrs. Pullen, observing the cloud which was settling down upon the girl's face, "but it is not everybody who admires dark eyes, or you and I would come off badly!"

"Well, with all due deference to you, my fair sister-in-law," replied Ralph, with the stupidity of a selfish man who never knows when he is wounding his hearers,

"most people give the preference to dark eyes in women. Anyway Miss Brandt (if that is her name) is a beauty and no mistake!"

"I can't say that I admire your taste," said Elinor, "and I sincerely hope that Miss Brandt will not force her company upon us whilst you are here. Margaret and I have suffered more than enough already in that respect! She is only half educated and knows nothing of the world, and is altogether a most uninteresting companion. I dislike her exceedingly!"

"Ah! don't forget her singing!" cried Margaret, unwittingly.

"Does she sing?" demanded the Captain.

"Yes! and wonderfully well for an amateur! She plays the mandoline also. I think Elinor is a little hard on her! Of course she is very young and unformed, but she has only just come out of a convent where she has been educated for the last ten years. What can you expect of a girl who has never been out in Society? I know that she is very good-natured, and has waited on baby as if she had been her servant!"

"Don't you think we have had about enough of Miss Harriet Brandt?" said Elinor, "I want to hear what Ralph thinks of Heyst, or if he advises our going on to Ostende. I believe Ostende is much gayer and brighter than Heyst!"

"But we must wait now till Doctor Phillips joins us," interposed Margaret.

"He could come after us, if Ralph preferred Ostende or Blankenburghe," said Elinor eagerly.

"My dear ladies," exclaimed Captain Pullen, "allow me to form an opinion of Heyst first, and then we will

talk about other places. This seems pleasant enough in all conscience to me now!"

"O! you two are bound to think any place pleasant," laughed Margaret, "but I think I must go in to my baby! I do not feel easy to be away from her too long, now that she is ailing. But there is no need for you to come in, Elinor! It is only just nine o'clock!"

"I would rather accompany you," replied Miss Leyton, primly.

"No! no! Elinor, stay with me! If you are tired we can sit in the balcony. I have seen nothing of you yet!" remonstrated her lover.

She consented to sit in the balcony with him for a few minutes, but she would not permit his chair to be placed too close to hers.

"The waiters pass backward and forward," she said, "and what would they think?"

"The deuce take what they think," replied Captain Pullen, "I haven't seen you for two months, and you keep me at arms' length as if I should poison you! What do you suppose a man is made of?"

"My dear Ralph, you know it is nothing of the kind, but it is quite impossible that we can sit side by side like a pair of turtle doves in a public Hotel like this!"

"Let us go up to your room then?"

"To my bedroom?" she ejaculated with horror.

"To Margaret's room then! she won't be so prudish, I'm sure! Anywhere where I can speak to you alone!"

"The nurse will be in Margaret's room, with little Ethel!"

"Hang it all, then, come for another walk! Let us

go away from the town, out on those sand hills. I'm sure no one will see us there!"

"Dear Ralph, you must be reasonable! If I were seen walking about Heyst alone with you at night, it would be all over the town to-morrow."

"Let it be! Where's the harm?"

"But I have kept our engagement most scrupulously secret! No one knows anything, but that you are Margaret's brother-in-law! You don't know how they gossip and chatter in a place like this. I could never consent to appear at the public *table d'hôte* again, if I thought that all those vulgarians had been discussing my most private affairs!"

"O! well! just as you choose!" replied Ralph Pullen discontentedly, "but I suppose you will not object to *my* taking another turn along the Digue before I go to bed! Here, garçon, bring me a *chasse*! Good-night, then, if you will not stay!"

"It is not that I *will* not—it is that I *cannot*, Ralph!" said Miss Leyton, as she gave him her hand. "Good-night! I hope you will find your room comfortable, and if it is fine to-morrow, we will have a nice walk in whichever direction you prefer!"

"And much good that will be!" grumbled the young man, as he lighted his cigarette and strolled out again upon the Digue.

As he stood for a moment looking out upon the sea, which was one mass of silvery ripples, he heard himself called by name. He looked up. The Gobellis had a private sitting-room facing the Digue on the ground floor, and the Baroness was leaning out of the open window, and beckoning to him.

"Won't you come in and 'ave a whiskey and soda?" she asked. "The Baron 'as 'is own whiskey 'ere, real Scotch, none of your nasty Belgian stuff, 'alf spirits of wine and 'alf varnish! Come along! We've got a jolly little parlour, and my little friend 'Arriet Brandt shall sing to you! Unless you're off on some lark of your own, eh?"

"No! indeed," replied Ralph, "I was only wondering what I should do with myself for the next hour. Thank you so much! I'll come with pleasure."

And in another minute he was seated in the company of the Baron and Baroness and Harriet Brandt.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day had heralded in the *Bataille de Fleurs* and all Heyst was *en fête*. The little furnished villas, hired for the season, were all built alike, with a balcony, on the ground floor, which was transformed into a veritable bower for the occasion. Villa Imperatrice vied with Villa Mentone and Villa Sebastien, as to which decoration should be the most beautiful and effective, and the result was a long line of arbours garlanded with every sort of blossom. From early morning, the occupants were busy, entwining their pillars with evergreens, interspersed with flags and knots of ribbon, whilst the balustrades were laden with growing flowers and the tables inside bore vases of severed blooms. One balcony was decorated with corn, poppies and *bluets*, whilst the next would display pink roses mixed with the delicate blue of the sea-nettle, and the third would be all yellow silk and white marguerites. The procession of *charrettes*, and the *Ba-*

taille itself was not to commence till the afternoon, so the visitors crowded the sands as usual in the morning, leaving the temporary owners of the various villas, to toil for their gratification, during their absence. Margaret Pullen felt sad as she sat in the hotel balcony, watching the proceedings on each side of her. She had intended her baby's perambulator to take part in the procession of *charrettes*, and had ordered a quantity of white field-lilies with which to decorate it. It was to be a veritable triumph—so she and Miss Leyton had decided between themselves—and she had fondly pictured how lovely little Ethel would look with her fluffy yellow hair, lying amongst the blossoms, but now baby was too languid and ill to be taken out of doors, and Margaret had given all the flowers to the little Montagues, who were trimming their mail-cart with them, in their own fashion. As she sat there, with a pensive, thoughtful look upon her face, Harriet Brandt, dressed in a costume of grass-cloth, with a broad-brimmed hat, nodding with poppies and green leaves, that wonderfully became her, on her head, entered the balcony with an eager, excited appearance.

“O! Mrs. Pullen! have you seen the Baroness?” she exclaimed. “We are going to bathe this morning. Aren't you coming down to the sands?”

“No! Miss Brandt, not to-day. I am unhappy about my dear baby! I am sure you will be sorry to hear that she has been quite ill all night—so restless and feverish!”

“O! she'll be all right directly her teeth come through!” replied Harriet indifferently, as her eyes scanned the scene before them. “There's the Baroness! She's beckoning to me! Good-bye!” and without a word

of sympathy or comfort, she rushed away to join her friends.

“Like the way of the world!” thought Margaret, as she watched the girl skimming over the sands, “but somehow—I didn’t think she would be so heartless!”

Miss Leyton and her *fiancé* had strolled off after breakfast to take a walk, and Mrs. Pullen went back to her own room, and sat down quietly to needlework. She was becoming very anxious for Doctor Phillips’ arrival; had even written to England to ask him to hurry it if possible—for her infant, though not positively ill, rejected her food so often that she was palpably thinner and weaker.

After she had sat there for some time, she took up her field glasses, to survey the bathers on the beach. She had often done so before, when confined to the hotel—it afforded her amusement to watch their faces and antics. On the present occasion, she had no difficulty in distinguishing the form of the Baroness Gobelli, looking enormous as, clad in a most conspicuous bathing costume, she waddled from her machine into the water, loudly calling attention to her appearance, from all assembled on the sands, as she went. The Baron, looking little less comical, advanced to conduct his spouse down to the water, whilst after them flew a slight boyish figure in yellow, with a mane of dark hair hanging down her back, which Margaret immediately recognised as that of Harriet Brandt.

She was dancing about in the shallow water, shrieking whenever she made a false step, and clinging hold of the Baron’s hand, when Margaret saw another gentleman come up to them, and join in the ring. She turned

the glasses upon him and saw to her amazement that it was her brother-in-law. Her first feeling was that of annoyance. There was nothing extraordinary or improper, in his joining the Baroness's party—men and women bathed promiscuously in Heyst, and no one thought anything of it. But that Ralph should voluntarily mix himself up with the Gobellis, after Elinor's particular request that he should keep aloof from them, was a much more serious matter. And by the way, that reminded her, where was Elinor the while? Margaret could not discern her anywhere upon the sands, and wondered if she had also been persuaded to bathe. She watched Captain Pullen, evidently trying to induce Miss Brandt to venture further into the water, holding out both hands for her protection,—she also saw her yield to his persuasion, and leaving go of her hold on the Herr Baron, trust herself entirely to the stranger's care. Mrs. Pullen turned from the window with a sigh. She hoped there were not going to be any "ructions" between Ralph and Elinor—but she would not have liked her to see him at that moment. She bestowed a silent benediction, "not loud but deep" on the foreign fashion of promiscuous bathing, and walked across the corridor to her friend's room, to see if she had returned to the Hotel. To her surprise, she found Miss Leyton dismantled of her walking attire, soberly seated at her table, writing letters.

"Why! Elinor," she said, "I thought you were out with Ralph!"

The young lady was quite composed.

"So I was," she answered, "until half an hour ago! But as he then expressed his determination to bathe, I

left him to his own devices and came back to write my letters."

"Would he not have preferred your waiting on the sands till he could join you again?"

"I did not ask him! I should think he would hardly care for me to watch him whilst bathing, and I am sure I should not consent to do so!"

"But everybody does it here, Elinor, and if you did not care to go down to the beach, you might have waited for him on the Digue."

"My dear Margaret, I am not in the habit of dancing attendance upon men. It is their business to come after me! If Ralph is eager for another walk after his dip, he can easily call for me here!"

"True! and he can as easily go for his walk with any stray acquaintance he may pick up on the sands!"

"O! if he should prefer it, he is welcome to do so," replied Elinor, resuming her scribbling.

"My dear Elinor, I don't think you quite understand Ralph! He has been terribly spoilt, you know, and when men have been accustomed to attention they will take it wherever they can get it! He has come over here expressly to be with you, so I think you should give him every minute of your time. Men are fickle creatures, my dear! It will take some time yet to despoil them of the idea that women were made for their convenience."

"I am afraid the man is not born yet for whose convenience I was made!"

"Well! you know the old saying: 'Most women can catch a man, but it takes a clever woman to keep him.' I don't mean to insinuate that you are in any danger of

losing Ralph, but I think he's quite worth keeping, and, I believe, you think so too!"

"And I mean to keep him!" replied Miss Leyton, as she went on writing.

Margaret did not venture to give her any further hints, but returned to her own room, and took another look through her spyglass.

The bathers in whom she was interested had returned to their machines by this time, and presently emerged, "clothed and in their right minds," Miss Brandt looking more attractive than before, with her long hair hanging down her back to dry. And then, that occurred which she had been anticipating. Captain Pullen, having taken a survey of the beach, and seeing none of his own party there, climbed with Harriet Brandt to where they were high and dry above the tide, and threw himself down on the hot, loose sand by her side, whilst the Baron and Baroness with a laughing injunction to the two young people, to take care of themselves, toiled up to the Digue and walked off in another direction.

When they all met at *déjeuner*, she attacked her brother-in-law on the subject.

"Have you been bathing all this while?" she said to him, "you must have stayed very long in the water!"

"O! dear no!" he replied, "I wasn't in above a quarter of an hour!"

"And what have you been doing since?"

"Strolling about, looking for you and Elinor!" said Captain Pullen. "Why the dickens didn't you come out this lovely morning?"

"I could not leave baby!" cried Margaret shortly.

"And I was writing," chimed in Elinor.

"Very well, ladies, if you prefer your own company to mine, of course I have nothing to say against it! But I suppose you are not going to shut yourselves up this afternoon!"

"O! no. It is a public duty to attend the *Bataille de Fleurs*. Have you bought any confetti, Ralph?"

"I have! Miss Brandt was good enough to show me where to get them, and we are well provided. There is to be a race between lady jockeys at the end of the Digue too, I perceive!"

"What, with horses?"

"I conclude so. I see they have railed in a portion of ground for the purpose," replied Captain Pullen.

"'Ow could they race without 'orses?" called out the Baroness.

Harriet Brandt did not join in the conversation, but she was gazing all the while at Ralph Pullen—not furtively as she had done the day before, but openly, and unabashedly, as though she held a proprietary right in him. Margaret noticed her manner at once and interpreted it aright, but Miss Leyton, true to her principles, never raised her eyes in her direction and ignored everything that came from that side of the table.

Mrs. Pullen was annoyed; she knew how angry Elinor would be if she intercepted any telegraphic communication between her lover and Miss Brandt; and she rose from the table as soon as possible, in order to avert such a catastrophe. She had never considered her brother-in-law a very warm wooer, and she fancied that his manner towards Miss Leyton was more indifferent than usual. She took one turn with them along the Digue to admire the flower-bedecked villas, which were

in full beauty, and then returned to her nursery, glad of an excuse to leave them together, and give Elinor a chance of becoming more cordial and affectionate to Ralph, than she had yet appeared to be. The lovers had not been alone long, however, before they were waylaid, to the intense disgust of Elinor, by Harriet Brandt and her friend, Olga Brimont.

Still further to her annoyance, Captain Pullen seemed almost to welcome the impertinent interference of the two girls, who could scarcely have had the audacity to join their company, unless he had invited them to do so.

"The *charrettes* are just about to start!" exclaimed Harriet. "O! they are lovely, and such dear little children! I am so glad that the *Bataille de Fleurs* takes place to-day, because my friend's brother, Alfred Brimont, is coming to take her to Brussels the day after to-morrow!"

"Brussels is a jolly place. Mademoiselle Brimont will enjoy herself there," said Ralph. "There are theatres, and balls and picture-galleries, and every pleasure that a young lady's heart can desire!"

"Have you been to Brussels?" asked Harriet.

"Yes! when I was a nasty little boy in jacket and trousers. I was placed at Mr. Jackson's English school there, in order that I might learn French, but I'm afraid that was the last thing I acquired. The Jackson boys were known all over the town for the greatest nuisances in it!"

"What did you do?"

"What did we *not* do? We tore up and down the rue Montagne de la Cour at all hours of the day, shouting and screaming and getting into scrapes. We ran up bills at the shops which we had no money to pay—

we appeared at every place of amusement—and we made love to all the school-girls, till we had become a terror to the school-mistresses.”

“What naughty boys!” remarked Miss Brandt, with a side glance at Miss Leyton. She did not like to say all she thought before this very stiff and proper young English lady. “But Captain Pullen,” she continued, “where are the confetti? Have you forgotten them? Shall I go and buy some more?”

“No! no! my pockets are stuffed with them,” he said, producing two bags, of which he handed Harriet one. Her thanks were conveyed by throwing a large handful of tiny pieces of blue and white and pink paper (which do duty for the more dangerous chalk sugar-plums) at him and which covered his tweed suit and sprinkled his fair hair and moustaches. He returned the compliment by flying after her retreating figure, and liberally showering confetti upon her.

“O! Ralph! I do hope you are not going to engage in this horse-play,” exclaimed Elinor Leyton, “because if so I would rather return to the Hotel. Surely, we may leave such vulgarities to the common people, and—Miss Harriet Brandt!”

“What nonsense!” he replied. “It’s evident you’ve never been in Rome during the Carnival! Why, everyone does it! It’s the national custom. If you imagine I’m going to stand by, like a British tourist and stare at everything, without joining in the fun, you’re very much mistaken!”

“But is it fun?” questioned Miss Leyton.

“To me it is! Here goes!” he cried, as he threw

a handful of paper into the face of a passing stranger, who gave him as good as she had got, in return.

"I call it low—positively vulgar," said Miss Leyton, "to behave so familiarly with people one has never seen before—of whose antecedents one knows nothing! I should be very much surprised if the mob behaved in such a manner towards me. Oh!"

The exclamation was induced by the action of some young *épiciér*, or hotel *garçon*, who threw a mass of confetti into her face with such violence as almost for the moment to blind her.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Ralph Pullen with his healthy British lungs, as he saw her outraged feelings depicted in her countenance.

"I thought you'd get it before long!" he said, as she attempted to brush the offending paper off her mantle.

"It has not altered my opinion of the indecency of the custom!" she replied.

"Never mind!" he returned soothingly. "Here come the *charrettes*."

They were really a charming sight. On one cart was drawn a boat, with little children dressed as fishermen and fisherwomen—another represented a harvest-field, with the tiny haymakers and reapers—whilst a third was piled with wool to represent snow, on the top of which were seated three little girls attired as Esquimaux. The mail-carts, and perambulators belonging to the visitors to Heyst were also well represented, and beautifully trimmed with flowers. The first prize was embowered in lilies and white roses, whilst its tiny inmate was seated in state as the Goddess Flora, with a wreath twined in her golden curls. The second was

taken by a gallant Neapolitan fisherman of about four years old, who wheeled a mail cart of pink roses, in which sat his little sisters, dressed as angels with large white wings. The third was a wheel-barrow hidden in moss and narcissi, on which reposed a Sleeping Beauty robed in white tissue, with a coronal of forget-me-nots.

Harriet Brandt fell into ecstasies over everything she saw. When pleased and surprised, she expressed herself more like a child than a young woman, and became extravagant and ungovernable. She tried to kiss each baby that took part in the procession, and thrust coins into their chubby hands to buy bonbons and confetti with. Captain Pullen thought her conduct most natural and unaffected; but Miss Leyton insisted that it was all put on for effect. Olga Brimont tried to put in a good word for her friend.

"Harriet is very fond of children," she said, "but she has never seen any—there were no children at the Convent under ten years of age, so she does not know how to make enough of them when she meets them. She wants to kiss every one. Sometimes, I tell her, I think she would like to eat them. But she only means to be kind!"

"I am sure of that!" said Captain Pullen.

"But she should be told," interposed Elinor, "that it is not the custom in civilised countries for strangers to kiss every child they meet, any more than it is to speak before being introduced, or to bestow their company where it is not desired. Miss Brandt has a great deal to learn in that respect before she can enter English Society!"

As is often the case when a woman becomes unjust

in abusing another, Miss Leyton made Captain Pullen say more to cover her discourtesy, than, in other circumstances, he would have done.

"Miss Brandt," he said slowly, "is so beautiful, that she will have a great deal forgiven her, that would not be overlooked in a plainer woman."

"That may be *your* opinion, but it is not mine," replied Miss Leyton.

Her tone was so acid, that it sent him flying from her side, to battle with his confetti against the tribe of Montagues, who fortunately for the peace of all parties, joined their forces to theirs, and after some time spent on the Digue, they returned, a large party, to the Hotel.

It was not until they had sat down to dinner, that they remembered they had never been to see the lady jockey race.

"He! he! he!" laughed Madame Gobelli, "but *I* did, and you lost something, I can tell you! We 'ad great difficulty to get seats, but when we did, it was worth it, wasn't it, Gustave?"

"*You* said so, mein tear!" replied the Baron, gravely.

"And you *thought* so, you old rascal! don't you tell me! *I* saw your wicked eyes glozing at the gals in their breeches and boots! There weren't any 'orses, after all, Captain Pullen, but sixteen gals with different-coloured jackets on and top boots and tight white breeches—such a sight you never saw! Gustave 'ere did 'ave a treat! As for Bobby, when I found we couldn't get out again, because of the crowd, I tied my 'andkerchief over 'is eyes, and made him put 'is 'ead in my lap!"

"Dear! dear!" cried Ralph, laughing, "was it as bad as that, Madame?"

"Bad! my dear boy! It was as bad as it could be! It's a mercy you weren't there, or we shouldn't 'ave seen you 'ome again so soon! There were the sixteen gals, with their tight breeches and their short racing jackets, and a fat fellow dressed like a huntsman whipping 'em round and round the ring, as if they were so much cattle! You should 'ave seen them 'op, when he touched 'em up with the lash of 'is whip. I expect they've never 'ad such a tingling since the time their mothers smacked 'em! There was a little fat one, there! I wish you could 'ave seen 'er, when 'e whipped 'er to make 'er 'urry! It was comical! She 'opped like a kangaroo!"

"And what was the upshot of it all? Who won?" asked Ralph.

"O! I don't know! I got Gustave out as soon as I could! I wasn't going to let 'im spend the whole afternoon, watching those gals 'opping. There were 'is eyes goggling out of 'is 'ead, and his lips licking each other, as if 'e was sucking a sugar-stick—"

"Mein tear! mein tear!" interposed the unfortunate Baron.

"You go on with your dinner, Gustave, and leave me alone! I saw you! And no more lady jockey races do you attend, whilst we're in this Popish country. They ain't good for you."

"I'm very thankful that I have been saved such a dangerous experiment," said Captain Pullen, "though if I thought that you would tie your handkerchief over my eyes, and put my head in your lap, Madame, I should feel tempted to try it as soon as dinner is over!"

"Go along with you, you bad boy!" chuckled the

Baroness, "there's something else to see this evening! They are going to 'ave a procession of lanterns as soon as it's dark!"

"And it is to stop in front of every hotel," added Harriet, "and the landlords are going to distribute bonbons and gâteaux amongst the lantern-bearers."

"O! we must not miss that on any account!" replied Captain Pullen, addressing himself to her in reply.

Margaret and Elinor thought, when the time came, that they should be able to see the procession of lanterns just as well from the balcony as when mingled with the crowd, so they brought their work and books down there, and sat with Ralph, drinking coffee and conversing of all that had occurred. The Baroness had disappeared, and Harriet Brandt had apparently gone with her—a fact for which both ladies were inwardly thankful.

Presently, as the dusk fell, the procession of lanterns could be seen wending its way from the further end of the Digue. It was a very pretty and fantastical sight. The bearers were not only children—many grown men and women took part in it, and the devices into which the Chinese lanterns had been formed were quaint and clever. Some held a ring around them, as milkmaids carry their pails—others held crosses and banners designed in tiny lanterns, far above their heads. One, which could be seen topping all the rest, was poised like a skipping-rope over the bearer's shoulders, whilst the coloured lanterns swung inside it, like a row of bells. The members of the procession shouted, or sang, or danced, or walked steadily, as suited their temperaments, and came along, a merry crowd, up and down the Digue,

stopping at the various hotels for largesse in the shape of cakes and sugar-plums.

Ralph Pullen found his eyes wandering more than once in the direction of the Baroness's sitting-room, to see if he could catch a glimpse of her or her *protégée* (as Harriet Brandt seemed to be now universally acknowledged to be), but he heard no sound, nor caught a glimpse of them, and concluded in consequence that they had left the hotel again.

"Whoever is carrying that skipping-rope of lanterns seems to be in a merry mood," observed Margaret after awhile, "for it is jumping up and down in the most extravagant manner! She must be dancing! Do look, Elinor!"

"I see! I suppose this sort of childish performance amuses a childish people, but for my own part, I think once of it is quite enough, and am thankful that we are not called upon to admire it in England!"

"O! I think it is rather interesting," remarked Margaret, "I only wish my dear baby had been well enough to enjoy it! How she would have screamed and cooed at those bright-coloured lanterns! But when I tried to attract her attention to them just now, she only whined to be put into her cot again. How thankful I shall be to see dear Doctor Phillips to-morrow!"

The procession had reached the front of the Hotel by this time, and halted there for refreshment. The waiters, Jules and Phillippe and Henri, appeared with plates of dessert and cakes and threw them indiscriminately amongst the people. One of the foremost to jump and scramble to catch the falling sweetmeats was the girl who carried the lantern-skipping rope above

her head, and in whom Ralph Pullen, to his astonishment, recognised Harriet Brandt. There she was, fantastically dressed in a white frock, and a broad yellow sash, with her magnificent hair loose and wreathed with scarlet flowers. She looked amazingly handsome, like a Bacchante, and her appearance and air of abandon, sent the young man's blood into his face and up to the roots of his fair hair.

"Surely!" exclaimed Margaret, "that is never Miss Brandt!"

"Yes! it is," cried Harriet, "I'm having the most awful fun! Why don't you come too? I've danced the whole way up the Digue, and it is so warm! I wish the waiters would give us something to drink! I've eaten so many bonbons I feel quite sick!"

"What will you take, Miss Brandt?" asked Captain Pullen eagerly, "*limonade* or soda water?"

"A *limonade*, please! You *are* good!" she replied, as he handed her the tumbler over the balcony balustrades. "Come along and dance with me!"

"I cannot! I am with my sister and Miss Leyton!" he replied.

"O! pray do not let *us* prevent you," said Elinor in her coldest voice; "Margaret was just going upstairs and I am quite ready to accompany her!"

"No, no, Elinor," whispered Mrs. Pullen with a shake of her head, "stay here, and keep Ralph company!"

"But it is nearly ten o'clock," replied Miss Leyton, consulting her watch, "and I have been on my feet all day! and feel quite ready for bed. Good-night, Ralph!" she continued, offering him her hand.

"Well! if you two are really going to bed, I shall go

too," said Captain Pullen, rising, "for there will be nothing for me to do here after you're gone!"

"Not even to follow the procession?" suggested Miss Leyton, with a smile.

"Don't talk nonsense!" he rejoined crossly. "Am I the sort of man to go bobbing up and down the Digue amongst a parcel of children?"

He shook hands with them both, and walked away rather sulkily to his own quarter of the hotel. But he did not go to bed. He waited until some fifteen minutes had elapsed, and then telling himself that it was impossible to sleep at that hour, and that if Elinor chose to behave like a bear, it was not his fault, he came downstairs again and sauntered out on the sea front.

It was very lonely there at that moment. The procession had turned and gone down to the other end again, where its lights and banners could be seen, waving about in the still summer air.

"Why shouldn't the girl jump about and enjoy herself if she chooses," thought Ralph Pullen. "Elinor makes no allowances for condition or age, but would have everyone as prim and old-maidish as herself. I declare she gets worse each time I see her! A nice sort of wife she will make if this kind of thing goes on! But by Jingo! if we are ever married, I'll take her prudery out of her, and make her—what? The woman who commences by pursing her mouth up at everything, ends by opening it wider than anybody else! There's twice as much harm in a prude as in one of these frank open-hearted girls, whose eyes tell you what they're thinking of, the first time you see them!"

He had been strolling down the Digue as he pon-

dered thus, and now found himself meeting the procession again.

"Come and dance with me," cried Harriet Brandt, who, apparently as fresh as ever, was still waving her branch of lanterns to the measure of her steps. He took her hand and tried to stop her.

"Haven't you had about enough of this?" he said, "I'm sure you must be tired. Here's a little boy without a lantern! Give him yours to hold, and come for a little walk with me!"

The touch of his cool hand upon her heated palm, seemed to rouse all the animal in Harriet Brandt's blood. Her hand, very slight and lissom, clung to his with a force of which he had not thought it capable, and he felt it trembling in his clasp.

"Come!" he repeated coaxingly, "you mustn't dance any more or you will overtire yourself! Come with me and get cool and rest!"

She threw her branch of lanterns to the boy beside her impetuously.

"Here!" she cried, "take them! I don't want them any more! And take me away," she continued to Ralph, but without letting go of his hand. "You are right! I want—I want—rest!"

Her slight figure swayed towards him as he led her out of the crowd, and across a narrow street, to where the road ran behind all the houses and hotels, and was dark and empty and void. The din of the voices, and the trampling of feet, and the echo of the songs still reached them, but they could see nothing—the world was on the Digue, and they were in the dusk and quietude together—and alone.

Ralph felt the slight form beside him lean upon his shoulder till their faces almost touched. He threw his arm about her waist. Her hot breath fanned his cheek.

"Kiss me!" she murmured in a dreamy voice.

Captain Pullen was not slow to accept the invitation so confidently extended. What Englishman would be? He turned his face to Harriet Brandt's, and her full red lips met his own, in a long-drawn kiss, that seemed to sap his vitality. As he raised his head again, he felt faint and sick, but quickly recovering himself, he gave her a second kiss more passionate, if possible, than the first. Then the following whispered conversation ensued between them.

"Do you know," he commenced, with his head close to hers, "that you are the very jolliest little girl that I have ever met!"

"And you—you are the man I have dreamt of, but never seen till now!"

"How is that? Am I so different from the rest of my sex?"

"Very—very different! So strong and brave and beautiful!"

"Dear little girl! And so you really like me?"

"I love you," said Harriet feverishly, "I loved you the first minute we met."

"And I love you! You're awfully sweet and pretty, you know!"

"Do you really think so? What would Mrs. Pullen say if she heard you?"

"Mrs. Pullen is not the keeper of my conscience. But she must not hear it."

"O! no! nor Miss Leyton either!"

"Most certainly not Miss Leyton. She is a terrible prude! She would be awfully shocked!"

"It must be a secret,—just between you and me!" murmured the girl.

"Just so! A sweet little secret, all our own, and nobody else's!"

And then the fair head and the dark one came again in juxtaposition, and the rest was lost in—Silence!

CHAPTER VII.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS had not been in the Hôtel Lion d'Or five minutes before Margaret Pullen took him upstairs to see her baby. She was becoming terribly anxious about her. They encountered Captain Ralph Pullen on the staircase.

"Hullo! young man, and what have *you* been doing to yourself?" exclaimed the doctor.

He was certainly looking ill. His face was chalky white, and his eyes seemed to have lost their brightness and colour.

"Been up racketing late at night?" continued Doctor Phillips. "What is Miss Leyton about, not to look after you better?"

"No, indeed, Doctor," replied the young man with a smile, "I am sure my sister-in-law will testify to the good hours I have kept since here. But I have a headache this morning—a rather bad one," he added, with his hand to the nape of his neck.

"Perhaps this place doesn't agree with you—it was always rather famous for its smells, if I remember aright!

However, I am going to see Miss Ethel Pullen now, and when I have finished with her, I will look after you!"

"No, thank you, Doctor," said Ralph laughing, as he descended the stairs. "None of your nostrums for me! Keep them for the baby!"

"He is not looking well," observed Doctor Phillips to Margaret, as they walked on together.

"I don't think he is, now you point it out to me, but I have not noticed it before," replied Margaret. "I am sure he has been living quietly enough whilst here!"

The infant was lying as she had now done for several days past—quite tranquil and free from pain, but inert and half asleep. The doctor raised her eyelids and examined her eyeballs—felt her pulse and listened to her heart—but he did not seem to be satisfied.

"What has this child been having?" he asked abruptly.

"Having, Doctor? Why! nothing, of course, but her milk, and I have always that from the same cow!"

"No opium—no soothing syrup, nor quackeries of any kind?"

"Certainly not! You know how often you have warned me against anything of the sort!"

"And no one has had the charge of her, except you and the nurse here? You can both swear she has never been tampered with?"

"O! I think so, certainly, yes! Baby has never been from under the eye of one or the other of us. A young lady resident in the hotel—a Miss Brandt—has often nursed her and played with her, but one of us has always been there at the time."

"A Miss—what did you say?" demanded the doctor, sharply.

"A Miss Brandt—a very good-natured girl, who is fond of children!"

"Very well then! I will go at once to the pharmacien's, and get a prescription made up for your baby, and I hope that your anxiety may soon be relieved!"

"O! thank you, Doctor, so much!" exclaimed Margaret. "I knew you would do her good, as soon as you saw her!"

But the doctor was not so sure of himself. He turned the case over and over in his mind as he walked to the chemist's shop, wondering how such a state of exhaustion and collapse could have been brought about.

The baby had her first dose and the doctor had just time to wash and change his travelling suit before they all met at the dinner-table.

Here they found the party opposite augmented by the arrival of Monsieur Alfred Brimont, a young Brussels tradesman, who had come over to Heyst to conduct his sister home. He was trying to persuade Harriet Brandt to accompany Olga and stay a few days with them, but the girl—with a long look in the direction of Captain Pullen—shook her head determinedly.

"O! you might come, Harriet, just for a few days," argued Olga, "now that the *Bataille de Fleurs* is over, there is nothing left to stay for in Heyst, and Alfred says that Brussels is such a beautiful place."

"There are the theatres, and the Parc, and the Quinçonce, and Wauxhall!" said young Brimont, persuasively. "Mademoiselle would enjoy herself, I have no doubt!"

But Harriet still negatived the proposal.

"Why shouldn't we make up a party and all go together," suggested the Baroness, "me and the Baron and Bobby and 'Arriet? You would like it then, my dear, wouldn't you?" she said to the girl, "and you really should see Brussels before we go 'ome! What do you say, Gustave? We'd go to the Hôtel de Saxe, and see everything! It wouldn't take us more than a week or ten days."

"Do as you like, mein tear," acquiesced the Baron.

"And why shouldn't you come with us, Captain?" continued Madame Gobelli to Ralph. "You don't look quite the thing to me! A little change would do you good. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy! 'Ave you been to Brussels?"

"I lived there for years, Madame, and know every part of it!" he replied.

"Come and renew your acquaintance then, and take me and 'Arriet about!! The Baron isn't much good when it comes to sight-seeing, are you, Gustave? 'E likes 'is pipe and 'is slippers too well! But you're young and spry! Well! is it a bargain?"

"I really could not decide in such a hurry," said Ralph, with a glance at Margaret and Elinor, "but we might all go on to Brussels perhaps, a little later on."

"I don't think you must buoy up the hopes of the Baroness and Miss Brandt with that idea," remarked Miss Leyton, coldly, "because I am sure that Mrs. Pullen has no intention of doing anything of the sort. If you wish to accompany Madame Gobelli's party, you had better make your arrangements without any reference to us!"

"All right! If you prefer it, I will," he answered in the same indifferent tone.

"*Who* is that young lady sitting opposite, with the dark eyes?" demanded Doctor Phillips of Mrs. Pullen.

"The same I spoke to you of, upstairs, as having been kind to baby—Miss Harriet Brandt!"

"I knew a Brandt once," he answered. "Has she anything to do with the West Indies?"

"O! yes! she comes from Jamaica! She is an orphan, the daughter of Doctor Henry Brandt, and has been educated in the Ursuline Convent there! She is a young lady with an independent fortune, and considered to be quite a catch in Heyst!"

"And you and Miss Leyton are intimate with her?"

"She has attached herself very much to us since coming here. She has few friends, poor girl!"

"Will you introduce me?"

"Miss Brandt, my friend, Doctor Phillips, wishes for an introduction to you."

The usual courtesies passed between them, and then the doctor said,

"I fancy I knew your father, Miss Brandt, when I was quartered in Jamaica with the Thirteenth Lances. Did he not live on the top of the Hill, on a plantation called Helvetia?"

"That was the name of our place," replied Harriet, "but I left it when I was only eleven. My trustee, Mr. Trawler, lives there now!"

"Ah! Trawler the attorney! I have no doubt he made as much out of the property as he could squeeze."

"Do you mean that he cheated me?" asked Harriet, naïvely.

“God forbid! my dear young lady. But he was a great crony of your father’s, and a d—d sharp lawyer, and those sort of gentry generally feather their own nest pretty well, in payment of their friendship.”

“He can’t do me any harm now,” said Harriet, “for I have my property in my own hands!”

“Quite right! quite right! that is, if you’re a business woman,” rejoined the doctor. “And are you travelling all by yourself?”

Harriet was about to answer in the affirmative, when the Baroness took the words out of her mouth.

“No, Sir, she ain’t! She came over with her friend, Mademoiselle Brimont, and now she’s under my chaperonage. She’s a deal too ’andsome, ain’t she? to be travelling about the world alone, with her money-bags under her arm. My name’s the Baroness Gobelli,—this is my ’usband, Baron Gustave Gobelli, and this is my little boy, Bobby Bates—by my first ’usband, you’ll understand—and when you return to London, if you like to come and see Miss Brandt at our ’ouse—the Red ’Ouse, ’Olloway, we shall be very pleased to see you!”

“I am sure, Madame, you are infinitely kind,” replied Doctor Phillips gravely.

“Not at all! You’ll meet no end of swells there, Prince Loris of Taxelmein, and Prince Adalbert of Waxquiemer, and ’eaps of others. But all the same we’re in trade, the Baron and I—and we’re not ashamed of it either. We make boots and shoes! Our firm is Fantaisie et Cie, of Oxford Street, and though I say it, you won’t find better boots and shoes in all London than ours. No brown paper soles, and rotten uppers! Not a bit of it! It’s all genuine stuff with us. You can take

any boot out of the shop and rip it to pieces, and prove what I say! The best materials, and the best workmen, that's our principle, and it answers. We can't make 'em fast enough!"

"I have no doubt of it," again gravely responded the old doctor.

"Ah! you might send some of your patients to us, Doctor, and we'll pay back by recommending you to our friends. Are you a Gout man? Prince Adalbert 'as the gout awfully! I've rubbed 'is feet with Elliman's Embrocation, by the hour together, but nothing gives 'im relief! Now if you could cure 'im your fortune would be made! 'E says it's all the English climate, but *I* say it's over-eating, and 'e'd attend more to a medical man, if 'e told 'im to diet, than 'e will to me!"

"Doubtless, doubtless!" said the Doctor, in a dreamy manner. He seemed to be lost in a reverie, and Margaret had to touch his arm to remind him that the meal was concluded.

She wanted him to join the others in a promenade and see the beauties of Heyst, but he was strangely eager in declining it.

"No! no! let the youngsters go and enjoy themselves, but I want to speak to you, *alone*."

"My dear doctor, you frighten me! Nothing about baby, I hope!"

"Not at all! Don't be foolish! But I want to talk to you where we cannot be overheard."

"I think we had better wait till the rest have dispersed then, and go down upon the sands. It is almost impossible to be private in a hotel like this!"

"All right! Get your hat and we will stroll off together."

As soon as they were out of earshot, he commenced abruptly,

"It is about that Miss Brandt! You seem pretty intimate with her! You must stop it at once. You must have nothing more to do with her."

Margaret's eyes opened wide with distress.

"But, Doctor Phillips, for what reason? I don't see how we could give her up now, unless we leave the place."

"Then leave the place! You mustn't know her, neither must Miss Leyton. She comes of a terrible parentage. No good can ever ensue of association with her."

"You must tell me more than this, Doctor, if you wish me to follow your advice!"

"I will tell you all I know myself! Some twelve or thirteen years ago I was quartered in medical charge of the Thirteenth Lances, and stationed in Jamaica, where I knew of, rather than knew, the father of this girl, Henry Brandt. You called him a doctor—he was not worthy of the name. He was a scientist perhaps—a murderer certainly!"

"How horrible! Do you really mean it?"

"Listen to me! This man Brandt matriculated in the Swiss hospitals, whence he was expelled for having caused the death of more than one patient by trying his scientific experiments upon them. The Swiss laboratories are renowned for being the foremost in Vivisection and other branches of science that gratify the curiosity and harden the heart of man more than they confer any lasting benefit on humanity. Even there,

Henry Brandt's barbarity was considered to render him unfit for association with civilised practitioners, and he was expelled with ignominy. Having a private fortune he settled in Jamaica, and set up his laboratory there, and I would not shock your ears by detailing one hundredth part of the atrocities that were said to take place under his supervision, and in company of this man Trawler, whom the girl calls her trustee, and who is one of the greatest brutes unhung."

"Are you not a little prejudiced, dear Doctor?"

"Not at all! If when you have heard all, you still say so, you are not the woman I have taken you for. Brandt did not confine his scientific investigations to the poor dumb creation. He was known to have decoyed natives into his Pandemonium, who were never heard of again, which raised, at last, the public feeling so much against him, that I am glad to say that his negroes revolted, and after having murdered him with appropriate atrocity, set fire to his house and burned it and all his property to the ground. Don't look so shocked! I repeat that I am *glad* to say it, for he richly deserved his fate, and no torture could be too severe for one who spent his worthless life in torturing God's helpless animals!"

"And his wife—" commenced Margaret.

"He had no wife! He was never married!"

"Never married! But this girl Harriet Brandt—"

"Has no more right to the name than you have! Henry Brandt was not the man to regard the laws, either of God or man. There was no reason why he should not have married—for that very cause, I suppose, he preferred to live in concubinage."

“Poor Harriet! Poor child! And her mother, did you know her?”

“Don’t speak to me of her mother. She was not a woman, she was a fiend, a fitting match for Henry Brandt! To my mind she was a revolting creature. A fat, flabby half-caste, who hardly ever moved out of her chair but sat eating all day long, until the power to move had almost left her! I can see her now, with her sensual mouth, her greedy eyes, her low forehead and half-formed brain, and her lust for blood. It was said that the only thing which made her laugh, was to watch the dying agonies of the poor creatures her brutal protector slaughtered. But she thirsted for blood, she loved the sight and smell of it, she would taste it on the tip of her finger when it came in her way. Her servants had some story amongst themselves to account for this lust. They declared that when her slave mother was pregnant with her, she was bitten by a Vampire bat, which are formidable creatures in the West Indies, and are said to fan their victims to sleep with their enormous wings, whilst they suck their blood. Anyway the slave woman did not survive her delivery, and her fellows prophesied that the child would grow up to be a murderess. Which doubtless she was in heart, if not in deed!”

“What an awful description! And what became of her?”

“She was killed at the same time as Brandt, indeed the natives would have killed her in preference to him, had they been obliged to choose, for they attributed all the atrocities that went on in the laboratory to her influence. They said she was ‘Obeah’ which means diabolical witchcraft in their language. And doubtless their

unfortunate child would have been slaughtered also, had not the overseer of the plantation carried her off to his cabin, and afterwards, when the disturbance was quelled, to the Convent, where, you say, she has been educated."

"But terrible as all this is, dear Doctor, it is not the poor girl's fault. Why should we give up her acquaintance for that?"

"My dear Margaret, are you so ignorant as not to see that a child born under such conditions cannot turn out well? The bastard of a man like Henry Brandt, cruel, dastardly, Godless, and a woman like her terrible mother, a sensual, self-loving, crafty and bloodthirsty half-caste—what do you expect their daughter to become? She may seem harmless enough at present, so does the tiger cub as it suckles its dam, but that which is bred in her will come out sooner or later, and curse those with whom she may be associated. I beg and pray of you, Margaret, not to let that girl come near you, or your child, any more. There is a curse upon her, and it will affect all within her influence!"

"You have made me feel very uncomfortable, Doctor," replied Mrs. Pullen. "Of course if I had known all this previously, I would not have cultivated Miss Brandt's acquaintance, and now I shall take your advice and drop her as soon as possible! There will be no difficulty with Miss Leyton, for she has had a strange dislike to the girl ever since we met, but she has certainly been very kind to my baby—"

"For Heaven's sake don't let her come near your baby any more!" cried Doctor Phillips, quickly.

"Certainly I will not, and perhaps it would be as well if we moved on to Ostende or Blankenburgh, as

we have sometimes talked of doing. It would sever the acquaintance in the most effectual way!"

"By all means do so, particularly if the young lady does not go to Brussels, as that stout party was proposing at dinner time. What an extraordinary person she appears to be! Quite a character!"

"That is just what she is! But, Doctor, there is another thing I should like to speak to you about, concerning Miss Brandt, and I am sure I may trust you to receive it in the strictest confidence. It is regarding my brother-in-law, Ralph Pullen. I am rather afraid, from one or two things I have observed, that he likes Miss Brandt—O! I don't mean anything particular, for (as you know) he is engaged to be married to Elinor Leyton and I don't suspect him of wronging her, only—young men are rather headstrong you know and fond of their own way, and perhaps if you were to speak to Ralph—"

"Tell me plainly, has he been carrying on with this girl?"

"Not in the sense you would take it, Doctor, but he affects her company and that of the Gobellis a good deal. Miss Brandt sings beautifully, and Ralph loves music, but his action annoys Elinor, I can see that, and since you think we should break off the intimacy——"

"I consider it most imperatively necessary, for many reasons, and especially in the case of a susceptible young man like Captain Pullen. She has money, you say——"

"Fifteen hundred a year, so I am told!"

"And Miss Leyton has nothing, and Ralph only his pay! O! yes! you are quite right, such an acquaintance-ship is dangerous for him. The sense of honour is not

so strong now, as it was when I was a boy, and gold is a powerful bait with the rising generation. I will take an early opportunity of talking to Captain Pullen on the subject."

"You will not wound his feelings, Doctor, nor betray me?"

"Trust me for doing neither! I shall speak from my own experience, as I have done to you. If he will not take my advice, you must get someone with more influence to caution him about it. I hardly know how to make my meaning clear to you, Margaret, but Miss Brandt is a *dangerous* acquaintance, for all of you. We medical men know the consequences of heredity, better than outsiders can do. A woman born in such circumstances—bred of sensuality, cruelty, and heartlessness—cannot in the order of things, be modest, kind, or sympathetic. And she probably carries unknown dangers in her train. Whatever her fascinations or her position may be, I beg of you to drop her at once and for ever!"

"Of course I will, but it seems hard upon her! She has seemed to crave so for affection and companionship."

"As her mother craved for food and blood; as her father craved for inflicting needless agony on innocent creatures, and sneered meanwhile at their sufferings! I am afraid I should have little faith in Miss Brandt craving for anything, except the gratification of her own senses!"

They were seated on the lower step of the wooden flight that led from the Digue to the sands, so that whilst they could see what went on above them, they were concealed from view themselves.

Just then, Harriet Brandt's beautiful voice, accompanied by the silvery strains of the mandoline, was heard to warble Gounod's "Marguerite" from the open window of the Baroness's sitting-room. Margaret glanced up. The apartment was brilliantly lighted—on the table were bottles of wine and spirits, with cakes and fruit, and Madame Gobelli's bulky form might be seen leaning over the dishes. She had assembled quite a little party there that night. The two Brimonts were present, and Captain Pullen's tall figure was distinctly visible under the lamplight. Harriet was seated on the sofa, and her full voice filled the atmosphere with melody.

"There's something like a voice!" remarked the old doctor.

"That is the very girl we have been talking of!" replied Mrs. Pullen. "I told you she had a lovely voice, and was an accomplished musician."

"Is that so?" said Doctor Phillips, "then she is still more dangerous than I imagined her to be! Those tones would be enough to drag any man down to perdition, especially if accompanied by such a nature as I cannot but believe she must have inherited from her progenitors!"

"And see, Doctor, there is Ralph," continued Margaret, pointing out her brother-in-law! "I left him with Miss Leyton. He must have got rid of her by some means and crept up to the Gobellis. He cannot go for *them*. He is so refined, so fastidious with regard to people in general, that a woman like the Baroness must grate upon his feelings every time she opens her mouth, and the Baron never opens his at all. He can only frequent their company for the sake of Harriet Brandt!

I have seen it for some time past and it has made me very uneasy."

"He shall know everything about her to-morrow, and then if he will not hear reason—" Doctor Phillips shrugged his shoulders and said no more.

"But surely," said his companion, "you do not think for a moment that Ralph could ever seriously contemplate breaking his engagement with Elinor Leyton for the sake of this girl! O! how angry Arthur would be if he suspected his brother could be guilty of such a thing—*he*, who considers that a man's word should be his bond!"

"It is impossible to say, Margaret—I should not like to give an opinion on the subject. When young men are led away by their passions, they lose sight of everything else—and if this girl is anything like her mother, she must be an epitome of lust!"

"O! you will speak to Ralph as soon as ever you can," cried Margaret, in a tone of distress. "You will put the matter as strongly before him as possible, will you not?"

"You may depend on my doing all I can, Margaret, but as there seems no likelihood of my being able to interview the young gentleman to-night, suppose you and I go to bed! I feel rather tired after my passage over, and you must want to go back to your baby!"

"Doctor," said Margaret, in a timid voice, as they ascended the hotel staircase together, "you don't think baby *very* ill, do you?"

"I think she requires a great deal of care, Margaret!"

"But she has always had that!"

"I don't doubt it, but I can't deny that there are symptoms about her case that I do not understand. She seems to have had all her strength drawn out of her. She is in the condition of a child who has been exercised and excited and hurried from place to place, far beyond what she is able to bear. But it may arise from internal causes. I shall be better able to judge to-morrow when my medicine has had its effect. Good-night, my dear, and don't worry. Please God, we will have the little one all right again in a couple of days."

But he only said the words out of compassion. In his own opinion, the infant was dying.

Meanwhile, Harriet having finished her songs, was leaning out of the window with Ralph Pullen by her side. She wore an open sleeve and as he placed his hand upon her bare arm, the girl thrilled from head to foot.

"And so you are determined *not* to go to Brussels," he whispered in her ear.

"Why should I go? You will not be there! The Baroness wants to stay for a week! What would become of me all that time, moping after you?"

"Are you sure that you *would* mope? Monsieur Brimont is a nice young man, and seems quite ready to throw himself at your feet! Would he not do as well, *pro tem?*"

Harriet's only answer was to cast her large eyes upwards to meet his own.

"Does that mean, 'No'?" continued Captain Pullen. "Then how would it do, if *I* joined you there, after a couple of days? Would the Baroness be complaisant, do you think, and a little short-sighted, and let us go

about together, and show each other the sights of the town?"

"O! I'm sure she would!" cried Harriet, all the blood in her body flying into her face, "she is so very kind to me! Madame Gobelli!" she continued, turning from the window to the light, "Captain Pullen says that if you will allow him to show us the lions of Brussels, he will come and join us there in a couple of days—"

"If I find I can manage it!" interposed Ralph, cautiously.

"Manage it! Why, of course you can manage it," said the Baroness. "What's to 'inder a young man like you doing as 'e chooses? You're not tied to your sister's apron-string, are you? Now mind! we shall 'old you to it, for I believe it's the only thing that will make 'Arriet come, and I think a week in Brussels will do us all good! You're not looking well yourself, you know, Captain Pullen! You're as white as ashes this evening, and if I didn't know you were such a good boy, I should say you'd been dissipating a bit lately! He! he! he!"

"The only dissipating I have indulged in, is basking in the sunshine of your eyes, Madame!" replied Ralph gallantly.

"That's a good 'un!" retorted the Baroness, "it is more likely you've been looking too much in the eyes of my little friend 'ere. You're a couple of foxes, that's what you are, and I expect it would take all my time to be looking after you both! And so I suppose it's settled, Miss 'Arriet, and you'll come with us to Brussels after all!"

"Yes, Madame, if you'll take charge of me!" said Miss Brandt.

"We'll do that for a couple of days, and then we'll give over charge. Are we to engage a room for you, Captain, at the Hôtel de Saxe?"

"I had better see after that myself, Madame, as the date of my coming is uncertain," replied Ralph.

"But you *will* come!" whispered Harriet.

"Need you ask? Would I not run over the whole world, only to find myself by your side? Haven't you taken the taste out of everything else for me, Harriet?"

CHAPTER VIII.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS was a man of sixty, and a bachelor. He had never made any home ties for himself, and was therefore more interested in Margaret Pullen (whose father had been one of his dearest friends) than he might otherwise have been. He feared that a heavy trial lay before her and he was unwilling to see it aggravated by any misconduct on the part of her brother-in-law. He could see that the young man was (to say the least of it) not behaving fairly towards his *fiancée*, Elinor Leyton, and he was determined to open his eyes to the true state of affairs with regard to Harriet Brandt. He spent a sleepless night, his last visit to Margaret's suffering child having strengthened his opinion as to her hopeless condition, and he lay awake wondering how he should break the news to the poor young mother. He rose with the intention of speaking to Ralph without delay, but he found it more difficult to get a word with him than he had anticipated. The Gobelli party had decided to start with the Brimonts that afternoon, and

Captain Pullen stuck to them the entire morning, ostensibly to assist the Baroness in her preparations for departure, but in reality, as anyone could see, to linger by the side of Miss Brandt. Miss Leyton perceived her lover's defalcation as plainly as the rest, but she was too proud to make a hint upon the subject, even to Margaret Pullen. She sat alone in the balcony, reading a book, and gave no sign of annoyance or discomfiture. But a close observer might have seen the trembling of her lip when she attempted to speak, and the fixed, white look upon her face, which betrayed her inward anxiety. It made Margaret's kind heart ache to see her, and Dr. Phillips more indignant with Ralph Pullen than before.

The party for Brussels had arranged to travel by the three o'clock train, and at the appointed time the doctor was ready in the balcony to accompany them to the *entrepôt*. There were no cabs in Heyst, the station being in the town. Luggage was conveyed backwards and forwards in hand carts drawn by the porters, and travellers invariably walked to their destination. The Baroness appeared dressed for her journey, in an amazing gown of blue velvet, trimmed with rare Maltese lace, with a heavy mantle over it, and a small hat on her head, which made her round, flat, unmeaning face, look coarser than before. She used the Herr Baron as a walking-stick as usual, whilst Harriet Brandt, in a white frock and large hat shading her glowing eyes under a scarlet parasol, looked like a tropical bird skimming by her side, with Captain Pullen in close attendance, carrying a flimsey wrap in case she should require it before she reached her journey's end. The Brimonts, fol-

lowing in the rear, were of no account beside their more brilliant and important friends.

Ralph Pullen did not look pleased when he saw Doctor Phillips join the party.

“Are you also going to the *entrepôt*?” he exclaimed, “what can you find to interest you there?—a dirty little smutty place! I am going just to help the ladies over the line, as there is no bridge for crossing.”

“Perhaps I am bent on the same errand,” replied the doctor, “do you give me credit for less gallantry than yourself, Pullen?”

“That’s right, Doctor,” said the Baroness, “and I’ve no doubt you’ll be very useful! My Bobby ain’t any manner of good, and the Baron ’as so many traps to carry that ’e ’asn’t got an arm to spare. I only wish you were coming with us! Why don’t you make up your mind to come over with Captain Pullen the day after to-morrow, and ’ave a little ’oliday?”

“I was not aware that Captain Pullen *was* going to Brussels, madame! I fancy he will have to get Miss Leyton’s consent first!”

At the mention of Miss Leyton’s name in connection with himself, Ralph Pullen flushed uneasily, and Harriet Brandt turned a look of startled enquiry upon the speaker.

“O! ’ang Miss Leyton!” retorted the Baroness, graphically, “she surely wouldn’t stop Captain Pullen’s fun, just because ’e’s staying with ’is sister-in-law! I should call that very ’ard. You can’t always tie a young man to ’is relations’ apron-strings, Doctor!”

“Not always, madame!” he replied, and dropped the subject.

"You wouldn't let Miss Leyton or Mrs. Pullen keep you from me!" whispered Harriet, to her cavalier.

"Never!" he answered emphatically.

They had reached the little station by this time, and the porters were calling out vociferously that the train was about to start for Brussels, so that in the hurry of procuring their tickets, and conveying the ladies and the luggage across the cinder-besprinkled line, to where the train stood puffing to be off, there was no more time to exchange sentimentalities, or excite suspicion. The party being safely stowed away in their carriage, Ralph Pullen and Doctor Phillips stood on the wooden platform with their hats off, bowing their farewells.

"Mind you don't put off your coming after Thursday!" screamed the Baroness to Ralph, as she filled up the entire window with her bulky person, "we shall expect you by dinner-time! And I shall bespeak a room for you, whether you will or no! 'Arriet 'ere will break 'er 'eart if you don't turn up, and I don't want the responsibility of 'er committing suicide on my 'ands!"

"All right! all right!" responded Ralph, pretending to turn it off as a joke, "None of you shall do that on my account, I promise you!"

"O! well! I 'ope you're going to keep your word, or we shall come back to 'Eyst in double quick time. Good-bye! Good-bye!" and kissing her fat hand to the two gentlemen, the Baroness was whisked out of Heyst.

Ralph looked longingly after the departing line of carriages for a minute, and then crossed the line again to the road beyond.

Doctor Phillips did not say a word till they were well clear of the station, and then he commenced,

"Of course you're not in earnest about following these people to Brussels."

"Why should I not be? I knew Brussels well as a lad, and I should enjoy renewing my acquaintance with the old town."

"In proper company perhaps, but you can hardly call that party a fit one for you to associate with!"

"You're alluding to the Baron and Baroness being in trade. Well! as a rule I confess that I do not care to associate intimately with bootmakers and their friends, but one does things abroad that one would not dream of doing in England. And for all her vulgarity, Madame Gobelli is very good-natured and generous, and I really don't see that I lower my dignity by being on friendly terms with her whilst here!"

"I was not alluding to Madame Gobelli, though I do not think that either she or the Brimonts are fit companions for a man who belongs to the Limerick Rangers, or is engaged to marry the daughter of Lord Walthamstowe. Neither do I admire the spirit which would induce you to hobnob with them in Heyst, when you would cut them in Bond Street. But as far as I know the Baron and his wife are harmless. It is Miss Harriet Brandt that I would caution you against!"

A quick resentment appeared on Ralph Pullen's features. His eyes darkened, and an ominous wrinkle stood out on his brow.

"And what may you have to say of Miss Brandt?" he demanded, coldly.

"A great deal more than you know, or can possibly imagine! She is not a fit person for Elinor Leyton to

associate with, and consequently, one whom it is your duty to avoid, instead of cultivating."

"I think you exceed *your* duty, Doctor, in speaking to me thus!"

"I am sorry you should think so, Pullen, but your anger will not deter me from telling you what is in my mind. You must not forget how old a friend I am of both sides of your family. Your brother Arthur is one of my greatest chums, and his wife's father was, without exception, my dearest friend—added to this, I am on intimate terms with the Walthamstowes. Knowing what I do, therefore, I should hold myself criminal if I left you in ignorance of the truth concerning this young woman."

"Are you alluding, may I ask, to Miss Brandt?"

"I am alluding to the girl who calls herself by that name, but who is in reality only the bastard daughter of Henry Brandt, one of the most infamous men whom God ever permitted to desecrate this earth, and his half-caste mistress."

"Be careful what you say, Doctor Phillips!" said Ralph Pullen, with ill-suppressed wrath gleaming in his blue eyes.

"There is no need to be, my dear fellow, I can verify everything I say, and I fear no man's resentment. I was stationed in Jamaica with my regiment, some fifteen years ago, when this girl was a child of six years old, running half naked about her father's plantation, uncared for by either parent, and associating solely with the negro servants. Brandt was a brute—the perpetrator of such atrocities in vivisection and other scientific experiments, that he was finally slaughtered on his own

plantation by his servants, and everyone said it served him right. The mother was the most awful woman I have ever seen, and my experience of the sex in back slums and alleys has not been small. She was the daughter of a certain Judge Carey of Barbadoes by one of his slave girls, and Brandt took her as his mistress before she was fourteen. At thirty, when I saw her, she was a revolting spectacle. Gluttonous and obese—her large eyes rolling and her sensual lips protruding as if she were always licking them in anticipation of her prey. She was said to be ‘Obeah’ too by the natives and they ascribed all the deaths and diseases that took place on the plantation, to her malign influence. Consequently, when they got her in their clutches, I have heard that they did not spare her, but killed her in the most torturing fashion they could devise.”

“And did the British Government take no notice of the massacre?”

“There was an enquiry, of course, but the actual perpetrator of the murders could not be traced, and so the matter died out. The hatred and suspicion in which Brandt had been held for some time, had a great effect upon the verdict, for in addition to his terrible experiments upon animals—experiments which he performed simply for his own gratification and for no use that he made of them in treating his fellow creatures—he had been known to decoy diseased and old natives into his laboratory, after which they were never seen again, and it was the digging up of human bones on the plantation, which finally roused the negroes to such a pitch of indignation that they rose *en masse*, and after murdering both Brandt and his abominable mistress, they set fire

to the house and burned it to the ground. There is no doubt but that, if the overseer of the plantation, an African negro named Pete, had not carried off the little girl, she would have shared the fate of her parents. And who can say if it would not have been as well if she had!"

"I really cannot see what right you have to give vent to such a sentiment!" exclaimed Captain Pullen. "What has this terrible story got to do with Miss Brandt?"

"Everything! 'When the cat is black, the kitten is black too!' It's the law of Nature!"

"I don't believe it! Miss Brandt bears no trace in feature or character of the parentage you ascribe to her!"

"Does she not? Your assertion only proves your ignorance of character, or characteristics. The girl is a quadroon, and she shews it distinctly in her long-shaped eyes with their blue whites and her wide mouth and blood-red lips! Also in her supple figure and apparently boneless hands and feet. Of her personal character, I have naturally had no opportunity of judging, but I can tell you by the way she eats her food, and the way in which she uses her eyes, that she has inherited her half-caste mother's greedy and sensual disposition. And in ten years' time she will in all probability have no figure at all! She will run to fat. I could tell that also at a glance!"

"And have you any more compliments to pay the young lady?" enquired Captain Pullen, sarcastically.

"I have this still to say, Pullen—that she is a woman whom you must never introduce to your wife, and that it is your bounden duty to separate her, as soon as possible, from your *fiancée* and your sister-in-law!"

“And what if I refuse to interfere in a matter which, as far as I can see, concerns no one but Miss Brandt herself?”

“In that case, I regret to say that I shall feel it *my* duty, to inform your brother Colonel Pullen and your future father-in-law, Lord Walthamstowe of what I have told you! Come, my dear boy, be reasonable! This girl has attracted you, I suppose! We are all subject to a woman’s influence at times, but you must not let it go further. You must break it off, and this is an excellent opportunity to do so! Your sister’s infant is, I fear, seriously ill. Take your party on to Ostende, and send the Baroness a polite note to say that you are prevented from going to Brussels, and all will be right! You will take my advice—will you not?”

“No! I’ll be hanged if I will,” exclaimed the young man, “I am not a boy to be ordered here and there, as if I were not fit to take care of myself. I’ve pledged my word to go to Brussels and to Brussels I shall go. If Miss Leyton doesn’t like it, she must do the other thing! She does not shew me such a superfluity of affection as to prevent the necessity of my seeking for sympathy and friendship elsewhere.”

“I am sorry to hear you speak like that, Pullen. It does not augur well for the happiness of your married life!”

“I have thought more than once lately, that I shall not be married at all—that is to Miss Leyton!”

“No! no! don’t say so. It is only a passing infidelity, engendered by the attraction of this other girl. Consider what your brother would say, and what Lord Walthamstowe would think, if you committed the great

mistake at this late hour, of breaking off your engagement!"

"I cannot see why my brother's opinion, or Lord Walthamstowe's thoughts, should interfere with the happiness of my whole life," rejoined Ralph, sullenly. "However, let that pass! The question on the *tapis* is, my acquaintance with Miss Brandt, which you consider should be put a stop to. For what reason? If what you bring against her is true, it appears to me that she has all the more need of the protection and loyalty of her friends. It would be cowardly to desert a girl, just because her father and mother happened to be brutes. It is not *her* fault!"

"I quite allow that! Neither is it the fault of a madman that his progenitors had lunacy in their blood, nor of a consumptive, that his were strumous. All the same the facts affect their lives and the lives of those with whom they come in contact. It is the curse of heredity!"

"Well! and if so, how can it concern anyone but the poor child herself?"

"O! yes, it can and it will! And if I am not greatly mistaken, Harriet Brandt carries a worse curse with her even than that! She possesses the fatal attributes of the Vampire that affected her mother's birth—that endued her with the thirst for blood, which characterised her life—that will make Harriet draw upon the health and strength of all with whom she may be intimately associated—that may render her love fatal to such as she may cling to! I must tell you, Pullen, that I fear we have already proofs of this in the illness of your little niece, whom, her mother tells me, was at one

time scarcely ever out of Miss Brandt's arms. I have no other means of accounting for her sudden failure of strength and vitality. You need not stare at me, as if you thought I do not know what I am talking about! There are many cases like it in the world. Cases of persons who actually feed upon the lives of others, as the deadly upas tree sucks the life of its victim, by lulling him into a sleep from which he never awakens!"

"Phillips, you must be mad! Do you know that you are accusing Miss Brandt of murder—of killing the child to whom she never shewed anything but the greatest kindness. Why! I have known her carry little Ethel about the sands for a whole afternoon."

"All the worse for poor little Ethel! I do not say she does harm intentionally or even consciously, but that the deadly attributes of her bloodthirsty parents have descended on her in this respect, I have not a shadow of doubt! If you watch that young woman's career through life, you will see that those she apparently cares for most, and clings to most, will soonest fade out of existence, whilst she continues to live all the stronger that her victims die!"

"Rubbish! I don't believe it!" replied Ralph sturdily. "You medical men generally have some crotchet in your brains, but this is the most wonderful bee that ever buzzed in a bonnet! And all I can say is, that I should be quite willing to try the experiment!"

"You *have* tried it, Pullen, in a mild form, and it has had its effect on you! You are not the same fellow who came over to Heyst, though by all rules, you should be looking better and stronger for the change. And Margaret has already complained to me of the strange

effect this girl has had upon her! But you must not breathe a suspicion to her concerning the child's illness, or I verily believe she would murder Miss Brandt!"

"Putting all this nonsense aside," said Ralph, "do you consider Margaret's baby to be seriously ill?"

"Very seriously. My medicines have not had the slightest effect upon her condition, which is inexplicable. Her little life is being slowly sapped. She may cease to breathe at any moment. But I have not yet had the courage to tell your sister the truth!"

"How disappointed poor Arthur will be!"

"Yes! but his grief will be nothing to the mother's. She is quite devoted to her child!"

By mutual consent, they had dropped the subject of Harriet Brandt, and now spoke only of family affairs. Ralph was a kind-hearted fellow under all his conceit, and felt very grave at the prospect held out in regard to his baby niece.

The fulfilment of the prophecy came sooner than even Doctor Phillips had anticipated. As they were all sitting at dinner that evening, Madame Lamont, her eyes over-brimming with tears, rushed unceremoniously into the *salle à manger*, calling to Margaret.

"Madame! Madame! please come up to your room at once! The dear baby is worse!"

Margaret threw one agonised glance at Doctor Phillips and rushed from the room, followed by himself and Elinor Leyton. The high staircase seemed interminable—more than once Margaret's legs failed under her and she thought she should never reach the top. But she did so all too soon. On the bed was laid the infant

form, limp and lifeless, and Martin the nurse met them at the door, bathed in tears.

"Oh! Ma'am!" she cried, "it happened all of a minute! She was lying on my lap, pretty dear, just as usual, when she went off in a convulsion and died."

"Died, died!" echoed Margaret in a bewildered voice, "Doctor Phillips! *who* is it that has died?"

"The baby, Ma'am, the dear baby! She went off like a lamb, without a struggle! O! dear mistress, do try to bear it!"

"Is my baby—*dead?*" said Margaret in the same dazed voice, turning to the doctor who had already satisfied himself that the tiny heart and pulse had ceased to beat.

"No! my dear child, she is not dead—she is living—with God! Try to think of her as quite happy and free from this world's ill."

"O! but I *wanted* her so—I *wanted* her," exclaimed the bereaved mother, as she clasped the senseless form in her arms, "O! baby! baby! why did you go, before you had seen your father?"

And then she slid, rather than sank, from the bedside, in a tumbled heap upon the floor.

"It is better so—it will help her through it," said Doctor Phillips, as he directed the nurse to carry the dead child into Elinor Leyton's room, and placed Margaret on her own bed. "You will not object, Miss Leyton, I am sure, and you must not leave Mrs. Pullen to-night!"

"Of course I shall not," replied Elinor; "I have been afraid for days past that this would happen, but poor Margaret would not take any hints."

She spoke sympathetically, but there were no tears in her eyes, and she did not caress, nor attempt to console her friend. She did all that was required of her, but there was no spontaneous suggestion on her part, with regard either to the mother, or the dead child, and as Doctor Phillips noted her coolness, he did not wonder so much at Ralph's being attracted by the fervour and warmth of Harriet Brandt.

As soon as poor Margaret had revived and had her cry out, he administered a sleeping draught to her, and leaving her in charge of Elinor Leyton, he went downstairs again to consult Captain Pullen as to what would be the best thing for them to do.

Ralph was very much shocked to hear of the baby's sudden death, and eager to do all in his power for his brother's wife. There was no Protestant cemetery in Heyst, and Doctor Phillips proposed that they should at once order a little shell, and convey the child's body either to Ostende or England, as Margaret might desire, for burial. The sooner she left the place where she had lost her child, he said, the better, and his idea was that she would wish the body to be taken to Devonshire and buried in the quiet country churchyard, where her husband's father and mother were laid to sleep. He left Ralph to telegraph to his brother in India and to anyone the news might concern in England—also to settle all hotel claims and give notice to the Lamonts that they would leave on the morrow.

"But supposing Margaret should object," suggested Ralph.

"She will not object!" replied the Doctor, "she might if we were not taking the child's body with us, but as it

is, she will be grateful to be thought, and acted, for. She is a true woman, God bless her! I only wish He had not seen fit to bring this heavy trial on her head!"

Not a word was exchanged between the two men about Harriet Brandt. Ralph, remembering the hint the doctor had thrown out respecting her being the ultimate cause of the baby's illness, did not like to bring up her name again—felt rather guilty with respect to it, indeed—and Doctor Phillips was only too glad to see the young man bestirring himself to be useful, and losing sight of his own worry in the trouble of his sister-in-law. Of course he could not have refused, or even demurred, at accompanying his party to England on so mournful an errand—and to do him justice, he did not wish it to be otherwise. Brussels, and its anticipated pleasures, had been driven clean out of his head by the little tragedy that had occurred in Heyst, and his attitude towards Margaret when they met again, was so quietly affectionate and brotherly that he was of infinite comfort to her. She quite acquiesced in Doctor Phillips' decision that her child should be buried with her father's family, and the mournful group with the little coffin in their midst, set out without delay for Devonshire.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRIET BRANDT set off for Brussels in the best of spirits. Captain Pullen had pledged himself to follow her in a couple of days, and had sketched with a free hand the pleasure they would mutually enjoy in each other's company, without the fear of Mrs. Pullen, or Miss Leyton, popping on them round the corner. Madame

Gobelli also much flattered her vanity by speaking of Ralph as if he were her confessed lover, and prospective *fiancé*, so that, what with the new scenes she was passing through, and her anticipated good fortune, Harriet was half delirious with delight, and looked as "handsome as paint" in consequence.

Olga Brimont, on the contrary, although quietly happy in the prospect of keeping house for her brother, did not share in the transports of her Convent companion. Alfred Brimont, observed, more than once, that she seemed to visibly shrink from Miss Brandt, and took an early opportunity of asking her the reason why. But all her answer was conveyed in a shrug of the shoulders, and a request that he would not leave her at the Hotel de Saxe with the rest of the party, but take her home at once to the rooms over which she was to preside for him. In consequence, the two Brimonts said good-bye to the Gobellis and Harriet Brandt at the Brussels station, and drove to their apartments in the rue de Vienne, after which the others saw no more of them. The Baroness declared they were "a good riddance of bad rubbish," and that she had never liked that pasty-faced Mademoiselle Brimont, and believed that she was jealous of the brilliancy and beauty of her dear 'Arriet. The Baroness had conceived one of her violent, and generally short-lived, fancies for the girl, and nothing, for the time being, was too good for her. She praised her looks and her talents in the most extravagant manner, and told everyone at the Hotel that the Baron and she had known her from infancy—that she was their ward—and that they regarded her as the daughter of the house, with various other falsehoods that made Harriet open her

dark eyes with amazement, whilst she felt that she could not afford to put a sudden end to her friendship with Madame Gobelli, by denying them. Brussels is a very pretty town, full of modern and ancient interest, and there was plenty for them to see and hear during their first days there. But Harriet was resolved to defer visiting the best sights until Captain Pullen had joined them.

She went to the concerts at the Quinçonce and Wauxhall, and visited the Zoological Gardens, but she would not go to the Musée nor the Académie des Beaux Arts, nor the Cathedral of Sainte Gudule, whilst Ralph remained in Heyst. Madame Gobelli laughed at her for her reticence—called her a sly cat—said she supposed they must make up their minds to see nothing of her when the handsome Captain came to Brussels—finally sending her off in company of Bobby to walk in the Parc, or visit the Wiertz Museum. The Baroness was not equal to much walking at the best of times, and had been suffering from rheumatism lately, so that she and the Baron did most of their sight-seeing in a carriage, and left the young people to amuse themselves. Bobby was very proud to be elected Miss Brandt's cavalier, and get out of the way of his formidable Mamma, who made his *table-d'hôte* life a terror to him. He was a well-grown lad and not bad-looking. In his blue eyes and white teeth, he took after his mother, but his hair was fair, and his complexion delicate. He was an anæmic young fellow and very delicate, being never without a husky cough, which, however, the Baroness seemed to consider of no consequence. He hardly ever opened his mouth in the presence of his parents, unless it were to

remonstrate against the Baroness's strictures on his appearance, or his conduct, but Harriet Brandt found he could be communicative enough, when he was alone with her. He gave her lengthy descriptions of the Red House, and the treasures which it contained—of his Mamma's barouche lined with satin—of the large garden which they had at Holloway, with its greenhouses and hot-houses, and the numbers of people who came to visit them there.

"O! yes!" rejoined Harriet, "the Baroness has told me about them, Prince Adalbert and Prince Loris and others! She said they often came to the Red House! I should like to know them very much!"

The youth looked at her in a mysterious manner.

"Yes! they do come, very often, and plenty of other people with them; the Earl of Watherhouse and Lord Drinkwater, and Lady Mountacue, and more than I know the names of. But—but—did Mamma tell you *why* they come?"

"No! not exactly! To see her and the Baron, I suppose!"

"Well! yes! for that too perhaps," stammered Bobby. "But there is another reason. Mamma is very wonderful, you know! She can tell people things they never knew before. And she has a room where—but I had better not say any more. You might repeat it to her and then she would be so angry." The two were on their way to the Wiertz Museum at the time, and Harriet's curiosity was excited.

"I will not, I promise you, Bobby," she said, "what has the Baroness in that room?"

Bobby drew near enough to whisper, as he replied,

"O! I don't know, I daren't say, but horrible things go on there! Mamma has threatened sometimes to make me go in with her, but I wouldn't for all the world. Our servants will never stay with us long. One girl told me before she left that Mamma was a witch, and could raise up the dead. Do you think it can be true—that it is possible?"

"I don't know," said Harriet, "and I don't want to know! There are no dead that I want to see back again, unless indeed it were dear old Pete, our overseer. He was the best friend I ever had. One night our house was burned to the ground and lots of the things in it, and old Pete wrapped me up in a blanket and carried me to his cabin in the jungle, and kept me safe until my friends were able to send me to the Convent. I shall never forget that. I should like to see old Pete again, but I don't believe the Baroness could bring him back. It wants 'Obeah' to do that!"

"What is 'Obeah,' Miss Brandt?"

"Witchcraft, Bobby!"

"Is it wicked?"

"I don't know. I know nothing about it! But let us talk of something else. I don't believe your Mamma can do anything more than other people, and she only says it to frighten you. But you mustn't tell her I said so. Is this the Wiertz Museum? I thought it would be a much grander place!"

"I heard father say that it is the house Wiertz lived in, and he left it with all his pictures to the Belgian Government on condition they kept it just as it was."

They entered the gallery, and Harriet Brandt, although not a great lover of painting in general, stood enwrapped

before most of the pictures. She passed over the "Bouton de Rose" and the sacred paintings with a cursory glance, but the representation of Napoleon in Hell, being fed with the blood and bones of his victims—of the mother in a time of famine devouring her child—and of the Suicide between his good and evil angels, appeared to absorb all her senses. Her eyes fixed themselves upon the canvasses, she stood before them, entranced, enraptured, and when Bobby touched her arm as a hint to come and look at something else, she drew a long breath as though she had been suddenly aroused from sleep. Again and again she returned to the same spot, the pictures holding her with a strange fascination, which she could not shake off, and when she returned to the Hotel, she declared the first thing she should do on the following morning, would be to go back to the Wiertz Museum and gaze once more upon those inimitable figures.

"But such 'orrid subjects, my dear," said the Baroness, "Bobby says they were all blood and bones!"

"But I like them—I *like* them!" replied Harriet, moving her tongue slowly over her lips, "they interest me! They are so life-like!"

"Well! to-morrow will be Thursday, you know, so I expect you will have somebody's else's wishes to consult! You will 'ave a letter by the early post, you may depend upon it, to say that the Captain will be with us by dinner-time!"

Harriet Brandt flushed a deep rose. It was when the colour came into her usually pale cheeks, and her eyes awakened from their slumbers and sparkled, that she looked beautiful. On the present occasion as she

glanced up to see Bobby Bates regarding her with steadfast surprise and curiosity, she blushed still more.

"You'll be 'aving a fine time of it together, you two, I expect, continued the Baroness facetiously, and Bobby, 'ere, will 'ave to content 'imself with me and his Papa! But we'll all go to the theatre together to-morrow night. I've taken five seats for the Alcazar, which the Captain said was the house he liked best in Brussels."

"How good you are to me!" exclaimed Harriet, as she wound her slight arms about the uncouth form of the Baroness.

"Good! Nonsense! Why! Gustave and I look upon you as our daughter, and you're welcome to share everything that is ours. You can come and live altogether at the Red 'Ouse, if you like! But I don't expect we shall keep you long, though I must say I should be vexed to see you throw yourself away upon an army Captain before you have seen the world a bit!"

"O! don't talk of such a thing, pray don't!" said the girl, hiding her face in the Baroness's ample bosom, "you know there is nothing as yet—only a pleasant friendship."

"He! he! he!" chuckled Madame Gobelli, "so that's what you call a pleasant friendship, eh? I wonder what Captain Pullen calls it! I expect we shall 'ear in a few days. But what 'e thinks is of no consequence, so long as *you* don't commit yourself, till you've looked about you a little. I do want you to meet Prince Adalbert! 'Is 'air's like flax—such a nice contrast to yours. And you speaking French so well! You would get on first-rate together!"

Bobby did not appear to like this conversation at all.

"I call Prince Adalbert hideous," he interposed. "Why! his face is as red as a tomato, and he drinks too much. I've heard Papa say so! I am sure Miss Brandt wouldn't like him."

"Old your tongue," exclaimed the Baroness, angrily, "'Ow dare you interrupt when I'm speaking to Miss Brandt? A child like you! What next, I wonder! Just mind your own business, Bobby, or I'll send you out of the room. Go away now, do, and amuse yourself! We don't want any boys 'ere!"

"Miss Brandt is going into the Parc with me," said Bobby sturdily.

"Ah! well, if she is going to be so good, I 'ope you won't worry 'er, that's all! But if you would prefer to come out in the carriage with the Baron and me, my dear, we'll take a drive to the Bois de Cambres."

"All right, if Bobby can come too," acquiesced Harriet.

"Lor! whatever do you want that boy to come with us for? 'E'll only take up all the room with 'is long legs."

"But we mustn't leave him alone," said the girl, kindly, "I shouldn't enjoy my drive if we were to do so!"

The lad gave her a grateful glance through eyes that were already moist with the prospect of disappointment.

"Very well then," said Madame Gobelli, "if you will 'ave your own way, 'e may come, but you must take all the trouble of 'im, 'Arriet, mind that!"

Bobby was only too happy to accompany the party, even in these humiliating circumstances, and they all set out together for the Bois de Cambres. The next day

was looked forward to by Harriet Brandt as one of certain happiness, but the morning post arrived without bringing the anticipated notice from Ralph Pullen that he should join them as arranged in the afternoon. The piteous eyes that she lifted to the Baroness's face as she discovered the defalcation, were enough to excite the compassion of anyone.

"It's all right!" said her friend, across the breakfast table, "'E said 'e would come, so there's no need of writing. Besides, it was much safer not! 'E couldn't stir, I daresay, without one of those two cats, Mrs. Pullen or Miss Leyton, at 'is elbow, so 'e thought they might find out what 'e was after, and prevent 'is starting. Say they wanted to leave 'Eyst or something, just to keep 'im at their side! You mark my words, I've means of finding out things that you know nothing of, and I've just seen it written over your 'ead that 'e'll be 'ere by dinner time, so you can go out for your morning's jaunt in perfect comfort!"

Harriet brightened up at this prophecy, and Bobby had never had a merrier time with her than he had that morning.

But the prophecy was not fulfilled. Ralph Pullen was by that time in England with his bereaved sister-in-law, and the night arrived without the people in Brussels hearing anything of him. He had not even written a line to account for his failure to keep his engagement with them. The fact is that Captain Pullen, although as a rule most punctilious in all matters of courtesy, felt so ashamed of himself and the folly into which he had been led, that he felt that silence would be the best explanation that he had decided to break

off the acquaintanceship. He had no real feeling for Harriet Brandt or anybody (except himself)—with him “out of sight” was “out of mind”—and the sad occurrence which had forced him to return to England seemed an excellent opportunity to rid himself of an undesirable entanglement. But Harriet became frantic at the nonfulfilment of his promise. Her strong feelings could not brook delay. She wanted to rush back to Heyst to demand the reason of his defalcation—and in default of that, to write, or wire to him at once and ascertain what he intended to do. But the Baroness prevented her doing either.

“Look ’ere, Arriet!” she said to the girl, who was working herself up into a fever, “it’s no use going on like this! ’E’ll come or ’e won’t come! Most likely you’ll see ’im to-morrow or next day, and if not, it’ll be because ’is sister won’t let ’im leave ’er, and the poor young man doesn’t know what excuse to make! Couldn’t you see ’ow that Doctor Phillips was set against the Captain joining us? ’E went most likely and told Mrs. Pullen, and she ’as dissuaded her brother from coming to Brussels. It’s ’ard for a man to go against ’is own relations, you know!”

“But he should have written,” pleaded Harriet, “it makes me look a fool!”

“Not a bit of it! Captain Pullen thinks you no fool. ’E’s more likely to be thinking ’imself one. And, after all, you know, we shall be going back to ’Eyst in a couple more days, and then you can ’ave ’im all to yourself in the evenings and scold ’im to your ’eart’s content!”

But the girl was not made of the stuff that is

amenable to reason. She pouted and raved and denounced Ralph Pullen like a fury, declaring she would not speak to him when they met again,—yet lay awake at night all the same, wondering what had detained him from her side, and longing with the fierceness of a tigress for blood, to feel his lips against her own and to hear him say that he adored her. Bobby Bates stood by during this tempestuous time, very sorrowful and rather perplexed. He was not admitted to the confidence of his mother and her young friend, so that he did not quite understand why Harriet Brandt should have so suddenly changed from gay to grave, just because Captain Pullen was unable to keep his promise to join them at Brussels. He had so enjoyed her company hitherto and she had seemed to enjoy his, but now she bore the gloomiest face possible, and it was no pleasure to go out with her at all. He wondered if all girls were so—as capricious and changeable! Bobby had not seen much of women. He had been kept in the school-room for the better part of his life, and his Mamma had not impressed him with a great admiration for the sex. So, naturally, he thought Harriet Brandt to be the most charming and beautiful creature he had ever seen, though he was too shy to whisper the truth, even to himself. He tried to bring back the smiles to her face in his boyish way, and the gift of an abnormally large and long *sucre de pomme* really did achieve that object better than anything else. But the defalcation of Captain Pullen made them all lose their interest in Brussels, and they returned to Heyst a day sooner than they had intended.

As the train neared the station, Harriet's forgotten

smiles began to dimple her face again, and she peered eagerly from the windows of the carriage, as if she expected Ralph Pullen to be on the platform to meet them. But from end to end, she saw only cinders, Flemish country women with huge baskets of fish or poultry on their arms, priests in their *soutanes* and broad-brimmed hats, and Belgians chattering and screaming to each other and their children, as they crossed the line. Still, she alighted with her party, expectant and happy, and traversed the little distance between the *entrepôt* and the Hotel, far quicker than the Baroness and her husband could keep up with her. She rushed into the balcony and almost fell into the arms of the *propriétaire*, Madame Lamont.

"Ah! Mademoiselle!" she cried, "welcome back to Heyst, but have you heard the desolating news?"

"What news?" exclaimed Harriet with staring eyes and a blanched cheek.

"Why! that the English lady, *cette Madame, si tranquille, si charmante*, lost her dear *bébé* the very day that Mademoiselle and Madame la Baronne left the Hotel!"

"Lost," repeated Harriet, "do you mean that the child is *dead*?"

"Ah! yes, I do indeed," replied Madame Lamont, "the dear *bébé* was taken with a fit whilst they were all at dinner, and never recovered again. *C'était une perte irréparable!* Madame was like a creature distracted whilst she remained here!"

"Where is she then? Where has she gone?" cried Harriet, excitedly.

"Ah! that I cannot tell Mademoiselle. The dear

bébé was taken away to England to be buried. Madame Pullen and Mademoiselle Leyton and Monsieur Phillippe and *le beau Capitaine* all left Heyst on the following day, that is Wednesday, and went to Ostende to take the boat for Dover. I know no more!"

"Captain Pullen has gone away—he is not here?" exclaimed Miss Brandt, betraying herself in her disappointment. "Oh! I don't believe it! It cannot be true! He has gone to Ostende to see them on board the steamer, but he will return—I am sure he will?"

Madame Lamont shrugged her shoulders.

"Monsieur paid everything before he went and gave *douceurs* to all the servants—I do not think he has any intention of returning!"

At that juncture the Baron and Baroness reached the hotel. Harriet flew to her friend for consolation.

"I cannot believe what Madame Lamont says," she exclaimed; "she declares that they are all gone for good, Mrs. Pullen and Miss Leyton and Captain Pullen and the doctor! They have returned to England. But he is sure to come back, isn't he? after all his promises to meet us in Brussels! He couldn't be so mean as to run off to England, without a word, or a line, unless he intended to come back."

She clung to Madame Gobelli with her eyes wide open and her large mouth trembling with agitation, until even the coarse fibre of the Baroness's propriety made her feel ashamed of the exhibition.

"'Ould up, 'Arriet!" she said, "you don't want the 'ole 'ouse to 'ear what you're thinking of, surely! Let me speak to Madame Lamont! What is all the row about, Madame?" she continued, turning to the *propriétaire*.

"There is no 'row' at all, Madame," was the reply, "I was only telling Mademoiselle Brandt of the sad event that has taken place here during your absence—that that *chère* Madame Pullen had the great misfortune to lose her sweet *bébé*, the very day you left Heyst, and that the whole party have quitted in consequence and crossed to England. I thought since Mademoiselle seemed so intimate with Madame Pullen and so fond of the dear child, that she would be *désolée* to hear the sad news, but she appears to have forgotten all about it, in her grief at hearing that the *beau Capitaine* accompanied his family to England where they go to bury the *petite*."

And with rather a contemptuous smile upon her face, Madame Lamont re-entered the *salle à manger*.

"Now, 'Arriet, don't make a fool of yourself!" said the Baroness. "You 'eard what that woman said—she's laughing at you and your Captain, and the story will be all over the Hotel in half an hour. Don't make any more fuss about it! If 'e's gone, crying won't bring 'im back. It's much 'arder for Mrs. Pullen, losing her baby so suddenly! I'm sorry for 'er, poor woman, but as for the other, there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it!"

But Harriet Brandt only answered her appeal by rushing away down the corridor and up the staircase to her bedroom like a whirlwind. The girl had not the slightest control over her passions. She would listen to no persuasion, and argument only drove her mad. She tumbled headlong up the stairs, and dashing into her room, which had been reserved for her, threw herself tumultuously upon the bed. How lonely and horrible

the corridor, on which her apartment opened, seemed. Olga Brimont, Mrs. Pullen, Miss Leyton, and Ralph, all gone! No one to talk to—no one to walk with—except the Baroness and her stupid husband! Of course this interpreted simply, meant that Captain Pullen had left the place without leaving a word behind him, to say the why or wherefore, or hold out any prospect of their meeting again. Of course it was impossible but that they must meet again—they *should* meet again, Harriet Brandt said to herself between her closed teeth—but meanwhile, what a wilderness, what a barren, dreary place this detestable Heyst would seem without him!

The girl put her head down on the pillow, and taking the corner of the linen case between her strong, white teeth, shook it and bit it, as a terrier worries a rat! But that did not relieve her feelings sufficiently, and she took to a violent fit of sobbing, hot, angry tears coursing each other down her cheeks, until they were blurred and stained, and she lay back upon the pillow utterly exhausted.

The first dinner bell rang without her taking any notice of it, and the second was just about to sound, when there came a low tap at her bedroom door. At first she did not reply, but when it was repeated, though rather timidly, she called out,

“Who is it? I am ill. I don’t want any dinner! I cannot come down!”

A low voice answered.

“It is I, dear Miss Brandt, Bobby! May I come in? Mamma has sent me to you with a message!”

“Very well! You can enter, but I have a terrible headache!” said Harriet.

The door opened softly, and the tall lanky form of Bobby Bates crept silently into the room. He held a small bunch of pink roses in his hand, and he advanced to the bedside and laid them without a word on the pillow beside her hot, inflamed cheek. They felt deliciously cool and refreshing. Harriet turned her face towards them, and in doing so, met the anxious, perturbed eyes of Bobby.

"Well!" she said smiling faintly, "and what is your Mamma's message?"

"She wishes to know if you are coming down to dinner. It is nearly ready!"

"No! no! I cannot! I am not hungry, and my eyes are painful," replied Harriet, turning her face slightly away.

The lad rose and drew down the blind of her window, through which the setting sun was casting a stream of light, and then captured a *flacon* of eau de Cologne from her toilet-table, and brought it to her in his hand.

"May I sit beside you a little while in case you need anything?" he asked.

"No! no! Bobby! You will want your dinner, and your Mamma will want you. You had better go down again at once, and tell her that if my head is better, I will meet her on the Digue this evening!"

"I don't want any dinner, I could not eat it whilst you lie here sick and unhappy. I want to stay, to see if I can help you, or do you any good. I wish—I *wish* I could!" murmured the lad.

"Your roses have done me good already," replied Harriet, more brightly. "It was sweet of you to bring them to me, Bobby."

"I wish I had ten thousand pounds a year," said Bobby feverishly, "that I might bring you roses, and everything that you like best!"

He laid his blonde head on the pillow by the side of hers and Harriet turned her face to his and kissed him.

The blood rushed into his face, and he trembled. It was the first time that any woman had kissed him. And all the feelings of his manhood rushed forth in a body to greet the creature who had awakened them.

As for Harriet Brandt, the boy's evident admiration flattered and pleased her. The tigress deprived of blood, will sometimes condescend to milder food. And the feelings with which she regarded Captain Pullen were such as could be easily replaced by anyone who evinced the same reciprocity. Bobby Bates was not a *beau sabreur*, but he was a male creature whom she had vanquished by her charms, and it interested her to watch his rising passion, and to know that he could never possibly expect it to be requited. She kissed and fondled him as he sat beside her with his head on the pillow—calling him every nice name she could think of, and caressing him as if he had been what the Baroness chose to consider him—a child of ten years old.

His sympathy and entreaties that she would make an effort to join them on the Digue, added to his love-lorn eyes, the clear childish blue of which was already becoming blurred with the heat of passion, convinced her that all was not lost, although Ralph Pullen *had* been ungrateful and impolite enough to leave Heyst without sending her notice, and presently she persuaded the lad to go down to his dinner, and inform the Baroness that she had ordered a cup of tea to be sent up to her bed-

room, and would try to rise after she had taken it, and join them on the Digue.

"But you will keep a look-out for me, Bobby, won't you?" she said in parting. "You will not let me miss your party, or I shall feel so lonely that I shall come straight back to bed!"

"Miss you! as if I would!" exclaimed the boy fervently, "why, I shall not stir from the balcony until you appear! O! Miss Brandt! I love you so. You cannot tell—you will never know—but you seem like part of my life!"

"Silly boy!" replied Harriet, reproachfully, as she gave him another kiss. "There, run away at once, and don't tell your mother what we've been about, or she will never let me speak to you again."

Bobby's eyes answered for him, that he would be torn to pieces before he let their precious secret out of his grasp, as he took his unwilling way down to the *table d'hôte*.

"Well! you 'ave made a little fool of yourself, and no mistake," was the Baroness's greeting, as Harriet joined her in the balcony an hour later, "and a nice lot of lies I've 'ad to tell about you to Mrs. Montague and the rest. But luckily, they're all so full of the poor child's death, and the coffin of white cloth studded with silver nails that was brought from Bruges to carry the body to England in, that they 'ad no time to spare for your tantrums. Lor! that poor young man must 'ave 'ad enough to do, I can tell you, from all accounts, without writing to you! Everything was on 'is 'ands, for Mrs. Pullen wouldn't let the doctor out of 'er sight! 'E 'ad to fly off to Bruges to get the coffin and to wire half

over the world, besides 'aving the two women to tow about, so you mustn't be 'ard on 'im. 'E'll write soon, and explain everything, you may make sure of that, and if 'e don't, why, we shall be after 'im before long! Aldershot, where the Limerick Rangers are quartered, is within a stone's throw of London, and Lord Menzies and Mr. Nalgett often run over to the Red 'Ouse, and so can Captain Pullen, if he chooses! So you just make yourself 'appy, and it will be all right before long."

"O! I'm all right!" cried Harriet, gaily, "I was only a little startled at the news, so would anyone have been. Come along, Bobby! Let us walk over the dunes to the next town. This cool air will do my head good. Good-bye, Baroness! You needn't expect us till you see us! Bobby and I are going for a good long walk!"

And tucking the lad's arm under her own, she walked off at a tremendous pace, and the pair were soon lost to view.

"I wish that Bobby was a few years older," remarked the Baroness thoughtfully to her husband, as they were left alone, "she wouldn't 'ave made a bad match for him, for she 'as a tidy little fortune, and it's all in Consols. But perhaps it's just as well there's no chance of it! She ain't got much 'eart—I couldn't 'ave believed that she'd receive the news of that poor baby's death, without a tear or so much as a word of regret, when at one time she 'ad it always in 'er arms. She quite forgot all about it, thinking of the man. Drat the men! They're more trouble than they're worth, but 'e's pretty sure to come after 'er as soon as 'e 'ears she's at the Red 'Ouse!"

“But to what good, mein tear,” demanded the Baron, “when you know he is betrothed to Miss Leyton?”

“Yes! and e’ll marry Miss Leyton, too. ’E’s not the sort of man to let the main chance go! And ’Arriet will console ’erself with a better beau. I can read all that without your telling me, Gustave. But Miss Leyton won’t get off without a scratch or two, all the same, and that’s what I’m aiming at. I’ll teach ’er not to call me a female elephant! I’ve got my knife into that young woman, and I mean to turn it! Confound ’er impudence! What next?”

And having delivered herself of her feelings, the Baroness rose and proceeded to take her evening promenade along the Digue.

CHAPTER X.

THE Red House at Holloway was, like its owner, a contradiction and an anomaly. It had lain for many years in Chancery, neglected and uncared-for, and the Baroness had purchased it for a song. She was very fond of driving bargains, and sometimes she was horribly taken in. She had been known to buy a house for two thousand pounds for a mere caprice, and exchange it, six months afterwards, for a dinner service. But as a rule she was too shrewd to be cheated, for her income was not a tenth part of what she represented. When she had concluded her bargain for the Red House, which she did after a single survey of the premises, and entered on possession, she found it would take double the sum she had paid to put it into proper repair. It was a very old house of the Georgian, era standing in

its own grounds of about a couple of acres, and containing thirty rooms, full of dust, damp, rats, and decay. The Baroness, however, having sent for a couple of workmen from the firm, to put the tangled wilderness which called itself a garden, into something like order, sent in all her household gods, and settled down there, with William and two rough maid servants, as lady of the Manor. The inside of the Red House presented an incongruous appearance. This extraordinary woman, who could not sound her aspirates and could hardly write her own name, had a wonderful taste for old china and pictures, and knew a good thing from a bad one. Her drawing-room was heaped with valuables, many of them piled on rickety tables which threatened every minute to overturn them upon the ground. The entrance hall was dingy, bare, and ill-lighted, and the breakfast-room to the side was furnished with the merest necessities. Yet the dressing-table in the Baroness's sleeping apartment was draped in ruby velvet, and trimmed with a flounce of the most costly Brussels lace, which a Princess might not have been ashamed to wear. The bed was covered with a *duvet* of the thickest satin, richly embroidered by her own hand, whilst the washing-stand held a set of the commonest and cheapest crockery. Everything about the house was on the same scale; it looked as though it belonged to people who had fallen from the utmost affluence to the depths of poverty. Harriet Brandt was terribly disappointed when she entered it, Bobby's accounts of the magnificence of his home having led her to expect nothing short of a palace.

The Baroness had insisted on her accompanying them to England. She had taken one of her violent

fancies to the girl, and nothing would satisfy her but that Harriet should go back with her husband and herself to the Red House, and stay there as long as she chose.

“Now look 'ere,” she said in her rough way, “you must make the Red 'Ouse your 'ome. Liberty 'All, as I call it! Get up and go to bed; go out and come in, just when you see fit—do what you like, see what you like, and invite your friends, as if the 'ouse was your own. The Baron and I are often 'alf the day at the boot shop, but that need make no difference to you. I daresay you'll find some way to amuse yourself. You're the daughter of the 'ouse, remember, and free to do as you choose!”

Harriet gladly accepted the offer. She had no friends of her own to go to, and the prospect of living by herself, in an unknown city, was rather lonely. She was full of anticipation also that by means of the Red House and the Baroness's influence, she would soon hear of, or see, Captain Pullen again—full of hope that Madame Gobelli would write to the young man and force him to fulfil the promises he had made to her. She did not want to know Prince Adalbert or Prince Loris—at the present moment, it was Ralph and Ralph only, and none other would fill the void she felt at losing him. She was sure there must be some great mistake at the bottom of his strange silence, and that they had but to meet, to see it rectified. She was only too glad then, when the day for their departure from Heyst arrived. Most of the English party had left the Lion d'Or by that time. The death of Mrs. Pullen's child seemed to have frightened them away. Some became nervous lest little Ethel

had inhaled poisonous vapours from the drainage—others thought that the atmosphere was unhealthy, or that it was getting too late in the year for the seaside, and so the visitors dwindled, until the Baroness Gobelli found they were left alone with foreigners, and elected to return to England in consequence.

Harriet had wished to write to Captain Pullen and ask for an explanation of his conduct, but the Baroness conjured her not to do so, even threatened to withdraw her friendship, if the girl went against her advice. The probabilities were, she said, that the young man was staying with his sister-in-law wherever she might be, and that the letter would be forwarded to him from the Camp, and fall into the hands of Mrs. Pullen, or Miss Leyton. She assured Harriet that it would be safer to wait until she had ascertained his address, and was sure that any communication would reach him at first hand.

“A man’s never the worse for being let alone, ’Arriet,” she said. “Don’t let ’im think ’e’s of too much consequence and ’e’ll value you all the more! Our fellows don’t care for the bird that walks up to the gun. A little ’olesome indifference will do my gentleman all the good in the world!”

“O! but how *can* I be indifferent, when I am burning to see him again, and to hear why he never wrote to say that he could not come to Brussels,” exclaimed Harriet, excitedly. “Do you think it was all falsehoods, Madame Gobelli? Do you think that he does not want to see me any more?”

Her eyes were flashing like diamonds—her cheeks and hands were burning hot. The Baroness chuckled over her ardour and anxiety.

"He! he! he! you little fool, no, I don't! Anyone could see with 'alf an eye, that he took a fancy for you! You're the sort of stuff to stir up a man and make 'im forget everything but yourself. Now don't you worry. 'E'll be at the Red 'Ouse like a shot, as soon as 'e 'ears we're back in London. Mark my words! it won't be long before we 'ave the 'ole lot of 'em down on us, like bees 'umming round a flower pot."

After this flattering tale, it was disheartening to arrive in town on a chilly September day, under a pouring rain, and to see the desolate appearance presented by the Red House.

It was seven in the evening before they reached Holloway, and drove up the dark carriage drive, clumped by laurels, to the hall door.

After the grand description given by Bobby of his Mamma's barouche lined with olive green satin, Harriet was rather astonished that they should have to charter cabs from the Victoria Station to Holloway, instead of being met by the Baroness's private carriage. But she discovered afterwards that though there was a barouche standing in the coach-house, which had been purchased in a moment of reckless extravagance by Madame Gobelli, there were no horses to draw it, and the only vehicle kept by the Baroness was a very much patched, not to say disreputable looking Victoria, with a spavined cob attached to it, in which William drove the mistress when she visited the boot premises.

The chain having been taken down, the hall door was opened to them by a slight, timid looking person, whom Harriet mistook for an upper housemaid.

"Well, Miss Wynward," exclaimed the Baroness, as she stumped into the hall, "'ere we are, you see!"

"Yes! my lady," said the person she addressed, "but I thought, from not hearing again, that you would travel by the night boat! Your rooms are ready," she hastened to add, "only—dinner, you see! I had no orders about it!"

"That doesn't signify," interrupted the Baroness, "send out for a steak and give us some supper instead! 'Ere William, where are you? Take my bag and Miss Brandt's up to our rooms, and, Gustave, you can carry the wraps! Where's that devil Bobby? Come 'ere at once and make yourself useful! What are you standing there, staring at 'Arriet for? Don't you see Miss Wynward? Go and say 'ow d'ye do' to 'er?"

Bobby started, and crossing to where Miss Wynward stood, held out his hand. She shook it warmly.

"How are you, Bobby?" she said. "You don't look much stronger for your trip. I expected to see you come back with a colour!"

"Nonsense!" commenced the Baroness testily, "what rubbish you old maids do talk! What should you know about boys? 'Ow many 'ave *you* got? 'Ere, why don't you kiss 'im? You've smacked 'im often enough, *I* know!"

Miss Wynward tried to pass the coarse rejoinder off as a joke, but it was with a very plaintive smile that she replied,

"I think Bobby is growing rather too tall to be kissed, and he thinks so too, don't you, Bobby?"

Bobby was about to make some silly reply, when his Mamma interrupted him,

"Oh! does he? 'E'll be wanting to kiss the gals soon,

so 'e may as well practise on you first! Come! Bobby, do you 'ear what I say? Kiss 'er!"

But Miss Wynward drew up her spare figure with dignity.

"No! my lady!" she said quietly, "I do not wish it!"

"He! he! he!" giggled the Baroness, as she commenced to mount the stairs, "'e ain't old enough for you, that's what's the matter! Come along, 'Arriet, my dear! I'm dog-tired and I daresay you're much the same! Let us 'ave some 'ot water to our rooms, Miss Wynward!"

Harriet Brandt was now ushered by her hostess into a bedroom on the same floor as her own, and left to unpack her bundles and boxes as she best might. It was not a badly furnished room, but there was too much pomp and too little comfort in it. The mantelshelf was ornamented with some rare old Chelsea figures, and a Venetian glass hung above them, but the carpet was threadbare, and the dressing-table was inconveniently small and of painted deal. But as though to atone for these discrepancies, the hangings to the bed were of satin, and the blind that shaded the window was edged with Neapolitan lace. Harriet had not been used to luxuries in the Convent, but her rooms in the Lion d'Or had been amply provided with all she could need, and she was a creature of sensual and indolent temperament, who felt any rebuff, in the way of her comfort, terribly.

There was an un-homelike feeling in the Red House and its furniture, and a coldness in their reception, which made the passionate, excited creature feel inclined to sit down and burst into tears. She was on the very brink of doing so, when a tap sounded on the door, and Miss Wynward entered with a zinc can of hot

water, which she placed on the washing-stand. Then she stood for a moment regarding the girl as though she guessed what was in her mind, before she said,

"Miss Brandt, I believe! I am so sorry that the Baroness never wrote me with any certainty regarding her arrival, or things would have been more comfortable. I hope you had a good dinner on board!"

"No!" said Harriet, shaking her head, "I felt too ill to eat. But it does not signify, thank you!"

"But you are looking quite upset! Supper cannot be ready for another hour. I will go and make you a cup of tea!"

She hurried from the room again, and presently returned with a small tray on which was set a Sèvres cup and saucer and Apostle teaspoon, with an earthenware teapot that may possibly have cost sixpence. But Harriet was too grateful for the tea to cavil whence it came, and drinking it refreshed her more than anything else could have done.

"Thank you, thank you so much," she said to Miss Wynward, "I think the long journey and the boat had been too much for me. I feel much better now!"

"It is such a melancholy house to come to when one is out of sorts," observed her companion, "I have felt that myself! It will not give you a good impression of your first visit to London. Her ladyship wrote me you had just come from the West Indies," she added, timidly.

"Yes! I have not long arrived in Europe," replied Harriet. "But I thought—I fancied—the Baroness gave me the idea that the Red House was particularly gay and cheerful, and that so many people visited her here!"

"That is true! A great many people visit here! But

—not such people, perhaps, as a young lady would care for!”

“O! I care for every sort,” said Harriet, more gaily, “and you,—don’t you care for company, Miss Wynward?”

“I have nothing to do with it, Miss Brandt, beyond seeing that the proper preparations are made for receiving it. I am Bobby’s governess, and housekeeper to the Baroness!”

“Bobby is getting rather tall for a governess!” laughed Harriet.

“He is, poor boy, but his education is very deficient. He ought to have been sent to school long ago, but her ladyship would not hear of it. But I never teach him now. He is supposed to be finished!”

“Why don’t you find another situation then?” demanded Harriet, who was becoming interested in the ex-governess.

She was a fragile, melancholy looking woman of perhaps five-and-thirty, who had evidently been good-looking in her day and would have been so then but for her attenuation, and shabby dress. But she was evidently a gentlewoman, and far above the menial offices she appeared to fill in the Red House. She gazed at Harriet for a minute in silence after she had put the last question to her, and then answered slowly:

“There are reasons which render it unadvisable. But you, Miss Brandt, have you known the Baroness before?”

“I never saw her till we met at Heyst and she invited me here,” replied the girl.

“O! why did you come? Why did you come?” exclaimed Miss Wynward, as she left the room.

Harriet stood gazing at the door as it closed behind her. *Why had she come?* What an extraordinary question to ask her! For the same reason that other people accepted invitations to them by their friends—because she expected to enjoy herself, and have the protection of the Baroness on first entering English society! But why should this governess—her dependant, almost her servant—put so strange a question to her? Why had she come? She could not get it out of her mind. She was roused from her train of speculation by hearing the Baroness thumping on the outside panels of her door with her stick.

“Come along,” she cried, “never mind dressing! The supper’s ready at last and I’m as ‘ungry as an ‘unter.”

Hastily completing her toilet, Harriet joined her hostess, who conducted her down to a large dining-room, wrapt in gloom. The two dozen morocco chairs ranged against the wall, looked sepulchral by the light of a single lamp, placed in the centre of a long mahogany table, which was graced by a fried steak, a huge piece of cheese, bread and butter, and lettuces from the garden. Harriet regarded the preparations for supper with secret dismay. She was greedy by nature, but it was the love of good feeding, rather than a superfluity of food, that induced her to be so. However, when the Baron produced a couple of bottles of the very best Champagne to add to the meal, she felt her appetite somewhat revive, and played almost as good a knife and fork as the Baroness. Bobby and Miss Wynward, who as it appeared, took her meals with the family, were the only ones who did not do justice to the supper.

The lad looked worn-out and very pale, but when

Miss Wynward suggested that a glass of champagne might do him good, and dispel the exhaustion under which he was evidently labouring, his mother vehemently opposed the idea.

"Champagne for a child like 'im," she cried, "I never 'eard of such a thing. Do you want to make 'im a drunkard, Miss Wynward? No! thank you, there 'ave been no 'ard drinkers in *our* family, and 'e shan't begin it! 'Is father was one of the soberest men alive! 'E never took anything stronger than toast and water all the time I knew 'im."

"Of course not, your ladyship," stammered Miss Wynward, who seemed in abject fear of her employer, "I only thought as Bobby seems so very tired, that a little stimulant——"

"Then let 'im go to bed," replied Madame Gobelli. "Bed is the proper place for boys when they're tired! Come, Sir, off to bed with you, at once, and don't let me 'ear anything more of you till to-morrow morning!"

"But mayn't I have some supper?" pleaded Bobby.

"Not a bit of it!" reiterated the Baroness, "if you're so done up that you require champagne, your stomach can't be in a fit state to digest beef and bread! Be off at once, I say, or you'll get a taste of my stick."

"But, my lady——" said Miss Wynward, entreatingly.

"It's not a bit of good, Miss Wynward, I know more about boys' insides than you do. Sleep's the thing for Bobby. Now, no more nonsense, I say——"

But Bobby, after one long look at Harriet Brandt, had already quitted the room. This episode had the effect of destroying Miss Wynward's appetite. She sat gazing at her plate for a few minutes, and then with

some murmured excuse of its being late, she rose and disappeared. The Baroness was some time over her meal, and Harriet had an opportunity to examine the apartment they sat in, as well as the dim light allowed her to do. The walls were covered with oil paintings and good ones, as she could see at a glance, whilst at the further end, where narrow shelves were fixed from the floor to the ceiling, was displayed the famous dinner service of Sèvres, for which the Baroness was said to have bartered the two thousand lease of her house.

Harriet glanced from the pictures and the china upon the walls to the steak and bread and cheese upon the table, and marvelled at the incongruity of the whole establishment. Madame Gobelli who, whilst at the Lion d'Or, had appeared to think nothing good enough for her, was now devouring fried steak and onions, as if they had been the daintiest of fare. But the champagne made amends, on that night at least, for the solids which accompanied it, and the girl was quite ready to believe that the poverty of the table was only due to the fact that they had arrived at the Red House unexpectedly. As they reached the upper corridor, her host and hostess parted with her, with much effusion, and passing into their own room, shut the door and locked it noisily. As Harriet gained hers, she saw the door opposite partly unclose to display poor Bobby standing there to see her once again.

He was clothed only in his long night-shirt, and looked like a lanky ghost, but he was too childish in mind to think for one moment that his garb was not a suitable one for a lover to accost his mistress in. She

heard him whisper her name as she turned the handle of her own door.

“Why, Bobby,” she exclaimed, “not in bed yet?”

“Hush! hush!” he said in a low voice, “or Mamma will hear you! I couldn’t sleep till I had seen you again and wished you good-night!”

“Poor dear boy! Are you not very hungry?”

“No, thanks. Miss Wynward is very kind to me. She has seen after that. But to leave without a word to you. That was the hard part of it!”

“Poor Bobby!” ejaculated Harriet again, drawing nearer to him. “But you must not stay out of bed. You will catch your death of cold!”

“Kiss me then and I will go!”

He advanced his face to the opening of the door, and she put her lips to his, and drew his breath away with her own.

“Good-night! good-night!” murmured Bobby with a long sigh. “God bless you! good-night!” and then he disappeared, and Harriet entered her own room, and her eyes gleamed, as she recognised the fact that Bobby also was going to make a fool of himself for her sake.

The next morning she was surprised on going downstairs at about nine o’clock, to find a cloth laid over only part of the dining table, and breakfast evidently prepared for one person. She was still gazing at it in astonishment, and wondering what it meant, when Miss Wynward entered the room, to express a hope that Miss Brandt had slept well and had everything that she required.

“O! certainly yes! but where are we going to have breakfast?”

"Here, Miss Brandt, if it pleases you. I was just about to ask what you would like for your breakfast."

"But the Baron and Baroness—"

"O! they started for the manufactory two hours ago. Her ladyship is a very early riser when at home, and they have some four miles to drive."

"The manufactory!" echoed Harriet, "do you mean where they make the boots and shoes?"

"Yes! There is a manufactory in Germany, and another in England, where the boots and shoes are finished off. And then there is the shop in Oxford Street, where they are sold. The Baron's business is a very extensive one!"

"So I have understood, but what good can Madame Gobelli do there? What can a woman know about such things?"

Miss Wynward shrugged her shoulders.

"She looks after the young women who are employed, I believe, and keeps them up to their work. The Baroness is a very clever woman. She knows something about most things—and a good deal that were better left unknown," she added, with a sigh.

"And does she go there every morning?"

"Not always, but as a rule she does. She likes to have a finger in the pie, and fancies that nothing can go on properly without her. And she is right so far that she has a much better head for business than the Baron, who would like to be out of it all if he could!"

"But why can't he give it up then, since they are so very rich?" demanded Harriet.

Miss Wynward regarded her for a moment, as if she

wondered who had given her the information, and then said quietly,

"But all this time we are forgetting your breakfast, Miss Brandt! What will you take? An egg, or a piece of bacon?"

"O! I don't care," replied Harriet, yawning, "I never can eat when I am alone! Where is Bobby? Won't he take his breakfast with me?"

"O! he had his long ago with his Mamma, but I dare say he would not mind a second edition, poor boy!"

She walked to the French windows which opened from a rustic porch to the lawn, and called "Bobby! Bobby!"

"Yes, Miss Wynward," replied the lad in a more cheerful tone than Harriet remembered to have ever heard him use before, "what is it?"

"Come in, my dear, and keep Miss Brandt company, whilst she takes her breakfast!"

"Won't I!" cried Bobby, as he came running from the further end of the disorderly garden, with a bunch of flowers.

"They are for you!" he exclaimed, as he put them into Harriet's hand, "I gathered them on purpose!"

"Thank you, Bobby," she replied. "It *was* kind of you!"

She felt cheered by the simple attention. For her hostess to have left her on the very first morning, without a word of explanation, had struck her as looking very much (notwithstanding all the effusive flattery and protestations of attachment with which she had been laden) as if she were not wanted at the Red House.

But when her morning meal was over, and she had been introduced to every part of the establishment under the chaperonage of Bobby—to the tangled, overgrown garden, the empty stables, Papa's library, which was filled with French and German books, and Mamma's drawing-room, which was so full of valuable china that one scarcely dared move freely about it—the burning thirst to see, or hear something of Ralph Pullen returned with full force upon Harriet, and she enquired eagerly of Miss Wynward when her hostess might be expected to return.

Miss Wynward looked rather blank as she replied, "Not till dinner time, I am afraid! I fancy she will find too much to enquire about and to do, after so long an absence from home. I am so sorry, Miss Brandt," she continued, noting the look of disappointment on the girl's face, "that her ladyship did not make this plain to you last night. Her injunctions to me were to see that you had everything you required, and to spare no trouble or expense on your account. But that is not like having her here, of course! Have you been into the library? There are some nice English works there, and there is a piano in the drawing-room which you might like to use. I am afraid it is not in tune, on account of the rain we have had, and that I have not opened it myself during the Baroness's absence, and indeed it is never used, except to teach Bobby his music lessons on, but it may amuse you in default of anything else."

"O! I daresay I shall find something to amuse myself with," replied Harriet rather sullenly, "I have my own instrument with me, and my books, thank you! But is no one likely to call this afternoon, do you think?"

"This afternoon," echoed Miss Wynward, "are you expecting any of your own friends to see you?"

"O! no! I have no friends in England,—none at least that know I have returned from Heyst. But the Baroness told me—she said the Red House was always full of guests—Prince Adalbert and Prince Loris, and a lot of others—do you think they may come to-day to see her?"

"O! not in September," replied her companion, "it is not the season now, Miss Brandt, and all the fashionable people are out of town, at the foreign watering-places, or shooting in the country. Her ladyship could never have intended you to understand that the people you have mentioned would come here at any time except between May and July! They *do* come here then—sometimes—but not I expect, as *you* think—not as friends, I mean!"

"Not as *friends*! What as, then?" demanded Harriet.

"Well!" returned Miss Wynward, dubiously, "many of them have business with her ladyship, and they come to see her upon it! I generally conduct them to her presence, and leave them alone with her, but that is all I see of them! They have never come here to a party, or dinner, to my knowledge!"

"How very extraordinary!" cried Harriet. "What do they come for then?"

"The Baroness must tell you that!" replied the other, gravely, "I am not in her confidence, and if I were, I should not feel justified in revealing it."

This conversation drove Harriet to her room to indite a letter to Captain Pullen. If she were to be deprived of the society of dukes and princes, she would

at least secure the company of one person who could make the time pass pleasantly to her. As she wrote to him, rapidly, unadvisedly, passionately, her head burned and her heart was fluttering. She felt as if she had been deceived—cheated—decoyed to the Red House under false pretences, and she was in as much of a rage as her indolent nature would permit her to be. The revelations of Miss Wynward had sunk down into her very soul. No parties, no dinners, with princes handing her into the dining-room and whispering soft nothings into her ears all the time! Why had Madame Gobelli so often promised to console her for the loss of Captain Pullen by this very means, and it was a dream, a chimera, they only came to the Red House on business—business, horrid unromantic word—and were shut up with the Baroness. *What* business, she wondered! Could it be about boots and shoes, and if so, why did they not go to the shop, which surely was the proper place from which to procure them! The idea that she had been deceived in this particular, made her write far more warmly and pleadingly perhaps, than she would otherwise have done. A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush—Harriet was not conversant with the proverb, but she fully endorsed the sentiment. When her letter was written and addressed to the Camp at Aldershot, and she had walked out with Bobby to post it in the pillar box, she felt happier and less resentful. At all events she was her own mistress and could leave the Red House when she chose, and take up her abode elsewhere. A hot sun had dried the garden paths and grass, and she spent the rest of the afternoon wandering about the unshaven lawn with Bobby, and lingering

on the rotten wooden benches under the trees, with the boy's arm round her waist, and his head drooping on her shoulder.

Bobby was blissfully happy, and she was content. If we cannot get caviare, it is wise to content ourselves with cod's roe. They spent hours together that afternoon, until the dusk had fallen and the hour of dining had drawn nigh. They talked of Heyst and the pleasures they had left behind them, and Harriet was astonished to hear how many were some of Bobby's ideas and sentiments, when out of sight of his Mamma.

At last, the strident tones of the Baroness's voice were heard echoing through the grounds. Harriet and Bobby leaped to their feet in a moment.

"'Ere, 'Arriet! Bobby! where are you? You're a nice son and daughter to 'ide away from me, when I've been toiling for your benefit all the day."

She came towards them as she spoke, and when Harriet saw how fatigued she looked, she almost forgave her for leaving her in the lurch as she had done.

"I suppose you thought we were both dead, didn't you?" she continued. "Well, we are, almost. Never 'ad such a day's work in my life! Found everything wrong, of course! You can't turn your back for five minutes but these confounded workmen play old 'Arry with your business! I sent off ten fellows before I'd been in the factory ten minutes, and fined as many girls, and 'ave been running all over London since to replace 'em. It's 'ard work, I can tell you!"

She plumped down upon the rotten seat, nearly bringing it to the ground, as she spoke, and burst out laughing.

"You should 'ave seen one man, you would 'ave died of laughing! 'Get out,' I said to 'im, 'not another day's work do you do 'ere!' 'Get out of the factory where I've worked for twenty years?' 'e said, 'Well, then, I shan't, not for you! If the governor 'ad said so, it might be a different thing, but a woman 'as no right to come interfering in business as she knows nothing about!' 'That's the way the wind lies,' I replied, 'and you want a man to turn you out! We'll soon see if a woman can't do it!' and I took my stick and laid it on his back till he holloed again. He was out of the place before you could say Jack Robinson! "Ow will that do?" I said to the others, 'who else wants a taste of my stick before 'e'll go!' But they all cleared out before I 'ad done speaking! I laughed till I was ill! But come along, children! It's time for dinner!" As they returned to the house, she accosted Harriet,

"I 'ope you've amused yourself to-day! You'll 'ave to look after yourself whenever I'm at the factory! But a 'andsome gal like you won't want long for amusement. We'll 'ave plenty of company 'ere, soon! Miss Wynward," she continued, as they entered the dining-room, "Mr. Milliken is coming to-morrow! See that 'is room is ready for 'im!"

"Very good, my lady!" replied Miss Wynward, but Harriet fancied she did not like the idea of Mr. Milliken staying with them.

The dinner proceeded merrily. It was more sumptuous than the day before, consisting of several courses, and the champagne flowed freely. Harriet, sitting at her ease and thoroughly enjoying the repast, thought that it atoned for all the previous inconvenience. But

a strange incident occurred before the meal was over. The Baron, who was carver, asked Bobby twice if he would take some roast beef, and received no answer, which immediately aroused the indignation of the Baroness.

"Do you 'ear what your father is saying to you, Bobby?" she cried, shrilly. "Answer 'im at once or I'll send you out of the room! Will you 'ave some beef?"

But still there was no reply.

"My lady! I think that he is ill," said Miss Wynward in alarm.

"Ill! Rubbish!" exclaimed the Baroness. Being so coarse-fibred and robust a woman herself, she never had any sympathy with delicacy or illness, and generally declared all invalids to be humbugs, shamming in order to attract the more attention. She now jumped up from her seat, and going round to her son's chair, shook him violently by the shoulder.

"'Ere, wake up! what are you about?" she exclaimed, "if you don't sit up at once and answer your father's question, I'll lay my stick about your back!"

She was going to put her argument into effect, when Harriet prevented her.

"Stop! stop! Madame Gobelli!" she exclaimed; "can't you see, he has fainted!"

It was really true! Bobby had fainted dead away in his chair, where he lay white as a sheet, with closed eyes, and limp body. Miss Wynward flew to her pupil's assistance.

"Poor dear boy! I was sure he was not well directly he entered the house," she said.

"Not well!" replied the Baroness, "nonsense! what should ail 'im? 'Is father was one of the strongest men

on God's earth! He never 'ad a day's illness in 'is life. 'Ow should the boy, a great 'ulking fellow like 'im, 'ave got ill?"

She spoke roughly, but there was a tremor in her voice as she uttered the words, and she looked at Bobby as though she were afraid of him.

But as he gradually revived under Miss Wynward's treatment, she approached nearer, and said with some tenderness in her tones,

"Well! Bobby, lad, and 'ow do you feel now?"

"Better, Mamma, thank you! only my head keeps going round!"

"Had I not better help him up to his bed, my lady?" asked Miss Wynward.

"O! yes! but I 'ope 'e isn't going to make a fool of 'imself like this again, for I don't 'old with boys fainting like hysterical gals!"

"I couldn't help it, Mamma!" said Bobby faintly.

"O! yes! you could, if you 'ad any pluck! You never saw *me* faint. Nor Gustave either! It's all 'abit! Trundle 'im off to bed, Miss Wynward. The sooner 'e's there, the better!"

"And I may give him a little stimulant," suggested Miss Wynward timidly, recalling the scene of the evening before, "a little champagne or brandy and water—I think he requires it, my lady!"

"O! yes! Coddle 'im to your 'ear's content, only don't let me 'ear of it! I 'ate a fuss! Good-night, Bobby! Mind you're well by to-morrow morning!"

And she brushed the lad's cheek with her bristly chin.

"Good-night!" replied Bobby, "good-night to all!"

as he was supported from the room on the arm of Miss Wynward.

The Baroness did not make any further remarks concerning her son, but Harriet noticed that her appetite disappeared with him, and declaring that she had tired herself too much to eat, she sat unoccupied and almost silent for the remainder of the meal.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ALEXANDER MILLIKEN arrived punctually upon the morrow.

He was a tall, gaunt, weak-kneed man, with a prominent nose and eyes that required the constant use of glasses. Harriet Brandt could not at first determine his relationship to the Baroness, who received him with one of the rough kisses she was wont to bestow on Bobby and herself.

He established himself in the Red House as if he had been a member of the family, and Harriet frequently surprised him engaged in confidential talk with their hostess, which was immediately stopped on her arrival. She perceived that Miss Wynward had an evident dislike for the new-comer, and never addressed him but in the most formal manner and when it was strictly necessary. The Baroness did not go so often to the manufactory after Mr. Milliken's arrival, but often shut herself up with him in a room with locked doors, after which Mr. Milliken would be much occupied with secretarial work, writing letters with his short-sighted eyes held close to the paper. He was a source of much curiosity to Harriet Brandt, but he need not have been.

He was only that very common and unclean animal—the jackal to Madame Gobelli's lion.

He was poor and she was rich, so he did all the dirty work which she was unable, or afraid, to do for herself. Mr. Milliken called himself an author and an actor, but he was neither. On account of his accidental likeness to a popular actor, he had once been engaged to play the part of his double at a West-end theatre, but with the waning of the piece, Mr. Milliken's fame evaporated, and he had never obtained an engagement since. His assumed authorship was built on the same scale. He had occasionally penned anonymous articles for newspapers, which had been inserted without pay, but no one in the literary or any other world knew him by name or by fame. Of late he had attached himself to Madame Gobelli, writing her letters for her (of doing which she was almost incapable), and occasionally dabbling in dirtier work, which she was too cunning to do for herself. Miss Wynward could have told tales of abusive epistles which had been sent through his hand to people, whom the Baroness considered had offended her—of anonymous letters also, which if traced would have landed them both in the County Court. But Mr. Milliken was out at elbows. He found it very convenient to hang about the Red House for weeks together, to the saving of his pocket—receiving douceurs sometimes in actual coin of the realm at the hands of his benefactress, and making himself useful to her in any way in return. Lately, notwithstanding her grand promises to Harriet Brandt of introductions to lords, and princes, the Baroness had thought it would be a very good thing for her favourite jackal if the young heiress took a fancy for

him, and gave him full leave in consequence to go in and conquer if he could. She would praise his appearance and his qualities to the girl, before his very face—calling attention to the fact of what a clever creature he was, and what a fine figure he possessed, and how well he was connected, and advising her in her coarse fashion to cultivate his acquaintance better. She even descended to having visions in the broad daylight, and prophesying the future, for them both.

“Arriet!” she would suddenly exclaim, “I see a man standing be’ind you!”

“O! gracious!” the girl would reply, jumping in her seat, “I wish you would not say such things, Madame!”

“Rubbish! Why shouldn’t I say ’em, if they’re there? Stop a bit! Let me see ’im plainly! ’E’s got dark ’air, slightly sprinkled with grey—a fine nose—deep-set eyes, with bushy eyebrows—no ’air on ’is face—a tall figure, and long ’ands and feet! ’E’s living in this world too! Do you know anybody that answers to the description?”

“No!” replied the girl, though she recognised it at once as being meant for Mr. Milliken.

“Well! if you don’t know ’im now, you will before long, but it’s my belief you’ve met. And mark my words! you and ’e will be closely connected in life! I shouldn’t wonder if ’e turns out to be your future ’usband!”

“O! nonsense!” exclaimed Harriet, trying to speak lightly, “I’m not going to marry anybody, thank you, Madame Gobelli, unless it’s one of the princes you promised to introduce me to.”

“O! princes are all rubbish!” replied the Baroness, forgetting her former assertions, “they’ve none of them

got any money, and yours wouldn't go far enough for 'em. *They* want a gal with something like five thousand a year at 'er back. I'd rather 'ave an Englishman any day, than a dirty little German prince!"

But Harriet Brandt was not the sort of woman to be forced into an intimacy against her will. Born under an hereditary curse, as she undoubtedly had been, and gifted with the fatal propensity of injuring, rather than benefiting those whom she took a fancy for, she was an epicure in her taste for her fellow creatures, and would not have permitted Mr. Alexander Milliken to take a liberty with her, had he been the last man left upon the earth. She avoided his society as much as it was possible to do, without being rude to her hostess, but as the Baroness was continually calling her to her side, it was difficult to do so. Meanwhile the days went on very differently from what she had anticipated when coming to the Red House. Bobby was languid and indifferent to everything but hanging about the place where she might have located herself—sitting on the sofa beside her, with his heavy head on her shoulder, and his weak arm wound about her waist. Miss Wynward feared he must have contracted some species of malaria at the seaside, and Harriet could see for herself that the lad was much altered from the time when they first met—the Baroness alone, either from ignorance or obstinacy, declaring that nothing ailed him but laziness, and she would give him the stick if he didn't exert himself more. Sometimes Harriet took him out with her—for a drive into the country, or to a concert or *matinée* in London, but what was that compared to the entertainment of Royalty and Aristocracy, which she had been

promised. And she had not heard a word from Captain Pullen, though her first letter of appeal had been succeeded by two or three more. Such a rebuff would have driven another girl to despondency or tears, but that was not the effect it had on Harriet Brandt. If you throw a bone to a tigress and then try to take it away, she does not weep—she fights for her prey. Harriet Brandt, deprived of the flatteries and attentions of Captain Pullen, did not weep either, but set her pretty teeth together, and determined in her own mind that if she were to give him up she would know the reason why. She was reckless—she did not care what she did to obtain it, but she would learn the truth of his defalcation if she travelled down to Aldershot for the purpose. She was in this mood one day, when the maidservant who answered the door came to tell her that a lady was in the drawing-room, and desired to see her. The Baroness had gone out that afternoon and taken Mr. Milliken with her, so that Harriet was alone. She eagerly demanded the name of her visitor.

“The lady didn’t give me her name,” replied the servant, “but she asked if Miss Brandt was at home, plain enough!”

“Go back and say that I will be with her in a minute!” said Harriet.

She had decided in her own mind that the stranger must be Margaret Pullen, bringing her, doubtless, some news of her brother-in-law. She only stayed to smoothe her hair, which was rather disordered from Bobby laying his head on her shoulder, before, with a heightened colour, she entered the drawing-room. What was her surprise to encounter, instead of Mrs. Pullen, Miss Leyton

—Miss Leyton, who had been so reserved and proud with her at Heyst, and who even though she had sought her out at the Red House, looked as reserved and proud as before. Harriet advanced with an extended hand, but Elinor Leyton did not appear to see the action, as she coldly bowed and sank into her chair again.

Harriet was rather taken aback, but managed to stammer out,

“I am very glad to see you, Miss Leyton! I thought you and Mrs. Pullen had forgotten all about me since leaving Heyst.”

“We had not forgotten, Miss Brandt,” replied Elinor, “but we had a great deal of trouble to encounter in the death of Mrs. Pullen’s baby, and that put everything else for awhile out of our minds. But—but—lately, we have had reason to remember your existence more forcibly than before!”

She spoke slowly and with an evident effort. She was as agitated as it was in her nature to be the while, but she did not show it outwardly. Elinor Leyton had at all times the most perfect command over herself. She was dressed on the present occasion with the utmost neatness and propriety, though she had left her home labouring under a discovery which had pierced her to the very soul. She was a woman who would have died upon the scaffold, without evincing the least fear.

“Reason to remember my existence!” echoed Harriet, “I do not understand you.”

“I think you soon will!” said Elinor, as she took three letters from her hand-bag and laid them on the

table, "I do not think you can fail to recognise that handwriting, Miss Brandt!"

Harriet stooped down and read the address upon the envelopes. They were her own letters to Captain Pullen.

"How did you get these?" she demanded angrily, as she seized them in her hand. "Is thieving one of your proclivities, Miss Leyton?"

"No, Miss Brandt, thieving, as you elegantly put it, is not one of my proclivities! But Captain Pullen has been staying in the house of my father, Lord Walthamstowe, at Richmond, and left those letters behind him—thrown in the empty grate just as they are, a proof of how much he valued them! One of the housemaids, whilst setting his room in order after his departure, found them and brought them to me. So I determined that I would return them to your hands myself!"

"And have you read them?" demanded Harriet.

"I have read them! I considered it my duty!"

"Your duty!" replied the other, scornfully, "what duty is there in a mean, dishonourable action like that? What right had you to interfere with things that don't belong to you? These letters concern myself and Captain Pullen alone!"

"I deny that, Miss Brandt! They concern me quite as much, if not more—Captain Pullen is my affianced husband! We are to be married in the spring!"

"I don't believe it!" cried Harriet, starting to her feet. "A woman who would read letters not addressed to her, would say anything! You are *not* engaged to be married to Captain Pullen!"

"Indeed! And on what grounds do you refuse to believe my statement?"

"Because he made love to me all the time he was in Heyst! Because he used to kiss me and tell me again and again that I was the only woman who had ever touched his heart! Because he had arranged to follow the Baroness's party to Brussels, only to be near me, and he would have done so, had *you* not prevented him!"

Her great eyes were blazing with indignation and mortified vanity—her slender hands were clenched—she looked as if she were about to spring upon her rival and tear her to pieces—whilst Miss Leyton sat there, calm and collected—and smiled at her ravings.

"You are quite mistaken," she said after a pause, "I have never mentioned your name to Captain Pullen—I had no idea, until those letters fell into my hands, that he had so far forgotten what he owes to me, as to address you in any terms but those of mere acquaintanceship. But now that I *do* know, it must of course be put a stop to at once and for ever! It was to tell you so, that I came here this afternoon."

"Put a stop to! Do you imagine that I am going to give up Captain Pullen at your request? You are vastly mistaken!"

"But you must—you *shall!*" exclaimed Elinor, getting (for her) quite excited. "He is engaged to marry me, and I will not allow him to keep up any communication with you! My decision is final, and you will be good enough to respect it!"

"Your decision is *final!*" cried Harriet in mocking tones. "Oh! indeed, is it? And what about Ralph's

decision? Does that count for nothing? What if Ralph refuses to give me up?"

Elinor rose to her feet, trembling with indignation at the other's boldness.

"You shall not call him 'Ralph,'" she exclaimed. "How dare you speak of a man who is nothing to you, in such familiar terms?"

"But *is* he nothing to me?" retorted Harriet, "and am I nothing to him? We must have that question answered first. Ralph told me to call him by his name, and he calls me Hally. How can you prevent our doing so? He loves me—he has told me so—and I shall write to him as often as I choose—yes! and I will take him from you, if I choose, and keep him into the bargain! What do you say to that?"

"I say that you are a bold, brazen girl, not fit for me to associate with, and that I refuse to be contaminated by your presence any longer! Let me go!"

She made an effort to gain the door, as she spoke, but Harriet barred her exit.

"No, no, Miss Leyton," she said, "you don't come here to insult me, and then leave before you have heard all I have to say to you! In the first place your assurance to-day is the first I ever heard of your being engaged to marry Captain Pullen. *He* didn't take the trouble to make it public. He never mentioned you except to say what a cold, reserved, unpleasant nature you had, and how impossible it would be for a man with any human feeling to get on with you! That is what *he* thought! And he said it too, when he had his arm round my waist, and his face close to mine. And now he has come to England, I suppose he is afraid to carry on

with me any more, for fear that you should hear of it! But I don't mean to let him off so easily, I can tell you! He shall answer those letters, which you *say* he threw away in the grate, but which you are just as likely to have pilfered from his desk, before he is many days older!"

"You cannot *make* him answer them," said Elinor, proudly, "whatever you may affirm!"

"Not on paper perhaps, but by word of mouth! I will take them back to him at Aldershot, and see whether he can deny what I have told when he is face to face with me!"

"Surely!—surely!—you would never proceed to so unmaidenly an extremity," exclaimed Elinor, losing sight for a moment of her indignation in her horror at the idea. "You must not think of such a thing! You would create a scandal in the Camp! You would be despised for it ever after!"

"I can take care of myself!" replied Harriet, boldly, "you need not fear for me! And if even you *do* get your own way about this matter, you will have the satisfaction all your married life of knowing that your husband was a coward and a traitor to you, even during your engagement, and that you will never be able to trust him further than you can see him, to the end! If you can care for such a husband, take him, for I'm sure I wouldn't. But he shall answer to me for all that!"

"Oh! Miss Brandt, let me go, pray let me go!" said Elinor in a tone of such unmistakeable pain, that the other involuntarily drew back, and let her push her way past her to the door.

As Miss Leyton disappeared, Harriet Brandt com-

menced to pace up and down the length of the drawing-room. It was not the swaying walk of disappointment and despair; it was determined and masterful, born of anger and a longing for revenge. All the Creole in her, came to the surface—like her cruel mother, she would have given over Ralph Pullen to the vivisectioning laboratory, if she could. Her dark eyes rolled in her passion; her slight hands were clenched upon each other; and her crimson lips quivered with the inability to express all she felt. Bobby, glancing in upon her from the French windows which opened on the garden, crept to her side and tried to capture her clenched hands, and to keep her restless body still. But she threw him off, almost brutally. At that moment she *was* brutal.

“Leave me alone,” she exclaimed impatiently, “don’t touch me! Go away!”

“O! Hally,” the boy replied, sympathetically, “what is the matter? Has anyone offended you? Let me know? Let me try to comfort you! Or tell me what I shall do to help you.”

“*Do!*” cried the girl, contemptuously, “what could *you* do?—a baby tied to your mother’s apron-string! Leave me to myself, I say! I don’t want you, or anyone! I want to be alone! Boys are of no use! It requires a *man* to revenge a woman’s wrong!”

The lad, after one long look of bitter disappointment, walked quietly away from the spot, and hid his grief in some sequestered part of the garden. Hally despised him—she, who had kissed him and let him lay his head upon her shoulder and tell her all his little troubles—said he was of no use, when she stood in need of help and comfort! When, if she only knew it, he was ready

to stand up in her defence against twenty men, if need be, and felt strong enough to defeat them all! But she had called him a baby, tied to his mother's apron-strings. The iron entered into his very soul.

Meanwhile, Elinor Leyton, having blindly found her way out of the Red House, hailed a passing hansom, and gave the driver directions to take her to a certain number in Harley Street, where Margaret Pullen was staying with her godfather, Doctor Phillips. She knew no one else to whom she could go in this great trouble, which made her feel as if her life had suddenly been cut in two. Yet she made no outward moan. Most young women having kept a bold front, as she had done, towards the enemy, would have broken down, as soon as they found themselves alone. But Elinor Leyton was not in the habit of breaking down. As soon as she had started for her destination, she leaned her head upon the back of the cab, closed her eyes and set her teeth fast together. Her face grew deadly pale, and an observer would have noted the trembling of her lips, and the ball which rose and fell in her throat. But she uttered no sound, not even a sigh—her misery was too deep for words.

Since she had returned to London, Margaret Pullen had stayed with Doctor Phillips, for he had insisted that it should be so. The telegram which had conveyed to Colonel Pullen the news of his little daughter's death, had been answered by one to say that he had applied for immediate leave, and should join his wife as soon as he received it. And Margaret was now expecting his arrival, every day—almost every hour. She looked very sad in her deep mourning dress, as she came for-

ward to greet Elinor, but as soon as she caught sight of her visitor's face, she forgot her own trouble in her womanly sympathy for her friend.

"My dear Elinor!" she exclaimed, "what has brought you to town? You have bad news for me—I can read it in your eyes. Nothing wrong with Ralph, I hope!"

She kissed the girl affectionately, and held her hand, but Elinor did not answer. She turned her white face towards her friend, and bit her lips hard, but the words would not come.

"You are suffering, my poor dear," went on Margaret, tenderly, as she made her sit down, and removed her hat and cloak. "Can't you trust me with your trouble? Haven't I had enough of my own? Ah! cry, that's better. God sends us tears, in order that our hearts may not break! And now, what is it? Is anyone ill at home?"

Elinor shook her head. The tears were rolling slowly one by one, down her marble cheeks, but she jerked them away as they came, as though it were a shame to weep.

After a long pause, she swallowed something in her throat and commenced in a husky voice:

"It concerns Ralph, Margaret! He has been untrue to me! All is over between us!"

"Oh! surely not!" said Margaret, "have you had a full explanation with him? Who told you he had been untrue? Has Ralph asked for a release from his engagement?"

"No! but he shall have it!"

She then went on to tell the story of the finding of Harriet Brandt's letters in Captain Pullen's grate—and of the interview she had had with the girl that afternoon.

"She did not attempt to deny it," continued Elinor. "On the contrary she declared that he had made love to her all the time he was at Heyst—that he had said she was the only woman who had ever touched his heart, and that no man with human feelings could be happy with such a cold, reserved nature as mine! And if you could see her letters to him, Margaret—I wish I had not given them to her, but she snatched them from my hand—they were *too* dreadful! I never read such letters from a woman to a man. I did not know they could be written."

"But, Elinor, it strikes me that all this time, you have only heard one side of the question. What does it signify what Miss Brandt may say? The only thing of importance to you is, what Ralph will say."

"But there were her letters—they told their own story! They were full of nothing but 'dearests' and 'darlings', and reminders of how he had embraced her in one place, and what he had said to her in another—such letters as I could not write to a man, if it were to save my life!"

"I can quite understand that! Miss Brandt and you possess two totally different natures. And cannot you understand that a girl like that, half educated, wholly ignorant of the usages of society, with a passionate undeveloped nature and a bold spirit, might write as you have described her doing, against the wishes of the recipient of her letters? You say that Ralph threw her epistles in the grate just as they were. Does that look as if he valued them, or felt himself to be guilty concerning their reception?"

"But, Margaret, you know he *did* make himself con-

spicuous with the Gobellis and Miss Brandt at Heyst! I think everyone noticed their intimacy!"

"I noticed it also, and I was very sorry for it, but, Elinor, my dear, it was partly your own fault! You were so much opposed to the idea of your engagement to Ralph being made public, that I feared it might lead to some *contretemps*. And then," she continued gently, "don't be offended if I say that your reserve with him, and your objection to anything like love-making on his part is in itself calculated to drive a young man to society he cares less for!"

"But—but—still—I love him!" said poor Elinor, with a tremendous effort.

"I know you do," replied Margaret, kissing her again, "and better and more faithfully, perhaps, than half the women who show their love so openly—yet, men are but men, Elinor, and as a rule they do not believe in the affection which is never expressed by caresses and fond words."

"Well! whether I have been right or wrong, it is over now," said Miss Leyton, "and Ralph can go to Miss Brandt or anyone else he chooses for amusement. I shall never stand in his way, but I cannot brook an affront, so I shall write and release him from his promise to me at once!"

"No, no, Elinor, you must not do anything so rash! I beg—I implore you, to do nothing, until Ralph has had an opportunity of denying the charges brought against him by this girl. They may be utterly untrue! She may be simply persecuting him. Depend upon it, you have only to ask him for an explanation of those letters, and everything will be satisfactorily cleared up."

"You have more belief in him than I have, Margaret. Miss Brandt has great confidence in her cause. She told me that she had not only taken him from me, but she meant to keep him, and expressed her intention of going down to Aldershot and confronting Ralph with the letters she had written him!"

At this intelligence, Margaret grew alarmed for her friend's peace of mind.

"No! no! that must never be," she exclaimed, "that girl must not be permitted to make a scandal in the Camp, and get your name perhaps mixed up with it! It must be prevented."

"I fancy you will find that a difficult task," said Elinor; "she seems the most determined young woman I have ever come across. She became so vehement at last, that she frightened me, and I was only too glad to get out of the house."

"Elinor," said Mrs. Pullen suddenly, "will you leave this matter in my hands to settle in my own way?"

"What do you intend to do? See Miss Brandt yourself? I advise you not! She will only insult you, as she did me."

"No! I shall not see her myself, I promise you that, but I will send a proper ambassador to interview Miss Brandt and the Baroness. This sort of thing must not be allowed to go on, and unless Ralph comes forward to second the girl's assertions (which I am sure he will never do), she and her friend Madame Gobelli must be made to understand that if they don't behave themselves, the law will be called into requisition to enforce obedience. I should not be at all surprised if the Baroness were not at the bottom of all this."

"At anyrate, it has ruined my life!" said Elinor, mournfully.

"Nonsense! my dear girl, no such thing! It is only an unpleasant episode which will soon be forgotten. But let it make you a little more careful for the future, Elinor. Ralph is a very conceited man. He has been spoilt by the women all his life, '*pour l'amour de ses beaux yeux.*' He has been used to flattery and attention, and when he doesn't get it he misses it, and goes where it is to be found. It is rather a contemptible weakness, but he shares it in common with most of his sex, and you have promised, remember, to take him for better or worse!"

"Not yet, thank goodness!" retorted Elinor, with something of her usual spirit. "He and father got talking together about the marriage, the other day, when he was down at Richmond, and fixed it, I believe, for the spring, but they will have to unfix it again now, if I am not mistaken."

"No such thing," replied Margaret, "and now you have consented—have you not?—to leave the settlement of this other affair in my hands."

"If you wish it, Margaret! But, remember, no compromise! If Ralph has really promised this girl what she says, let him keep his promises, for I will have none of him. And now I must go home or they will wonder what has become of me!"

Margaret was not sorry to see her depart, for she was most anxious to summon Anthony Pennell, her husband's cousin, to her aid, and ask his advice as to what was best to be done in the circumstances.

She had great faith in Anthony Pennell, not only in

his genius, which was an accepted thing, but in his good sense, which is not usually found associated with the higher quality. He was a man of about thirty, with a grand intellect—a sound understanding—a liberal mind, and a sympathetic disposition. He had been originally intended for the Bar, but having “taken silk,” and made a most promising debut, he had suddenly blossomed into an author, and his first novel had taken London by storm.

He had accomplished the rare feat of being lifted up at once on the waves of public opinion and carried over the heads of all his fellows.

Since his first success, he had continued writing—had given up the law in consequence—and was now making a large and steady income.

But Anthony Pennell’s great charm lay in his unassuming manner and modest judgment of his own work. His triumphs were much more astonishing to him than to his friends. In person, he was less handsome than his cousin Ralph Pullen, but much more manly looking, having been a distinguished athlete in his College days, and still finding his best recreation on the cricket field and the golf ground. He was very fair, with a white skin, embrowned here and there by sun and outdoor exercise—short, curly hair—a fine figure, standing six foot high, and the bluest of blue eyes. He was smoking in his own chambers late that afternoon, when he received a telegram from Margaret Pullen, “Can you come over this evening?” and as soon as he had changed his lounging coat, he obeyed her summons.

CHAPTER XII.

ANTHONY PENNELL was a very fresh, pleasant, and good-looking presentment of a young English gentleman, as he entered the room where Margaret was sitting with Doctor Phillips that evening. It had been arranged between them beforehand, that as little as need be should be confided to him of Harriet Brandt's former history. All that was necessary for him to know, was the danger that threatened to blast the future happiness of Ralph Pullen and Elinor Leyton.

"Well! Mrs. Pullen," he said, as he shook hands cordially with Margaret and the doctor, "and what important business is it, that you want to consult me upon? I thought, at the very least, that I should meet my cousin Arthur here!"

"If I had had Arthur, perhaps I should not have needed you," replied Margaret, with a faint smile. "But really, Mr. Pennell, I am in want of advice sorely, and the Doctor agreed with me that you would be the best person to whom I could apply!"

"I am at your service, Madam!" said the young man, gaily, as he seated himself.

Then she told him the story of Harriet Brandt—how Ralph had met her at the Lion d'Or, and devoted his time to her—and how she was persecuting him with letters, and had threatened to follow him to the Camp and interview him there.

"And it must be put a stop to, you know, Mr. Pennell," she concluded, "not only for Ralph's sake and Elinor's, but for the sake of the Walthamstowes and my

husband. I am sure that Arthur would be exceedingly annoyed at any scandal of that sort, and especially as Lord Walthamstowe is so old a friend of his family!"

Anthony Pennell had looked very grave during her recital. After a pause he said,

"Are you sure that Ralph has not given this young lady good cause to run after him?"

"I think not—I hope not! There was very little amusement in Heyst, and this girl, and the people with whom she is now staying—a Baron and Baroness Gobelli, they call themselves—were amongst the visitors to the Lion d'Or. Miss Leyton is rather a stickler for the proprieties, and used to refuse to walk out with Ralph alone in the evenings, and I was too much occupied with my poor darling baby to accompany them," said Margaret, in a faltering voice, "so Ralph took to going to the Baroness's private rooms instead, and became intimate with Miss Brandt!"

"You acknowledge then, that he *was* intimate with her!"

"I think he must have been—because it appears that he had agreed to join their party at Brussels, when—when—my great trouble obliged him to return to England with us instead."

"Did you know this young lady, Mrs. Pullen?"

"I did, and at one time I was rather intimate with her, that is, before the Baroness took her up, when she passed almost all her time with them."

"She is, I suppose, very attractive in person?"

"O! dear no, not at all!" cried Margaret, with a woman's dull appreciation of the charms of one of her own sex, "she has fine eyes, and what men would, I

suppose, call a good figure, but no complexion and an enormous mouth. Not at all pretty, but nice-looking at times,—that is all!”

“Clever?” said Pennell, interrogatively.

“I do not think so! She had just come out of a Convent school and was utterly unused to society. But she has a very good voice and plays well on the mandoline!”

“Ladies are not always the best judges of their own sex,” remarked Anthony, turning to Doctor Phillips, “what do *you* say, Doctor? Had you an opportunity of appraising Miss Brandt’s beauties and accomplishments for yourself?”

“I would rather say nothing, Mr. Pennell,” replied the Doctor. “The fact is, I knew her parents in the West Indies, and could never believe in anything good coming from such a stock. Whatever the girl may be, she inherits terrible proclivities, added to black blood. She is in point of fact a quadroon, and not fit to marry into any decent English family!”

“O! dear!” exclaimed Mr. Pennell laconically,

“And how do you expect me to help you?” he enquired, after a pause.

“I want you to see the Baroness, or Miss Brandt, and tell them that this girl must cease all communication with Captain Pullen,” said Margaret, “tell them that he is engaged to marry Miss Leyton—that the marriage is fixed to take place next spring, and that the Walthamstowe family will be excessively annoyed if any scandal of this sort occurs to break it off.”

“Do they not know that such an engagement exists?”

“No! that is the unfortunate part of it! Elinor Ley-

ton is so absurdly scrupulous that she will not have the fact made public, and forbade me to tell Miss Brandt about it! Elinor went to the Red House where Miss Brandt is staying this morning and had a most stormy interview with her. She came here afterwards in a most distressed state of mind. Harriet Brandt had told her that she had secured Ralph Pullen and meant to keep him—that he had told her he loved her—and that Miss Leyton was too cold and prudish a nature for any man to be happy with! Of course Elinor was terribly upset. She seldom shows her feelings, but it was quite impossible for her to disguise them to-day. I begged her to leave the matter in my hands, and she consented to do so. That is why I telegraphed for you.”

“It is rather an awkward predicament!” said Anthony Pennell, thoughtfully, “you will forgive me for saying, Mrs. Pullen, that Ralph is so very likely to have done this sort of thing, that I feel one might be treading on very delicate ground—in fact, putting one’s foot in it—by interfering. You know what Ralph is—selfish and indolent and full of vanity. He considers it far too much trouble to make love (as it is called) to a woman, but he will accept any amount of love that is offered him, so long as it gives him no trouble. If this Miss Brandt is all that you and the doctor here say of her, she may possibly have drawn Ralph on, and taken his languid satisfaction as proof that he agreed to all she said and did. But it will make the *dénouement* just as unpleasant. Besides, how will Ralph himself take my interference in the matter? He may have some designs on this girl—some ideas in the future connected with her—and will ask what business I had to come between them.”

"O! no! Did I not tell you that he had left her letters in his grate!"

"That might be part of his indolent carelessness, or they may have been left there by design, as a means of breaking the ice between himself and Miss Leyton. Is not he, after all, the most proper person to appeal to? Why not wait till your husband returns, and let him speak to his brother?"

"I am so afraid in that case, that Ralph might consider that he had gone too far with Miss Brandt, and honour demanded that he should marry her! And, Mr. Pennell, Doctor Phillips could tell you things, if he chose, to prove to you that Harriet Brandt is not a fit wife for any decent man."

Anthony Pennell thought again for a few minutes—sitting silent with his hand caressing his smooth chin. Then he said:

"If you are very much bent on my doing what I can in this matter, I see only one way to accomplish it. I must enter the Red House under a flag of truce. Did you know this Baroness Gobelli? Can you tell me what sort of woman she is? I never heard the name before!"

"She is quite a character," replied Margaret; "I believe her husband *is* a German Baron, but she was a Mrs. Bates, and is an extraordinary Baroness. A strange mixture also, of vulgarity and refined tastes. She drops all her aspirates, yet talks familiarly of aristocratic and royal titles, she dresses like a cook out on Sundays, and yet has a passion for good paintings and old china."

At the last words, Anthony Pennell pricked up his ears.

"A passion for old china!" he exclaimed, "then there must be some good in her! Cannot you give me an introduction to the Red House on the plea that I am a connoisseur and am desirous of seeing her collection?"

"Of course I can, but how can you approach these people in amity, with a censure of Miss Brandt's conduct in your hand? Madame Gobelli is infatuated with Harriet Brandt! I was telling poor Elinor only this afternoon, that I should not be at all surprised if she were at the bottom of all this unpleasantness."

"She could not be at the bottom of anything unless Ralph had given her cause," replied Mr. Pennell, who had never had a good opinion of his cousin's straightforward dealing, "and however it may turn out, I should think he would have a heavy reckoning to settle with Miss Leyton! This is not the first time, remember! You have not forgotten the trouble Arthur had to get him out of that scrape with the laundress's girl at Aldershot, the year before last!"

"Yes! Arthur told me about it," replied Margaret. "But you are going to help us, this time, Mr. Pennell, are you not?"

"In so far as procuring an introduction to the Baroness, and taking my opportunity to let her know the true state of affairs with Miss Leyton, yes," said Mr. Pennell, "but there, my responsibility must cease. Should Ralph have committed himself in writing, or anything of that sort, you must promise to let them fight it out their own way. I daresay there will be no trouble about the matter. I can see how it has occurred at a glance. Ralph has been merely amusing himself with the girl, and she has taken his philandering in earnest. But I wish he would

leave that sort of thing off. It will ruin his married life if he does not!"

"Yes! indeed, and Elinor Leyton really loves him, more, I am sure, than he imagines. She declared this afternoon, that if it were not put a complete stop to, she should break off her engagement. And I think she would be right!"

"So do I," acquiesced Anthony Pennell. "Well! if these people are ordinarily decent, they will, as soon as they hear the truth, prevent their young friend interfering with another woman's rights. Write me the introduction, Mrs. Pullen, and I will pay the Red House a visit as soon as its owner gives me leave. And now let us talk of something pleasanter. How soon do you expect Arthur to arrive?"

"Any day," replied Margaret, "and I am longing so for him to come!"

"Of course you are! Will he remain long in England?"

"Only a few weeks! He has taken three months' leave. Then, I shall return with him to Hoosur."

"And you like the idea of India?"

"O! anything—anything—to find myself with him again," she answered feverishly.

The conversation turned upon more indifferent subjects, and armed with the note of introduction to the Baroness, Anthony Pennell presently took his leave. He did not like the task imposed upon him, and he hardly knew how he should set about it, but on consideration he thought he could do no harm by having a look at the young lady, who had taken the fancy of his fickle-minded cousin Ralph, and leaving his future action to

be decided by the interview. He sat down therefore before turning into bed, and wrote a note to the Baroness, enclosing the introduction from Mrs. Pullen, and asking permission to call and inspect her rare collection of china, of which he had heard so much.

His letter reached the Red House on the following morning, at an unfortunate moment, when Madame Gobelli was giving full display to the worst side of her eccentric character.

The Baroness was not a lover of animals, either dogs or horses. She was merciless to the latter and the former she kicked whenever they came in her way. It was considered necessary, however, for the safety of the Red House, that it should be guarded by a watch-dog, and a miserable retriever, which answered to that name, lived in a rotten cask in the stable yard. This unhappy animal, which had neither sufficient food, exercise, nor straw to lie on, was in the habit of keeping up a continuous baying at night, in remonstrance at the cruelty of its treatment, which was a cause of annoyance to the neighbours, who had often written to the Baroness about it in vain.

On the morning in question, a Captain Hill, who lived on one side of the Red House, with his parents, sent in his card to Madame Gobelli and asked for an interview. She admitted him at once. She liked men of all sorts, and particularly if they were young and she could kiss them with impunity, under the pretence that she was old enough to be their mother.

She therefore welcomed Captain Hill quite amiably. She came in from the garden to receive him, attired in a Genoa velvet dress that trailed half a yard on the

damp ground behind, and a coarse Zulu hat perched on her large bullet head. She was attended by Harriet Brandt, who had been making a tour of the premises with her, and was always eager to see anybody who might call at the Red House. Miss Wynward also, who was dusting the china with a feather brush as the visitor was announced, continued her occupation, and without apologising for doing so, or asking leave.

Harriet had not yet been able to determine the exact place which this lady held in the Baroness's household, for she was treated as one of the family, and yet degraded at times to the position of a servant.

The Baroness expected her to cook, or dust rooms, or darn stockings, or do anything required of her, whilst she introduced her to all her friends as if on a perfect equality with themselves. As she entered the drawing-room through one of the French windows, she shook hands familiarly with Captain Hill, and introduced him to both her companions.

"Well!" she went on, "and so you've come to see us at last! I thought you were going to live and die in that tumble-down old place of yours, without so much as a shake of the 'and! I 'ope you're all well at 'ome!"

The stranger did not seem to know how to receive these civilities. He had not seated himself, but stood in the centre of the room with his hat in his hand, as though he found a difficulty in stating his errand at the Red House.

"Take a chair," said Madame Gobelli in her rough way, "there's enough and to spare, and my young friend 'ere won't eat you!"

Still Captain Hill deliberated about accepting her offer.

"Thank you," he commenced, "but I shall not detain you above a few moments. I came to speak to you about your dog, Madame Gobelli. My parents are both very old, and my mother especially delicate—indeed, I fear that she may never rise from her bed again!"

Here his voice faltered a little, but quickly recovering himself he went on,

"She sleeps very little, and that little has now become impossible to her on account of the incessant barking of your yard dog. I am here to-day by the wish of my mother's medical attendant, Doctor Parker, to tell you that the noise is seriously affecting her health, and to beg that you will adopt some measures to have the annoyance stopped."

As the Baroness understood the reason for which her neighbour had called upon her, her countenance palpably changed. The broad smile faded from her face and was replaced by an ominous frown. If there was one thing which she resented above another, it was being called to task for any disturbance in her household. Without taking any notice apparently of Captain Hill's complaint, she turned to Miss Wynward and said,

"Miss Wynward, come 'ere! Does that dog bark at night?"

"Sometimes, my lady," replied the governess dubiously.

"I don't believe it! You're lying! 'Arriet, does Nelson ever bark so as to disturb anyone?"

"He barks whenever there is a ring at the bell, or a stranger enters the grounds, Madame," said Harriet, with politic evasion.

"Oh! I assure you he does more than that!" inter-

posed the visitor, "the poor animal howls without ceasing. Either he is ill, or the servants do not give him sufficient food!"

But at this censure cast upon her domestics whom she bullied from morning till night, the Baroness's uncontrolled temper burst forth.

"Ow dare you come 'ere," she exclaimed loudly, "and bring false accusations against my servants? No one in this 'ouse is kept short of food. What do you mean—a rubbishing fellow like you—by coming 'ere, and accusing the Baron of starving 'is animals? There's more money spent upon our animals, I bet, than goes in your poverty-stricken 'ouse-'old in a year!"

Captain Hill was now offended, as he well might be.

"I do not know what knowledge you may possess of the exigencies of my parents' household, Madam," he replied, "but what I came here to tell you is this—that from whatever cause it may arise, the howling and whining of your dog is a public nuisance and it must be stopped!"

"Must, must!" exclaimed Madame Gobelli, shaking her stick at him, "and pray 'oo's to make me stop it?"

"I will," said Captain Hill, "the noise is endangering the life of my mother, and I shall insist upon the animal being destroyed, or taken elsewhere. If you cannot take a friendly hint—if you have so callous a nature that the sufferings of an aged and invalid lady cannot excite your sympathy, the law shall teach you that, whatever you may fail to feel, you cannot annoy your neighbours with impunity!"

"Fine neighbours indeed!" cried the Baroness, her whole face trembling and contorted with passion. "A

beggarly lot of half-pay officers and retired parsons! I'll soon see if you'll be allowed to come riding the 'igh 'orse over me! Confound your impudence! Do you know 'oo I am?"

"A Billingsgate fishwoman, I should imagine, from your language! Certainly not a gentlewoman!" said Captain Hill, his eyes blazing with his wrath.

"Ang you! I'll soon teach you 'ow to insult a lady that's connected with Royalty!"

At that, the stranger burst into a derisive laugh.

"Down the back stairs!" he muttered to himself, but Madame Gobelli caught the words.

"Get out of my 'ouse," she cried. "Ere, Miss Wynward, see this fellow out at the front door, and never you let 'im in again, or I'll give you a month's warning! Down the back stairs indeed! Confound you! If you don't clear out this very minute, I'll lay my stick across your back! You'll make me destroy my dog, will you, and just because your trumpery mother don't like 'is barking! Go 'ome and tell 'er to 'old 'er own row! And you accuse my servants of not giving 'im enough to eat. You'd be glad enough to see 'is dinner on your own table once or twice a week. Out with you, I say—out with you at once, and don't let me see your ugly mug and your carroty 'ead in 'ere again, or I'll set the dog you don't like upon you."

Captain Hill had turned white as a sheet with anger.

"You'll hear more of this, Madam, and from my solicitor next time," he said. "Heartless, unfeeling woman! How can you call yourself a mother, when you have no pity for a son's grief at his mother's illness? Pray God you may not have occasion to remember this

morning, when you have to part from your own son!"

He rushed from the room as he spoke, and they heard the hall door slam after him. For a minute after he left, there was a dead pause between the three women. His last words seemed to have struck the Baroness as with a two-edged sword. She stood silent, staring into vacancy, and breathing hard, whilst Harriet Brandt and Miss Wynward regarded each other with furtive dismay. The silence was broken by Madame Gobelli bursting into a harsh laugh.

"I don't fancy 'e will show 'is face in my 'ouse again, in an 'urry," she exclaimed. "It was as good as a play to watch 'im, trying to brave it out! Confound 'is old mother! Why don't she die and 'ave done with it! I've no patience with old people 'anging on in that way, and worrying the 'ole world with their fads! Well! what is it?" she continued to a maid who brought her a letter.

"By the post, my lady!"

The Baroness broke the seal. There was such a look of scare upon her features, that some people might have thought she was glad to have anything to do that should hide it from her companions. The letter was from Anthony Pennell, whose name was familiar to her, as to all the world.

As she finished its perusal, her manner entirely altered. The broad smile broke out on her countenance—her eyes sparkled—one would have thought she could never be in anything but a beaming good temper.

"Oloa! 'Arriet!" she exclaimed, "'ere's news for you! 'Oo do you think this letter's from?"

"How can I guess?" replied the girl, though her thoughts had flown at once to Ralph Pullen.

"From Mr. Anthony Pennell, the great author, you know, and own cousin to that rascalion, Captain Pullen! Now we shall 'ear all about the 'andsome Captain! Mr. Pennell says 'e wants to come 'ere and see my china, but I know better! 'E's bringing you a message from 'is cousin, mark my words! I can see it written up be'ind you!"

Harriet's delicate face flushed with pleasure at the news.

"But why shouldn't Captain Pullen have come himself?" she asked, anxiously.

"I can't tell you that! Perhaps 'e is coming, be'ind the other, and this is only a feeler! There's wheels within wheels in these big families, sometimes, you know, and the Pullens are connected with a lot of big-wigs! But we'll 'ave some news, anyway! You just sit down, my dear, and write Mr. Pennell a pretty note in my name—you write a prettier 'and than I do—and say we shall be very pleased to see 'im to-morrow afternoon, if convenient, and I 'ope 'e will stay to dinner afterwards and be introduced to the Baron—will you?"

"O! yes, of course, Madame, if you wish it!" replied the girl, smiles dimpling her face at the thought of her triumph over Elinor Leyton.

"Now, Miss Wynward, we must 'ave a first-rate dinner to-morrow for Mr. Pennell, and you and Bobby 'ad better dine at one o'clock, or you'll spoil the table. Let me see! We'll 'ave——"

But turning to enforce her orders, the Baroness discovered that Miss Wynward had quitted the room.

"Why! where 'as the woman gone? Did you see 'er leave the room, 'Arriet?"

"I did not! I was too much occupied listening to you," replied the girl from the table, where she was inditing the answer to Anthony Pennell's note.

"'Ere, Miss Wynward! Miss Wynward!" screamed the Baroness from the open door, but no reply came to her call.

"I must go and see after 'er!" she said, as she stumped from the room, as intent upon procuring a good dinner for one young man, as she had been in insulting the other, and turning him from her doors.

Meanwhile Captain Hill, hot and angry, was striding away in the direction of his own home, when he heard a soft voice calling his name in the rear. He turned to encounter the spare, humiliated form of Miss Wynward.

"Captain Hill," she ejaculated, "I beg your pardon, but may I speak to you for a moment?"

Recognising her as having been in the room, when the Baroness had so grossly insulted him, he waited rather coldly for her to come up with him.

"Don't think me impertinent or interfering," faltered Miss Wynward, "but I was so shocked—so distressed—I could not let you go without saying how grieved and sorry I am!"

"I do not quite understand you," replied Captain Hill.

"O! yes, surely, did you not see me in the room just now! I felt as if I should die of shame! But if you knew what it is to be dependent—to be unable to speak or to expostulate—you would guess perhaps——"

"Yes! Yes! I think I can understand. But pray don't

distress yourself about it! It was my own fault! I should have addressed her first through my solicitor. But I thought she was a gentlewoman!"

"It is her temper that gets the better of her," said Miss Wynward in an apologetic tone, "she is not always so bad as she was this morning!"

"That is fortunate for the world at large," replied Captain Hill, gravely. "I could have forgiven her vulgarity, but not her heartlessness. I can only think that she is a most terrible woman."

"That is what everybody says," answered his companion, "but she will admit of no remonstrance. She *will* have her own way, and the Baron is as powerless to refrain her, as you, or I. But that she should so insult a gentleman like yourself, even descending to oaths and personalities—O! I cannot tell you how much I felt it—how ashamed I was, and how anxious that you should not confound me with anything the Baroness said, or did!"

"Indeed," said Captain Hill, holding out his hand, "you need have no fear on that score. I hope I know a gentlewoman when I see her! But tell me, since your eyes are open to all this, how is it that a lady like yourself can stay under the roof of so terrible a person? There are plenty of other situations to be had! Why do you not leave her, and go elsewhere?"

He was struck by the look of mingled anxiety and fear with which she regarded him.

"O! Captain Hill, there are reasons that are difficult to explain—that I could not tell to anyone on so short an acquaintance. But the Baroness possesses great power—she could ruin me, I believe she could *kill* if she chose!"

"She threatens you then!"

"Yes!" came from Miss Wynward's lips, but in almost a whisper.

"Well! this is hardly the time and place to discuss such a question," said Captain Hill, "but I should much like to see more of you, Miss Wynward! If you have any time at your disposal, will you come over and see my old mother? She is quite confined to her room, but I know it would please her to have a quiet talk with you!"

A light glistened in Miss Wynward's washed-out eyes, and a smile stole over her countenance.

"Do you really mean it, Captain Hill?"

"I never say anything that I do not mean," he answered, "I am sure both my parents would be glad to give you their advice, and my dear father, who is a clergyman, though past an active ministry, may be able to be of use to you in a more practical way. At any rate, you will come and see us. That is a bargain!" and he held out his hand to her again in farewell.

"O! I will—I will, indeed," exclaimed Miss Wynward, gratefully, "and thank you so very much for the permission. You have put a little hope into my life!"

She seized the hand he proffered her, and kissed it, as an inferior might have done, and then hurried back to the Red House, before he had had time to remonstrate with her on the proceeding.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Anthony Pennell received the Baroness's invitation, penned in the delicate foreign handwriting of Harriet Brandt, he accepted it at once. Being out of

the season, he had no engagement for that evening, but he would have broken twenty engagements, sooner than miss the chance, so unexpectedly offered him, of meeting in an intimate family circle, the girl who appeared to have led his cousin Ralph's fancy astray. He pictured her to himself as a whitey-brown young woman with thick lips and rolling eyes, and how Ralph, who was so daintily particular where the *beau sexe* was concerned, could have been attracted by such a specimen, puzzled Anthony altogether. The knowledge that she had money struck him unpleasantly, for he could think of no other motive for Captain Pullen having philandered with her, as he evidently had done. At anyrate, the idea that there was the least chance of allying herself with their family, must be put out of her head, at once and for ever.

Mr. Pennell amused himself with thinking of the scare he should create at the dinner table, by "springing" the news of Ralph's intended marriage upon them, all at once. Would the young lady have hysterics, he wondered, or faint away, or burst into a passion of tears? He laughed inwardly at the probability! He felt very cruel over it! He had no pity for the poor quadroon, as Doctor Phillips had called her. It was better that she should suffer, than that Elinor Leyton should have to break off her engagement. And, by Margaret Pullen's account, Miss Brandt had been both defiant and insulting to Miss Leyton. She must be a brazen, unfeeling sort of girl—it was meet that she paid the penalty of her foolhardiness.

It was in such a mood that Anthony Pennell arrived at the Red House at five o'clock in the afternoon, that

he might have the opportunity to inspect the collection of china that had gained him an entrance there.

The Baroness had promised to be home in time to receive him, but he was punctual and she was not. Harriet Brandt was loitering about the garden, which was still pleasant enough on fine days in the middle of September, when the news that Mr. Pennell was in the drawing-room was brought to her by Miss Wynward. Harriet had been very eager to meet Anthony Pennell—not because she was pining after his cousin, but because her feminine curiosity was strong to discover *why* Ralph had deserted her, and if he had been subjected to undue influence to force him to do so. But now that the time had come, she felt shy and nervous. Suppose he, Mr. Pennell, had seen Miss Leyton meanwhile, and heard all that had taken place between them, when she visited the Red House. And suppose he should take Miss Leyton's part! Harriet's mind was full of "supposes" as she turned to Miss Wynward and said,

"O! I can't go and receive him, Miss Wynward! Mr. Pennell has come to see the Baroness, not me! Cannot you entertain him until she comes home? She will not be long now!"

"Her ladyship's last words to me, Miss Brandt, were, that if she had not returned from the factory by the time Mr. Pennell arrived, you were to receive him and give him afternoon tea in her stead! I hope you will do as her ladyship desired!"

"Well! I suppose I must then," replied Harriet, screwing up her mouth, with a gesture of dissatisfaction, "but do send in the tea, quickly, please!"

"It shall be up, Miss Brandt, as soon as I can get

back to make it! Mr. Pennell seems a very pleasant gentleman! I wouldn't mind if I were you!"

Miss Wynward hurried back to the house, as she spoke, and Harriet walked slowly over the lawn towards the drawing-room windows.

Anthony Pennell, who had been bending over some rare specimens of old Chelsea, looked up suddenly as she approached, and was struck dumb with admiration. She had improved wonderfully in looks since she had been in Europe, though the women who lived with her continually, were slow to perceive it. Her delicate complexion had acquired a colour like that of a blush rose, which was heightened by contrast with her dark, glowing eyes, whilst her hair, by exposure to the rays of the sun, had caught some of its fire and showed ruddily, here and there, in streaks of auburn. Her figure, without having lost its lissom grace, was somewhat fuller, and her manner was altogether more intelligent, and less *gauche* than it had been. But the dark eyes were still looking for their prey, and the restless lips were incessantly twitching and moving one over the other. She was beautifully dressed that evening—she had not been in London for a month, without finding a way to spend her money—and Anthony Pennell, like most artistic natures, was very open to the influence of dress upon a woman. Harriet wore a frock of the palest lemon colour, cut quite plain, but perfect in every line and pleat and fold, and finished off at the throat with some rare lace, caught up here and there with tiny diamond pins.

"By Jove! what a beautiful girl!" was Mr. Pennell's inward ejaculation as he saw her drawing nearer the spot where he stood. It was strange that his first

judgment of Harriet Brandt should have been the same as that of his cousin, Ralph Pullen, but it only proves from what a different standpoint men and women judge of beauty. As Harriet walked over the grass, Anthony Pennell noted each line of her swaying figure—each tint of her refined face—with the pretty little hands hanging by her side, and the slumbrous depths of her magnificent eyes. He did not, for one moment, associate her with the idea which he had formed of the West Indian heiress who was bent on capturing his cousin Ralph. He concluded she was another young friend who might be partaking of the Baroness's hospitality. He bowed low as she entered through the open French window looking as a Georgian or Cashmerian *houri* might have looked, he thought, if clad in the robes of civilisation. Harriet bowed in return, and said timidly,

"I am so sorry that Madame Gobelli is not here to receive you, but she will not keep you waiting more than a few minutes, I am sure. She particularly said that she would not be later than five o'clock."

"She has left a very charming substitute in her place," replied Pennell, with another bow.

"I believe you have come to see the china," continued Harriet, "I do not know much about it myself, but Miss Wynward will be here in a minute, and she knows the name of every piece, and where it came from!"

"That will be eminently satisfactory," rejoined Anthony Pennell, "but I happen to be a connoisseur in such things myself. I have one or two charming bits of old Sèvres and Majolica in my chambers, which I think the Baroness would like to see if she will honour

me with a visit to my little place. A lonely bachelor like myself must take up some hobby, you know, to fill his life, and mine happens to be china. Madame Gobelli appears to have some lovely Chelsea there. I would like to steal one or two of those groups on the cabinet. Will you hold the door open for me, whilst I run away with them?"

At this sally, Harriet laughed, and Mr. Pennell thought she looked even handsomer when she laughed than when she was pensive.

"Here is the tea!" she cried nervously, as Miss Wynward appeared with the tray. "O! Miss Wynward, surely Madame cannot be much longer now! Have you looked down the road to see if she is coming?"

"The carriage has just turned into the stable yard," replied Miss Wynward, and in another minute, the doorway was filled with the ample proportions of the Baroness.

"'Olloa! Mr. Pennell, and so you've stolen a march upon me!" was her first greeting, "'ow are you?" extending her enormous hand, "'ave you been looking at the china? Wait till I've 'ad my tea; I'll show you one or two bits that'll make your mouth water! It's my 'obby! I used to save my pocket money when I was a little gal to buy china. I remember my grandfather, the Dook of—but there, I 'aven't known you long enough to let you into family secrets. Let's 'ave our tea and talk afterwards! I 'ope 'Arriet 'as entertained you well!"

"This young lady—" commenced Anthony Pennell, interrogatively.

"To be sure, Miss 'Arriet Brandt! 'Asn't she introduced 'erself to you? She's like a daughter of the 'ouse to us! We look upon 'er as one of our own, Gustave

and me! Miss Brandt from Jamaica! And she knew your cousin, Captain Pullen, too, at Heyst, we all did, and we're dying to 'ear what 'as become of 'im, for 'e's never shown 'is face at the Red 'Ouse!"

The murder was out now, and Harriet waited tremblingly for the result! What did Mr. Pennell know? What would he say?

But Mr. Pennell said nothing—he was too much startled to speak. *This*, Harriet Brandt—this lovely girl, the quadron of whom both Doctor Phillips and Mrs. Pullen had spoken so disparagingly?—of whom they had said that she was not fit to be the wife of any decent man? Oh! they must be fools and blind—or he was dreaming! The Baroness was not slow to see the look upon his face and to interpret it rightly.

"Are you surprised? You needn't look so incredulous! I give you my word that this is 'Arriet Brandt—the same young lady that knew Mrs. Pullen and her brother-in-law and Miss Leyton over at Heyst. What sort of a character 'ave they been giving 'er be'ind 'er back?"

"Indeed, I assure you, Madame—" commenced Mr. Pennell, deprecatingly.

"You needn't take the trouble to tell any tarradiddles about it! I can see it in your face! I didn't think much of that cousin of yours from the beginning; 'e's got a shifty sort of look, and as for that cold bit of goods, Miss Leyton, well, all I say is, God 'elp the man that marries 'er, for she's enough to freeze the sun himself! But I liked Mrs. Pullen well enough, and I was sorry to 'ear that she 'ad lost 'er baby, for she was quite wrapt up in it! But I daresay she'll soon 'ave another!"

Without feeling it incumbent on him to enter into an argument as to the probability of the Baroness's last suggestion, Anthony Pennell was glad of the digression, as it gave him an opportunity of slurring over the dangerous subject of Ralph Pullen's character.

"The loss of her child was a very great blow to my poor cousin," he replied, "and she is still suffering from it, bitterly. Else, I have no doubt that you would have seen something of her—and the others," he added in a lower tone. After a slight interval, he ventured to raise his eyes and see how the girl opposite to him had taken what was said, but it did not appear to have made much impression on her—she was, on the contrary, gazing at him with that magnetic glance of hers as though she wanted to read into his very soul.

"Don't go and say that I want to see 'em," said the Baroness as, having devoured enough cake and bread and butter to feed an ordinary person for a day, she rose and led the way into another room. "I don't want to see anybody at the Red 'Ouse that doesn't want to come, and I 'aven't expected the ladies. But as for Captain Pullen, 'oo made an engagement to follow our party to Brussels, and then never took the trouble to write a line to excuse 'imself for breaking 'is word, why, I say 'e's a jerry sneak, and you may tell 'im so if you like! *We* didn't want 'im. 'E proposed to come 'imself, and I engaged 'is room and everything, and then 'e skedaddled without a word, and I call it beastly be-'aviour. You mustn't mind my plain speaking, Mr. Pennell. I always say what I think! And I would like to break my stick over Captain Pullen's back and that's the truth."

They were walking along the passage now, on their way to the Baron's library—the Baroness in front with her hand leaning heavily on Pennell's shoulder, and Harriet lingering a little behind. Anthony Pennell pondered awhile before he replied. Was this the time to announce Ralph's intended marriage. How would the girl behind them take it?

He turned slightly and looked at her face as the thought passed through his mind. Somehow the eyes that met his reassured him. He began to think it must be a mistake—that she did not care for Ralph as much as Mrs. Pullen had supposed—that she was only offended perhaps (as her hostess evidently was) by the curt and uncivil manner in which he had treated them both. So he replied,

“I have not the slightest excuse to make for my cousin's conduct, Madame Gobelli. It appears to me that he has treated you with very scant civility, and he ought to be ashamed of himself. But as you know, his little niece's death was very sudden and unexpected, and the least he could do was to escort his sister-in-law and Miss Leyton back to England, and since then——”

“Well! and what since then?” demanded the Baroness, sharply.

“Lord Walthamstowe and he have come to an arrangement,” said Pennell, speaking very slowly, “that his marriage with Miss Elinor Leyton shall take place sooner than was at first intended. The Limerick Rangers are under orders for foreign service, and Captain Pullen naturally wishes to take his wife out with him, and though, of course, all this is no excuse for his omitting to write you a letter, the necessary preparations and the

consequent excitement *may* have put his duty out of his head. Of course," he continued, "you know that Ralph is engaged to marry Miss Leyton?"

"I 'eard something of it," replied the Baroness reluctantly, "but one never knows what is true and what is not. Anyway, Captain Pullen didn't give out the news 'imself! 'E seemed 'appy enough without Miss Leyton, didn't 'e, 'Arriet?"

But turning round to emphasise her words, she found that Harriet had not followed them into the library. Whereupon she became confidential.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Pennell," she continued, "'e just be'aved like a scoundrel to our little 'Arriet there. 'E ran after the gal all day, and spent all 'is evenings in our private sitting-room, gazing at 'er as if 'e would eat 'er, whilst she sang and played to 'im. 'E never said a word about marrying Miss Leyton. It was all "'Ally, 'Ally, 'Ally' with 'im. And if the gal 'adn't been a deal too clever for 'im, and wise enough to see what a vain zany 'e is, she might 'ave broken 'er 'eart over it. The conceited jackanapes!"

"But she has not fretted," said Anthony Pennell eagerly.

"Not she! I wouldn't let 'er! She's meat for Captain Pullen's master! A gal with fifteen 'undred a year in 'er own 'ands, and with a pair of eyes like that! Oh! no! 'Arriet can pick up a 'usband worth two of your cousin any day!"

"I should think so indeed," replied Mr. Pennell fervently, "I have heard Mrs. Pullen mention Miss Brandt, but she did not prepare me for meeting so beautiful a girl. But I can hardly wonder at my cousin running

away from her, Madame Gobelli. Knowing himself to be already engaged, Miss Brandt must have proved a most dangerous companion. Perhaps he found his heart was no longer under his own control, and thought discretion the better part of valour. You must try and look upon his conduct in the best light you can!"

"Oh! well! it don't signify much anyway, for 'e's no miss at the Red 'Ouse, I can tell you, and 'Arriet could marry to-morrow if she chose, and to a man worthy of 'er. But now you must look at my Spode."

She walked up to a tall cabinet at one end of the room, which was piled with china, and took up a fragile piece in her hands.

"Do you see that?" she said, turning up the plate and showing the mark upon the bottom, "there it is, you see! There's the M. These five pieces are said to be the oldest in existence. And here's a cup of Limoges. And that's Majolica. Do you know the marks of Majolica. They're some of the rarest known! A cross on a shield. The first real bit of china I ever possessed was a Strasbourg. Have you ever seen any Dutch Pottery—marked with an A.P.? I picked that up at an old Jew's shop in the market in Naples. And this Capo di Monte, strange to say, in a back alley in Brighton. There's nothing I like better than to grub about back slums and look for something good. Some of my best pieces 'ave come out of pawnbrokers' shops. That plate you're looking at is old Flemish—more than two 'undred years, I believe! It came out of the rag market at Bruges. There used to be first-rate pickings to be 'ad at Bruges and Ghent and in Antwerp some years ago, but the English 'ave pretty well cleared 'em out."

"I never saw a better private collection, Madame Gobelli," said Anthony Pennell, as he gloated over the delicate morsels of Sèvres and Limoges and Strasbourg. "The Baron should have had an old curiosity and bric-a-brac establishment, instead of anything so prosaic as boots and shoes."

"O! I couldn't 'ave 'ad it!" exclaimed the Baroness, "it would 'ave gone to my 'eart to sell a good bargain when I 'ad made it! My cups and saucers and plates and teapots are like children to me, and if I thought my Bobby would sell 'em when I was gone, I believe I should rise from my grave and whack 'im."

The woman became almost womanly as her eyes rested lovingly on her art treasures. It seemed incongruous to Pennell, to watch her huge coarse hands, with their thick stumpy fingers and broad chestnut nails, fingering the delicate fabric with apparent carelessness. Cup after cup and vase and plate she almost tossed over each other, as she pushed some away to make room for others, and piled them up on the top of one another, until he trembled lest they should all come toppling down together.

"You are more used to handle these treasures than I am," he remarked presently, "I should be too much afraid of smashing something, to move them so quickly as you do."

"I never broke a bit of china in my life," returned the Baroness energetically. "I've broken a stick over a man's back, more than once, but never 'ad an accident with my plates and dishes. 'Ow do you account for that?"

"You must have a flow of good luck!" said Mr.

Pennell, "I am so fearful for mine that I keep all the best under glass!"

"I 'ave more friends to 'elp me than perhaps you know of," said the Baroness, mysteriously, "but it ain't only that! I never let a servant dust it! Miss Wynward does it, but she's too much afraid to do more than touch 'em with the tip of her feather brush. They come to me sometimes and complain that the china is dirty. 'Let it be dirty,' I say, '*that* won't break it, but if you clean it, you will!' Ha! ha! ha!"

At that moment Harriet Brandt entered the room, moving sinuously across the carpet as a snake might glide to its lair. Anthony Pennell could not take his eyes off that gliding walk of hers. It seemed to him the very essence of grace. It distracted all his attention from the china.

"The Baron has just come in," observed Harriet to her hostess.

"Oh! well! come along and leave the rest of the china till after dinner," said Madame Gobelli. "Gustave likes to 'ave 'is dinner as soon as 'e comes 'ome."

She thrust her arm through that of Anthony Pennell, and conducted him to the dining-room, where the Baron (without having observed the ceremony of changing his coat or boots) was already seated just as he had come in, at the table. He gave a curt nod to the visitor as Mr. Pennell's name was mentioned to him, and followed it up immediately by a query whether he would take fish. Mr. Pennell sat out the meal with increasing amazement at every course. He, who was accustomed, in consequence of his popularity, to sit at the tables of some of the highest in the land, could liken this one to

nothing but a farmhouse dinner. Course succeeded course, in rapid succession, and there was no particular fault to find with anything, but the utter want of ceremony—the mingling of well-known and aristocratic names with the boot and shoe trade—and the way in which the Baron and Baroness ate and drank, filled him with surprise. The climax was reached when Mr. Milliken, who was late for dinner, entered the room, and his hostess, before introducing him to the stranger, saluted him with a resounding smack on either cheek.

Pennell thought it might be his turn next, and shuddered. But the wine flowed freely, and the Baroness, being in an undoubted good humour, the hospitality was unlimited. After dinner, the Baron having settled to sleep in an armchair, Madame Gobelli proposed that the party should amuse themselves with a game of "Hunt the slippers."

She was robed in an expensive satin dress, but she threw herself down on the ground with a resounding thump, and thrusting two enormous feet into view, offered her slipper as an inducement to commence the game.

Pennell stood aloof, battling to restrain his laughter at the comical sight before him. The Baroness's foot, from which she had taken the shoe, was garbed in a black woollen stocking full of holes, which displayed a set of bare toes. But, apparently quite unaware of the ludicrous object she presented, she kept on calling out for Harriet Brandt and Miss Wynward to come and complete the circle at which only Mr. Milliken and herself were seated. But Harriet shrank backwards and refused to play.

"No! indeed, Madame, I cannot. I do not know your English games!" she pleaded.

"Come on, we'll teach you!" screamed Madame Gobelli, "'ere's Milliken, 'e knows all about it, don't you, Milliken? 'E knows 'ow to look for the slipper under the gal's petticoats. You come 'ere, 'Arriet, and sit next me, and Mr. Pennell shall be the first to 'unt. Come on!"

But Miss Brandt would not "come on". She remained seated, and declared that she was too tired to play and did not care for *les jeux innocents*, and she had a headache, and anything and everything, before she would comply with the outrageous request preferred to her.

Madame Gobelli grumbled at her idleness and called her disobliging, but Anthony admired the girl for her steadfast refusal. He did not like to see her in the familiar society of such a woman as the Baroness—he would have liked still less to see her engaged in such a boisterous and unseemly game as "Hunt the slipper."

He took the opportunity of saying,

"Since you are disinclined for such an energetic game, Miss Brandt, perhaps you would oblige me by singing a song! I should so much like to hear the mandoline. Mrs. Pullen has spoken to me of your efficiency on it."

"If Madame Gobelli wishes it, I have no objection," replied Harriet.

"Oh! well! if you are all going to be so disagreeable as not to play a good game," said the Baroness, as Mr. Milliken pulled her on her feet again, "'Arriet may as

well sing to us! But a good romp first wouldn't 'ave done us any 'arm!"

She adjourned rather sulkily to a distant sofa with Mr. Milliken, where they entertained each other whilst Harriet tuned her mandoline and presently let her rich voice burst forth in the strains of "Oh! ma Charmante." Anthony Pennell was enchanted. He had a passion for music, and it appealed more powerfully to him than anything else. He sat in rapt attention until Harriet's voice had died away, and then he implored her to sing another song.

"You cannot tell what it is for me, who care more for music than for anything else in this world, to hear a voice like yours. Why! you will create a perfect *furor* when you go into society. You could make your fortune on the stage, but I know you have no need of that!"

"Oh! one never knows what one may have need of," said Harriet gaily, as she commenced "Dormez, ma belle", and sang it to perfection.

"You must have had a very talented singing-master," observed Pennell when the second song was finished.

"Indeed no! My only instructress was a nun in the Ursuline Convent in Jamaica. But I always loved it," said the girl, as she ran over the strings of her mandoline in a merry little tarantelle, which made everyone in the room feel as if they had been bitten by the spider from which it took its name, and wanted above all other things to dance.

How Pennell revelled in the music and the performer! How he longed to hear from her own lips that Ralph's treatment had left no ill effects behind it.

When she had ceased playing, he drew nearer to

her, and under the cover of the Baroness's conversation with Mr. Milliken and the Baron's snores, they managed to exchange a few words.

"How can I ever thank you enough for the treat you have given me!" he began.

"I am very glad that you liked it!"

"I was not prepared to hear such rare talent! My experience of young ladies' playing and singing has not hitherto been happy. But you have great genius. Did you ever sing to Mrs. Pullen whilst in Heyst?"

"Once or twice."

"And to my cousin, Ralph Pullen?"

"Yes!"

"I cannot understand his having treated the Baroness with such scant courtesy. And you also, who had been kind enough to allow him to enjoy your society. You would not have found me so ungrateful. But you have heard doubtless that he is going to be married shortly!"

"Yes! I have heard it!"

"And that has, I suppose, put everything else out of his head! Perhaps it may be as well, especially for his future wife. There are some things which are dangerous for men to remember—such as your lovely voice, for example!"

"Do you think so?" Harriet fixed her dark eyes on him, as she put the question.

"I am sure it will be dangerous for me, unless you will give me leave to come and hear it again. I shall not be able to sleep for thinking of it. Do you think the Baroness will be so good as to enrol me as a visitor to the house?"

"You had better ask her!"

"And if she consents, will you sing to me sometimes?"

"I am always singing or playing! There is nothing else to do here. The Baron and Baroness are almost always out, and I have no company but that of Bobby and Miss Wynward. It is terribly dull, I can tell you. I am longing to get away, but I do not know where to go."

"Have you no friends in England?"

"Not one, except Mr. Tarver, who is my solicitor!"

"That sounds very grim. If you will let me count myself amongst your friends, I shall be so grateful."

"I should like it very much! I am not so ignorant as not to have heard your name and to know that you are a celebrated man. But I am afraid I shall prove a very stupid friend for you."

"I have no such fear, and if I may come and see you sometimes, I shall count myself a very happy man."

"I am generally alone in the afternoon," replied Miss Brandt, sophistically.

In another minute Mr. Pennell was saying good-night to his hostess and asking her permission to repeat his visit at some future time.

"And if you and Miss Brandt would so far honour me, Madame Gobelli, as to come and have a little lunch at my chambers in Piccadilly, I shall feel myself only too much indebted to you. Perhaps we might arrange a *matinée* or a concert for the same afternoon, if it would please you? Will you let me know? And pray fix as early a date as possible. And I may really avail myself of your kind permission to come and see you again. You may be sure that I shall not forget to do

so. Good-night! Good-night, Baron! Good-night, Miss Brandt!" and with a nod to Mr. Milliken he was gone.

"Ain't 'e a nice fellow? Worth two of that conceited jackanapes, 'is cousin," remarked the Baroness as he disappeared, "what do you think of 'im, 'Arriet?"

"Oh! he is well enough," replied Miss Brandt with a yawn, as she prepared also to take her departure, "he is taller and broader and stronger looking than Captain Pullen—and he must be very clever into the bargain."

"And 'e never said a word about 'is books," exclaimed Madame Gobelli, "only fancy!"

"No! he never said a word about his books," echoed Harriet.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANTHONY PENNELL had promised to let Margaret Pullen hear the result of his visit to the Red House, and as he entered her presence on the following evening, she saluted him with the queries,

"Well! have you been there? Have you seen her?"

To which he answered soberly,

"Yes! I have been there and I have seen her!"

"And what do you think of her? What did she say? I hope she was not rude to you!"

"My dear Mrs. Pullen," said Pennell, as he seated himself, and prepared for a long talk, "you must let me say in the first place, that I should never have recognised Miss Brandt from your description of her! You led me to expect a *gauche* schoolgirl, a half-tamed savage, or a juvenile virago. And I am bound to say that she struck me as belonging to none of the species. I sent your

note of introduction to Madame Gobelli, and received a very polite invitation in return, in accordance with which I dined at the Red House yesterday."

"You *dined* there!" exclaimed Margaret with renewed interest. "Oh! do tell me all about it, from the very beginning. What do you think of that dreadful woman, the Baroness, and her little humpty Baron, and did you tell Miss Brandt of Ralph's impending marriage?"

"My dear lady, one question at a time, if you please. In the first place I arrived there rather sooner than I was expected, and Madame Gobelli had not returned from her afternoon drive, but Miss Harriet Brandt did the honours of the tea-table in a very efficient manner, and with as much composure and dignity as if she had been a duchess. We had a very pleasant time together until the Baroness burst in upon us!"

"Are you chaffing me?" asked Margaret, incredulously. "What do you really think of her?"

"I think she is, without exception, the most perfectly beautiful woman I have ever seen!"

"*What!*" exclaimed his companion.

She had thrown herself back in her armchair, and was regarding him as if he were perpetrating some mysterious joke, which she did not understand.

"How extraordinary; how very extraordinary!" she exclaimed at length, "that is the very thing that Ralph said of her when they first met."

"But why extraordinary? There are few men who would not endorse the opinion. Miss Brandt possesses the kind of beauty that appeals to the senses of animal creatures like ourselves. She has a far more dangerous quality than that of mere regularity of feature. She

attracts without knowing it. She is a mass of magnetism."

"O! do go on, Mr. Pennell! Tell me how she received the news you went to break to her!"

"I never broke it at all. There was no need to do so. Miss Brandt alluded to the magnificent Captain Pullen's marriage with the greatest nonchalance. She evidently estimates him at his true value, and does not consider him worth troubling her head about!"

"You astonish me! But how are we to account then for the attitude she assumed towards Miss Leyton, and the boast she made of Ralph's attentions to her?"

"Bravado, most likely! Miss Leyton goes to the Red House all aflame, like an angry turkey cock, and accuses Miss Brandt of having robbed her of her lover, and what would you have the girl do? Not cry Peccavi, surely, and lower her womanhood? She had but one course—to brave it out. Besides, you have heard only one side of the question, remember! I can imagine Miss Leyton being very 'nasty' if she liked!"

"You forget the letters which Miss Brandt wrote to Ralph and which were found in his empty grate at Richmond!"

"I do not! I remember them as only another proof of how unworthy he is of the confidence of any woman."

"Really, Mr. Pennell, you seem to be all on Miss Brandt's side!"

"I am, and for this reason. If your ideas concerning her are correct, she displayed a large amount of fortitude whilst speaking of your brother-in-law yesterday. But my own belief is, that you are mistaken—that Miss Brandt is too clever for Ralph, or any of you

—and that she cares no more for him in that way than you do. She considers doubtless that he has behaved in a most ungentlemanly manner towards them all, and so do I. I did not know what excuse to make for Ralph! I was ashamed to own him as a relation.”

“Harriet Brandt *did* then confide her supposed wrongs to you!”

“Not at all! When she mentioned Ralph’s name, it was like that of any other acquaintance. But when she was out of the room, the Baroness told me that he had behaved like a scoundrel to the girl—that he had never confided the fact of his engagement to her, but run after her on every occasion, and then after having promised to join their party in Brussels, and asked Madame Gobelli to engage his room for him, he left for England without even sending her a line of apology, nor has he taken the least notice of them since!”

“Ah! but you know the reason of his sudden departure!” cried Margaret, her soft eyes welling over with tears.

“My dear Mrs. Pullen,” said Anthony Pennell, sympathetically, “even at that sad moment, Ralph might have sent a telegram, or scratched a line of apology. We have to attend to such little courtesies, you know, even if our hearts are breaking! And how can you excuse his not having called on them, or written since? No wonder the Baroness is angry. She did not restrain her tongue in speaking of him yesterday. She said she never wished to see his face again.”

“Does she know that Elinor went to the Red House?”

“I think not! There was no mention of her name!”

"Then I suppose we may at all events consider the affair *une chose finie?*"

"I hope so, sincerely! I should not advise Master Ralph to show his face at the Red House again. The Baroness said she longed to lay her stick across his back, and I believe she is quite capable of doing so!"

"Oh! indeed she is," replied Margaret, smiling, "we heard a great many stories of her valour in that respect from Madame Lamont, the landlady of the Lion d'Or. Has Miss Brandt taken up her residence altogether with Madame Gobelli?"

"I think not! She told me her life there was very dull, and she should like to change it."

"She is in a most unfortunate position for a young girl," remarked Margaret, "left parentless, with money at her command, and in a strange country! And with the strange stigma attached to her birth—"

"I don't believe in stigmas being attached to one's birth," returned Pennell hastily, "the only stigmas worth thinking about, are those we bring upon ourselves by our misconduct—such a one, for instance, as my cousin Ralph has done with regard to Miss Brandt! I would rather be in her shoes than his. Ralph thinks, perhaps, that being a stranger and friendless she is fair game—"

"Who is that, taking my name in vain?" interrupted a languid voice at the open door, as Captain Pullen advanced into the room.

Margaret Pullen started and grew very red at being detected in discussing her brother-in-law's actions, but Anthony Pennell, who was always ruffled by his cousin's affected walk and drawl, blurted the truth right out.

"I was," he replied, hardly touching the hand which

Captain Pullen extended to him, "I was just telling Mrs. Pullen of the high estimation in which your name is held at the Red House!"

It was now Ralph's turn to grow red. His fair face flushed from chin to brow, as he repeated,

"The Red House! what Red House?"

"Did they not mention the name to you? I mean the residence of Madame Gobelli. I was dining there yesterday."

"Dining there, were you? By Jove! I didn't know you were acquainted with the woman. Isn't she a queer old party? Baroness Boots, eh? Fancy your knowing them! I thought you were a cut above that, Anthony!"

"If the Gobellis were good enough for you to be intimate with in Heyst, I suppose they are good enough for me to dine with in London, Ralph! I did not know until last evening, however, that you had left them to pay for your rooms in Brussels, or I would have taken the money over with me to defray the debt."

Ralph had seated himself by this time, but he looked very uneasy and as if he wished he had not come.

"Did the old girl engage rooms for me?" he stammered. "Well! you know the reason I could not go to Brussels, but of course if I had known that she had gone to any expense for me, I would have repaid her. Did she tell you of it herself?" he added, rather anxiously.

"Yes! and a good many more things besides. As you have happened to come in whilst we are on the question, I had better make a clean breast of it. Perhaps you have heard that Miss Leyton has been to the Red House and had an interview with Miss Brandt!"

"Yes! I've just come from Richmond, where we've had a jolly row over it," grumbled Ralph, pulling his moustaches.

"Your family all felt that sort of thing could not go on—that it must end one way or the other—and therefore I went to the Red House, ostensibly to view Madame Gobelli's collection of china, but in reality to ascertain what view of the matter she and Miss Brandt took—and to undeceive them as to your being in a position to pursue your intimacy with the young lady any further."

"And what the devil business have you to meddle in my private affairs?" demanded Captain Pullen rousing himself.

"Because, unfortunately, your mother happened to be my father's sister," replied Pennell sternly, "and the scrapes you get in harm me more than they do yourself! One officer more or less, who gets into a scrape with women, goes pretty well unnoticed, but I have attained a position in which I cannot afford to have my relations' names bandied about as having behaved in a manner unbecoming gentlemen."

"Who dares to say that of me?" cried Ralph angrily.

"Everybody who knows of the attention you paid Miss Brandt in Heyst," replied Anthony Pennell, boldly, "and without telling her that you were already engaged to be married. I do not wonder at Miss Leyton being angry about it! I only wonder she consents to have any more to do with you in the circumstances."

"O! we've settled all that!" said Ralph, testily, "we had the whole matter out at Richmond this afternoon, and I've promised to be a good boy for the future, and

never speak to a pretty woman again! You need not wonder any more about Elinor! She is only glad enough to get me back at any price!”

“Yes? And what about Miss Brandt?” enquired Pennell.

“Is she worrying about this affair?” asked Captain Pullen, quickly.

“Not a bit! I think she estimates your attentions at their true value. I was alluding to the opinion she and her friends must have formed of your character as an officer and a gentleman.”

“O! I’ll soon set all that right! I’ll run over to the Red House and see the old girl, if you two will promise not to tell Elinor!”

“I should not advise you to do that! I am afraid you might get a warm reception. I think Madame Gobelli is quite capable of having you soused in the horse-pond. You would think the same if you had heard the names she called you yesterday.”

“What did she call me?”

“Everything she could think of. She considers you have behaved not only in a most ungentlemanly manner towards her, but in a most dishonourable one to Miss Brandt. She particularly told me to tell you that she never wished to see your face again.”

“Damn her!” exclaimed Captain Pullen, wrathfully, “and all her boots and shoes into the bargain. A vulgar, coarse old tradesman’s wife! How dare she——”

“Stop a minute, Ralph! The Baroness’s status in society makes no difference in this matter. You know perfectly well that you did wrong. Let us have no more discussion of the subject.”

Captain Pullen leaned back sulkily in his chair.

"Well! if I *did* flirt a little bit more than was prudent with an uncommonly distracting little girl," he muttered presently, "I am sure I have had to pay for it! Lord Walthamstowe insists that if I do not marry Elinor before the Rangers start for Malta the engagement shall be broken off, so I suppose I must do it! But it is a doosid nuisance to be tied up at five-and-twenty, before one has half seen life! What the dickens I am to do with her when I've got her, I'm sure I don't know!"

"O! you will find married life very charming when you're used to it!" said Pennell consolingly, "and Miss Leyton is everything a fellow could wish for in a wife! Only you must give up flirting, my boy, or if I mistake not, you'll find you've caught a tartar!"

"I expect to have to give up everything," said the other with a sour mouth.

As soon as he perceived a favourable opportunity, Anthony Pennell rose to take his leave. He did not wish to quarrel with Ralph Pullen about a girl whom he had only seen once, at the same time he feared for his own self-control, if his cousin continued to mention the matter in so nonchalant a manner. Pennell had always despised Captain Pullen for his easy conceit with regard to women, and it seemed to him to have grown more detestably contemptible than before. He was anxious therefore to quit the scene of action. But, to his annoyance, when he bade Margaret good-evening, Ralph also rose and expressed his wish to walk with him in the direction of his chambers.

"I suppose you couldn't put me up for the night, old chappie!" he said with his most languid air.

"Decidedly not!" replied Pennell. "I have only my own bedroom, and I've no intention of your sharing it. Why do you not go back to Richmond, or put up at an hotel?"

"Doosid inhospitable!" remarked Captain Pullen, with a faded smile.

"Sorry you think so, but a man cannot give what he does not possess. You had better stay and keep your sister-in-law company for a little while. I have work to do and am going straight home!"

"All right! I'll walk with you a little way," persisted Ralph, and the two young men left the house together.

As soon as they found themselves in the street, Captain Pullen attacked his cousin, eagerly.

"I say, Pennell, what is the exact direction of the Red House?"

"Why do you want to know?" enquired his companion.

"Because I feel that I owe the Baroness a visit. I acknowledge that I was wrong not to write and make my apologies, but you must know what it is—with a deuce of a lot of women to look after, and the whole gang crying their eyes out, and everything thrown on my shoulders, coffin, funeral, taking them over from Heyst to England, and all—it was enough to drive everything else out of a man's head. You must acknowledge that."

"You owe no excuses to me, Pullen, neither do I quite believe in them. You have had plenty of time

since to remedy your negligence, even if you did forget to be courteous at the moment!"

"I know that, and you're quite right about the other thing. I had more reasons than one for letting the matter drop. You are a man and I can tell you with impunity what would set the women tearing my eyes out. I *did* flirt a bit with Harriet Brandt, perhaps more than was quite prudent in the circumstances—"

"You mean the circumstance of your engagement to Miss Leyton?"

"Yes and No! If I had been free, it would have been all the same—perhaps worse, for I should not have had a loophole of escape. For you see Miss Brandt is not the sort of girl that any man could marry."

"Why not?" demanded Pennell with some asperity.

"Oh! because—well! you should hear old Phillips talk of her and her parents. They were the most awful people, and she has black blood in her, her mother was a half-caste, so you see it would be impossible for any man in my position to think of marrying her! One might get a piebald son and heir! Ha! ha! ha! But putting all that aside, she is one of the demndest fascinating little women I ever came across—you would say so too, if you had seen as much of her as I did—I can't tell you what it is exactly, but she has a drawing way about her, that pulls a fellow into the net before he knows what he is about. And her voice, by Jove!—have you heard her sing?"

"I have, but that has nothing to do that I can see with the subject under discussion. You, an engaged man, who had no more right to philander with a girl, than if you had been married, appear to me to have

followed this young lady about and paid her attentions, which were, to say the least of them, compromising, never announcing the fact, meanwhile, that you were bound to Miss Leyton. After which, you left her, without a word of explanation, to think what she chose of your conduct. And now you wish to see her again, in order to apologise. Am I right?"

"Pretty well, only you make such a serious matter out of a little fun!"

"Well, then, I repeat that if you are wise, you will save yourself the trouble, Ralph! Miss Brandt is happily too sensible to have been taken in by your pretence of making love to her. She estimates you at your true value. She knows that you are engaged to Elinor Leyton—that you were engaged all the time she knew you—and, I think, she rather pities Miss Leyton for being engaged to you!"

But this point of view had never presented itself before to the inflated vanity of Ralph Pullen.

"*Pities* her!" he exclaimed, "the devil!"

"I daresay it seems incomprehensible to you that any woman should not be thankful to accept at your hands the crumbs that may fall from another's table, but with regard to Miss Brandt, I assure you it is true! And even were it otherwise, I am certain Madame Gobelli would not admit you to her house. You know the sort of person she is! She can be very violent if she chooses, and the names she called you yesterday, were not pretty ones. I had much trouble, as your relative, to stand by and listen to them quietly. Yet I could not say that they were undeserved!"

"O well! I daresay!" returned Ralph, impatiently.

“Let us allow, for the sake of argument, that you are right, and that I behaved like a brute! The matter lies only between Hally Brandt and myself. The old woman has nothing to do with it! She never met the girl till she went to Heyst. What I want to do is to see Hally again and make my peace with her! You know how easily women are won over. A pretty present—a few kisses and excuses,—a few tears—and the thing is done. I shouldn’t like to leave England without making my peace with the little girl. Couldn’t you get her to come to your chambers, and let me meet her there? Then the Baroness need know nothing about it!”

“I thought you told us just now, that you had had a reconciliation with Miss Leyton on condition that you were to be a good boy for the future. Does that not include a surreptitious meeting with Miss Brandt?”

“I suppose it does, but we have to make all sorts of promises where women are concerned. A nice kind of life a man would lead, if he consented to be tied to his wife’s apron-strings, and never go anywhere, nor see anyone, of whom she did not approve. I swore to everything she and old Walthamstowe asked me, just for peace’s sake,—but if they imagine I’m going to be hampered like that, they must be greater fools than I take them for!”

“You must do as you think right, Pullen, but I am not going to help you to break your word!”

“Tell me where the Red House is! Tell me whereabouts Hally takes her daily walks!” urged Captain Pullen.

“I shall tell you nothing—you must find out for yourself!”

"Well! you are damned particular!" exclaimed his cousin, "one would think this little half-caste was a princess of the Blood Royal. What is she, when all's said and done? The daughter of a mulatto and a man who made himself so detested that he was murdered by his own servants—the bastard of a——"

"Stop!" cried Pennell, so vehemently that the passers-by turned their heads to look at him, "I don't believe it, and if it is true, I do not wish to hear it! Miss Brandt may be all that you say—I am not in a position to contradict your assertions—but to me she represents only a friendless and unprotected woman, who has a right to our sympathy and respect."

"A friendless woman!" sneered Captain Pullen, "yes! and a doosid good-looking one into the bargain, eh, my dear fellow, and much of your sympathy and respect she would command if she were ugly and humpbacked. O! I know you, Pennell! It's no use your coming the benevolent Samaritan over me! You have an eye for a jimper waist and a trim ancle as well as most men. But I fancy your interest is rather thrown away in this quarter. Miss Brandt has a thorny path before her. She is a young lady who will have her own way, and with the glorious example of the Baroness the way is not likely to be too carefully chosen. To tell the truth, old boy, I ran away because I was afraid of falling into the trap. The girl wishes intensely to be married, and she is not a girl whom men will marry, and so—we need go no further. Only, I should not be surprised if, notwithstanding her fortune and her beauty, we should find Miss Harriet Brandt figuring before long, amongst the free lances of London."

"And you would have done your best to send her there!" replied Anthony Pennell indignantly, as he stopped on the doorstep of his Piccadilly chambers. "But I am glad to say that your folly has been frustrated this time, and Miss Brandt sees you as you are! Good-night!" and without further discussion, he turned on his heel and walked upstairs.

"By Jove!" thought Ralph, as he too went on his way, "I believe old Anthony is smitten with the girl himself, though he has only seen her once! That was the most remarkable thing about her—the ease with which she seemed to attract, looking so innocent all the while, and the deadly strength with which she resisted one's efforts to get free again. Perhaps it is as well after all that I should not meet her. I don't believe I could trust myself, only speaking of her seems to have revived the old sensation of being drawn against my will—hypnotised, I suppose the scientists would call it—to be near her, to touch her, to embrace her, until all power of resistance is gone. But I do hope old Anthony is not going to be hypnotised. He's too good for that."

Meanwhile Pennell, having reached his rooms, lighted the gas, threw himself into an armchair, and rested his head upon his hands.

"Poor little girl!" he murmured to himself. "Poor little girl!"

Anthony Pennell was a Socialist in the best and truest sense of the world. He loved his fellow creatures, both high and low, better than he loved himself. He wanted all to share alike—to be equally happy, equally comfortable—to help and be helped, to rest and depend upon one another. He knew that the dream was only a dream

—that it would never be fulfilled in his time, nor any other; that some men would be rich and some poor as long as the world lasts, and that what one man can do to alleviate the misery and privation and suffering with which we are surrounded, is very little. What little Pennell could do, however, to prove that his theories were not mere talk, he did. He made a large income by his popular writings and the greater part of it went to relieve the want of his humbler friends, not through governors and secretaries and the heads of charitable Societies, but from his own hand to theirs. But his Socialism went further and higher than this. Money was not the only thing which his fellow creatures required—they wanted love, sympathy, kindness, and consideration—and these he gave also, wherever he found that there was need. He set his face pertinaciously against all scandal and back-biting, and waged a perpetual warfare against the tyranny of men over women; the ill-treatment of children; and the barbarities practised upon dumb animals and all living things. He was a liberal-minded man, with a heart large enough and tender enough to belong to a woman—with a horror of cruelty and a great compassion for everything that was incapable of defending itself. He was always writing in defence of the People, calling the attention of those in authority to their misfortunes; their evil chances; their lack of opportunity; and their patience under tribulation. For this purpose and in order to know them thoroughly, he had gone and lived amongst them; shared their filthy dens in Whitechapel, partaken of their unappetising food in Stratford; and watched them at their labour in Homerton. His figure and his kindly face were well-known in some of

the worst and most degraded parts of London, and he could pass anywhere, without fear of a hand being lifted up against him, or an oath called after him in salutation. Anthony Pennell was, in fact, a general lover—a lover of Mankind.

And that is why he leant his head upon his hand as he ejaculated with reference to Harriet Brandt, "Poor little girl."

It seemed so terrible in his eyes that just because she was friendless, and an orphan, just because her parents had been, perhaps, unworthy, just because she had a dark stream mingling with her blood, just because she needed the more sympathy and kindness, the more protection and courtesy, she should be considered fit prey for the sensualist—a fit subject to wipe men's feet upon!

What difference did it make to Harriet Brandt herself, that she was marked with an hereditary taint? Did it render her less beautiful, less attractive, less graceful and accomplished? Were the sins of the fathers ever to be visited upon the children?—was no sympathetic fellow-creature to be found to say, "If it is so, let us forget it! It is not your fault nor mine! Our duty is to make each other's lives as happy as possible and trust the rest to God."

He hoped as he sat there, that before long, Harriet Brandt would find a friend for life, who would never remind her of anything outside her own loveliness and loveable qualities.

Presently he rose, with a sigh, and going to his bookcase drew thence an uncut copy of his last work, "God and the People." It had been a tremendous suc-

cess, having already reached the tenth edition. It dealt largely, as its title indicated, with his favourite theory, but it was light and amusing also, full of strong nervous language, and bristling every here and there, with wit—not strained epigrams, such as no Society conversation-alists ever tossed backward and forward to each other—but honest, mirth-provoking humour, arising from the humorous side of Pennell's own character, which ever had a good-humoured jest for the oddities and comicalities of everyday life.

He regarded the volume for a moment as though he were considering if it were an offering worthy of its destination, and then he took up a pen and transcribed upon the fly leaf the name of Harriet Brandt—only her name, nothing more.

“She seems intelligent,” he thought, “and she may like to read it. Who knows, if there is any fear of the sad destiny which Ralph prophesies for her, whether I may not be happy enough to turn her ideas into a worthier and more wholesome direction. With an independent fortune, how much good might she not accomplish, amongst those less happily situated than herself! But the other idea—No, I will not entertain it for a moment! She is too good, too pure, too beautiful, for so horrible a fate! Poor little girl! Poor, poor little girl!”

CHAPTER XV.

THE holiday season being now over, and the less fashionable people returned to town, Harriet Brandt's curiosity was much excited by the number of visitors who called at the Red House, but were never shewn into the drawing-room. As many as a dozen might arrive in the course of an afternoon and were taken by Miss Wynward straight upstairs to the room where Madame Gobelli and Mr. Milliken so often shut themselves up together. These mysterious visitors were not objects of charity either, but well-dressed men and women, some of whom came in their own carriages, and all of whom appeared to be of the higher class of society. The Baroness had left off going to the factory, also, and stayed at home every day, apparently with the sole reason of being at hand to receive her visitors.

Harriet could not understand it at all, and after having watched two fashionably attired ladies accompanied by a gentleman, ascend the staircase, to Madame Gobelli's room, one afternoon, she ventured to sound Miss Wynward on the subject.

"Who were the ladies who went upstairs just now?" she asked.

"Friends of the Baroness, Miss Brandt!" was the curt reply.

"But why do they not come down to the drawing-

room then? What does Madame Gobelli do with them in that little room upstairs? I was passing one day just after someone had entered, and I heard the key turned in the lock. What is all the secrecy about?"

"There is no secrecy on my part, Miss Brandt. You know the position I hold here. When I have shewn the visitors upstairs, according to my Lady's directions, my duty is done!"

"But you must know why they come to see her!"

"I know nothing. If you are curious on the subject, you must ask the Baroness."

But Harriet did not like to do that. The Baroness had become less affectionate to her of late—her fancy was already on the wane—she no longer called the attention of strangers to her young friend as the "daughter of the house"—and Harriet felt the change, though she could scarcely have defined where it exactly lay. She had begun to feel less at home in her hostess's presence, and her high spirit chafed at the alteration in her manner. She realised, as many had done before her, that she had out-stayed her welcome. But her curiosity respecting the people who visited Madame Gobelli upstairs was none the less. She confided it to Bobby—poor Bobby who grew whiter and more languid ever day—but her playful threat to invade the sacred precincts and find out what the Baroness and her friends were engaged upon, was received by the youth with horror. He trembled as he begged her not to think of such a thing.

"Hally, you mustn't, indeed you mustn't! You don't know—you have no idea—what might not happen to you, if you offended Mamma by breaking in upon her

privacy. O! don't, pray don't! She can be so terrible at times—I do not know what she might not do or say!”

“My dear Bobby, I was only in fun! I have not the least idea of doing anything so rude. Only, if you think that I am frightened of your Mamma or any other woman, you are very much mistaken. It's all nonsense! No one person can harm another in this world!”

“O! yes, they can—if they have *help*,” replied the boy, shaking his head.

“Help! what help? The help of Mr. Milliken, I suppose! I would rather fight him than the Baroness any day—but I fear neither of them.”

“O! Hally, you are wrong,” said the lad, “you must be careful, indeed you must—for my sake!”

“Why! you silly Bobby, you are actually trembling! However, I promise you I will do nothing rash! And I shall not be here much longer now! Your Mamma is getting tired of me, I can see that plainly enough! She has hardly spoken a word to me for the last two days. I am going to ask Mr. Pennell, to advise me where to find another home!”

“No! no!” cried the lad, clinging to her, “you shall not leave us! Mr. Pennell shall not take you away! I will kill him first!”

He was getting terribly jealous of Anthony Pennell, but Harriet laughed at his complaints and reproaches as the emanations of a love-sick schoolboy. She was flattered by his feverish longing for her society, and his outspoken admiration of her beauty, but she did not suppose for one moment that Bobby was capable of a lasting, or dangerous, sentiment.

Mr. Pennell had become a familiar figure at the Red House by this time. His first visit had been speedily succeeded by another, at which he had presented Harriet Brandt with the copy of his book—an attention, which had he known it, flattered her vanity more than any praises of her beauty could have done. A plain woman likes to be told that she is good-looking, a handsome one that she is clever. Harriet Brandt was not unintelligent, on the contrary she had inherited a very fair amount of brains from her scientific father—but no one ever seemed to have found it out, until Anthony Pennell came her way. She was a little tired of being told that she had lovely eyes, and the most fascinating smile, she knew all that by heart, and craved for something new. Mr. Pennell had supplied the novelty by talking to her as if her intellect were on a level with his own—as if she were perfectly able to understand and sympathise with his quixotic plans for the alleviation of the woes of all mankind—with his Arcadian dreams of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,—and might help them also, if she chose, not with money only, but by raising her own voice in the Cause of the People. Harriet had never been treated so by anyone before, and her ardent, impetuous, passionate nature, which had a large amount of gratitude in its composition, fixed itself upon her new friend with a vehemence which neither of them would find it easy to overcome—or to disentangle themselves from. Her love (eager to repair the void left by the desertion of Captain Pullen) had poured itself, by means of looks and sighs and little timid, tender touches upon Anthony Pennell like a mountain torrent that had burst its bounds, and he had been responsive—he had opened

his arms to receive the flood, actuated not only by the admiration which he had conceived for her from the first, but by the intense, yearning pity which her loneliness and friendlessness had evoked in his generous, compassionate nature. In fact they were desperately in love with each other, and Harriet was expecting each time he came, to hear Anthony Pennell say that he could no longer live without her. And Bobby looked on from a little distance—and suffered. The next time that Mr. Pennell came to see her, Harriet confided to him the mystery of the upstairs room, and asked his opinion as to what it could possibly mean.

“Perhaps they are people connected with the boot trade,” suggested Anthony jestingly, “does Madame keep a stock of boots and shoes up there, do you think?”

“O! no! Mr. Pennell, you must not joke about it! This is something serious! Poor Bobby grew as white as a sheet when I proposed to make a raid upon the room some day and discover the mystery, and said that his mother was a terrible woman, and able to do me great harm if I offended her!”

“I quite agree with Bobby in his estimate of his Mamma being a terrible woman,” replied Mr. Pennell, “but it is all nonsense about her being able to harm you! *I* should soon see about that!”

“What would you do?” asked Harriet, with downcast eyes.

“What would I *not* do to save you from anything disagreeable, let alone anything dangerous. But the Baroness is too fond of you, surely, to do you any harm!”

Harriet pursed up her lips.

"I am not so sure about her being fond of me, Mr. Pennell! She used to profess to be, I know, but lately her manner has very much altered. She will pass half a day without speaking a word to me, and they have cut off wine and champagne and everything nice from the dinner table. I declare the meals here are sometimes not fit to eat. And I believe they grudge me the little I consider worthy my attention."

"But why do you stay here, if you fancy you are not welcome?" asked Pennell, earnestly, "you are not dependent on these people or their hospitality."

"But where am I to go?" said the girl, "I know no one in London, and Miss Wynward says that I am too young to live at an hotel by myself!"

"Miss Wynward is quite right! You are far too young and too beautiful. You don't know what wicked men and women there are in the world, who would delight in fleecing an innocent lamb like you. But I can soon find you a home where you could stay in respectability and comfort, until—until——"

"Until *what*," asked Harriet, with apparent ingenuousness, for she knew well enough what was coming.

They were seated on one of those little couches made expressly for conversation, where a couple can sit back to back, with their faces turned to one another. Harriet half raised her slumbrous black eyes as she put the question, and met the fire in his own. He stretched out his arms and caught her round the waist.

"Hally! Hally! you know—there is no need for me to tell you! Will you come home to me, dearest? Don't ever say that you are friendless again! Here is

your friend and your lover and your devoted slave for ever! My darling—my beautiful Hally, say you will be my wife—and make me the very happiest man in all the world!”

She did not shrink from his warm wooing—that was not her nature! Her eyes waked up and flashed fire, responsive to his own; she let her head rest on his shoulder, and turned her lips upwards eagerly to meet his kiss, she cooed her love into his ear, and clasped him tightly round the neck as if she would never let him go.

“I love you—I love you,” she kept on murmuring, “I have loved you from the very first!”

“O! Hally, how happy it makes me to hear you say so,” he replied, “how few women have the honesty and courage to avow their love as you do. My sweet child of the sun! The women in this cold country have no idea of the joy that a mutual love like ours has the power to bestow. We will love each other for ever and ever, my Hally, and when our bodies are withered by age, our spirits shall still go loving on.”

He—the man whose whole thoughts hitherto had been so devoted to the task of ameliorating the condition of his fellow-creatures, that he had had no time to think of dalliance, succumbed as fully to its pleasures now, as the girl whose life had simply been a ripening process for the seed which had burst forth into flower. They were equally passionate—equally loving—equally unreserved—and they were soon absorbed in their own feelings, and noticed nothing that was taking place around them.

But they were not as entirely alone as they imagined.

A pale face full of misery was watching them through one of the panes in the French windows, gazing at what seemed like his death doom, too horribly fascinated to tear himself away. Bobby stood there and saw Hally—*his* Hally, as he had often fondly called her, without knowing the meaning of the word—clasped in the arms of this stranger, pressing her lips to his, and being released with tumbled hair and a flushed face, only to seek the source of her delight again. At last Bobby could stand the bitter sight no longer, and with a low moan, he fled to his own apartment and flung himself, face downward on the bed. And Anthony Pennell and Harriet Brandt continued to make love to each other, until the shadows lengthened, and six o'clock was near at hand.

"I must go now, my darling," he said at last, "though it is hard to tear myself away. But I am so happy, Hally, so very, very happy, that I dare not complain."

"Why cannot you stay the evening?" she urged.

"I had better not! I have not been asked in the first instance, and if what you say about the Baroness's altered demeanour towards yourself be true, I am afraid I should find it difficult to keep my temper. But we part for a very short time, my darling! The first thing to-morrow, I shall see about another home for you, where I can visit you as freely as I like! And as soon as it can ever be, Hally, we will be married—is that a promise?"

"A promise, yes! a thousand times over, Anthony! I long for the time when I shall be your wife!"

"God bless you, my sweet! You have made my future life look all sunshine! I will write to you as soon

as ever I have news and then you will lose no time in leaving your present home, will you?"

"Not an instant that I can help," replied Harriet, eagerly; "I am longing to get away. I feel that I have lost my footing here!"

And with another long embrace, the lovers parted. As soon as Anthony had left her, Harriet ran up to her room, to cool her feverish face and change her dress for dinner. She was really and truly fond of the man she had just promised to marry, and if anything could have the power to transform her into a thinking and responsible woman, it would be marriage with Anthony Pennell. She was immensely proud that so clever and popular a writer should have chosen her from out the world of women to be his wife, and she loved him for the excellent qualities he had displayed towards his fellow men, as well as for the passionate warmth he had shewn for herself. She was a happier girl than she had ever been in all her life before, as she stood, flushed and triumphant, in front of her mirror and saw the beautiful light in her dark eyes, and the luxuriant growth of her dusky hair, and the carmine of her lips, and loved every charm she possessed for Anthony's sake. She felt less vexed even with the Baroness than she had done, and determined that she would not break the news of her intended departure from the Red House, that evening, but try to leave as pleasant an impression behind her as she could! And she put on the lemon-coloured frock, though Anthony was not there to see it, from a feeling that since he approved of her, she must be careful of her appearance for the future, to do justice to his opinion.

Madame Gobelli appeared to be in a worse temper than usual that evening. She stumped in to the dining-room and took her seat at table without vouchsafing a word to Harriet, although she had not seen her since luncheon time. She found fault with everything that Miss Wynward did, and telling her that she grew stupider and stupider each day, ordered her to attend her upstairs after dinner, as she had some friends coming and needed her assistance. The ex-governess did not answer at first, and the Baroness sharply demanded if she had heard her speak.

"Yes! my lady," she replied, slowly, "but I trust that you will excuse my attendance, as I have made an engagement for this evening!"

Madame Gobelli boiled over with rage.

"Engagement! What do you mean by making an engagement without asking my leave first? You can't keep it! I want you to 'elp me in something and you'll 'ave to come!"

"You must forgive me," repeated Miss Wynward, firmly, "but I cannot do as you wish!"

Harriet opened her eyes in amazement. Miss Wynward refusing a request from Madame Gobelli. What would happen next?

The Baroness grew scarlet in the face. She positively trembled with rage.

"Old your tongue!" she screamed. "You'll do as I say, or you leave my 'ouse."

"Then I will leave your house!" replied Miss Wynward.

Madame Gobelli was thunderstruck! Where was this insolent menial, who had actually dared to defy her,

going? What friends had she? What home to go to? She had received no salary from her for years past, but had accepted board and lodging and cast-off clothes in return for her services. How could she face the world without money?

"You go at your peril," she exclaimed, hoarse with rage, "you know what will 'appen to you if you try to resist me! I 'ave those that will 'elp me to be revenged on my enemies! You know that those I 'ate, *die!* And when I 'ave my knife in a body, I turn it! You 'ad better be careful, and think twice about what you're going to do."

"Your ladyship cannot frighten me any longer," replied Miss Wynward, calmly, "I thank God and my friends that I have got over that! Nor do I believe any more in your boasted powers of revenge! If they are really yours, you should be ashamed to use them."

"Gustave!" shrieked the Baroness, "get up and put this woman from the door. She don't stop in the Red 'Ouse another hour! Let 'er pack up, 'er trumpery and go! Do you 'ear me, Gustave? Turn 'er out of the room!"

"Mein tear! mein tear! a little patience! Miss Wynward will go quietly! But the law, mein tear, the law! We must be careful!"

"Damn the law!" exclaimed the Baroness. "'Ere, where's that devil Bobby? Why ain't 'e at dinner? What's the good of my 'aving a 'usband and a son if neither of 'em will do my bidding!"

Then everyone looked round and discovered that Bobby was not at the table.

"Where's Bobby?" demanded the Baroness of the servant in waiting.

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied the domestic, who like most of Madame Gobelli's dependents, talked as familiarly with her as though they had been on an equality. "The last time I saw 'im was at luncheon."

"I will go and look for him," said Miss Wynward quietly, as she rose from table.

"No! you don't!" exclaimed the Baroness insolently, "you don't touch my child nor my 'usband again whilst you remain under this roof. I won't 'ave them polluted by your fingers. 'Ere, Sarah, you go upstairs and see if Bobby's in 'is room. It'll be the worse for 'im if 'e isn't."

Sarah took her way upstairs, in obedience to her employer's behest, and the next minute a couple of shrieks, loud and terrified, proceeded from the upper story. They were in Sarah's voice, and they startled everyone at the dinner table.

"Oh! what is that?" exclaimed Harriet, as her face grew white with fear.

"Something is wrong!" said Miss Wynward, as she hastily left the room.

The Baroness said nothing, until Miss Wynward's voice was heard calling out over the banisters,

"Baron! will you come here, please, at once!"

Then she said,

"Gustave! 'elp me up," and steadying herself by means of her stick, she proceeded to the upper story, accompanied by her husband and Harriet Brandt. They were met on the landing by Miss Wynward, who addressed herself exclusively to the Baron.

"Will you send for a doctor at once," she said eagerly, "Bobby is very ill, very ill indeed!"

"What is the matter?" enquired the stolid German.

"It's all rubbish!" exclaimed Madame Gobelli, forcing her way past the ex-governess, "ow can 'e be ill when 'e was running about all the morning? 'Ere, Bobby," she continued, addressing the prostrate figure of her son which was lying face downward on the bed, "get up at once and don't let's 'ave any of your nonsense, or I'll give you such a taste of my stick as you've never 'ad before! Get up, I say, at once now!"

She had laid hold of her son's arm, and was about to drag him down upon the floor, when Miss Wynward interposed with a face of horror.

"Leave him alone!" she cried, indignantly. "Woman! cannot you see what is the matter? Your son has left you! He is *dead!*"

The Baroness was about to retort that it was a lie and she didn't believe it, when a sudden trembling overtook her, which she was powerless to resist. Her whole face shook as if every muscle had lost control, and her cumbersome frame followed suit. She did not cry, nor call out, but stood where the news had reached her, immovable, except for that awful shaking, which made her sway from head to foot. The Baron on hearing the intelligence turned round to go downstairs and dispatch William, who was employed in the stables, in search of a medical man. Miss Wynward took the lifeless body in her arms and tenderly turned it over, kissing the pallid face as she did so—when Harriet Brandt, full of mournful curiosity, advanced to have a look at her dead playmate. Her appearance, till then unnoticed, seemed to wake the paralysed energies of the Baroness into life.

She pushed the girl from the bed with a violence that sent her reeling against the mantelshef, whilst she exclaimed furiously,

“Out of my sight! Don’t you dare to touch ’im! This is all *your* doing, you poisonous, wicked creature!”

Harriet stared at her hostess in amazement! Had she suddenly gone mad with grief?

“What do you mean, Madame?” she cried.

“What I say! I ought to ’ave known better than to let you enter an ’ouse of mine! I was a fool not to ’ave left you be’ind me at Heyst, to practise your devilish arts on your army captains and foreign grocers, instead of letting you come within touch of my innocent child!”

“You are mad!” cried Harriet. “What have I done? Do you mean to insinuate that Bobby’s death has anything to do with me?”

“It is *you* ’oo ’ave killed ’im,” screamed the Baroness, shaking her stick, “it’s your poisonous breath that ’as sapped ’is! I should ’ave seen it from the beginning. Do you suppose I don’t know your ’istory? Do you think I ’aven’t ’eard all about your parents and their vile doings—that I don’t know that you’re a common bastard, and that your mother was a devilish negress, and your father a murderer? Why didn’t I listen to my friends and forbid you the ’ouse?”

“Miss Wynward!” said Harriet, who had turned deadly white at this unexpected attack, “what can I say? What can I do?”

“Leave the room, my dear, leave the room! Her ladyship is not herself? She does not know what she is saying!”

“Don’t I?” screamed Madame Gobelli, barring the

way to the door, "I am telling 'er nothing but the truth, and she doesn't go till she 'as 'eard it! She has the vampire's blood in 'er and she poisons everybody with whom she comes in contact. Wasn't Mrs. Pullen and Mademoiselle Brimont both taken ill from being too intimate with 'er, and didn't the baby die because she carried it about and breathed upon it? And now she 'as killed my Bobby in the same way—curse 'er!"

Even when reiterating the terrible truth in which she evidently believed, Madame Gobelli showed no signs of breaking down, but stood firm, leaning heavily on her stick and trembling in every limb.

Harriet Brandt's features had assumed a scared expression.

"Miss Wynward!" she stammered piteously, "Oh! Miss Wynward! this cannot be true!"

"Of course not! Of course not!" replied the other, soothingly, "her ladyship will regret that she has spoken so hastily to you to-morrow."

"I shan't regret it!" said the Baroness sturdily, "for it is the truth! Her father and her mother were murderers who were killed by their own servants in revenge for their atrocities, and they left their curse upon this girl—the curse of black blood and of the vampire's blood which kills everything which it caresses. Look back over your past life," she continued to Harriet, "and you'll see that it's the case! And if you don't believe me, go and ask your friend Dr. Phillips, for 'e knew your infamous parents and the curse that lies upon you!"

"Madame! Madame!" cried Miss Wynward, "is this a moment for such recrimination? If all this were true,

it is no fault of Miss Brandt's! Think of what lies here, and that he loved her, and the thought will soften your feelings!"

"But it don't!" exclaimed the Baroness, "when I look at my dead son, I could kill 'er, because she has killed 'im."

And in effect, she advanced upon Harriet with so vengeful a look that the girl with a slight cry, darted from the room, and rushed into her own.

"For shame!" said Miss Wynward, whose previous fear of the Baroness seemed to have entirely evaporated, "how dare you intimidate an innocent woman in the very presence of Death?"

"Don't you try to browbeat me!" replied the Baroness.

"I will tell you what I think," said Miss Wynward boldly, "and that is, that you should blush to give way to your evil temper in the face of God's warning to yourself! You accuse that poor girl of unholy dealings—what can you say of your own? You, who for years past have made money by deceiving your fellow creatures in the grossest manner—who have professed to hold communication with the spiritual world for their satisfaction when, if any spirits have come to you, they must have been those of devils akin to your own! And because I refused to help you to deceive—to take the place of that miserable cur Milliken and play cheating tricks with cards, and dress up stuffed figures to further your money-getting ends, you threatened me with loss of home and character and friends, until, God forgive me, I consented to further the fraud, from fear of starving. But now, thank Heaven, I have no more fear of you!

Yes! you may shake your stick at me, and threaten to take my life, but it is useless! *This,*" pointing to the dead boy upon the bed, "was the only tie I had to the Red House, and as soon as he is dressed for his grave, I shall leave you for ever!"

"And where would you go?" enquired the Baroness. The voice did not sound like her own; it was the cracked dry voice of a very old woman.

"That is no concern of yours, my lady," replied Miss Wynward, as she prepared to quit the room. "Be good enough to let me pass! The inexcusable manner in which you have insulted that poor young lady, Miss Brandt, makes me feel that my first duty is to her!"

"I forbid you—" commenced Madame Gobelli in her old tone, but the ex-governess simply looked her in the face and passed on. She made the woman feel that her power was gone.

Miss Wynward found Harriet in her own room, tossing all her possessions into her travelling trunks. There was no doubt of her intention. She was going to leave the Red House.

"Not at this time of night, my dear," said Miss Wynward, kindly, "it is nearly nine o'clock."

"I would go if I had to walk the street all night!" replied Harriet, feverishly.

Her eyes were inflamed with crying, and she shook like an aspen leaf.

"Oh! Miss Wynward, such awful things to say! What could she mean? What have I done to be so cruelly insulted? And when I am so sorry for poor Bobby too!"

She began to cry afresh as she threw dresses, mantles, stockings, and shoes one on the top of the other, in her endeavour to pack as quickly as possible.

“Let me help you, dear Miss Brandt! It is cruel that you should be driven from the house in this way! But I am going too, as soon as the doctor has been and dear Bobby’s body may be prepared for burial. It is a great grief to me, Miss Brandt; I have had the care of him since he was five years old, and I loved him like my own. But I am glad he is dead! I am glad he has escaped from it all, for this is a wicked house, a godless, deceiving and slanderous house, and this trouble has fallen on it as a Nemesis. I will not stay here a moment longer now he has gone! I shall join my friends to-morrow.”

“I am glad you have friends,” said Harriet, “for I can see you are not happy here! Do they live far off? Have you sufficient money for your journey? Forgive my asking!”

Miss Wynward stooped down and kissed the girl’s brow.

“Thank you so much for your kind thought, but it is unnecessary. You will be surprised perhaps,” continued Miss Wynward, blushing, “but I am going to be married.”

“And so am I,” was on Harriet’s lips, when she laid her head down on the lid of her trunk and began to cry anew. “Oh! Miss Wynward, what did she mean? Can there be any truth in it? Is there something poisonous in my nature that harms those with whom I come in contact? How can it be? *How* can it be?”

"No! no! of course not!" replied her friend, "Cannot you see that it was the Baroness's temper that made her speak so cruelly to you? But you are right to go! Only, where are you going?"

"I do not know! I am so ignorant of London. Can you advise me?"

"You will communicate with your friends to-morrow?" asked Miss Wynward anxiously.

"Oh! yes! as soon as I can!"

"Then I should go to the Langham Hotel in Portland Place for to-night at all events! There you will be safe till your friends advise you further. What can I do to help you?"

"Ask Sarah or William to fetch a cab! And to have my boxes placed on it! There is a *douceur* for them," said Harriet, placing a handsome sum in Miss Wynward's hand.

"And you will not see the Baroness again?" asked her companion.

"No! no! for God's sake, no. I could not trust myself! I can never look upon her face again!"

In a few minutes the hired vehicle rolled away from the door, bearing Harriet Brandt and her possessions to the Langham Hotel, and Miss Wynward returned to the room where Bobby lay. Madame Gobelli stood exactly where she had left her, gazing at the corpse. There were no tears in her eyes—only the continuous shaking of her huge limbs.

"Come!" said Miss Wynward, not unkindly, "you had better sit down, and let me bring you a glass of wine! This terrible shock has been too much for you."

But the Baroness only pushed her hand away, impatiently.

"Who was that driving away just now?" she enquired.

"Miss Brandt! You have driven her from the house with your cruel and unnecessary accusations. No one liked Bobby better than she did!"

"Has the doctor arrived?"

"I expect so! I hear the Baron's voice in the hall now!"

Almost as she spoke, the Baron and the doctor entered the room. The medical man did what was required of him. He felt the heart and pulse of the corpse—turned back the eyelids—sighed professionally, and asked how long it was since it had happened.

He was told that it was about an hour since they had found him.

"Ah! he has been dead longer than that! Three hours at the least, maybe four! I am afraid there must be an inquest, and it would be advisable in the interests of science to have a post mortem. A great pity, a fine grown lad—nineteen years old, you say—shall probably detect hidden mischief in the heart and lungs. I will make all the necessary arrangements with the Baron. Good evening!"

And the doctor bowed himself out of sight again.

"It is quite true then," articulated the Baroness thickly. "He is gone!"

"Oh! yes, my lady, he is gone, poor dear boy! I felt sure of that!"

"It is quite certain?"

“Quite certain! The body is already stiffening!”

The Baroness did not utter a sound, but Miss Wynward glancing at her, saw her body sway slowly backwards and forwards once or twice, before it fell heavily to the ground, stricken with paralysis.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS was a great favourite with the *beau sexe*. He was so mild and courteous, so benevolent and sympathetic, that they felt sure he might be trusted with their little secrets. Women, both old and young, invaded his premises daily, and therefore it was no matter of surprise to him, when, whilst he was still occupied with his breakfast on the morning following Harriet Brandt's flight from the Red House, his confidential servant Charles announced that a young lady was waiting to see him in his consulting room.

"No name, Charles?" demanded the doctor.

"No name, Sir!" replied the discreet Charles without the ghost of a smile.

"Say that I will be with her in a minute!"

Doctor Phillips finished his cutlet and his coffee before he rose from table. He knew what ladies' confidences were like and that he should not have much chance of returning to finish an interrupted meal.

But as he entered his consulting room, his air of indifference changed to one of surprise. Pacing restlessly up and down the carpet, was Harriet Brandt, but so altered that he should hardly have recognised her. Her face was puffy and swollen, as though she had wept all night, her eyelids red and inflamed, her whole demeanour wild and anxious.

"My dear young lady—is it possible that I see Miss Brandt?" the doctor began.

She turned towards him and coming up close to his side, grasped his arm. "I must speak to you!" she exclaimed, without further preliminary, "you are the only person who can set my doubts at rest."

"Well! well! well!" he said, soothingly, for the girl looked and spoke as though her mind were disordered. "You may rely that I will do all I can for you! But let us sit down first!"

"No! no!" cried Harriet, "there is no time, I cannot rest; you must satisfy my mind at once, or I shall go mad! I have not closed my eyes all night—the time was interminable, but how could I sleep! I seemed to be torn in pieces by ten thousand devils!"

"My dear child," said Doctor Phillips, as he laid his hand on hers and looked her steadily in the face, "you are over-excited. You must try to restrain yourself."

He went up to a side table and, pouring out some cordial, made her drink it. Harriet gulped it down, and sank back exhausted in a chair. She was weak and worn-out with the excitement she had passed through.

"Come! that is better," said the doctor, as he saw the tears stealing from beneath her closed eyelids, "now, don't hurry yourself! Keep quiet till you feel strong enough to speak, and then tell me what it is that brings you here!"

The allusion appeared to stir up all her misery again. She sat upright and grasped the doctor by the arm as she had done at first.

"You must tell me," she said breathlessly, "you must tell me all I want to know. They say you knew my father and mother in Jamaica! Is that true!"

The old doctor began to feel uncomfortable. It is

one thing to warn those in whom you are interested against a certain person, or persons, and another to be confronted with the individual you have spoken of, and forced to repeat your words. Yet Doctor Phillips was innocent of having misjudged, or slandered anyone.

"I *did* know your father and mother—for a short time!" he answered cautiously.

"And were they married to each other?"

"My dear young lady, what is the use of dragging up such questions now? Your parents are both gone to their account—why not let all that concerned them rest also?"

"No! no! you forget that I live—to suffer the effects of their wrong-doing! I *must* know the truth—I will not leave the house until you tell me! Were they married? Am I a—a—bastard?"

"If you insist upon knowing, I believe they were not married—at least it was the general opinion in the Island. But would not Mr. Tarver be the proper person to inform you of anything which you may wish to know?"

Harriet seized his hand and carried it to her forehead—it was burning hot.

"Feel that!" she exclaimed, "and you would have me wait for weeks before I could get any satisfaction from Mr. Tarver, and not then perhaps! Do you think I could live through the agony of suspense. I should kill myself before the answer to my letter came. No! you are the only person that can give me any satisfaction. Madame Gobelli told me to ask you for the truth, if I did not believe her!"

"Madame Gobelli," reiterated the doctor in surprise.

"Yes! I was staying with her at the Red House

until last night, and then she was so cruel to me that I left. Her son Bobby is dead, and she accused me of having killed him. She said that my father was a murderer and my mother a negress—that they were both so wicked that their own servants killed them, and that I have inherited all their vices. She said that it was *I* who killed Mrs. Pullen's baby and that I had vampire blood in me, and should poison everyone I came in contact with. What does she mean? Tell me the truth, for God's sake, for more depends upon it than you have any idea of."

"Madame Gobelli was extremely wrong to speak in such a manner, and I do not know on what authority she did so. What can she know of your parents or their antecedents?"

"But you—you—" cried Harriet feverishly, "what do *you* say?"

Doctor Phillips was silent. He did not know what to say. He was not a man who could tell a lie glibly and appear as if he were speaking the truth. Patients always guessed when he had no hope to give them, however soothing and carefully chosen his words might be. He regarded the distracted girl before him for some moments in compassionate silence, and then he answered:

"I have said already that if a daughter cannot hear any good of her parents, she had better hear nothing at all!"

"Then it is true—my father and mother were people so wicked and so cruel that their names are only fit for execration. If you could have said a good word for them, you would! I can read that in your eyes!"

"The purity and charity of your own life can do much to wipe out the stain upon theirs," said the doctor. "You have youth and money, and the opportunity of doing good. You may be as beloved, as they were——"

"Hated," interposed the girl, "I understand you perfectly! But what about my possessing the fatal power of injuring those I come in contact with! What truth is there in that? Answer me, for God's sake! Have I inherited the vampire's blood? Who bequeathed to me that fatal heritage?"

"My dear Miss Brandt, you must not talk of such a thing! You are alluding only to a superstition!"

"But have I got it, whatever it may be?" persisted Harriet. "Had I anything to do with the baby's death, or with that of Bobby Bates? I loved them both! Was it my love that killed them? Shall I always kill every-body I love? I *must* know—I *will*!"

"Miss Brandt, you have now touched upon a subject that is little thought of or discussed amongst medical men, but that is undoubtedly true. The natures of persons differ very widely. There are some born into this world who nourish those with whom they are associated; they *give out* their magnetic power, and their families, their husbands or wives, children and friends, feel the better for it. There are those, on the other hand, who *draw* from their neighbours, sometimes making large demands upon their vitality—sapping their physical strength, and feeding upon them, as it were, until they are perfectly exhausted and unable to resist disease. This proclivity has been likened to that of the vampire bat who is said to suck the breath of its victims. And

it was doubtless to this fable that Madame Gobelli alluded when speaking to you."

"But have I got it? Have I got it?" the girl demanded, eagerly.

The doctor looked at her lustrous glowing eyes, at her parted feverish lips; at the working hands clasped together; the general appearance of excited sensuality, and thought it was his duty to warn her, at least a little, against the dangers of indulging such a temperament as she unfortunately possessed. But like all medical men, he temporised.

"I should certainly say that your temperament was more of the *drawing* than the *yielding* order, Miss Brandt, but that is not your fault, you know. It is a natural organism. But I think it is my duty to warn you that you are not likely to make those with whom you intimately associate, stronger either in mind or body. You will always exert a weakening and debilitating effect upon them, so that after awhile, having sapped their brains, and lowered the tone of their bodies, you will find their affection, or friendship for you visibly decrease. You will have, in fact, *sucked them dry*. So, if I may venture to advise you I would say, if there is any one person in the world whom you most desire to benefit and retain the affection of, let that be the very person from whom you separate, as often as possible. You must never hope to keep anyone near you for long, without injuring them. Make it your rule through life never to cleave to any one person altogether, or you will see that person's interest in you wax and wane, until it is destroyed!"

"And what if I—marry?" asked Harriet, in a strained voice.

"If you insist upon my answering that question, I should advise you seriously *not* to marry! I do not think yours is a temperament fitted for married life, nor likely to be happy in it! You will not be offended by my plain speaking, I hope. Remember, you have forced it from me!"

"And that is the truth, medically and scientifically—that I must not marry?" she repeated, dully.

"I think it would be unadvisable, but everyone must judge for himself in such matters. But marriage is not, after all, the ultimatum of earthly bliss, Miss Brandt! Many married couples would tell you it is just the reverse. And with a fortune at your command, you have many pleasures and interests quite apart from that very over-rated institution of matrimony. But don't think I am presuming to do more than advise you. There is no real reason—medical or legal—why you should not choose for yourself in the matter!"

"Only—only—that those I cling to most nearly, will suffer from the contact," said Harriet in the same strained tones.

"Just so!" responded the doctor, gaily, "and an old man's advice to you is, to keep out of it as he has done! And now—if there is anything more—" he continued, "that I can do for you——"

"Nothing more, thank you," replied the girl rising, "I understand it all now!"

"Will you not see your old friend, Mrs. Pullen, before you go?" asked the doctor. "She and her husband are staying with me!"

"Oh! no, no," cried Harriet, shrinking from the idea, "I *could* not see her, I would rather go back at once!"

And she hurried from the consulting-room as she spoke.

Doctor Phillips stood for awhile musing, after her departure. Had he done right, he thought, in telling her, yet how in the face of persistent questioning, could he have done otherwise? His thoughts were all fixed upon Ralph Pullen and the scenes that had taken place lately with him, respecting this girl. He did not dream she had an interest in Anthony Pennell. He did not know that they had met more than once. He thought she might still be pursuing Ralph; still expecting that he might break his engagement with Miss Leyton in order to marry herself; and he believed he had done the wisest thing in trying to crush any hopes she might have left concerning him.

"A most dangerous temperament," he said to himself, as he prepared to receive another patient, "one that is sufficient to mar a man's life, if not to kill him entirely. I trust that she and Captain Pullen may never meet again. It was evident that my remarks on marriage disappointed the poor child! Ah! well, she will be much better without it!"

And here the discreet Charles softly opened the door and ushered in another lady.

An hour later, Anthony Pennell, who had projected a visit to the Red House that afternoon, received a note by a commissioner instead, containing a few, hurried lines. "Come to me as soon as you can," it said, "I have left Madame Gobelli. I am at the Langham Hotel, and very unhappy!" Needless to say that ten minutes

after the reception of this news, her lover was rushing to her presence, as fast as hansom wheels could take him.

He was very desperately and truly in love with Harriet Brandt. Like most men who use their brains in fiction, his work, whilst in course of progression, occupied his energies to such an extent that he had no time or thought for anything else. But the burden once lifted, the romance written, the strain and anxiety removed, the pendulum swung in the other direction, and Anthony Pennell devoted all his attention to pleasure and amusement. He had been set down by his colleagues as a reserved and cold-blooded man with regard to the other sex, but he was only self-contained and thoughtful. He was as warm by nature, as Harriet herself, and once sure of a response, could make love with the best, and as he flew to her assistance now. He resolved that if anything unpleasant had occurred to drive her from the Red House, and launch her friendless on the world, he would persuade her to marry him at once, and elect him her protector and defence.

His fair face flushed with anticipation as he thought of the joy it would be to make her his wife, and take her far away from everything that could annoy or harass her.

Having arrived at the Langham and flung a double fare to the cab-driver, he ran up the high staircase with the light step of a boy, and dashed into Harriet's private room. The girl was sitting, much as she had done since returning from her interview with the doctor—silent, sullen, and alone, at war with Heaven and Destiny and all that had conduced to blight the brightest hopes she had ever had.

"Hally, my darling, why is this?" exclaimed Pennell,

as he essayed to fold her in his arms. But she pushed him off, not unkindly but with considerable determination.

"Don't touch me, Tony!—don't come near me. You had better not! I might harm you!"

"What is the matter? Are you ill? If so, you know me too well to imagine that I should fear infection."

"No! no! you do not understand!" replied Harriet, as she rose from her seat and edged further away from him, "but I am going to tell you all! It is for that I sent for you!"

Then, waving him from her with her hand, she related the whole story to him—what the Baroness had accused her of, and what Doctor Phillips had said in confirmation of it, only that morning. Pennell had heard something of it before, through Margaret Pullen, but he had paid no attention to it, and now, when Harriet repeated it in detail, with swollen eyes and quivering lips, he laughed the idea to scorn.

"Pooh! Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it," he exclaimed, "it is a parcel of old woman's tales. Phillips should be ashamed of himself to place any credence in it, far more to repeat it to you! Hally, my darling! you are surely not going to make yourself unhappy because of such nonsense. If so, you are not the sensible girl I have taken you for!"

"But, Tony," said the girl, still backing from his advances, "listen to me! It is not all nonsense, indeed. I know for myself that it is true! Having been shut up for so many years in the Convent dulled my memory for what went before it, but it has all come back to me now! It seems as if what Madame Gobelli and Doctor Phillips have said, had lifted a veil from my eyes, and I

can recall things that had quite escaped my memory before. I can remember now hearing old Pete say, that when I was born, I was given to a black wet nurse, and after a little while she was taken so ill, they had to send her away, and get me another, and the next one—*died!* Pete used to laugh and call me the puma's cub, but I didn't know the meaning of it, then. And—Oh! stop a moment, Tony, till I have done—there was a little white child, I can see her so plainly now. They called her little Caroline, I think she must have belonged to the planter who lived next to us, and I was very fond of her. I was quite unhappy when we did not meet, and I used to creep into her nursery door and lie down in the cot beside her. Poor little Caroline! I can see her now! So pale and thin and wan she was! And one night, I remember her mother came in and found me there and called to her husband to send the 'Brandt bastard' back to Helvetia. I had no idea what she meant, but I cried because she sent me home, and I asked Pete what a bastard was, but he would not tell me. And," went on Harriet in a scared tone, "little Caroline *died!* Pete carried me on his shoulder to see the funeral, and I would not believe that Caroline could be in the narrow box, and I struck Pete on the face for saying so!"

"Well! my darling! and if you did, are these childish reminiscences to come between our happiness? Why should they distress you, Hally? Madame Gobelli's insolence must have been very hard to bear—I acknowledge that, and I wish I had been by to prevent it, but you must make excuses for her. I suppose the poor creature was so mad with grief that she did not know

what she was saying! But you need never see her again, so you must try to forgive her!"

"But, Anthony, you do not understand me! What the Baroness said was *true!* I see it now! *I killed Bobby!*"

"My dearest, you are raving! *You killed Bobby!* What utter, utter folly! How could you have killed Bobby?"

Harriet passed her hand wearily across her brow, as if she found it too hard to make her meaning plain.

"Oh! yes, I did! We were always together, in the garden or the house! And he used to sit with his head on my shoulder and his arm round my waist, I should not have allowed it! I should have driven him away! But he loved me, poor Bobby, and it will be the same, Doctor Phillips says, with everybody I love! I shall only do them harm!"

"Hally! I shall begin to think in another moment that you are ill yourself—that you have a fever or something, and that it is affecting your brain!"

"There was a sister at the Convent, Sister Theodosia, who was very good to me when I first went there," continued the girl in a dreamy voice, as if she had not heard his words; "and she used to sit with me upon her lap for hours together, because I was sad. But she grew ill and they had to send her away up to the hill, where they had their sanatorium. That made the fourth in Jamaica!"

"Now! I will not have you talk any more of this nonsense," said Pennell, half annoyed by her perseverance, "and to prove to you what a little silly you are to imagine that everyone who falls ill, or dies, or who comes within the range of your acquaintance, owes it to your

influence, tell me how it is that your father and mother, who must have lived nearer to you than anybody else, did not fall sick and die also."

"My parents saw less of me than anybody," replied Harriet, sadly, "they were ashamed of their 'bastard', I suppose! But old Pete loved me, and took me with him everywhere, and he didn't get sick," she concluded, with a faint smile.

"Of course not! See! what rubbish you have been talking—making yourself and me unhappy for nothing at all! So now let me take you in my arms and kiss the remembrance of it away!"

He was about to put his suggestion into execution, but she still shrank from him.

"No! no! indeed you must not! It is all true! I cannot forget Olga Brimont, and Mrs. Pullen, and the baby, and poor Bobby! It is true, indeed it is, and I have been accursed from my birth."

And she burst into a torrent of passionate tears.

Pennell let her expend some of her emotion, before he continued,

"Well! and what is to be the upshot of it all!"

"I must part from you," replied the girl, "Indeed, indeed I must! I cannot injure you as I have done others! Doctor Phillips said I was not fit for marriage—that I should always weaken and hurt those whom I loved most—and that I should draw from them, physically and mentally, until I had sapped all their strength—that I have the blood of the vampire in me, the vampire that sucks its victims' breaths until they die!"

"Doctor Phillips be damned!" exclaimed Pennell, "what right has he to promulgate his absurd and un-

tenable theories, and to poison the happiness of a girl's life, with his folly? He is an old fool, a dotard, a senseless ass, and I shall tell him so! Vampire be hanged! And if it were the truth, I for one could not wish for a sweeter death! Come along, Hally, and try your venom upon me! I am quite ready to run the risk!"

He held out his arms to her again, as he spoke, and she sank on her knees beside him.

"Oh! Tony! Tony! cannot you read the truth? I love you, dear, I love you! I never loved any creature in this world before I loved you. I did not know that it was given to mortals to love so much! And my love has opened my eyes! Sooner than injure you, whom I would die to save from harm, I will separate myself from you! I will give you up! I will live my lonely life without you, I *could* do that, but I can never, never consent to sap your manhood and your brains, which do not belong to me but to the world, and see you wither, like a poisoned plant, the leaves of which lie discoloured and dead upon the garden path."

Never in the course of their acquaintanceship had Harriet Brandt seemed so sweet, so pathetic, so unselfish to Anthony Pennell as then. If he had resolved not to resign her from the first, he did so a thousand times more now. He threw his arms around her kneeling figure and lowered his head until it lay upon the crown of her dusky hair.

"My darling! my darling! my own sweet girl!" he murmured, "our destinies are interwoven for ever! No one and nothing shall come between us! You cannot give me up unless you have my consent to doing so. I

hold your sacred promise to become my wife, and I shall not release you from it!"

"But if I harmed you?" she said fearfully.

"I do not believe in the possibility of your harming me," he replied, "but if I am to die, which is what I suppose you mean, I claim my right to die in your arms. But whenever it happens, you will have neither hastened, nor retarded it!"

"Oh! if I could only think so!" she murmured.

"You must! Why cannot you trust my judgment as much as that of Madame Gobelli or old Phillips—a couple of mischief-makers. And now, Hally, when shall it be?"

"When shall 'what' be?" she whispered.

"You know what I mean as well as I do! When shall we be married? We have no one to consult but ourselves! I am my own master and you are alone in the world! These things are very easily managed, you know. I have but to go to Doctors' Commons for a special license to enable us to be married at a registrar's office to-morrow. Shall it be to-morrow, love?"

"Oh! no! no! I could not make up my mind so soon!"

"But why not? Would you live in this dull hotel all by yourself, Hally?"

"I do not know! I am so very unhappy! Leave me, Anthony, for God's sake, leave me, whilst there is time! You do not know the risk you may be running by remaining by my side! How can I consent to let you, whom I love like my very life, run any risk for my sake! Oh! I love you—I love you!" cried the impassioned girl, as she clung tightly to him. "You are my lord and master and my king, and I will never, *never*

be so selfish as to harm you for the sake of my own gratification. You must go away—put the seas between us—never see me, never write or speak to me more—only save yourself, my beloved, save yourself!”

He smiled compassionately, as he would have smiled at the ravings of a child, as he raised her from her lowly position and placed her in a chair.

“Do you know what I am going to do, little woman?” he said cheerfully. “I am going to leave you all alone to think this matter over until to-morrow. By that time you will have been able to compare the opinions of two people who do not care a jot about you, with those of mine who love you so dearly. Think well over what they have said to you, and I have said to you, and you have said to me! Remember, that if you adhere to your present determination, you will make both yourself and me most unhappy, and do no one any good. As for myself, I venture to say that if I lose you my grief and disappointment will be so great, that, in all probability, I shall never do any good work again. But be a sensible girl—make up your mind to marry me, and give the lie to all this nonsense, and I’ll write a book that will astonish the world! Come, Hally, is it to be ruin or success for me?—Ruin to spend my life without the only woman I have ever cared for, or success to win my wife and a companion who will help me in my work and make my happiness complete?”

He kissed her tear-stained face several times, and left her with a bright smile.

“This time to-morrow, remember, and I shall come with the licence in my pocket.”

CHAPTER XVI.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS did not meet Margaret and her husband until luncheon time and then they were full of an encounter which they had had during their morning walk.

"Only fancy, Doctor!" exclaimed Margaret, with more animation than she had displayed of late, "Arthur and I have been shopping in Regent Street, and whom do you think we met?"

"I give it up, my dear," replied the doctor, helping himself to cold beef. "I am not good at guessing riddles."

"Ralph and Elinor! They had just come from some exhibition of pictures in New Bond Street, and I never saw them so pleased with each other before. Ralph was looking actually 'spooney', and Elinor was positively radiant."

"*Souvent femme varie,*" quoted Doctor Phillips, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh! but, Doctor, it made Arthur and me so glad to see them. Elinor is very fond of Ralph, you know, although she has shewn it so little. And so I have no doubt is he of her, and there would never have been any unpleasantness between them, if it had not been for that horrid girl, Harriet Brandt."

"It is not like you, my dear Margaret, to condemn

anyone without a hearing. Perhaps you have not heard the true case of Miss Harriet Brandt. Although I am glad that Ralph has disentangled himself from her, I still believe that he behaved very badly to both the young ladies, and whilst I am glad to hear that Miss Leyton smiles upon him again, I think it is more than he deserves!"

"And I agree with you, Doctor," interposed Colonel Pullen, "I have never seen this Miss Brandt, but I know what a fool my brother is with women, and can quite understand that he may have raised her hopes just to gratify his own vanity. I have no patience with him."

"Well! for Miss Leyton's sake let us hope that this will be his last experience of dallying with forbidden pleasures. But what will you say when I tell you that one of my visitors this morning has been the young lady in question—Miss Brandt!"

"Harriet Brandt!" exclaimed Margaret, "but why—is she ill?"

"Oh! no! Her trouble is mental—not physical."

"She is not still hankering after Ralph, I hope."

"You are afraid he might not be able to resist the bait! So should I be. But she did not mention Captain Pullen. Her distress was all about herself!"

"Oh! do tell me about it, Doctor, if it is not a secret! You know I have a kind of interest in Harriet Brandt!"

"When she does not interfere with the prospects of your family," observed the doctor, drily, "exactly so! Well, then, the poor girl is in great trouble, and I had very little consolation to give her! She has left Madame Gobelli's house. It seems that the old woman insulted her terribly and almost turned her out."

“Oh! that awful Baroness!” cried Margaret; “it is only what might have been expected! We heard dreadful stories about her at Heyst. She has an uncontrollable temper and, when offended, a most vituperative tongue. Her ill-breeding is apparent at all times, but it must be overwhelming when she is angry. But how did she insult Miss Brandt?”

“You remember what I told you of the girl’s antecedents! It appears that the Baroness must have got hold of the same story, for she cast it in her teeth, accusing her moreover of having caused the death of her son.”

“Madame Gobelli’s son? What! Bobby—Oh! you do not mean to say that Bobby—is *dead*?”

“Yes! There was but one son, I think! He died yesterday, as I understood Miss Brandt. And the mother in her rage and grief turned upon the poor girl and told her such bitter truths, that she rushed from the house at once. Her visit to me this morning was paid in order to ascertain if such things were true, as the Baroness, very unjustifiably I think, had referred her to me for confirmation.”

“And what did you tell her?”

“What could I tell her? At first I declined to give an opinion, but she put such pertinent questions to me, that unless I had lied, I saw no way of getting out of it. I glossed over matters as well as I could, but even so, they were bad enough. But I impressed it upon her that she must not think of marrying. I thought it the best way to put all idea of catching Captain Pullen out of her mind. Let him once get safely married, and she can decide for herself with regard to the next. But at

all hazards, we must keep Ralph out of her way, for between you and me and the post, she is a young woman whom most men would find it difficult to resist."

"Oh! yes! she and Ralph must not meet again," said Margaret, dreamingly. Her thoughts had wandered back to Bobby and Heyst, and all the trouble she had encountered whilst there. What despair had attacked her when she lost her only child, and now Madame Gobelli—the woman she so much disliked—had lost her only child also.

"Poor Madame Gobelli!" she ejaculated, "I cannot help thinking of her! Fancy Bobby being—*dead!* And she used to make him so unhappy, and humiliate him before strangers! How she must be suffering for it now! How it must all come back upon her! Poor Bobby! Elinor will be sorry to hear that he is gone! She used to pity him so, and often gave him fruit and cakes. Fancy his being dead! I cannot believe it."

"It is true, nevertheless! But it is the common lot, Margaret! Perhaps, as his mother used to treat him so roughly, the poor lad is better off where he is."

"Oh! of course, I have no doubt of that! But he was all she had—like me!" said Margaret, with her eyes over-brimming. Her husband put his arms round her, and let her have her cry out on his shoulder.

Then, as he wiped her tears away she whispered, "Arthur, I should like to go and see her—the Baroness, I mean! I can sympathise so truly with her, I might be able to say a few words of comfort!"

"Do as you like, my darling," replied Colonel Pullen, "that is, if you are sure that the woman won't insult you, as she did Miss Brandt!"

"Oh! no! no! I am not in the least afraid! Why should she? I shall only tell her how much I feel for her own our common loss——"

She could not proceed, and the doctor whispered to the Colonel.

"Let her do as she wishes! The best salve for our own wounds is to try and heal those of others."

Margaret rose and prepared to leave the room.

"I shall go at once," she said, "I suppose there is no chance of my meeting Harriet Brandt there!"

"I think not! She told me she had left the Red House for good and all, but she did not say where she was staying! Though, after all, I think she is in most want of comfort of the two."

"Oh! no!" replied Margaret, faintly, "there is no grief like that of—of—" She did not finish her sentence, but left the room hastily in order to assume her walking things.

"Will she ever get over the loss of her child?" demanded Colonel Pullen, gloomily. The doctor regarded him with a half-amused surprise.

"My dear fellow, though it is useless to preach the doctrine to a bereaved mother, the loss of an innocent baby is perhaps the least trying in the category of human ills. To rear the child, as thousands do, to be unloving, or unsympathetic, or ungrateful, is a thousand times worse. But it is too soon for your dear wife to acknowledge it. Let her go to this other mother and let them cry together. It will do her all the good in the world!"

And the doctor, having finished his luncheon, put on his top-coat and prepared to make a round of professional calls.

Margaret came back ready for her visit.

"I shall not offer to go with you, darling," said the Colonel, "because my presence would only be inconvenient. But mind you keep the cab waiting, or you may find some difficulty in getting another in that district. What address shall I give the driver?"

"First to our florist in Regent Street that I may get some white flowers."

In another minute she was off, and in about an hour afterwards, she found herself outside the Red House, which looked gloomier than ever, with all the blinds drawn down. Margaret rang the front door bell, which was answered by Miss Wynward.

"Can I see Madame Gobelli?" commenced Margaret, "I have just heard the sad news, and came to condole with her!"

Miss Wynward let her into the hall and ushered her into a side room.

"You will excuse my asking if you are a friend of her ladyship's," she said.

"I can hardly call myself a friend," replied Margaret, "but I stayed with her in the same hotel at Heyst last summer, and I knew the dear boy who is dead. I was most grieved to hear of his death, and naturally anxious to enquire after the Baroness. But if she is too upset to see me, of course I would not think of forcing my presence upon her!"

"I don't think her ladyship would object to receiving any friend, but I am not sure if she would recognise you!"

"Not recognise me? It is not three months since we parted."

"You do not understand me! Our dear boy's death was so sudden—I have been with him since he was five years old, so you will forgive my mentioning him in such a fashion—that it has had a terrible effect upon his poor mother. In fact she is paralysed! The medical men think the paralysis is confined to the lower limbs, but at present they are unable to decide definitely, as the Baroness has not opened her lips since the event occurred."

"Oh! poor Madame Gobelli!" cried Margaret, tearfully, "I felt sure she loved him under all her apparent roughness and indifference!"

"Yes! I have been with them so long, that I know her manner amounted at times to cruelty, but she did not mean it to be so! She thought to make him hardy and independent, instead of which it had just the opposite effect! But she is paying bitterly for it now! I really think his death will kill her, though the doctors laugh at my fears!"

"I—I—too have lost my only child, my precious little baby," replied Margaret, encouraged by the sympathetic tenderness in the other woman's eyes, "and I thought also at first that I must die—that I could not live without her—but God is so good, and there is such comfort in the thought that whatever we may suffer, our darlings have missed all the bitterness and sin and disappointments of this world, that at last—that is, sometimes—one feels *almost* thankful that they are safe with Him!"

"Ah! Madame Gobelli has not your hope and trust, Madam!" said Miss Wynward, "if she had, she would be a better and happier woman. But I must tell you

that she is in the same room as Bobby! She will not be moved from there, but lies on the couch where we placed her when she fell, stricken with the paralysis, gazing at the corpse!"

"Poor dear woman!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Perhaps you would hardly care to go into that room!"

"Oh! I should like it! I want to see the dear boy again! I have brought some flowers to put over him!"

"Then, what name shall I tell her ladyship?"

"Mrs. Pullen, say Margaret Pullen whose little baby died at Heyst—then I think she will remember!"

"Will you take a seat, Mrs. Pullen, whilst I go upstairs and see if I can persuade her to receive you?"

Margaret sat down, and Miss Wynward went up to the chamber which had once been Bobby's. On the bed was stretched the body of the dead boy, whilst opposite to it lay on a couch a woman with dry eyes, but palsied limbs, staring, staring without intermission at the silent figure which had once contained the spirit of her son. She did not turn her head as Miss Wynward entered the room.

"My lady," she said, going up to her, "Mrs. Pullen is downstairs and would like to see you! She told me to say that she is Margaret Pullen whose baby died in Heyst last summer, and she knew Bobby and has brought some flowers to strew over his bed. May she come up?"

But she received no answer. Madame Gobelli's features were working, but that was the only sign of life which she gave.

"Mrs. Pullen is so very sorry for your loss," Miss Wynward went on, "she cried when she spoke of it,

and as she has suffered the same, I am sure she will sympathise with you. May I say that you will see her?"

Still there was no response, and Miss Wynward went down again to Margaret.

"I think you had better come up without waiting for her consent," she said, "if seeing you roused her, even to anger, it would do her good. Do you mind making the attempt?"

"No," replied Margaret, "but if the Baroness gets very angry, you must let me run away again. I am quite unequal to standing anything like a scene!"

"You will have but to quit the room. Whatever her ladyship may say she cannot move from her couch. She attacked poor Miss Brandt most unwarrantably last evening, but that was in the first frenzy of her grief. She is quite different now!"

"Poor woman!" again ejaculated Margaret, as she followed Miss Wynward, not without some inward qualms, to the presence of Madame Gobelli. But when she caught sight of the immovable figure on the couch, all her fear and resentment left her, overcome by a mighty compassion. She went straight up to the Baroness and bending down tenderly kissed her twitching face.

"Dear Madame," she said, "I am—we all are—so truly sorry for your grievous loss. It reminds me of the bitter time, not so long ago, you may remember, when I lost my darling little Ethel, and thought for the while that my life was over! It is so hard, so unnatural, to us poor mothers, to see our children go before ourselves! I can weep with you tear for tear! But do remember—try to remember—that he is safe—that though you remain here with empty arms for awhile, death can no

more take your boy from you, than a veil over your face can take God's light from you. He is there, dear Madame Gobelli—just in the next room with the door closed between you, and though I know full well how bitter it is to see the door closed, think of the time when it will open again—when you and I will spring through it and find, not only our dear Bobby and Ethel, but Christ our Lord, ready to give them back into our arms again!"

The Baroness said nothing, but two tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her flabby cheeks. Margaret turned from her for a minute and walking up to the bed, knelt down beside it in prayer.

"Dear Christ!" she said, "Thou Who knowest what our mothers' hearts are called upon to bear, have pity on us and give us Thy Peace! And open our eyes that we may gather strength to realise what our dear children have escaped by being taken home to Thee—the sin, the trouble, the anxiety, the disappointment—and make us thankful to bear them in their stead, and give us grace to look forward to our happy meeting and reunion in the Better Land."

Then she rose and bent over the dead boy.

"Dear Bobby!" she murmured, as she kissed the cold brow, and placed the white blossoms in his hands and round his head. "Good-bye! I know how happy you must be now, in company with the spirits of all those whom we have loved and who have gone home before us—how grateful you must feel to the dear Redeemer Who has called you so early—but don't forget your poor mother upon earth! Pray for her, Bobby,—never cease to ask our dear Lord to send her comfort

and peace and joy in believing. For His own dear sake. Amen!"

When she turned again, the Baroness's cheeks were wet with tears and she was stretching forth her arms towards her.

"Oh!" she gasped, as Margaret reached her side, "I am a godless woman—I am a godless woman!"

"No! no! my dear friend, we are none of us godless," replied Margaret, "we may think we are, but God knows better! We may forsake Him, but He never forsakes us! We should never be saved if we waited till we wanted to be so. It is *He* Who wants *us*—that is our great safeguard! He wanted our two dear children—not to spite us, but to draw us after them. Try to look at it in that light, and then Bobby's death will prove your greatest gain."

"I am a godless woman," repeated the Baroness, "and this is my punishment!" pointing to the bed. "I loved him best of all! My 'eart is broken!"

"So much the better, if it was a hard heart," rejoined Margaret, smiling. "Who was it that said, 'If your heart is broken, give the pieces to Christ and He will mend it again'? Never think of Bobby, dear Madame Gobelli, except as with Christ—walking with Him, talking with Him, learning of Him and growing in grace and the love of God daily! Never disassociate the two memories, and in a little while you would hate yourself if you could separate them again. God bless you! I must go back to my husband now!"

"You will come again?" said the Baroness.

"I am afraid I shall have no time! We sail for India on Saturday, but I shall not forget you. Good-bye,

Bobby," she repeated, with a last look at the corpse, "remember your mother and me in your prayers."

As Miss Wynward let her out of the Red House, she remarked,

"I could never have believed that anyone could have had so much influence over her ladyship as you have, Mrs. Pullen. I hope you will come again."

"I shall not be able to do so. But Madame Gobelli will have you to talk to her! You live here altogether, do you not?"

"I have lived here for many years, but I am on the point of leaving. Bobby was my only tie to the Red House, or I should have gone long ago."

"But now that the Baroness is so helpless surely you will delay your departure until she no longer needs you."

"I shall not leave her until she has secured a better woman in my stead. But to tell you the truth, I am going to be married, Mrs. Pullen, and I consider my first duty is towards my future husband and his parents who are very old!"

"Oh! doubtless! May I ask his name?"

"Captain Hill! He lives in the next house to this—Stevenage! You are surprised, perhaps, that a man who has been in the army should marry a poor governess like myself. That is his goodness. I know that I am worn and faded and no longer young—thirty-three on my last birthday—but he is good enough to care for me all the more for the troubles I have passed through. Mine has been a chequered life, Mrs. Pullen, but I have told Captain Hill everything, and he still wishes to make me his wife! I ought to be a happy woman for the future, ought I not?"

"Indeed yes," said Margaret, heartily, "and I sincerely hope that you may be so! But I can't help thinking of poor Madame Gobelli! Is the Baron good to her?"

"Pretty well!" answered Miss Wynward, "but he is very stolid and unsympathetic! It is strange to think that her heart must have been bound up in that boy, and yet at times she was positively cruel to him!"

"It has all been permitted for some good purpose," said Margaret, as she bade her farewell, "perhaps her remorse and self-accusation are the only things which would have brought her down upon her knees."

She returned home considerably saddened by what she had seen, but in three days she was to accompany her husband to India, and in the bustle of preparation, and the joy of knowing that she was not to be separated from him again, her heart was comforted and at peace. Never once during that time did she give one thought to Harriet Brandt. Miss Wynward had hardly mentioned her name, and no one seemed to know where she had gone. The girl had passed out of their lives altogether.

Margaret only regretted one thing in leaving England—that she had not seen Anthony Pennell again. Colonel Pullen had called twice at his chambers, but had each time found him from home. Margaret wanted to put in a good word for the Baroness with him. She thought perhaps that he might see her, after awhile, and speak a few words of comfort to her. But she was obliged to be content with writing her wishes in a farewell letter. She little knew how hardened Anthony Pennell felt, at that moment, against anyone who had treated the woman he loved in so harsh a manner.

Harriet Brandt spent the time, after her lover had left her to think over and decide upon their mutual fate, in walking up and down the room. She was like a restless animal; she could not stay two moments in the same place. Even when night fell, and the inhabitants of the Langham Hotel had retired to rest, she still kept pacing up and down the room, without thinking of undressing herself or seeking repose, whilst her conscience wrestled in warfare with her inclinations. Her thoughts took her far, far back to the earliest remembrance of which her mind was capable. She thought of her hard, unfeeling, indifferent father—of her gross, flabby, sensual mother—and shuddered at the remembrance! What had *she* done?—she said to herself—wherein had *she* sinned, that she should have been cursed with such progenitors? How had they *dared* to bring her into the world, an innocent yet hapless child of sin—the inheritor of their evil propensities—of their lust, their cruelty, their sensuality, their gluttony—and worst of all, the fatal heritage that made her a terror and a curse to her fellow-creatures? How dared they? *How dared they?* Why had God's vengeance not fallen upon them before they had completed their cruel work, or having accomplished it, why did He not let her perish with them—so that the awful power with which they had imbued her, might have been prevented from harming others?

Harriet thought of little Caroline; of her two nurses; of Sister Theodosia—of Mrs. Pullen's baby; of Bobby Bates; until she felt as though she should go mad. No! no! she would never bring that curse upon her Beloved; he must go far away, he must never see her again, or

else she would destroy herself in order that he might escape!

But if she persuaded Anthony to consent to her wishes—if she insisted upon a total separation between them, what would become of her? What should she do? She had no friends in England; Madame Gobelli had turned against her—she was all alone! She would live and die alone. How should she ever get to know people, or to obtain an entrance to Society. She would be a pariah to the end of her life! And if she did surmount all these obstacles, what would be the result, except a repetition of what had gone before? Strangers would come to know her—to like her—would grow more intimate, and she would respond to their kindness—with the same result. They would droop and fail, die perhaps, like Bobby and the baby—find out that she was the cause, and shun her ever after.

“Oh! God!” cried Harriet in her perplexity and anguish, “I am accursed! My parents have made me not fit to live!”

She passed that night through the agonies of Death—not the death that overtakes the believer in a God and a Future—but the darkness and uncertainty that enwraps the man who knows he is full of sin and yet has no knowledge that His Lord has paid his debt to the uttermost farthing—the doubt and anxiety that beset the unbeliever when he is called upon to enter the dark Valley. The poor child saw her destiny entangling her as in a net—she longed to break through it, but saw no means of escape—and she rebelled against the cruel lot that heredity had marked out for her.

“Why am *I* to suffer?” she exclaimed aloud; “I have youth and health and good looks, and money—everything, the world would say, calculated to make my life a pleasant one, and yet, I am tortured by this awful thought—that I must keep aloof from everybody, that I am a social leper, full of contagion and death! Doctor Phillips said that the more I loved a person, the more I must keep away from him! It is incredible! unheard-of! Could he have had any motive in saying such a thing?”

The remembrance of her flirtation with Ralph Pullen recurred to her mind, and she seized it, as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

“Was it a plant, after all? Did the old man want to put me off the track of Captain Pullen? Margaret Pullen is staying in the house—he said so—had she asked him to get rid of me if possible? After all, am I torturing myself by believing the story of my fatal power to be true, when it was only a ruse to get rid of me? The Baroness said the same thing, but she was mad about poor Bobby and would have said anything to annoy me—and, after all, what does it amount to? The baby died in teething—heaps of babies do—and Bobby was consumptive from the first—I have heard Miss Wynward say so, and would have died anyway, as he grew to be a man and had larger demands made upon his physical strength. And for the others—what happened to them, happens to all the world. It is *fortune de guerre*; people drop every day like rotten sheep;—everyone might accuse himself of causing the death of his neighbour. I have been frightening myself with a chimera. Anthony said so, and he must know better than I! And

I can't give up Tony—*I can't, I can't, I can't!* It is of no use thinking of it! Besides, he wouldn't let me! He would never leave me alone, until I had consented to marry him, so I may as well do it at the first as at the last."

But the tide of triumphant feeling would be succeeded by a wave of despondency, which threatened to upset all her casuistry.

"But if—*if*—it should be true, and Anthony should—should—Oh! God! Oh! God! I dare not think of it! I will kill myself before it shall occur."

When the morning dawned it found her quite undecided—lamenting her unfortunate fate one instant, and declaring that she could never give up her lover the next. She tore off her clothes and took a cold bath, and re-robed herself, but she was looking utterly ill and exhausted when Pennell burst in upon her at eleven o'clock.

"Well, darling," he exclaimed, "and have you made up your mind by this time? Which death am I to die?—suffocated in your dear embrace, or left to perish of cold and hunger outside?"

"O! Tony," she cried, throwing herself into his arms, "I don't know what to say! I have not closed my eyes all night, trying to decide what will be for the best. And I am as far off as ever—only I can never, *never* consent to do anything that shall work you harm!"

"Then I shall decide for you," exclaimed her lover, "and that is that you make me and yourself happy, and forget all the rubbish these people have been telling you! Depend upon it, whatever they may have said was for

their own gratification, and not yours, and that they would be quick enough to accept the lot that lies before you, were it in their power!"

"I have been so lonely and friendless all my life," said Harriet, sobbing in his arms, "and I have longed for love and sympathy so much, and now that they have come to me, it is hard, Oh! *so* hard, to have to give them up."

"So hard, Hally, for *me*, remember, as well as yourself, that we will not make the attempt. Now, I want you to place yourself in my hands, and start for Paris to-night!"

"To-night?" she cried, lifting such a flushed, startled, happy face from his breast, that he had no alternative but to kiss it again.

"Yes! to-night! What did I tell you yesterday—that I should come with the ring and the license in my pocket! I am as good as my word, and better—for I have given notice to the registrar of marriages in my district, that he is to be ready for us at twelve o'clock to-day. Am I not a good manager?"

"Tony! Tony! but I have not made up my mind!"

"I have made it up for you, and I will take no refusal! I have calculated it all to a nicety! Married at twelve—back here at one for lunch—a couple of hours to pack up, and off by the four o'clock train for Dover—sleep at the Castle Warden, and cross to-morrow to Paris! How will that do, Mrs. Pennell, eh?"

"Oh! ought I to do it, ought I to do it?" exclaimed Harriet, with a look of despair.

"If you don't I'll shoot myself. I swear it!"

“No! no! darling, don’t say that! It is of you alone that I am thinking! God forgive me if I am doing wrong, but I feel that I cannot refuse you! Take me and do with me as you think best.”

After which it came to pass, that Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Pennell started in very high spirits for Dover, by the four o’clock train that afternoon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FORTNIGHT afterwards, the married couple found themselves at Nice. Much as has been said and sung of the *lune de miel*, none ever surpassed, if it ever reached, this one in happiness. Harriet passed the time in a silent ecstasy of delight. Her cup of bliss was filled to overflowing; her satisfaction was too deep for words. To this girl, for whom the world had been seen as yet only through the barred windows of a convent—who had never enjoyed the society of an intellectual companion before; who had viewed no scenery but that of the Island; seen no records of the past; and visited no foreign capital—the first weeks of her married life were a panorama of novelties, her days one long astonishment and delight.

She could not adore Anthony Pennell sufficiently for having afforded her the opportunity of seeing all this, and more especially of feeling it. The presents he lavished upon her were as nothing in her eyes, compared to the lover-like attentions he paid her; the bouquets of flowers he brought her every morning; the glass of lemonade or milk he had ready to supply her need when they were taking their excursions; the warm shawl or mantle he carried on his arm in the evenings, lest the air should become too chilly for her delicate frame after sunset. Money Harriet had no need of, but

love—love she had thirsted for, as the hart thirsts for the water-streams, yet had never imagined it could be poured out at her feet, as her husband poured it now.

And Pennell, on the other hand, though he had been much sought after and flattered by the fair sex for the sake of the fame he had acquired and the money he made, had never lost his heart to any woman as he had done to his little unknown wife. He had never met anyone like Hally before. She combined the intelligence of the Englishwoman with the *espièglerie* of the French—the devotion of the Creole with the fiery passion of the Spanish or Italian. He could conceive her quite capable of dying silently and uncomplainingly for him, or anyone she loved; or on the other hand stabbing her lover without remorse if roused by jealousy or insult.

He was hourly discovering new traits in her character which delighted him, because they were so utterly unlike any possessed by the women of the world, with whom he had hitherto associated. He felt as though he had captured some beautiful wild creature and was taming it for his own pleasure.

Harriet would sit for hours at a time in profound silence, contemplating his features or watching his actions—crouched on the floor at his feet, until he was fain to lay down his book or writing, and take to fondling her instead. She was an ever-constant joy to him; he felt it would be impossible to do anything to displease her so long as he loved her—that like the patient Griselda she would submit to any injustice and meekly call it justice if from *his* hand. And yet he knew all the while that the savage in her was *not* tamed—that at any moment, like the domesticated lion or tiger, her nature

might assert itself and become furious, wild and intractable. It was the very uncertainty that pleased him; men love the women of whom they are not quite certain, all the more. From Nice they wandered to Mentone, but the proximity of the Monte Carlo tables had no charm for Anthony Pennell. He was not a speculative man: his brain was filled with better things, and he only visited such places for the sake of reproduction. Although the autumn was now far advanced, the air of Mentone was too enervating to suit either of them, and Pennell proposed that they should move on to Italy.

"I must show you Venice and Rome before we return home, Hally," he said, "and when I come to think of it, why should we return to England at all just yet? Why not winter in Rome? Richards is always advising me to take a good, long holiday. He says I overwork my brain and it reacts upon my body—what better opportunity could we find to adopt his advice? Hitherto I have pooh-poohed the idea! Wandering over a foreign country in solitary grandeur held no charms for me, but with you, my darling, to double the pleasure of everything, any place assumes the appearance of Paradise! What do you say, little wife? Shall we set up our tent South until the spring?"

"Don't you feel well, Tony?" asked Harriet, anxiously.

"Never better in my life, dear! I am afraid you will not make an interesting invalid out of me. I am as fit as a fiddle. But I fancy my next novel will deal with Italy, and I should like to make a few notes of the spots I may require to introduce. It is nothing to take me away from you, darling. We will inspect the old places

together, and your quick eye and clear brain shall help me in my researches. Is it a settled thing, Hally?"

"O! yes, darling!" she replied, "anywhere with you! The only place I shall ever object to, will be the one where I cannot go with you."

"That place does not exist on this earth, Hally," said Pennell, "but if you are willing, we may as well start to-morrow, for if we leave it till too late, we shall find all the best winter quarters pre-engaged."

He left the room, as she thought rather hurriedly, but as he gained the hotel corridor he slightly staggered and leaned against the wall. He had told his wife that he was quite well, but he knew it was not the truth. He had felt weak and enervated ever since coming to Mentone, but he ascribed it to the soft mild atmosphere.

"Confound this dizziness!" he said inwardly, as the corridor swam before his eyes, "I think my liver must be out of order, and yet I have been taking plenty of exercise. It must be this mild moist air. Heat never did agree with me. I shall be glad to get on. We shall find Florence cold by comparison."

He descended to the bureau and announced his intention of giving up his rooms on the morrow, and then ordered a carriage and returned to take Hally out for a drive.

In Florence they procured rooms in a grand old palazzo, furnished with rococo chairs and tables, placed upon marble floors. Harriet was charmed and astonished by the ease with which they got everything *en route*, as though they possessed Aladin's lamp, she told Pennell, and had but to wish to obtain.

"Ah! Hally!" said her husband, "we have something

better than the genie's lamp—we have money! *That* is the true magician in this century. I am very thankful that you have a fortune of your own, my dearest, because I know that whatever happens, my girl will be able to hold her own with the world!"

Harriet grew pale.

"What *could* happen?" she stammered.

"My silly little goose, are we immortal?" he replied, "I make a first-rate income, my dear, but have not laid by enough as yet to leave you more than comfortably off, but with your own money——"

"Don't speak of it, pray don't speak of it!" she exclaimed, with ashen lips, and noting her distress, Pennell changed the subject.

"You are a lucky little woman," he continued, "I wonder what some people would give to possess your income—poor Margaret Pullen for instance."

"Why Mrs. Pullen in particular, Tony? Are they poor?"

"Not whilst Colonel Pullen is on active service, but he has nothing but his pay to depend upon, and whilst he can work, he must. Which means a residence in India, and perhaps separation from his wife and children—if he should lose his health, a compulsory retirement; and if he keeps it, toiling out there till old age, and then coming home to spin out the remainder of his life on an inadequate pension. A man who accepts service in India should make up his mind to live and die in the country, but so many accidents may prevent it. And at the best, it means banishment from England and all one's friends and relations. Poor Margaret feels that severely, I am sure!"

"Has Mrs. Pullen many relations then?"

"She has a mother still living, and several brothers and sisters, besides her husband's family. What a sweet, gentle woman she is! She was kind to you, Hally, was she not, whilst you were abroad?"

By mutual agreement they never spoke of Heyst, or the Red House, or anything which was associated with what Pennell called his wife's infatuation regarding herself.

"Yes! she was very kind—at first," replied Harriet, "until—until—it all happened, and they went to England. Oh! do not let us talk of it!" she broke off suddenly.

"No! we will not! Have you unpacked your mandoline yet, Hally? Fetch it, dear, and let me hear your lovely voice again! I shall get you to sing to me when I am in the vein for composing! You would bring me all sorts of beautiful ideas and phantasies!"

"Should I? should I?" exclaimed the girl joyfully. "Oh! how lovely! I should do a part of your work then, shouldn't I, Tony?—I should inspire you! Why, I would sing day and night for that!"

"No! no! my bird, I would not let you tire yourself! A few notes now and then—they will help me more than enough. I must draw from you for my next heroine, Hally! I could not have a fairer model!"

"Oh! Tony!"

She rushed to him in the extremity of her delight and hid her face upon his breast.

"I am not good enough, not pretty enough! Your heroines should be perfect!"

"I don't think so! I prefer them to be of flesh and blood, like you!"

He stooped his head and kissed her passionately.

"Hally! Hally!" he whispered, "you draw my very life away!"

The girl got up suddenly, almost roughly, and walked into the next room to fetch her mandoline.

"No! no!" she cried to herself with a cold fear, "not that, my God, not that!"

But when she returned with the instrument, she did not revert to the subject, but played and sang as usual to her husband's admiration and delight.

They "did" Florence very thoroughly during the first week of their stay there, and were both completely tired.

"I must really stay at home to-morrow," cried Hally one afternoon on returning to dinner, "Tony, I am regularly fagged out! I feel as if I had a corn upon every toe!"

"So do I," replied her husband, "and I cannot have my darling knocked up by fatigue! We will be lazy to-morrow, Hally, and lie on two sofas and read our books all day! I have been thinking for the last few days that we have been going a little too fast! Let me see, child!—how long have we been married?"

"Six weeks to-morrow," she answered glibly.

"Bless my soul! we are quite an old married couple, a species of Darby and Joan! And have you been happy, Hally?"

The tears of excitement rushed into her dark eyes.

"*Happy!* That is no word for what I have been, Tony; I have been in Heaven—in Heaven all the while!"

"And so have I," rejoined her husband.

"I met some nuns whilst I was out this morning," continued Hally, "the sisters of the Annunciation, and they stopped and spoke to me, and were so pleased to hear that I had been brought up in a convent. 'And have you no vocation, my child?' asked one of them. 'Yes! Sister,' I replied, 'I have—a big, strong, handsome vocation called my husband.' They looked quite shocked, poor dears, at first, but I gave them a subscription for their orphan schools—one hundred francs—and they were so pleased. They said if I was sick whilst in Florence, I must send for one of them, and she would come and nurse me! I gave it as a thanksgiving, Tony—a thanksgiving offering because I am so very happy. I am not a good woman like Margaret Pullen, I know that, but I love you—*I love you!*"

"Who said that you were not a good woman?" asked Pennell, as he drew her fondly to his side, and kissed away the tears that hung on her dark lashes.

"Oh! I know I am not. Besides, you once said that Margaret Pullen was the best woman you had ever known."

"I think she is very sweet and unselfish," replied Pennell musingly, "she felt the loss of her infant terribly, Doctor Phillips told me, but the way in which she struggled to subdue her grief, in order not to distress others, was wonderful! Poor Margaret! how she mourns little Ethel to this day."

"Don't! *don't!*" cried Harriet in a stifled voice, "I cannot bear to think of it!"

"My darling, it had nothing to do with you! I have told you so a thousand times!"

"Yes! yes! I know you have—but I loved the little darling! It is dreadful to me to think that she is mouldering in the grave!"

"Come, child, you will be hysterical if you indulge in any more reminiscences! Suppose we go for a stroll through the Ghetto or some other antiquated part of Florence. Or shall we take a drive into the country? I am at your commands, Madam!"

"A drive, darling, then—a drive!" whispered his wife, as she left him to get ready for the excursion.

It was three hours before they returned to their rooms in the old palazzo. Harriet was dull and somewhat silent, and Anthony confessed to a headache.

"I am not quite sure now," he said, as they were dining, "whether a trip to Australia or America would not do us both more good than lingering about these mild, warm places. I think our constitutions both require bracing rather than coddling. Australia is a grand young country! I have often contemplated paying her a visit. What would you say to it, Hally?"

"I should enjoy it as much as yourself, Tony! You so often have a headache now! I think the drainage of these southern towns must be defective!"

"Oh! shocking! They are famous for typhoid and malarial fevers. They are not drained at all!"

"Don't let us stay here long then! What should I do if you were to fall ill?"

"You are far more liable to fall sick of the two, my darling," returned her husband, "I do not think your

beautiful little body has much strength to sustain it. And then what should *I* do?"

"Ah! neither of us could do without the other, Tony!"

"Of course we couldn't, and so we will provide against such a contingency by moving on before our systems get saturated with miasma and mistral. Will you sing to me to-night, Hally?"

"Not unless you very much wish it! I am a little tired. I feel as if I couldn't throw any expression into my songs to-night!"

"Then come here and sit down on the sofa beside me, and let us talk!"

She did as he desired, but Pennell was too sleepy to talk. In five minutes he had fallen fast asleep, and it was with difficulty she could persuade him to abandon the couch and drag his weary limbs up to bed, where he threw himself down in a profound slumber. Harriet was also tired. Her husband was breathing heavily as she slipped into her place beside him. His arm was thrown out over her pillow, as though he feared she might go to sleep without remembering to wish him good-night! She bent over him and kissed him passionately on the lips.

"Good-night, my beloved," she whispered, "sleep well, and wake in happiness!"

She kissed the big hand too that lay upon her pillow and composed herself to sleep while it still encircled her.

The dawn is early in Florence, but it had broken for some time before she roused herself again. The

sun was streaming brightly into the long, narrow, uncurtained windows, and everything it lighted on was touched with a molten glory. Harriet started up in bed. Her husband's arm was still beneath her body.

"Oh! my poor darling!" she exclaimed, as though the fault were her own, "how cramped he must be! How soundly we must have slept not to have once moved through the night!"

She raised Tony's arm and commenced to chafe it. How strangely heavy and cold it felt. Why! he was cold all over! She drew up the bedclothes and tucked them in around his chin. Then, for the first time, she looked at his face. His eyes were open.

"Tony, Tony!" she exclaimed, "are you making fun of me? Have you been awake all the time?"

She bent over his face laughingly, and pressed a kiss upon his cheek.

How stiff it felt! My God! what was the matter? Could he have fainted? She leapt from the bed, and running to her husband's side, pulled down the bedclothes again and placed her hand upon his heart. The body was cold—cold and still all over! His eyes were glazed and dull. His mouth was slightly open. In one awful moment she knew the truth. Tony was—*dead!*

She stood for some moments—some hours—some months—she could not have reckoned the time, silent and motionless, trying to realise what had occurred. Then—as it came upon her, like a resistless flood which she could not stem, nor escape, Harriet gave one fearful shriek which brought the servants hurrying upstairs to know what could be the matter.

"I have killed my husband—I have killed him—it was I myself who did it!" was all that she would say.

Of course they did not believe her. They accepted the unmeaning words as part of their mistress's frenzy at her sudden and unexpected loss. They saw what had happened, and they ran breathlessly for a doctor, who confirmed their worst fears—the Signor was dead!

The old palazzo became like a disturbed ant-hill. The servants ran hither and thither, unknowing how to act, whilst the mistress sat by the bedside with staring, tearless eyes, holding the hand of her dead husband. But there were a dozen things to be done—half a hundred orders to be issued. Death in Florence is quickly followed by burial. The law does not permit a mourner to lament his Dead for more than four-and-twenty hours.

But the signora would give no orders for the funeral nor answer any questions put to her! She had no friends in Florence—for ought they knew, she had no money—what were they to do? At last one of them thought of the neighbouring Convent of the Annunciation and ran to implore one of the good sisters to come to their mistress in her extremity.

Shortly afterwards, Sister Angelica entered the bedroom where Harriet sat murmuring at intervals, "It is *I* who have killed him," and attempted to administer comfort to the young mourner. But her words and prayers had no effect upon Harriet. Her brain could hold but one idea—she had killed Tony! Doctor Phillips was right—it was she who had killed Margaret Pullen's baby and Bobby Bates, and to look further back, little Caroline, and now—now, her Tony! the light of her life, the passion of her being, the essence of all her joy—her hope

for this world and the next. She had killed him—*she*, who worshipped him, whose pride was bound up in him, who was to have helped him and comforted him and waited on him all his life—she had killed him!

Her dry lips refused to say the words distinctly, but they kept revolving in her brain until they dazed and wearied her. The little sister stood by her and held her hand, as the professional assistants entered the death chamber and arranged and straightened the body for the grave, finally placing it in a coffin and carrying it away to a mortuary where it would have to remain until buried on the morrow, but Harriet made no resistance to the ceremony and no sign. She did not even say "Good-bye" as Tony was carried from her sight for ever! Sister Angelica talked to her of the glorious Heaven where they must hope that her dear husband would be translated, of the peace and happiness he would enjoy, of the reunion which awaited them when her term of life was also past.

She pressed her to make the Convent her refuge until the first agony of her loss was overcome—reminded her of the peace and rest she would encounter within the cloisters, and how the whole fraternity would unite in praying for the soul of her beloved that he might speedily obtain the remission of his sins and an entrance into the Beatific Presence.

Harriet listened dully and at last in order to get rid of her well-intentioned but rather wearisome consoler, she promised to do all that she wished. Let the sister return to the Convent for the present, and on the morrow if she would come for her at the same time, she might take her back with her. She wanted rest and peace—

she would be thankful for them, poor Harriet said—only to-night, this one night more, she wished to be alone. So the good little sister went away rejoicing that she had succeeded in her errand of mercy, and looking forward to bearing the poor young widow to the Convent on the morrow, there to learn the true secret of earthly happiness.

When she had gone and the old palazzo was quiet and empty, the bewildered girl rose to her feet and tried to steady her shaking limbs sufficiently, to write what seemed to be a letter but was in reality a will.

“I leave all that I possess,” so it ran, “to Margaret Pullen, the wife of Colonel Arthur Pullen, the best woman Tony said that he had ever met, and I beg her to accept it in return for the kindness she showed to me when I went to Heyst, a stranger. Signed, HARRIET PENNELL.”

She put the paper into an envelope, and as soon as the morning had dawned, she asked her servant Lorenzo to show her the way to the nearest notary in whose presence she signed the document and directed him to whom it should be sent in case of her own death.

And after another visit to a *pharmacien*, she returned to the Palazzo and took up her watch again in the now deserted bedchamber.

Her servants brought her refreshments and pressed her to eat, without effect. All she desired, she told them, was to be left alone, until the sister came for her in the afternoon.

Sister Angelica arrived true to her appointment, and went at once to the bedchamber. To her surprise she found Harriet lying on the bed, just where the corpse of Anthony Pennell had lain, and apparently asleep.

"*Pauvre enfant!*" thought the kind-hearted nun, "grief has exhausted her! I should not have attended to her request, but have watched with her through the night! *Eh, donc! ma pauvre,*" she continued, gently touching the girl on the shoulder, "*levez-vous! Je suis là.*"

But there was no awakening on this earth for Harriet Pennell. She had taken an overdose of chloral and joined her husband.

When Margaret Pullen received the will which Harriet had left behind her, she found these words with it, scribbled in a very trembling hand upon a scrap of paper.

"Do not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out."

THE END.

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The Beetle

A Mystery

Richard Marsh

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THE BEETLE: A MYSTERY

BY

RICHARD MARSH

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN WILLIAMSON

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BOOK I

The House with the Open Window

The Surprising Narration of Robert Holt

CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE

'No room!—Full up!'

He banged the door in my face.

That was the final blow.

To have tramped about all day looking for work; to have begged even for a job which would give me money enough to buy a little food; and to have tramped and to have begged in vain,—that was bad. But, sick at heart, depressed in mind and in body, exhausted by hunger and fatigue, to have been compelled to pocket any little pride I might have left, and solicit, as the penniless, homeless tramp which indeed I was, a night's lodging in the casual ward,—and to solicit it in vain!—that was worse. Much worse. About as bad as bad could be.

I stared, stupidly, at the door which had just been banged in my face. I could scarcely believe that the thing was possible. I had hardly expected to figure as a tramp; but, supposing it conceivable that I could become a tramp, that I should be refused admission to that abode of all ignominy, the tramp's ward, was to have attained a depth of misery of which never even in nightmares I had dreamed.

As I stood wondering what I should do, a man slouched towards me out of the shadow of the wall.

'Won't 'e let yer in?'

'He says it's full.'

'Says it's full, does 'e? That's the lay at Fulham,—they always says it's full. They wants to keep the number down.'

I looked at the man askance. His head hung forward; his hands were in his trouser pockets; his clothes were rags; his tone was husky.

'Do you mean that they say it's full when it isn't,—that they won't let me in although there's room?'

'That's it,—bloke's a-kiddin' yer.'

'But, if there's room, aren't they bound to let me in?'

'Course they are,—and, blimey, if I was you I'd make 'em. Blimey I would!'

He broke into a volley of execrations.

'But what am I to do?'

'Why, give 'em another rouser—let 'em know as you won't be kidded!'

I hesitated; then, acting on his suggestion, for the second time I rang the bell. The door was flung wide open, and the grizzled pauper, who had previously responded to my summons, stood in the open doorway. Had he

been the Chairman of the Board of Guardians himself he could not have addressed me with greater scorn.

'What, here again! What's your little game? Think I've nothing better to do than to wait upon the likes of you?'

'I want to be admitted.'

'Then you won't be admitted!'

'I want to see someone in authority.'

'Ain't yer seein' someone in authority?'

'I want to see someone besides you,—I want to see the master.'

'Then you won't see the master!'

He moved the door swiftly to; but, prepared for such a manoeuvre, I thrust my foot sufficiently inside to prevent his shutting it. I continued to address him.

'Are you sure that the ward is full?'

'Full two hours ago!'

'But what am I to do?'

'I don't know what you're to do!'

'Which is the next nearest workhouse?'

'Kensington.'

Suddenly opening the door, as he answered me, putting out his arm he thrust me backwards. Before I could recover the door was closed. The man in rags had continued a grim spectator of the scene. Now he spoke.

'Nice bloke, ain't he?'

'He's only one of the paupers,—has he any right to act as one of the officials?'

'I tell yer some of them paupers is wuss than the orficers,—a long sight wuss! They thinks they owns the 'ouses, blimey they do. Oh it's a——fine world, this is!'

He paused. I hesitated. For some time there had been a suspicion of rain in the air. Now it was commencing to fall in a fine but soaking drizzle. It only needed that to fill my cup to overflowing. My companion was regarding me with a sort of sullen curiosity.

'Ain't you got no money?'

'Not a farthing.'

'Done much of this sort of thing?'

'It's the first time I've been to a casual ward,—and it doesn't seem as if I'm going to get in now.'

'I thought you looked as if you was a bit fresh.—What are yer goin' to do?'

'How far is it to Kensington?'

'Work'us?—about three mile;—but, if I was you, I'd try St George's.'

'Where's that?'

'In the Fulham Road. Kensington's only a small place, they do you well there, and it's always full as soon as the door's opened;—you'd 'ave more chawnce at St George's.'

He was silent. I turned his words over in my mind, feeling as little disposed to try the one place as the other. Presently he began again.

'I've travelled from Reading this——day, I 'ave,—tramped every——foot! —and all the way as I come along, I'll 'ave a shakedown at 'Ammersmith, I says,—and now I'm as fur off from it as ever! This is a——fine country,

this is,—I wish every——soul in it was swept into the——sea, blimey I do! But I ain't goin' to go no further,—I'll 'ave a bed in 'Ammersmith or I'll know the reason why.'

'How are you going to manage it,—have you got any money?'

'Got any money?—My crikey!—I look as though I 'ad,—I sound as though I 'ad too! I ain't 'ad no brads, 'cept now and then a brown, this larst six months.'

'How are you going to get a bed then?'

'Ow am I going to?—why, like this way.' He picked up two stones, one in either hand. The one in his left he flung at the glass which was over the door of the casual ward. It crashed through it, and through the lamp beyond. 'That's 'ow I'm goin' to get a bed.'

The door was hastily opened. The grizzled pauper reappeared. He shouted, as he peered at us in the darkness,

'Who done that?'

'I done it, guvnor,—and, if you like, you can see me do the other. It might do your eyesight good.'

Before the grizzled pauper could interfere, he had hurled the stone in his right hand through another pane. I felt that it was time for me to go. He was earning a night's rest at a price which, even in my extremity, I was not disposed to pay.

When I left two or three other persons had appeared upon the scene, and the man in rags was addressing them with a degree of frankness, which, in that direction, left little to be desired. I slunk away unnoticed. But had not gone far before I had almost decided that I might as well have thrown in my fortune with the bolder wretch, and smashed a window too. Indeed, more than once my feet faltered, as I all but returned to do the feat which I had left undone.

A more miserable night for an out-of-door excursion I could hardly have chosen. The rain was like a mist, and was not only drenching me to the skin, but it was rendering it difficult to see more than a little distance in any direction. The neighbourhood was badly lighted. It was one in which I was a stranger, I had come to Hammersmith as a last resource. It had seemed to me that I had tried to find some occupation which would enable me to keep body and soul together in every other part of London, and that now only Hammersmith was left. And, at Hammersmith, even the workhouse would have none of me!

Retreating from the inhospitable portal of the casual ward, I had taken the first turning to the left,—and, at the moment, had been glad to take it. In the darkness and the rain, the locality which I was entering appeared unfinished. I seemed to be leaving civilisation behind me. The path was unpaved; the road rough and uneven, as if it had never been properly made. Houses were few and far between. Those which I did encounter, seemed, in the imperfect light, amid the general desolation, to be cottages which were crumbling to decay.

Exactly where I was I could not tell. I had a faint notion that, if I only kept on long enough, I should strike some part of Walham Green. How long I should have to keep on I could only guess. Not a creature seemed to be about of whom I could make inquiries. It was as if I was in a land of desolation.

I suppose it was between eleven o'clock and midnight. I had not given up my quest for work till all the shops were closed,—and in Hammersmith, that night, at any rate, they were not early closers. Then I had lounged about dispiritedly, wondering what was the next thing I could do. It was only because I feared that if I attempted to spend the night in the open air, without food, when the morning came I should be broken up, and fit for nothing, that I sought a night's free board and lodging. It was really hunger which drove me to the workhouse door. That was Wednesday. Since the Sunday night preceding nothing had passed my lips save water from the public fountains,—with the exception of a crust of bread which a man had given me whom I had found crouching at the root of a tree in Holland Park. For three days I had been fasting,—practically all the time upon my feet. It

seemed to me that if I had to go hungry till the morning I should collapse,—there would be an end. Yet, in that strange and inhospitable place, where was I to get food at that time of night, and how?

I do not know how far I went. Every yard I covered, my feet dragged more. I was dead beat, inside and out. I had neither strength nor courage left. And within there was that frightful craving, which was as though it shrieked aloud. I leant against some palings, dazed and giddy. If only death had come upon me quickly, painlessly, how true a friend I should have thought it! It was the agony of dying inch by inch which was so hard to bear.

It was some minutes before I could collect myself sufficiently to withdraw from the support of the railings, and to start afresh. I stumbled blindly over the uneven road. Once, like a drunken man, I lurched forward, and fell upon my knees. Such was my backboneless state that for some seconds I remained where I was, half disposed to let things slide, accept the good the gods had sent me, and make a night of it just there. A long night, I fancy, it would have been, stretching from time unto eternity.

Having regained my feet, I had gone perhaps another couple of hundred yards along the road—Heaven knows that it seemed to me just then a couple of miles!—when there came over me again that overpowering giddiness which, I take it, was born of my agony of hunger. I staggered, helplessly, against a low wall which, just there, was at the side of the path. Without it I should have fallen in a heap. The attack appeared to last for hours; I suppose it was only seconds; and, when I came to myself, it was as though I had been aroused from a swoon of sleep,—aroused, to an extremity of pain. I exclaimed aloud,

'For a loaf of bread what wouldn't I do!'

I looked about me, in a kind of frenzy. As I did so I for the first time became conscious that behind me was a house. It was not a large one. It was one of those so-called villas which are springing up in multitudes all round London, and which are let at rentals of from twenty-five to forty pounds a year. It was detached. So far as I could see, in the imperfect light, there was not another building within twenty or thirty yards of either side of it. It was in two storeys. There were three windows in the upper storey. Behind each

the blinds were closely drawn. The hall door was on my right. It was approached by a little wooden gate.

The house itself was so close to the public road that by leaning over the wall I could have touched either of the windows on the lower floor. There were two of them. One of them was a bow window. The bow window was open. The bottom centre sash was raised about six inches.

CHAPTER II

INSIDE

I realised, and, so to speak, mentally photographed all the little details of the house in front of which I was standing with what almost amounted to a gleam of preternatural perception. An instant before, the world swam before my eyes. I saw nothing. Now I saw everything, with a clearness which, as it were, was shocking.

Above all, I saw the open window. I stared at it, conscious, as I did so, of a curious catching of the breath. It was so near to me; so very near. I had but to stretch out my hand to thrust it through the aperture. Once inside, my hand would at least be dry. How it rained out there! My scanty clothing was soaked; I was wet to the skin! I was shivering. And, each second, it seemed to rain still faster. My teeth were chattering. The damp was liquefying the very marrow in my bones.

And, inside that open window, it was, it must be, so warm, so dry!

There was not a soul in sight. Not a human being anywhere near. I listened; there was not a sound. I alone was at the mercy of the sodden night. Of all God's creatures the only one unsheltered from the fountains of Heaven which He had opened. There was not one to see what I might do; not one to care. I need fear no spy. Perhaps the house was empty; nay, probably. It was my plain duty to knock at the door, rouse the inmates, and call attention to their oversight,—the open window. The least they could do would be to reward me for my pains. But, suppose the place was empty, what would be the use of knocking? It would be to make a useless clatter. Possibly to disturb the neighbourhood, for nothing. And, even if the people were at

home, I might go unrewarded. I had learned, in a hard school, the world's ingratitude. To have caused the window to be closed—the inviting window, the tempting window, the convenient window!—and then to be no better for it after all, but still to be penniless, hopeless, hungry, out in the cold and the rain—better anything than that. In such a situation, too late, I should say to myself that mine had been the conduct of a fool. And I should say it justly too. To be sure.

Leaning over the low wall I found that I could very easily put my hand inside the room. How warm it was in there! I could feel the difference of temperature in my fingertips. Very quietly I stepped right over the wall. There was just room to stand in comfort between the window and the wall. The ground felt to the foot as if it were cemented. Stooping down, I peered through the opening. I could see nothing. It was black as pitch inside. The blind was drawn right up; it seemed incredible that anyone could be at home, and have gone to bed, leaving the blind up, and the window open. I placed my ear to the crevice. How still it was! Beyond doubt, the place was empty.

I decided to push the window up another inch or two, so as to enable me to reconnoitre. If anyone caught me in the act, then there would be an opportunity to describe the circumstances, and to explain how I was just on the point of giving the alarm. Only, I must go carefully. In such damp weather it was probable that the sash would creak.

Not a bit of it. It moved as readily and as noiselessly as if it had been oiled. This silence of the sash so emboldened me that I raised it more than I intended. In fact, as far as it would go. Not by a sound did it betray me. Bending over the sill I put my head and half my body into the room. But I was no forwarder. I could see nothing. Not a thing. For all I could tell the room might be unfurnished. Indeed, the likelihood of such an explanation began to occur to me. I might have chanced upon an empty house. In the darkness there was nothing to suggest the contrary. What was I to do?

Well, if the house was empty, in such a plight as mine I might be said to have a moral, if not a legal, right, to its bare shelter. Who, with a heart in his bosom, would deny it me? Hardly the most punctilious landlord. Raising myself by means of the sill I slipped my legs into the room.

The moment I did so I became conscious that, at any rate, the room was not entirely unfurnished. The floor was carpeted. I have had my feet on some good carpets in my time; I know what carpets are; but never did I stand upon a softer one than that. It reminded me, somehow, even then, of the turf in Richmond Park,—it caressed my instep, and sprang beneath my tread. To my poor, travel-worn feet, it was luxury after the puddly, uneven road. Should I, now I had ascertained that—the room was, at least, partially furnished, beat a retreat? Or should I push my researches further? It would have been rapture to have thrown off my clothes, and to have sunk down, on the carpet, then and there, to sleep. But,—I was so hungry; so famine-goaded; what would I not have given to have lighted on something good to eat!

I moved a step or two forward, gingerly, reaching out with my hands, lest I struck, unawares, against some unseen thing. When I had taken three or four such steps, without encountering an obstacle, or, indeed, anything at all, I began, all at once, to wish I had not seen the house; that I had passed it by; that I had not come through the window; that I were safely out of it again. I became, on a sudden, aware, that something was with me in the room. There was nothing, ostensible, to lead me to such a conviction; it may be that my faculties were unnaturally keen; but, all at once, I knew that there was something there. What was more, I had a horrible persuasion that, though unseeing, I was seen; that my every movement was being watched.

What it was that was with me I could not tell; I could not even guess. It was as though something in my mental organisation had been stricken by a sudden paralysis. It may seem childish to use such language; but I was overwrought, played out; physically speaking, at my last counter; and, in an instant, without the slightest warning, I was conscious of a very curious sensation, the like of which I had never felt before, and the like of which I pray that I never may feel again,—a sensation of panic fear. I remained rooted to the spot on which I stood, not daring to move, fearing to draw my breath. I felt that the presence with me in the room was something strange, something evil.

I do not know how long I stood there, spell-bound, but certainly for some considerable space of time. By degrees, as nothing moved, nothing was

seen, nothing was heard, and nothing happened, I made an effort to better play the man. I knew that, at the moment, I played the cur. And endeavoured to ask myself of what it was I was afraid. I was shivering at my own imaginings. What could be in the room, to have suffered me to open the window and to enter unopposed? Whatever it was, was surely to the full as great a coward as I was, or why permit, unchecked, my burglarious entry. Since I had been allowed to enter, the probability was that I should be at liberty to retreat,—and I was sensible of a much keener desire to retreat than I had ever had to enter.

I had to put the greatest amount of pressure upon myself before I could summon up sufficient courage to enable me to even turn my head upon my shoulders,—and the moment I did so I turned it back again. What constrained me, to save my soul I could not have said,—but I was constrained. My heart was palpitating in my bosom; I could hear it beat. I was trembling so that I could scarcely stand. I was overwhelmed by a fresh flood of terror. I stared in front of me with eyes in which, had it been light, would have been seen the frenzy of unreasoning fear. My ears were strained so that I listened with an acuteness of tension which was painful.

Something moved. Slightly, with so slight a sound, that it would scarcely have been audible to other ears save mine. But I heard. I was looking in the direction from which the movement came, and, as I looked, I saw in front of me two specks of light. They had not been there a moment before, that I would swear. They were there now. They were eyes,—I told myself they were eyes. I had heard how cats' eyes gleam in the dark, though I had never seen them, and I said to myself that these were cats' eyes; that the thing in front of me was nothing but a cat. But I knew I lied. I knew that these were eyes, and I knew they were not cats' eyes, but what eyes they were I did not know,—nor dared to think.

They moved,—towards me. The creature to which the eyes belonged was coming closer. So intense was my desire to fly that I would much rather have died than stood there still; yet I could not control a limb; my limbs were as if they were not mine. The eyes came on,—noiselessly. At first they were between two and three feet from the ground; but, on a sudden, there was a squelching sound, as if some yielding body had been squashed upon

the floor. The eyes vanished,—to reappear, a moment afterwards, at what I judged to be a distance of some six inches from the floor. And they again came on.

So it seemed that the creature, whatever it was to which the eyes belonged, was, after all, but small. Why I did not obey the frantic longing which I had to flee from it, I cannot tell; I only know, I could not. I take it that the stress and privations which I had lately undergone, and which I was, even then, still undergoing, had much to do with my conduct at that moment, and with the part I played in all that followed. Ordinarily I believe that I have as high a spirit as the average man, and as solid a resolution; but when one has been dragged through the Valley of Humiliation, and plunged, again and again, into the Waters of Bitterness and Privation, a man can be constrained to a course of action of which, in his happier moments, he would have deemed himself incapable. I know this of my own knowledge.

Slowly the eyes came on, with a strange slowness, and as they came they moved from side to side as if their owner walked unevenly. Nothing could have exceeded the horror with which I awaited their approach,—except my incapacity to escape them. Not for an instant did my glance pass from them,—I could not have shut my eyes for all the gold the world contains!—so that as they came closer I had to look right down to what seemed to be almost the level of my feet. And, at last, they reached my feet. They never paused. On a sudden I felt something on my boot, and, with a sense of shrinking, horror, nausea, rendering me momentarily more helpless, I realised that the creature was beginning to ascend my legs, to climb my body. Even then what it was I could not tell,—it mounted me, apparently, with as much ease as if I had been horizontal instead of perpendicular. It was as though it were some gigantic spider,—a spider of the nightmares; a monstrous conception of some dreadful vision. It pressed lightly against my clothing with what might, for all the world, have been spider's legs. There was an amazing host of them,—I felt the pressure of each separate one. They embraced me softly, stickily, as if the creature glued and unglued them, each time it moved.

Higher and higher! It had gained my loins. It was moving towards the pit of my stomach. The helplessness with which I suffered its invasion was not

the least part of my agony,—it was that helplessness which we know in dreadful dreams. I understood, quite well, that if I did but give myself a hearty shake, the creature would fall off; but I had not a muscle at my command.

As the creature mounted its eyes began to play the part of two small lamps; they positively emitted rays of light. By their rays I began to perceive faint outlines of its body. It seemed larger than I had supposed. Either the body itself was slightly phosphorescent, or it was of a peculiar yellow hue. It gleamed in the darkness. What it was there was still nothing to positively show, but the impression grew upon me that it was some member of the spider family, some monstrous member, of the like of which I had never heard or read. It was heavy, so heavy indeed, that I wondered how, with so slight a pressure, it managed to retain its hold,—that it did so by the aid of some adhesive substance at the end of its legs I was sure,—I could feel it stick. Its weight increased as it ascended,—and it smelt! I had been for some time aware that it emitted an unpleasant, foetid odour; as it neared my face it became so intense as to be unbearable.

It was at my chest. I became more and more conscious of an uncomfortable wobbling motion, as if each time it breathed its body heaved. Its forelegs touched the bare skin about the base of my neck; they stuck to it,—shall I ever forget the feeling? I have it often in my dreams. While it hung on with those in front it seemed to draw its other legs up after it. It crawled up my neck, with hideous slowness, a quarter of an inch at a time, its weight compelling me to brace the muscles of my back. It reached my chin, it touched my lips,—and I stood still and bore it all, while it enveloped my face with its huge, slimy, evil-smelling body, and embraced me with its myriad legs. The horror of it made me mad. I shook myself like one stricken by the shaking ague. I shook the creature off. It squashed upon the floor. Shrieking like some lost spirit, turning, I dashed towards the window. As I went, my foot, catching in some obstacle, I fell headlong to the floor.

Picking myself up as quickly as I could I resumed my flight,—rain or no rain, oh to get out of that room! I already had my hand upon the sill, in another instant I should have been over it,—then, despite my hunger, my

fatigues, let anyone have stopped me if they could!—when someone behind me struck a light.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN IN THE BED

The illumination which instantly followed was unexpected. It startled me, causing a moment's check, from which I was just recovering when a voice said,

'Keep still!'

There was a quality in the voice which I cannot describe. Not only an accent of command, but a something malicious, a something saturnine. It was a little guttural, though whether it was a man speaking I could not have positively said; but I had no doubt it was a foreigner. It was the most disagreeable voice I had ever heard, and it had on me the most disagreeable effect; for when it said, 'Keep still!' I kept still. It was as though there was nothing else for me to do.

'Turn round!'

I turned round, mechanically, like an automaton. Such passivity was worse than undignified, it was galling; I knew that well. I resented it with secret rage. But in that room, in that presence, I was invertebrate.

When I turned I found myself confronting someone who was lying in bed. At the head of the bed was a shelf. On the shelf was a small lamp which gave the most brilliant light I had ever seen. It caught me full in the eyes, having on me such a blinding effect that for some seconds I could see nothing. Throughout the whole of that strange interview I cannot affirm that I saw clearly; the dazzling glare caused dancing specks to obscure my

vision. Yet, after an interval of time, I did see something; and what I did see I had rather have left unseen.

I saw someone in front of me lying in a bed. I could not at once decide if it was a man or a woman. Indeed at first I doubted if it was anything human. But, afterwards, I knew it to be a man,—for this reason, if for no other, that it was impossible such a creature could be feminine. The bedclothes were drawn up to his shoulders; only his head was visible. He lay on his left side, his head resting on his left hand; motionless, eyeing me as if he sought to read my inmost soul. And, in very truth, I believe he read it. His age I could not guess; such a look of age I had never imagined. Had he asserted that he had been living through the ages, I should have been forced to admit that, at least, he looked it. And yet I felt that it was quite within the range of possibility that he was no older than myself,—there was a vitality in his eyes which was startling. It might have been that he had been afflicted by some terrible disease, and it was that which had made him so supernaturally ugly.

There was not a hair upon his face or head, but, to make up for it, the skin, which was a saffron yellow, was an amazing mass of wrinkles. The cranium, and, indeed, the whole skull, was so small as to be disagreeably suggestive of something animal. The nose, on the other hand, was abnormally large; so extravagant were its dimensions, and so peculiar its shape, it resembled the beak of some bird of prey. A characteristic of the face—and an uncomfortable one!—was that, practically, it stopped short at the mouth. The mouth, with its blubber lips, came immediately underneath the nose, and chin, to all intents and purposes, there was none. This deformity—for the absence of chin amounted to that—it was which gave to the face the appearance of something not human,—that, and the eyes. For so marked a feature of the man were his eyes, that, ere long, it seemed to me that he was nothing but eyes.

His eyes ran, literally, across the whole of the upper portion of his face,—remember, the face was unwontedly small, and the columna of the nose was razor-edged. They were long, and they looked out of narrow windows, and they seemed to be lighted by some internal radiance, for they shone out like lamps in a lighthouse tower. Escape them I could not, while, as I

endeavoured to meet them, it was as if I shrivelled into nothingness. Never before had I realised what was meant by the power of the eye. They held me enchained, helpless, spell-bound. I felt that they could do with me as they would; and they did. Their gaze was unfaltering, having the bird-like trick of never blinking; this man could have glared at me for hours and never moved an eyelid.

It was he who broke the silence. I was speechless.

'Shut the window.' I did as he bade me. 'Pull down the blind.' I obeyed. 'Turn round again.' I was still obedient. 'What is your name?'

Then I spoke,—to answer him. There was this odd thing about the words I uttered, that they came from me, not in response to my will power, but in response to his. It was not I who willed that I should speak; it was he. What he willed that I should say, I said. Just that, and nothing more. For the time I was no longer a man; my manhood was merged in his. I was, in the extremest sense, an example of passive obedience.

'Robert Holt.'

'What are you?'

'A clerk.'

'You look as if you were a clerk.' There was a flame of scorn in his voice which scorched me even then. 'What sort of a clerk are you?'

'I am out of a situation.'

'You look as if you were out of a situation.' Again the scorn. 'Are you the sort of clerk who is always out of a situation? You are a thief.'

'I am not a thief.'

'Do clerks come through the window?' I was still,—he putting no constraint on me to speak. 'Why did you come through the window?'

'Because it was open.'

'So!—Do you always come through a window which is open?'

'No.'

'Then why through this?'

'Because I was wet—and cold—and hungry—and tired.'

The words came from me as if he had dragged them one by one,—which, in fact, he did.

'Have you no home?'

'No.'

'Money?'

'No.'

'Friends?'

'No.'

'Then what sort of a clerk are you?'

I did not answer him,—I did not know what it was he wished me to say. I was the victim of bad luck, nothing else,—I swear it. Misfortune had followed hard upon misfortune. The firm by whom I had been employed for years suspended payment. I obtained a situation with one of their creditors, at a lower salary. They reduced their staff, which entailed my going. After an interval I obtained a temporary engagement; the occasion which required my services passed, and I with it. After another, and a longer interval, I again found temporary employment, the pay for which was but a pittance. When that was over I could find nothing. That was nine months ago, and since then I had not earned a penny. It is so easy to grow shabby, when you are on the everlasting tramp, and are living on your stock of clothes. I had trudged all over London in search of work,—work of any kind would have been welcome, so long as it would have enabled me to keep body and soul together. And I had trudged in vain. Now I had been refused admittance as a

casual,—how easy is the descent! But I did not tell the man lying on the bed all this. He did not wish to hear,—had he wished he would have made me tell him.

It may be that he read my story, unspoken though it was,—it is conceivable. His eyes had powers of penetration which were peculiarly their own,—that I know.

'Undress!'

When he spoke again that was what he said, in those guttural tones of his in which there was a reminiscence of some foreign land. I obeyed, letting my sodden, shabby clothes fall anyhow upon the floor. A look came on his face, as I stood naked in front of him, which, if it was meant for a smile, was a satyr's smile, and which filled me with a sensation of shuddering repulsion.

'What a white skin you have,—how white! What would I not give for a skin as white as that,—ah yes!' He paused, devouring me with his glances; then continued. 'Go to the cupboard; you will find a cloak; put it on.'

I went to a cupboard which was in a corner of the room, his eyes following me as I moved. It was full of clothing,—garments which might have formed the stock-in-trade of a costumier whose speciality was providing costumes for masquerades. A long dark cloak hung on a peg. My hand moved towards it, apparently of its own volition. I put it on, its ample folds falling to my feet.

'In the other cupboard you will find meat, and bread, and wine. Eat and drink.'

On the opposite side of the room, near the head of his bed, there was a second cupboard. In this, upon a shelf, I found what looked like pressed beef, several round cakes of what tasted like rye bread, and some thin, sour wine, in a straw-covered flask. But I was in no mood to criticise; I crammed myself, I believe, like some famished wolf, he watching me, in silence, all the time. When I had done, which was when I had eaten and drunk as much as I could hold, there returned to his face that satyr's grin.

'I would that I could eat and drink like that,—ah yes!—Put back what is left.' I put it back,—which seemed an unnecessary exertion, there was so little to put. 'Look me in the face.'

I looked him in the face,—and immediately became conscious, as I did so, that something was going from me,—the capacity, as it were, to be myself. His eyes grew larger and larger, till they seemed to fill all space—till I became lost in their immensity. He moved his hand, doing something to me, I know not what, as it passed through the air—cutting the solid ground from underneath my feet, so that I fell headlong to the ground. Where I fell, there I lay, like a log.

And the light went out.

CHAPTER IV

A LONELY VIGIL

I knew that the light went out. For not the least singular, nor, indeed, the least distressing part of my condition was the fact that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I never once lost consciousness during the long hours which followed. I was aware of the extinction of the lamp, and of the black darkness which ensued. I heard a rustling sound, as if the man in the bed was settling himself between the sheets. Then all was still. And throughout that interminable night I remained, my brain awake, my body dead, waiting, watching, for the day. What had happened to me I could not guess. That I probably wore some of the external evidences of death my instinct told me, —I knew I did. Paradoxical though it may sound, I felt as a man might feel who had actually died,—as, in moments of speculation, in the days gone by, I had imagined it as quite possible that he would feel. It is very far from certain that feeling necessarily expires with what we call life. I continually asked myself if I could be dead,—the inquiry pressed itself on me with awful iteration. Does the body die, and the brain—the I, the ego—still live on? God only knows. But, then! the agony of the thought.

The hours passed. By slow degrees, the silence was eclipsed. Sounds of traffic, of hurrying footsteps,—life!—were ushers of the morn. Outside the window sparrows twittered,—a cat mewed, a dog barked—there was the clatter of a milk can. Shafts of light stole past the blind, increasing in intensity. It still rained, now and again it pattered against the pane. The wind must have shifted, because, for the first time, there came, on a sudden, the clang of a distant clock striking the hour,—seven. Then, with the interval of a lifetime between each chiming, eight,—nine,—ten.

So far, in the room itself there had not been a sound. When the clock had struck ten, as it seemed to me, years ago, there came a rustling noise, from the direction of the bed. Feet stepped upon the floor,—moving towards where I was lying. It was, of course, now broad day, and I, presently, perceived that a figure, clad in some queer coloured garment, was standing at my side, looking down at me. It stooped, then knelt. My only covering was unceremoniously thrown from off me, so that I lay there in my nakedness. Fingers prodded me then and there, as if I had been some beast ready for the butcher's stall. A face looked into mine, and, in front of me, were those dreadful eyes. Then, whether I was dead or living, I said to myself that this could be nothing human,—nothing fashioned in God's image could wear such a shape as that. Fingers were pressed into my cheeks, they were thrust into my mouth, they touched my staring eyes, shut my eyelids, then opened them again, and—horror of horrors!—the blubber lips were pressed to mine—the soul of something evil entered into me in the guise of a kiss.

Then this travesty of manhood reascended to his feet, and said, whether speaking to me or to himself I could not tell,

'Dead!—dead!—as good as dead!—and better! We'll have him buried.'

He moved away from me. I heard a door open and shut, and knew that he was gone.

And he continued gone throughout the day. I had no actual knowledge of his issuing out into the street, but he must have done so, because the house appeared deserted. What had become of the dreadful creature of the night before I could not guess. My first fear was that he had left it behind him in the room with me,—it might be, as a sort of watchdog. But, as the minutes and the hours passed, and there was still no sign or sound of anything living, I concluded that, if the thing was there, it was, possibly, as helpless as myself, and that during its owner's absence, at any rate, I had nothing to fear from its too pressing attentions.

That, with the exception of myself, the house held nothing human, I had strong presumptive proof more than once in the course of the day. Several times, both in the morning and the afternoon, people without endeavoured

to attract the attention of whoever was within. Vehicles—probably tradesmen's carts—drew up in front, their stopping being followed by more or less assiduous assaults upon the knocker and the bell. But in every case their appeals remained unheeded. Whatever it was they wanted, they had to go unsatisfied away. Lying there, torpid, with nothing to do but listen, I was, possibly, struck by very little, but it did occur to me that one among the callers was more persistent than the rest.

The distant clock had just struck noon when I heard the gate open, and someone approached the front door. Since nothing but silence followed, I supposed that the occupant of the place had returned, and had chosen to do so as silently as he had gone. Presently, however, there came from the doorstep a slight but peculiar call, as if a rat was squeaking. It was repeated three times, and then there was the sound of footsteps quietly retreating, and the gate re-closing. Between one and two the caller came again; there was a repetition of the same signal,—that it was a signal I did not doubt; followed by the same retreat. About three the mysterious visitant returned. The signal was repeated, and, when there was no response, fingers tapped softly against the panels of the front door. When there was still no answer, footsteps stole softly round the side of the house, and there came the signal from the rear,—and then, again, tapping of fingers against what was, apparently, the back door. No notice being taken of these various proceedings, the footsteps returned the way they went, and, as before, the gate was closed.

Shortly after darkness had fallen this assiduous caller returned, to make a fourth and more resolute attempt to call attention to his presence. From the peculiar character of his manoeuvres it seemed that he suspected that whoever was within had particular reasons for ignoring him without. He went through the familiar pantomime of the three squeaky calls both at the front door and the back,—followed by the tapping of the fingers on the panels. This time, however, he also tried the window panes,—I could hear, quite distinctly, the clear, yet distinct, noise of what seemed like knuckles rapping against the windows behind. Disappointed there, he renewed his efforts at the front. The curiously quiet footsteps came round the house, to pause before the window of the room in which I lay,—and then something singular occurred.

While I waited for the tapping, there came, instead, the sound of someone or something, scrambling on to the window-sill,—as if some creature, unable to reach the window from the ground, was endeavouring to gain the vantage of the sill. Some ungainly creature, unskilled in surmounting such an obstacle as a perpendicular brick wall. There was the noise of what seemed to be the scratching of claws, as if it experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining a hold on the unyielding surface. What kind of creature it was I could not think,—I was astonished to find that it was a creature at all. I had taken it for granted that the persevering visitor was either a woman or a man. If, however, as now seemed likely, it was some sort of animal, the fact explained the squeaking sounds,—though what, except a rat, did squeak like that was more than I could say—and the absence of any knocking or ringing.

Whatever it was, it had gained the summit of its desires,—the window-sill. It panted as if its efforts at climbing had made it short of breath. Then began the tapping. In the light of my new discovery, I perceived, clearly enough, that the tapping was hardly that which was likely to be the product of human fingers,—it was sharp and definite, rather resembling the striking of the point of a nail against the glass. It was not loud, but in time—it continued with much persistency—it became plainly vicious. It was accompanied by what I can only describe as the most extraordinary noises. There were squeaks, growing angrier and shriller as the minutes passed; what seemed like gaspings for breath; and a peculiar buzzing sound like, yet unlike, the purring of a cat.

The creature's resentment at its want of success in attracting attention was unmistakable. The tapping became like the clattering of hailstones; it kept up a continuous noise with its cries and pantings; there was the sound as of some large body being rubbed against the glass, as if it were extending itself against the window, and endeavouring, by force of pressure, to gain an entrance through the pane. So violent did its contortions become that I momentarily anticipated the yielding of the glass, and the excited assailant coming crashing through. Considerably to my relief the window proved more impregnable than seemed at one time likely. The stolid resistance proved, in the end, to be too much either for its endurance or its patience. Just as I was looking for some fresh manifestation of fury, it seemed rather

to tumble than to spring off the sill; then came, once more, the same sound of quietly retreating footsteps; and what, under the circumstances, seemed odder still, the same closing of the gate.

During the two or three hours which immediately ensued nothing happened at all out of the way,—and then took place the most surprising incident of all. The clock had struck ten some time before. Since before the striking of the hour nothing and no one had passed along what was evidently the little frequented road in front of that uncanny house. On a sudden two sounds broke the stillness without,—of someone running, and of cries. Judging from his hurrying steps someone seemed to be flying for his life,—to the accompaniment of curious cries. It was only when the runner reached the front of the house that, in the cries, I recognised the squeaks of the persistent caller. I imagined that he had returned, as before, alone, to renew his attacks upon the window,—until it was made plain, as it quickly was, that, with him, was some sort of a companion. Immediately there arose, from without, the noise of battle. Two creatures, whose cries were, to me, of so unusual a character, that I found it impossible to even guess at their identity, seemed to be waging war to the knife upon the doorstep. After a minute or two of furious contention, victory seemed to rest with one of the combatants, for the other fled, squeaking as with pain. While I listened, with strained attention, for the next episode in this queer drama, expecting that now would come another assault upon the window, to my unbounded surprise I heard a key thrust in the keyhole, the lock turned, and the front door thrown open with a furious bang. It was closed as loudly as it was opened. Then the door of the room in which I was, was dashed open, with the same display of excitement, and of clamour, footsteps came hurrying in, the door was slammed to with a force which shook the house to its foundations, there was a rustling as of bed-clothes, the brilliant illumination of the night before, and a voice, which I had only too good reason to remember said,

'Stand up.'

I stood up, automatically, at the word of command, facing towards the bed.

There, between the sheets, with his head resting on his hand, in the attitude in which I had seen him last, was the being I had made acquaintance with

under circumstances which I was never likely to forget,—the same, yet not the same.

CHAPTER V

AN INSTRUCTION TO COMMIT BURGLARY

That the man in the bed was the one whom, to my cost, I had suffered myself to stumble on the night before, there could, of course, not be the faintest doubt. And yet, directly I saw him, I recognised that some astonishing alteration had taken place in his appearance. To begin with, he seemed younger,—the decrepitude of age had given place to something very like the fire of youth. His features had undergone some subtle change. His nose, for instance, was not by any means so grotesque; its beak-like quality was less conspicuous. The most part of his wrinkles had disappeared, as if by magic. And, though his skin was still as yellow as saffron, his contours had rounded,—he had even come into possession of a modest allowance of chin. But the most astounding novelty was that about the face there was something which was essentially feminine; so feminine, indeed, that I wondered if I could by any possibility have blundered, and mistaken a woman for a man; some ghoulish example of her sex, who had so yielded to her depraved instincts as to have become nothing but a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood.

The effect of the changes which had come about in his appearance—for, after all, I told myself that it was impossible that I could have been such a simpleton as to have been mistaken on such a question as gender—was heightened by the self-evident fact that, very recently, he had been engaged in some pitched battle; some hand to hand, and, probably, discreditable encounter, from which he had borne away uncomfortable proofs of his opponent's prowess. His antagonist could hardly have been a chivalrous fighter, for his countenance was marked by a dozen different scratches which seemed to suggest that the weapons used had been someone's finger-

nails. It was, perhaps, because the heat of the battle was still in his veins that he was in such a state of excitement. He seemed to be almost overwhelmed by the strength of his own feelings. His eyes seemed literally to flame with fire. The muscles of his face were working as if they were wholly beyond his own control. When he spoke his accent was markedly foreign; the words rushed from his lips in an inarticulate torrent; he kept repeating the same thing over and over again in a fashion which was not a little suggestive of insanity.

'So you're not dead!—you're not dead:—you're alive!—you're alive! Well, —how does it feel to be dead? I ask you!—Is it not good to be dead? To keep dead is better,—it is the best of all! To have made an end of all things, to cease to strive and to cease to weep, to cease to want and to cease to have, to cease to annoy and to cease to long, to no more care,—no!—not for anything, to put from you the curse of life,—forever!—is that not the best? Oh yes!—I tell you!—do I not know? But for you such knowledge is not yet. For you there is the return to life, the coming out of death,—you shall live on!—for me!—Live on!'

He made a movement with his hand, and, directly he did so, it happened as on the previous evening, that a metamorphosis took place in the very abysses of my being. I woke from my torpor, as he put it, I came out of death, and was alive again. I was far, yet, from being my own man; I realised that he exercised on me a degree of mesmeric force which I had never dreamed that one creature could exercise on another; but, at least, I was no longer in doubt as to whether I was or was not dead. I knew I was alive.

He lay, watching me, as if he was reading the thoughts which occupied my brain,—and, for all I know, he was.

'Robert Holt, you are a thief.'

'I am not.'

My own voice, as I heard it, startled me,—it was so long since it had sounded in my ears.

'You are a thief! Only thieves come through windows,—did you not come through the window?' I was still,—what would my contradiction have availed me? 'But it is well that you came through the window,—well you are a thief,—well for me! for me! It is you that I am wanting,—at the happy moment you have dropped yourself into my hands,—in the nick of time. For you are my slave,—at my beck and call,—my familiar spirit, to do with as I will,—you know this,—eh?'

I did know it, and the knowledge of my impotence was terrible. I felt that if I could only get away from him; only release myself from the bonds with which he had bound me about; only remove myself from the horrible glamour of his near neighbourhood; only get one or two square meals and have an opportunity of recovering from the enervating stress of mental and bodily fatigue;—I felt that then I might be something like his match, and that, a second time, he would endeavour in vain to bring me within the compass of his magic. But, as it was, I was conscious that I was helpless, and the consciousness was agony. He persisted in reiterating his former falsehood.

'I say you are a thief!—a thief, Robert Holt, a thief! You came through a window for your own pleasure, now you will go through a window for mine,—not this window, but another.' Where the jest lay I did not perceive; but it tickled him, for a grating sound came from his throat which was meant for laughter. 'This time it is as a thief that you will go,—oh yes, be sure.'

He paused, as it seemed, to transfix me with his gaze. His unblinking eyes never for an instant quitted my face. With what a frightful fascination they constrained me,—and how I loathed them!

When he spoke again there was a new intonation in his speech,—something bitter, cruel, unrelenting.

'Do you know Paul Lessingham?'

He pronounced the name as if he hated it,—and yet as if he loved to have it on his tongue.

'What Paul Lessingham?'

'There is only one Paul Lessingham! THE Paul Lessingham,—the GREAT Paul Lessingham!'

He shrieked, rather than said this, with an outburst of rage so frenzied that I thought, for the moment, that he was going to spring on me and rend me. I shook all over. I do not doubt that, as I replied, my voice was sufficiently tremulous.

'All the world knows Paul Lessingham,—the politician,—the statesman.'

As he glared at me his eyes dilated. I still stood in expectation of a physical assault. But, for the present, he contented himself with words.

'To-night you are going through his window like a thief!'

I had no inkling of his meaning,—and, apparently, judging from his next words, I looked something of the bewilderment I felt.

'You do not understand?—no!—it is simple!—what could be simpler? I say that to-night—to-night!—you are going through his window like a thief. You came through my window,—why not through the window of Paul Lessingham, the politician—the statesman.'

He repeated my words as if in mockery. I am—I make it my boast!—of that great multitude which regards Paul Lessingham as the greatest living force in practical politics; and which looks to him, with confidence, to carry through that great work of constitutional and social reform which he has set himself to do. I daresay that my tone, in speaking of him, savoured of laudation,—which, plainly, the man in the bed resented. What he meant by his wild words about my going through Paul Lessingham's window like a thief, I still had not the faintest notion. They sounded like the ravings of a madman.

As I continued silent, and he yet stared, there came into his tone another note,—a note of tenderness,—a note of which I had not deemed him capable.

'He is good to look at, Paul Lessingham,—is he not good to look at?'

I was aware that, physically, Mr Lessingham was a fine specimen of manhood, but I was not prepared for the assertion of the fact in such a quarter,—nor for the manner in which the temporary master of my fate continued to harp and enlarge upon the theme.

'He is straight,—straight as the mast of a ship,—he is tall,—his skin is white; he is strong—do I not know that he is strong—how strong!—oh yes! Is there a better thing than to be his wife? his well-beloved? the light of his eyes? Is there for a woman a happier chance? Oh no, not one! His wife!—Paul Lessingham!'

As, with soft cadences, he gave vent to these unlooked-for sentiments, the fashion of his countenance was changed. A look of longing came into his face—of savage, frantic longing—which, unalluring though it was, for the moment transfigured him. But the mood was transient.

'To be his wife,—oh yes!—the wife of his scorn! the despised and rejected!'

The return to the venom of his former bitterness was rapid,—I could not but feel that this was the natural man. Though why a creature such as he was should go out of his way to apostrophise, in such a manner, a publicist of Mr Lessingham's eminence, surpassed my comprehension. Yet he stuck to his subject like a leech,—as if it had been one in which he had an engrossing personal interest.

'He is a devil,—hard as the granite rock,—cold as the snows of Ararat. In him there is none of life's warm blood,—he is accursed! He is false,—ay, false as the fables of those who lie for love of lies,—he is all treachery. Her whom he has taken to his bosom he would put away from him as if she had never been,—he would steal from her like a thief in the night,—he would forget she ever was! But the avenger follows after, lurking in the shadows, hiding among the rocks, waiting, watching, till his time shall come. And it shall come!—the day of the avenger!—ay, the day!'

Raising himself to a sitting posture, he threw his arms above his head, and shrieked with a demoniac fury. Presently he became a trifle calmer.

Reverting to his recumbent position, resting his head upon his hand, he eyed me steadily; then asked me a question which struck me as being, under the circumstances, more than a little singular.

'You know his house,—the house of the great Paul Lessingham,—the politician,—the statesman?'

'I do not.'

'You lie!—you do!'

The words came from him with a sort of snarl,—as if he would have lashed me across the face with them.

'I do not. Men in my position are not acquainted with the residences of men in his. I may, at some time, have seen his address in print; but, if so, I have forgotten it.'

He looked at me intently, for some moments, as if to learn if I spoke the truth; and apparently, at last, was satisfied that I did.

'You do not know it?—Well!—I will show it you,—I will show the house of the great Paul Lessingham.'

What he meant I did not know; but I was soon to learn,—an astounding revelation it proved to be. There was about his manner something hardly human; something which, for want of a better phrase, I would call vulpine. In his tone there was a mixture of mockery and bitterness, as if he wished his words to have the effect of corrosive sublimate, and to sear me as he uttered them.

'Listen with all your ears. Give me your whole attention. Hearken to my bidding, so that you may do as I bid you. Not that I fear your obedience,—oh no!'

He paused,—as if to enable me to fully realise the picture of my helplessness conjured up by his jibes.

'You came through my window, like a thief. You will go through my window, like a fool. You will go to the house of the great Paul Lessingham. You say you do not know it? Well, I will show it you. I will be your guide. Unseen, in the darkness and the night, I will stalk beside you, and will lead you to where I would have you go.—You will go just as you are, with bare feet, and head uncovered, and with but a single garment to hide your nakedness. You will be cold, your feet will be cut and bleeding,—but what better does a thief deserve? If any see you, at the least they will take you for a madman; there will be trouble. But have no fear; bear a bold heart. None shall see you while I stalk at your side. I will cover you with the cloak of invisibility,—so that you may come in safety to the house of the great Paul Lessingham.'

He paused again. What he said, wild and wanton though it was, was beginning to fill me with a sense of the most extreme discomfort. His sentences, in some strange, indescribable way, seemed, as they came from his lips, to warp my limbs; to enwrap themselves about me; to confine me, tighter and tighter, within, as it were, swaddling clothes; to make me more and more helpless. I was already conscious that whatever mad freak he chose to set me on, I should have no option but to carry it through.

'When you come to the house, you will stand, and look, and seek for a window convenient for entry. It may be that you will find one open, as you did mine; if not, you will open one. How,—that is your affair, not mine. You will practise the arts of a thief to steal into his house.'

The monstrosity of his suggestion fought against the spell which he again was casting upon me, and forced me into speech,—endowed me with the power to show that there still was in me something of a man; though every second the strands of my manhood, as it seemed, were slipping faster through the fingers which were strained to clutch them.

'I will not.'

He was silent. He looked at me. The pupils of his eyes dilated,—until they seemed all pupil.

'You will.—Do you hear?—I say you will.'

'I am not a thief, I am an honest man,—why should I do this thing?'

'Because I bid you.'

'Have mercy!'

'On whom—on you, or on Paul Lessingham?—Who, at any time, has shown mercy unto me, that I should show mercy unto any?'

He stopped, and then again went on,—reiterating his former incredible suggestion with an emphasis which seemed to eat its way into my brain.

'You will practise the arts of a thief to steal into his house; and, being in, will listen. If all be still, you will make your way to the room he calls his study.'

'How shall I find it? I know nothing of his house.'

The question was wrung from me; I felt that the sweat was standing in great drops upon my brow.

'I will show it you.'

'Shall you go with me?'

'Ay,—I shall go with you. All the time I shall be with you. You will not see me, but I shall be there. Be not afraid.'

His claim to supernatural powers, for what he said amounted to nothing less, was, on the face of it, preposterous, but, then, I was in no condition to even hint at its absurdity. He continued.

'When you have gained the study, you will go to a certain drawer, which is in a certain bureau, in a corner of the room—I see it now; when you are there you shall see it too—and you will open it.'

'Should it be locked?'

'You still will open it.'

'But how shall I open it if it is locked?'

'By those arts in which a thief is skilled. I say to you again that that is your affair, not mine.'

I made no attempt to answer him. Even supposing that he forced me, by the wicked, and unconscionable exercise of what, I presumed, were the hypnotic powers with which nature had to such a dangerous degree endowed him, to carry the adventure to a certain stage, since he could hardly, at an instant's notice, endow me with the knack of picking locks, should the drawer he alluded to be locked—which might Providence permit!—nothing serious might issue from it after all. He read my thoughts.

'You will open it,—though it be doubly and trebly locked, I say that you will open it.—In it you will find—' he hesitated, as if to reflect—'some letters; it may be two or three,—I know not just how many,—they are bound about by a silken ribbon. You will take them out of the drawer, and, having taken them, you will make the best of your way out of the house, and bear them back to me.'

'And should anyone come upon me while engaged in these nefarious proceedings,—for instance, should I encounter Mr Lessingham himself, what then?'

'Paul Lessingham?—You need have no fear if you encounter him.'

'I need have no fear!—If he finds me, in his own house, at dead of night, committing burglary!'

'You need have no fear of him.'

'On your account, or on my own?—At least he will have me haled to gaol.'

'I say you need have no fear of him. I say what I mean.'

'How, then, shall I escape his righteous vengeance? He is not the man to suffer a midnight robber to escape him scatheless,—shall I have to kill him?'

'You will not touch him with a finger,—nor will he touch you.'

'By what spell shall I prevent him?'

'By the spell of two words.'

'What words are they?'

'Should Paul Lessingham chance to come upon you, and find you in his house, a thief, and should seek to stay you from whatever it is you may be at, you will not flinch nor flee from him, but you will stand still, and you will say—'

Something in the crescendo accents of his voice, something weird and ominous, caused my heart to press against my ribs, so that when he stopped, in my eagerness I cried out,

'What?'

'THE BEETLE!'

As the words came from him in a kind of screech, the lamp went out, and the place was all in darkness, and I knew, so that the knowledge filled me with a sense of loathing, that with me, in the room, was the evil presence of the night before. Two bright specks gleamed in front of me; something flopped from off the bed on to the ground; the thing was coming towards me across the floor. It came slowly on, and on, and on. I stood still, speechless in the sickness of my horror. Until, on my bare feet, it touched me with slimy feelers, and my terror lest it should creep up my naked body lent me voice, and I fell shrieking like a soul in agony.

It may be that my shrieking drove it from me. At least, it went. I knew it went. And all was still. Until, on a sudden, the lamp flamed out again, and there, lying, as before, in bed, glaring at me with his baleful eyes, was the being whom, in my folly, or in my wisdom,—whichever it was!—I was beginning to credit with the possession of unhallowed, unlawful powers.

'You will say that to him; those two words; they only; no more. And you will see what you will see. But Paul Lessingham is a man of resolution. Should he still persist in interference, or seek to hinder you, you will say those two words again. You need do no more. Twice will suffice, I promise you.—Now go.—Draw up the blind; open the window; climb through it. Hasten to do what I have bidden you. I wait here for your return,—and all the way I shall be with you.'

CHAPTER VI

A SINGULAR FELONY

I went to the window; I drew up the blind, unlatching the sash, I threw it open; and clad, or, rather, unclad as I was, I clambered through it into the open air. I was not only incapable of resistance, I was incapable of distinctly formulating the desire to offer resistance. Some compelling influence moved me hither and thither, with completest disregard of whether I would or would not.

And yet, when I found myself without, I was conscious of a sense of exultation at having escaped from the miasmatic atmosphere of that room of unholy memories. And a faint hope began to dawn within my bosom that, as I increased the distance between myself and it, I might shake off something of the nightmare helplessness which numbed and tortured me. I lingered for a moment by the window; then stepped over the short dividing wall into the street; and then again I lingered.

My condition was one of dual personality,—while, physically, I was bound, mentally, to a considerable extent, I was free. But this measure of freedom on my mental side made my plight no better. For, among other things, I realised what a ridiculous figure I must be cutting, barefooted and bareheaded, abroad, at such an hour of the night, in such a boisterous breeze,—for I quickly discovered that the wind amounted to something like a gale. Apart from all other considerations, the notion of parading the streets in such a condition filled me with profound disgust. And I do believe that if my tyrannical oppressor had only permitted me to attire myself in my own garments, I should have started with a comparatively light heart on the felonious mission on which he apparently was sending me. I believe, too,

that the consciousness of the incongruity of my attire increased my sense of helplessness, and that, had I been dressed as Englishmen are wont to be, who take their walks abroad, he would not have found in me, on that occasion, the facile instrument which, in fact, he did.

There was a moment, in which the gravelled pathway first made itself known to my naked feet, and the cutting wind to my naked flesh, when I think it possible that, had I gritted my teeth, and strained my every nerve, I might have shaken myself free from the bonds which shackled me, and bade defiance to the ancient sinner who, for all I knew, was peeping at me through the window. But so depressed was I by the knowledge of the ridiculous appearance I presented that, before I could take advantage of it the moment passed,—not to return again that night.

I did catch, as it were, at its fringe, as it was flying past me, making a hurried movement to one side,—the first I had made, of my own initiative, for hours. But it was too late. My tormentor,—as if, though unseen, he saw—tightened his grip, I was whirled round, and sped hastily onwards in a direction in which I certainly had no desire of travelling.

All the way I never met a soul. I have since wondered whether in that respect my experience was not a normal one; whether it might not have happened to any. If so, there are streets in London, long lines of streets, which, at a certain period of the night, in a certain sort of weather—probably the weather had something to do with it—are clean deserted; in which there is neither foot-passenger nor vehicle,—not even a policeman. The greater part of the route along which I was driven—I know no juster word—was one with which I had some sort of acquaintance. It led, at first, through what, I take it, was some part of Walham Green; then along the Lillie Road, through Brompton, across the Fulham Road, through the network of streets leading to Sloane Street, across Sloane Street into Lowndes Square. Who goes that way goes some distance, and goes through some important thoroughfares; yet not a creature did I see, nor, I imagine, was there a creature who saw me. As I crossed Sloane Street, I fancied that I heard the distant rumbling of a vehicle along the Knightsbridge Road, but that was the only sound I heard.

It is painful even to recollect the plight in which I was when I was stopped, —for stopped I was, as shortly and as sharply, as the beast of burden, with a bridle in its mouth, whose driver puts a period to his career. I was wet,—intermittent gusts of rain were borne on the scurrying wind; in spite of the pace at which I had been brought, I was chilled to the bone; and—worst of all!—my mud-stained feet, all cut and bleeding, were so painful—for, unfortunately, I was still susceptible enough to pain—that it was agony to have them come into contact with the cold and the slime of the hard, unyielding pavement.

I had been stopped on the opposite side of the square,—that nearest to the hospital; in front of a house which struck me as being somewhat smaller than the rest. It was a house with a portico; about the pillars of this portico was trelliswork, and on the trelliswork was trained some climbing plant. As I stood, shivering, wondering what would happen next, some strange impulse mastered me, and, immediately, to my own unbounded amazement, I found myself scrambling up the trellis towards the verandah above. I am no gymnast, either by nature or by education; I doubt whether, previously, I had ever attempted to climb anything more difficult than a step ladder. The result was, that, though the impulse might be given me, the skill could not, and I had only ascended a yard or so when, losing my footing, I came slithering down upon my back. Bruised and shaken though I was, I was not allowed to inquire into my injuries. In a moment I was on my feet again, and again I was impelled to climb,—only, however, again to come to grief. This time the demon, or whatever it was, that had entered into me, seeming to appreciate the impossibility of getting me to the top of that verandah, directed me to try another way. I mounted the steps leading to the front door, got on to the low parapet which was at one side, thence on to the sill of the adjacent window,—had I slipped then I should have fallen a sheer descent of at least twenty feet to the bottom of the deep area down below. But the sill was broad, and—if it is proper to use such language in connection with a transaction of the sort in which I was engaged—fortune favoured me. I did not fall. In my clenched fist I had a stone. With this I struck the pane of glass, as with a hammer. Through the hole which resulted, I could just insert my hand, and reach the latch within. In another minute the sash was raised, and I was in the house,—I had committed burglary.

As I look back and reflect upon the audacity of the whole proceeding, even now I tremble. Hapless slave of another's will although in very truth I was, I cannot repeat too often that I realised to the full just what it was that I was being compelled to do—a fact which was very far from rendering my situation less distressful!—and every detail of my involuntary actions was projected upon my brain in a series of pictures, whose clear-cut outlines, so long as memory endures, will never fade. Certainly no professional burglar, nor, indeed, any creature in his senses, would have ventured to emulate my surprising rashness. The process of smashing the pane of glass—it was plate glass—was anything but a noiseless one. There was, first, the blow itself, then the shivering of the glass, then the clattering of fragments into the area beneath. One would have thought that the whole thing would have made din enough to have roused the Seven Sleepers. But, here, again the weather was on my side. About that time the wind was howling wildly,—it came shrieking across the square. It is possible that the tumult which it made deadened all other sounds.

Anyhow, as I stood within the room which I had violated, listening for signs of someone being on the alert, I could hear nothing. Within the house there seemed to be the silence of the grave. I drew down the window, and made for the door.

It proved by no means easy to find. The windows were obscured by heavy curtains, so that the room inside was dark as pitch. It appeared to be unusually full of furniture,—an appearance due, perhaps, to my being a stranger in the midst of such Cimmerian blackness. I had to feel my way, very gingerly indeed, among the various impedimenta. As it was I seemed to come into contact with most of the obstacles there were to come into contact with, stumbling more than once over footstools, and over what seemed to be dwarf chairs. It was a miracle that my movements still continued to be unheard,—but I believe that the explanation was, that the house was well built; that the servants were the only persons in it at the time; that their bedrooms were on the top floor; that they were fast asleep; and that they were little likely to be disturbed by anything that might occur in the room which I had entered.

Reaching the door at last, I opened it,—listening for any promise of being interrupted—and—to adapt a hackneyed phrase—directed by the power which shaped my end, I went across the hall and up the stairs. I passed up the first landing, and, on the second, moved to a door upon the right. I turned the handle, it yielded, the door opened, I entered, closing it behind me. I went to the wall just inside the door, found a handle, jerked it, and switched on the electric light,—doing, I make no doubt, all these things, from a spectator's point of view, so naturally, that a judge and jury would have been with difficulty persuaded that they were not the product of my own volition.

In the brilliant glow of the electric light I took a leisurely survey of the contents of the room. It was, as the man in the bed had said it would be, a study,—a fine, spacious apartment, evidently intended rather for work than for show. There were three separate writing-tables, one very large and two smaller ones, all covered with an orderly array of manuscripts and papers. A typewriter stood at the side of one. On the floor, under and about them, were piles of books, portfolios, and official-looking documents. Every available foot of wall space on three sides of the room was lined with shelves, full as they could hold with books. On the fourth side, facing the door, was a large lock-up oak bookcase, and, in the farther corner, a quaint old bureau. So soon as I saw this bureau I went for it, straight as an arrow from a bow,—indeed, it would be no abuse of metaphor to say that I was propelled towards it like an arrow from a bow.

It had drawers below, glass doors above, and between the drawers and the doors was a flap to let down. It was to this flap my attention was directed. I put out my hand to open it; it was locked at the top. I pulled at it with both hands; it refused to budge.

So this was the lock I was, if necessary, to practise the arts of a thief to open. I was no picklock; I had flattered myself that nothing, and no one, could make me such a thing. Yet now that I found myself confronted by that unyielding flap, I found that pressure, irresistible pressure, was being put upon me to gain, by any and every means, access to its interior. I had no option but to yield. I looked about me in search of some convenient tool with which to ply the felon's trade. I found it close beside me. Leaning

against the wall, within a yard of where I stood, were examples of various kinds of weapons,—among them, spear-heads. Taking one of these spear-heads, with much difficulty I forced the point between the flap and the bureau. Using the leverage thus obtained, I attempted to prise it open. The flap held fast; the spear-head snapped in two. I tried another, with the same result; a third, to fail again. There were no more. The most convenient thing remaining was a queer, heavy-headed, sharp-edged hatchet. This I took, brought the sharp edge down with all my force upon the refractory flap. The hatchet went through,—before I had done with it, it was open with a vengeance.

But I was destined on the occasion of my first—and, I trust, last—experience of the burglar's calling, to carry the part completely through. I had gained access to the flap itself only to find that at the back were several small drawers, on one of which my observation was brought to bear in a fashion which it was quite impossible to disregard. As a matter of course it was locked, and, once more, I had to search for something which would serve as a rough-and-ready substitute for the missing key.

There was nothing at all suitable among the weapons,—I could hardly for such a purpose use the hatchet; the drawer in question was such a little one that to have done so would have been to shiver it to splinters. On the mantelshelf, in an open leather case, were a pair of revolvers. Statesmen, nowadays, sometimes stand in actual peril of their lives. It is possible that Mr Lessingham, conscious of continually threatened danger, carried them about with him as a necessary protection. They were serviceable weapons, large, and somewhat weighty,—of the type with which, I believe, upon occasion the police are armed. Not only were all the barrels loaded, but, in the case itself there was a supply of cartridges more than sufficient to charge them all again.

I was handling the weapons, wondering—if, in my condition, the word was applicable—what use I could make of them to enable me to gain admission to that drawer, when there came, on a sudden, from the street without, the sound of approaching wheels. There was a whirring within my brain, as if someone was endeavouring to explain to me to what service to apply the revolvers, and I, perforce, strained every nerve to grasp the meaning of my

invisible mentor. While I did so, the wheels drew rapidly nearer, and, just as I was expecting them to go whirling by, stopped,—in front of the house. My heart leapt in my bosom. In a convulsion of frantic terror, again, during the passage of one frenzied moment, I all but burst the bonds that held me, and fled, haphazard, from the imminent peril. But the bonds were stronger than I,—it was as if I had been rooted to the ground.

A key was inserted in the keyhole of the front door, the lock was turned, the door thrown open, firm footsteps entered the house. If I could I would not have stood upon the order of my going, but gone at once, anywhere, anyhow; but, at that moment, my comings and goings were not matters in which I was consulted. Panic fear raging within, outwardly I was calm as possible, and stood, turning the revolvers over and over, asking myself what it could be that I was intended to do with them. All at once it came to me in an illuminating flash,—I was to fire at the lock of the drawer, and blow it open.

A madder scheme it would have been impossible to hit upon. The servants had slept through a good deal, but they would hardly sleep through the discharge of a revolver in a room below them,—not to speak of the person who had just entered the premises, and whose footsteps were already audible as he came up the stairs. I struggled to make a dumb protest against the insensate folly which was hurrying me to infallible destruction, without success. For me there was only obedience. With a revolver in either hand I marched towards the bureau as unconcernedly as if I would not have given my life to have escaped the denouement which I needed but a slight modicum of common sense to be aware was close at hand. I placed the muzzle of one of the revolvers against the keyhole of the drawer to which my unseen guide had previously directed me, and pulled the trigger. The lock was shattered, the contents of the drawer were at my mercy. I snatched up a bundle of letters, about which a pink ribbon was wrapped. Startled by a noise behind me, immediately following the report of the pistol, I glanced over my shoulder.

The room door was open, and Mr Lessingham was standing with the handle in his hand.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT PAUL LESSINGHAM

He was in evening dress. He carried a small portfolio in his left hand. If the discovery of my presence startled him, as it could scarcely have failed to do, he allowed no sign of surprise to escape him. Paul Lessingham's impenetrability is proverbial. Whether on platforms addressing excited crowds, or in the midst of heated discussion in the House of Commons, all the world knows that his coolness remains unruffled. It is generally understood that he owes his success in the political arena in no slight measure to the adroitness which is born of his invulnerable presence of mind. He gave me a taste of its quality then. Standing in the attitude which has been familiarised to us by caricaturists, his feet apart, his broad shoulders well set back, his handsome head a little advanced, his keen blue eyes having in them something suggestive of a bird of prey considering just when, where, and how to pounce, he regarded me for some seconds in perfect silence,—whether outwardly I flinched I cannot say; inwardly I know I did. When he spoke, it was without moving from where he stood, and in the calm, airy tones in which he might have addressed an acquaintance who had just dropped in.

'May I ask, sir, to what I am indebted for the pleasure of your company?'

He paused, as if waiting for my answer. When none came, he put his question in another form.

'Pray, sir, who are you, and on whose invitation do I find you here?'

As I still stood speechless, motionless, meeting his glance without a twitching of an eyebrow, nor a tremor of the hand, I imagine that he began to consider me with an even closer intentness than before. And that the—to say the least of it—peculiarity of my appearance, caused him to suspect that he was face to face with an adventure of a peculiar kind. Whether he took me for a lunatic I cannot certainly say; but, from his manner, I think it possible he did. He began to move towards me from across the room, addressing me with the utmost suavity and courtesy.

'Be so good as to give me the revolver, and the papers you are holding in your hand.'

As he came on, something entered into me, and forced itself from between my lips, so that I said, in a low, hissing voice, which I vow was never mine,

'THE BEETLE!'

Whether it was, or was not, owing, in some degree, to a trick of my imagination, I cannot determine, but, as the words were spoken, it seemed to me that the lights went low, so that the place was all in darkness, and I again was filled with the nauseous consciousness of the presence of something evil in the room. But if, in that matter, my abnormally strained imagination played me a trick, there could be no doubt whatever as to the effect which the words had on Mr Lessingham. When the mist of the blackness—real or supposititious—had passed from before my eyes, I found that he had retreated to the extremest limits of the room, and was crouching, his back against the bookshelves, clutching at them, in the attitude of a man who has received a staggering blow, from which, as yet, he has had no opportunity of recovering. A most extraordinary change had taken place in the expression of his face; in his countenance amazement, fear, and horror seemed struggling for the mastery. I was filled with a most discomforting qualm, as I gazed at the frightened figure in front of me, and realised that it was that of the great Paul Lessingham, the god of my political idolatry.

'Who are you?—In God's name, who are you?'

His very voice seemed changed; his frenzied, choking accents would hardly have been recognised by either friend or foe.

'Who are you?—Do you hear me ask, who are you? In the name of God, I bid you say!'

As he perceived that I was still, he began to show a species of excitement which it was unpleasant to witness, especially as he continued to crouch against the bookshelf, as if he was afraid to stand up straight. So far from exhibiting the impassivity for which he was renowned, all the muscles in his face and all the limbs in his body seemed to be in motion at once; he was like a man afflicted with the shivering ague,—his very fingers were twitching aimlessly, as they were stretched out on either side of him, as if seeking for support from the shelves against which he leaned.

'Where have you come from? what do you want? who sent you here? what concern have you with me? is it necessary that you should come and play these childish tricks with me? why? why?'

The questions came from him with astonishing rapidity. When he saw that I continued silent, they came still faster, mingled with what sounded to me like a stream of inchoate abuse.

'Why do you stand there in that extraordinary garment,—it's worse than nakedness, yes, worse than nakedness! For that alone I could have you punished, and I will!—and try to play the fool? Do you think I am a boy to be bamboozled by every bogey a blunderer may try to conjure up? If so, you're wrong, as whoever sent you might have had sense enough to let you know. If you tell me who you are, and who sent you here, and what it is you want, I will be merciful; if not, the police shall be sent for, and the law shall take its course,—to the bitter end!—I warn you.—Do you hear? You fool! tell me who you are?'

The last words came from him in what was very like a burst of childish fury. He himself seemed conscious, the moment after, that his passion was sadly lacking in dignity, and to be ashamed of it. He drew himself straight up. With a pocket-handkerchief which he took from an inner pocket of his coat, he wiped his lips. Then, clutching it tightly in his hand, he eyed me

with a fixedness which, under any other circumstances, I should have found unbearable.

'Well, sir, is your continued silence part of the business of the role you have set yourself to play?'

His tone was firmer, and his bearing more in keeping with his character.

'If it be so, I presume that I, at least have liberty to speak. When I find a gentleman, even one gifted with your eloquence of silence, playing the part of burglar, I think you will grant that a few words on my part cannot justly be considered to be out of place.'

Again he paused. I could not but feel that he was employing the vehicle of somewhat cumbrous sarcasm to gain time, and to give himself the opportunity of recovering, if the thing was possible, his pristine courage. That, for some cause wholly hidden from me, the mysterious utterance had shaken his nature to its deepest foundations, was made plainer by his endeavour to treat the whole business with a sort of cynical levity.

'To commence with, may I ask if you have come through London, or through any portion of it, in that costume,—or, rather, in that want of costume? It would seem out of place in a Cairene street,—would it not?—even in the Rue de Rabagas,—was it not the Rue de Rabagas?'

He asked the question with an emphasis the meaning of which was wholly lost on me. What he referred to either then, or in what immediately followed, I, of course, knew no more than the man in the moon,—though I should probably have found great difficulty in convincing him of my ignorance.

'I take it that you are a reminiscence of the Rue de Rabagas,—that, of course;—is it not of course? The little house with the blue-grey Venetians, and the piano with the F sharp missing? Is there still the piano? with the tinny treble,—indeed, the whole atmosphere, was it not tinny?—You agree with me?—I have not forgotten. I am not even afraid to remember,—you perceive it?'

A new idea seemed to strike him,—born, perhaps, of my continued silence.

'You look English,—is it possible that you are not English? What are you then—French? We shall see!'

He addressed me in a tongue which I recognised as French, but with which I was not sufficiently acquainted to understand. Although, I flatter myself that,—as the present narrative should show—I have not made an ill-use of the opportunities which I have had to improve my, originally, modest education, I regret that I have never had so much as a ghost of a chance to acquire an even rudimentary knowledge of any language except my own. Recognising, I suppose, from my looks, that he was addressing me in a tongue to which I was a stranger, after a time he stopped, added something with a smile, and then began to talk to me in a lingo to which, in a manner of speaking, I was even stranger, for this time I had not the faintest notion what it was,—it might have been gibberish for all that I could tell. Quickly perceiving that he had succeeded no better than before, he returned to English.

'You do not know French?—nor the patois of the Rue de Rabagas? Very good,—then what is it that you do know? Are you under a vow of silence, or are you dumb,—except upon occasion? Your face is English,—what can be seen of it, and I will take it, therefore, that English spoken words convey some meaning to your brain. So listen, sir, to what I have to say,—do me the favour to listen carefully.'

He was becoming more and more his former self. In his clear, modulated tones there was a ring of something like a threat,—a something which went very far beyond his words.

'You know something of a period which I choose to have forgotten,—that is plain; you come from a person who, probably, knows still more. Go back to that person and say that what I have forgotten I have forgotten; nothing will be gained by anyone by an endeavour to induce me to remember,—be very sure upon that point, say that nothing will be gained by anyone. That time was one of mirage, of delusion, of disease. I was in a condition, mentally and bodily, in which pranks could have been played upon me by any trickster. Such pranks were played. I know that now quite well. I do not

pretend to be proficient in the modus operandi of the hankey-pankey man, but I know that he has a method, all the same,—one susceptible, too, of facile explanation. Go back to your friend, and tell him that I am not again likely to be made the butt of his old method,—nor of his new one either.—You hear me, sir?'

I remained motionless and silent,—an attitude which, plainly, he resented.

'Are you deaf and dumb? You certainly are not dumb, for you spoke to me just now. Be advised by me, and do not compel me to resort to measures which will be the cause to you of serious discomfort.—You hear me, sir?'

Still, from me, not a sign of comprehension,—to his increased annoyance.

'So be it. Keep your own counsel, if you choose. Yours will be the bitterness, not mine. You may play the lunatic, and play it excellently well, but that you do understand what is said to you is clear.—Come to business, sir. Give me that revolver, and the packet of letters which you have stolen from my desk.'

He had been speaking with the air of one who desired to convince himself as much as me,—and about his last words there was almost a flavour of braggadocio. I remained unheeding.

'Are you going to do as I require, or are you insane enough to refuse?—in which case I shall summon assistance, and there will quickly be an end of it. Pray do not imagine that you can trick me into supposing that you do not grasp the situation. I know better.—Once more, are you going to give me that revolver and those letters?'

Yet no reply. His anger was growing momentarily greater,—and his agitation too. On my first introduction to Paul Lessingham I was not destined to discover in him any one of those qualities of which the world held him to be the undisputed possessor. He showed himself to be as unlike the statesman I had conceived, and esteemed, as he easily could have done.

'Do you think I stand in awe of you?—you!—of such a thing as you! Do as I tell you, or I myself will make you,—and, at the same time, teach you a

much-needed lesson.'

He raised his voice. In his bearing there was a would-be defiance. He might not have been aware of it, but the repetitions of the threats were, in themselves, confessions of weakness. He came a step or two forward,—then, stopping short, began to tremble. The perspiration broke out upon his brow; he made spasmodic little dabs at it with his crumpled-up handkerchief. His eyes wandered hither and thither, as if searching for something which they feared to see yet were constrained to seek. He began to talk to himself, out loud, in odd disconnected sentences,—apparently ignoring me entirely.

'What was that?—It was nothing.—It was my imagination.—My nerves are out of order.—I have been working too hard.—I am not well.—WHAT'S THAT?'

This last inquiry came from him in a half-stifled shriek,—as the door opened to admit the head and body of an elderly man in a state of considerable undress. He had the tousled appearance of one who had been unexpectedly roused out of slumber, and unwillingly dragged from bed. Mr Lessingham stared at him as if he had been a ghost, while he stared back at Mr Lessingham as if he found a difficulty in crediting the evidence of his own eyes. It was he who broke the silence,—stutteringly.

'I am sure I beg your pardon, sir, but one of the maids thought that she heard the sound of a shot, and we came down to see if there was anything the matter,—I had no idea, sir, that you were here.' His eyes travelled from Mr Lessingham towards me,—suddenly increasing, when they saw me, to about twice their previous size. 'God save us!—who is that?'

The man's self-evident cowardice possibly impressed Mr Lessingham with the conviction that he himself was not cutting the most dignified of figures. At any rate, he made a notable effort to, once more, assume a bearing of greater determination.

'You are quite right, Matthews, quite right. I am obliged by your watchfulness. At present you may leave the room—I propose to deal with

this fellow myself,—only remain with the other men upon the landing, so that, if I call, you may come to my assistance.'

Matthews did as he was told, he left the room,—with, I fancy, more rapidity than he had entered it. Mr Lessingham returned to me, his manner distinctly more determined, as if he found his resolution reinforced by the near neighbourhood of his retainers,

'Now, my man, you see how the case stands, at a word from me you will be overpowered and doomed to undergo a long period of imprisonment. Yet I am still willing to listen to the dictates of mercy. Put down that revolver, give me those letters,—you will not find me disposed to treat you hardly.'

For all the attention I paid him, I might have been a graven image. He misunderstood, or pretended to misunderstand, the cause of my silence.

'Come, I see that you suppose my intentions to be harsher than they really are,—do not let us have a scandal, and a scene,—be sensible!—give me those letters!'

Again he moved in my direction; again, after he had taken a step or two, to stumble and stop, and look about him with frightened eyes; again to begin to mumble to himself aloud.

'It's a conjurer's trick!—Of course!—Nothing more,—What else could it be?—I'm not to be fooled.—I'm older than I was. I've been overdoing it,—that's all.'

Suddenly he broke into cries.

'Matthews! Matthews!—Help! help!'

Matthews entered the room, followed by three other men, younger than himself. Evidently all had slipped into the first articles of clothing they could lay their hands upon, and each carried a stick, or some similar rudimentary weapon.

Their master spurred them on.

'Strike the revolver out of his hand, Matthews!—knock him down!—take the letters from him!—don't be afraid!—I'm not afraid!'

In proof of it, he rushed at me, as it seemed half blindly. As he did so I was constrained to shout out, in tones which I should not have recognised as mine,

'THE BEETLE!'

And that moment the room was all in darkness, and there were screams as of someone in an agony of terror or of pain. I felt that something had come into the room, I knew not whence nor how,—something of horror. And the next action of which I was conscious was, that under cover of the darkness, I was flying from the room, propelled by I knew not what.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN IN THE STREET

Whether anyone pursued I cannot say. I have some dim recollection, as I came out of the room, of women being huddled against the wall upon the landing, and of their screaming as I went past. But whether any effort was made to arrest my progress I cannot tell. My own impression is that not the slightest attempt to impede my headlong flight was made by anyone.

In what direction I was going I did not know. I was like a man flying through the phantasmagoric happenings of a dream, knowing neither how nor whither. I tore along what I suppose was a broad passage, through a door at the end into what, I fancy, was a drawing-room. Across this room I dashed, helter-skelter, bringing down, in the gloom, unseen articles of furniture, with myself sometimes on top, and sometimes under them. In a trice, each time I fell, I was on my feet again,—until I went crashing against a window which was concealed by curtains. It would not have been strange had I crashed through it,—but I was spared that. Thrusting aside the curtains, I fumbled for the fastening of the window. It was a tall French casement, extending, so far as I could judge, from floor to ceiling. When I had it open I stepped through it on to the verandah without,—to find that I was on the top of the portico which I had vainly essayed to ascend from below.

I tried the road down which I had tried up,—proceeding with a breakneck recklessness of which now I shudder to think. It was, probably, some thirty feet above the pavement, yet I rushed at the descent with as much disregard for the safety of life and limb as if it had been only three. Over the edge of the parapet I went, obtaining, with my naked feet, a precarious foothold on

the latticework,—then down I commenced to scramble. I never did get a proper hold, and when I had descended, perhaps, rather more than half the distance—scraping, as it seemed to me, every scrap of skin off my body in the process—I lost what little hold I had. Down to the bottom I went tumbling, rolling right across the pavement into the muddy road. It was a miracle I was not seriously injured,—but in that sense, certainly, that night the miracles were on my side. Hardly was I down, than I was up again,—mud and all.

Just as I was getting on to my feet I felt a firm hand grip me by the shoulder. Turning I found myself confronted by a tall, slenderly built man, with a long, drooping moustache, and an overcoat buttoned up to the chin, who held me with a grasp of steel. He looked at me,—and I looked back at him.

'After the ball,—eh?'

Even then I was struck by something pleasant in his voice, and some quality as of sunshine in his handsome face.

Seeing that I said nothing he went on,—with a curious, half mocking smile.

'Is that the way to come slithering down the Apostle's pillar?—Is it simple burglary, or simpler murder?—Tell me the glad tidings that you've killed St Paul, and I'll let you go.'

Whether he was mad or not I cannot say,—there was some excuse for thinking so. He did not look mad, though his words and actions alike were strange.

'Although you have confined yourself to gentle felony, shall I not shower blessings on the head of him who has been robbing Paul?—Away with you!'

He removed his grip, giving me a gentle push as he did so,—and I was away. I neither stayed nor paused.

I knew little of records, but if anyone has made a better record than I did that night between Lowndes Square and Walham Green I should like to

know just what it was,—I should, too, like to have seen it done.

In an incredibly short space of time I was once more in front of the house with the open window,—the packet of letters—which were like to have cost me so dear!—gripped tightly in my hand.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONTENTS OF THE PACKET

I pulled up sharply,—as if a brake had been suddenly, and even mercilessly, applied to bring me to a standstill. In front of the window I stood shivering. A shower had recently commenced,—the falling rain was being blown before the breeze. I was in a terrible sweat,—yet tremulous as with cold; covered with mud; bruised, and cut, and bleeding,—as piteous an object as you would care to see. Every limb in my body ached; every muscle was exhausted; mentally and physically I was done; had I not been held up, willy nilly, by the spell which was upon me, I should have sunk down, then and there, in a hopeless, helpless, hapless heap.

But my tormentor was not yet at an end with me.

As I stood there, like some broken and beaten hack, waiting for the word of command, it came. It was as if some strong magnetic current had been switched on to me through the window to draw me into the room. Over the low wall I went, over the sill,—once more I stood in that chamber of my humiliation and my shame. And once again I was conscious of that awful sense of the presence of an evil thing. How much of it was fact, and how much of it was the product of imagination I cannot say; but, looking back, it seems to me that it was as if I had been taken out of the corporeal body to be plunged into the inner chambers of all nameless sin. There was the sound of something flopping from off the bed on to the ground, and I knew that the thing was coming at me across the floor. My stomach quaked, my heart melted within me,—the very anguish of my terror gave me strength to scream,—and scream! Sometimes, even now, I seem to hear those screams

of mine ringing through the night, and I bury my face in the pillow, and it is as though I was passing through the very Valley of the Shadow.

The thing went back,—I could hear it slipping and sliding across the floor. There was silence. And, presently, the lamp was lit, and the room was all in brightness. There, on the bed, in the familiar attitude between the sheets, his head resting on his hand, his eyes blazing like living coals, was the dreadful cause of all my agonies. He looked at me with his unpitying, unblinking glance.

'So!—Through the window again!—like a thief!—Is it always through that door that you come into a house?'

He paused,—as if to give me time to digest his gibe.

'You saw Paul Lessingham,—well?—the great Paul Lessingham!—Was he, then, so great?'

His rasping voice, with its queer foreign twang, reminded me, in some uncomfortable way, of a rusty saw,—the things he said, and the manner in which he said them, were alike intended to add to my discomfort. It was solely because the feat was barely possible that he only partially succeeded.

'Like a thief you went into his house,—did I not tell you that you would? Like a thief he found you,—were you not ashamed? Since, like a thief he found you, how comes it that you have escaped,—by what robber's artifice have you saved yourself from gaol?'

His manner changed,—so that, all at once, he seemed to snarl at me.

'Is he great?—well!—is he great,—Paul Lessingham? You are small, but he is smaller,—your great Paul Lessingham!—Was there ever a man so less than nothing?'

With the recollection fresh upon me of Mr Lessingham as I had so lately seen him I could not but feel that there might be a modicum of truth in what, with such an intensity of bitterness, the speaker suggested. The

picture which, in my mental gallery, I had hung in the place of honour, seemed, to say the least, to have become a trifle smudged.

As usual, the man in the bed seemed to experience not the slightest difficulty in deciphering what was passing through my mind.

'That is so,—you and he, you are a pair,—the great Paul Lessingham is as great a thief as you,—and greater!—for, at least, than you he has more courage.'

For some moments he was still; then exclaimed, with sudden fierceness,

'Give me what you have stolen!'

I moved towards the bed—most unwillingly—and held out to him the packet of letters which I had abstracted from the little drawer. Perceiving my disinclination to his near neighbourhood, he set himself to play with it. Ignoring my outstretched hand, he stared me straight in the face.

'What ails you? Are you not well? Is it not sweet to stand close at my side? You, with your white skin, if I were a woman, would you not take me for a wife?'

There was something about the manner in which this was said which was so essentially feminine that once more I wondered if I could possibly be mistaken in the creature's sex. I would have given much to have been able to strike him across the face,—or, better, to have taken him by the neck, and thrown him through the window, and rolled him in the mud.

He condescended to notice what I was holding out to him.

'So!—that is what you have stolen!—That is what you have taken from the drawer in the bureau—the drawer which was locked—and which you used the arts in which a thief is skilled to enter. Give it to me,—thief!'

He snatched the packet from me, scratching the back of my hand as he did so, as if his nails had been talons. He turned the packet over and over,

glaring at it as he did so,—it was strange what a relief it was to have his glance removed from off my face.

'You kept it in your inner drawer, Paul Lessingham, where none but you could see it,—did you? You hid it as one hides treasure. There should be something here worth having, worth seeing, worth knowing,—yes, worth knowing!—since you found it worth your while to hide it up so closely.'

As I have said, the packet was bound about by a string of pink ribbon,—a fact on which he presently began to comment.

'With what a pretty string you have encircled it,—and how neatly it is tied! Surely only a woman's hand could tie a knot like that,—who would have guessed yours were such agile fingers?—So! An endorsement on the cover! What's this?—let's see what's written!—"The letters of my dear love, Marjorie Lindon."

As he read these words, which, as he said, were endorsed upon the outer sheet of paper which served as a cover for the letters which were enclosed within, his face became transfigured. Never did I suppose that rage could have so possessed a human countenance. His jaw dropped open so that his yellow fangs gleamed through his parted lips,—he held his breath so long that each moment I looked to see him fall down in a fit; the veins stood out all over his face and head like seams of blood. I know not how long he continued speechless. When his breath returned, it was with chokings and gaspings, in the midst of which he hissed out his words, as if their mere passage through his throat brought him near to strangulation.

'The letters of his dear love!—of his dear love!—his!—Paul Lessingham's!—So!—It is as I guessed,—as I knew,—as I saw!—Marjorie Lindon!—Sweet Marjorie!—His dear love!—Paul Lessingham's dear love!—She with the lily face, the corn-hued hair!—What is it his dear love has found in her fond heart to write Paul Lessingham?'

Sitting up in bed he tore the packet open. It contained, perhaps, eight or nine letters,—some mere notes, some long epistles. But, short or long, he devoured them with equal appetite, each one over and over again, till I thought he never would have done re-reading them. They were on thick

white paper, of a peculiar shade of whiteness, with untrimmed edges, On each sheet a crest and an address were stamped in gold, and all the sheets were of the same shape and size. I told myself that if anywhere, at any time, I saw writing paper like that again, I should not fail to know it. The caligraphy was, like the paper, unusual, bold, decided, and, I should have guessed, produced by a J pen.

All the time that he was reading he kept emitting sounds, more resembling yelps and snarls than anything more human,—like some savage beast nursing its pent-up rage. When he had made an end of reading,—for the season,—he let his passion have full vent.

'So!—That is what his dear love has found it in her heart to write Paul Lessingham!—Paul Lessingham!'

Pen cannot describe the concentrated frenzy of hatred with which the speaker dwelt upon the name,—it was demoniac.

'It is enough!—it is the end!—it is his doom! He shall be ground between the upper and the nether stones in the towers of anguish, and all that is left of him shall be cast on the accursed stream of the bitter waters, to stink under the blood-grimed sun! And for her—for Marjorie Lindon!—for his dear love!—it shall come to pass that she shall wish that she was never born,—nor he!—and the gods of the shadows shall smell the sweet incense of her suffering!—It shall be! it shall be! It is I that say it,—even I!'

In the madness of his rhapsodical frenzy I believe that he had actually forgotten I was there. But, on a sudden, glancing aside, he saw me, and remembered,—and was prompt to take advantage of an opportunity to wreak his rage upon a tangible object.

'It is you!—you thief!—you still live!—to make a mock of one of the children of the gods!'

He leaped, shrieking, off the bed, and sprang at me, claspng my throat with his horrid hands, bearing me backwards on to the floor; I felt his breath mingle with mine * * * and then God, in His mercy, sent oblivion.

BOOK II

The Haunted Man

The Story according to Sydney Atherton, Esquire

CHAPTER X

REJECTED

It was after our second waltz I did it. In the usual quiet corner—which, that time, was in the shadow of a palm in the hall. Before I had got into my stride she checked me,—touching my sleeve with her fan, turning towards me with startled eyes.

'Stop, please!'

But I was not to be stopped. Cliff Challoner passed, with Gerty Cazell. I fancy that, as he passed, he nodded. I did not care. I was wound up to go, and I went it. No man knows how he can talk till he does talk,—to the girl he wants to marry. It is my impression that I gave her recollections of the Restoration poets. She seemed surprised,—not having previously detected in me the poetic strain, and insisted on cutting in.

'Mr Atherton, I am so sorry.'

Then I did let fly.

'Sorry that I love you!—why? Why should you be sorry that you have become the one thing needful in any man's eyes,—even in mine? The one thing precious,—the one thing to be altogether esteemed! Is it so common for a woman to come across a man who would be willing to lay down his life for her that she should be sorry when she finds him?'

'I did not know that you felt like this, though I confess that I have had my—my doubts.'

'Doubts!—I thank you.'

'You are quite aware, Mr Atherton, that I like you very much.'

'Like me!—Bah!'

'I cannot help liking you,—though it may be "bah."'

'I don't want you to like me,—I want you to love me.'

'Precisely,—that is your mistake.'

'My mistake!—in wanting you to love me!—when I love you—'

'Then you shouldn't,—though I can't help thinking that you are mistaken even there.'

'Mistaken!—in supposing that I love you!—when I assert and reassert it with the whole force of my being! What do you want me to do to prove I love you,—take you in my arms and crush you to my bosom, and make a spectacle of you before every creature in the place?'

'I'd rather you wouldn't, and perhaps you wouldn't mind not talking quite so loud. Mr Challoner seems to be wondering what you're shouting about.'

'You shouldn't torture me.'

She opened and shut her fan,—as she looked down at it I am disposed to suspect that she smiled.

'I am glad we have had this little explanation, because, of course, you are my friend.'

'I am not your friend.'

'Pardon me, you are.'

'I say I'm not,—if I can't be something else, I'll be no friend.'

She went on,—calmly ignoring me,—playing with her fan.

'As it happens, I am, just now, in rather a delicate position, in which a friend is welcome.'

'What's the matter? Who's been worrying you,—your father?'

'Well,—he has not,—as yet; but he may be soon.'

'What's in the wind?'

'Mr Lessingham.'

She dropped her voice,—and her eyes. For the moment I did not catch her meaning.

'What?'

'Your friend, Mr Lessingham.'

'Excuse me, Miss Lindon, but I am by no means sure that anyone is entitled to call Mr Lessingham a friend of mine.'

'What!—Not when I am going to be his wife?'

That took me aback. I had had my suspicions that Paul Lessingham was more with Marjorie than he had any right to be, but I had never supposed that she could see anything desirable in a stick of a man like that. Not to speak of a hundred and one other considerations,—Lessingham on one side of the House, and her father on the other; and old Lindon girding at him anywhere and everywhere—with his high-dried Tory notions of his family importance,—to say nothing of his fortune.

I don't know if I looked what I felt,—if I did, I looked uncommonly blank.

'You have chosen an appropriate moment, Miss Lindon, to make to me such a communication.'

She chose to disregard my irony.

'I am glad you think so, because now you will understand what a difficult position I am in.'

'I offer you my hearty congratulations.'

'And I thank you for them, Mr Atherton, in the spirit in which they are offered, because from you I know they mean so much.'

I bit my lip,—for the life of me I could not tell how she wished me to read her words.

'Do I understand that this announcement has been made to me as one of the public?'

'You do not. It is made to you, in confidence, as my friend,—as my greatest friend; because a husband is something more than friend.' My pulses tingled. 'You will be on my side?'

She had paused,—and I stayed silent.

'On your side,—or Mr Lessingham's?'

'His side is my side, and my side is his side;—you will be on our side?'

'I am not sure that I altogether follow you.'

'You are the first I have told. When papa hears it is possible that there will be trouble,—as you know. He thinks so much of you and of your opinion; when that trouble comes I want you to be on our side,—on my side.'

'Why should I?—what does it matter? You are stronger than your father,—it is just possible that Lessingham is stronger than you; together, from your father's point of view, you will be invincible.'

'You are my friend,—are you not my friend?'

'In effect, you offer me an Apple of Sodom.'

'Thank you;—I did not think you so unkind.'

'And you,—are you kind? I make you an avowal of my love, and, straightway, you ask me to act as chorus to the love of another.'

'How could I tell you loved me,—as you say! I had no notion. You have known me all your life, yet you have not breathed a word of it till now.'

'If I had spoken before?'

I imagine that there was a slight movement of her shoulders,—almost amounting to a shrug.

'I do not know that it would have made any difference.—I do not pretend that it would. But I do know this, I believe that you yourself have only discovered the state of your own mind within the last half-hour.'

If she had slapped my face she could not have startled me more. I had no notion if her words were uttered at random, but they came so near the truth they held me breathless. It was a fact that only during the last few minutes had I really realised how things were with me,—only since the end of that first waltz that the flame had burst out in my soul which was now consuming me. She had read me by what seemed so like a flash of inspiration that I hardly knew what to say to her. I tried to be stinging.

'You flatter me, Miss Lindon, you flatter me at every point. Had you only discovered to me the state of your mind a little sooner I should not have discovered to you the state of mine at all.'

'We will consider it terra incognita.'

'Since you wish it.' Her provoking calmness stung me,—and the suspicion that she was laughing at me in her sleeve. I gave her a glimpse of the cloven hoof. 'But, at the same time, since you assert that you have so long been innocent, I beg that you will continue so no more. At least, your innocence shall be without excuse. For I wish you to understand that I love you, that I have loved you, that I shall love you. Any understanding you may have with Mr Lessingham will not make the slightest difference. I warn you, Miss Lindon, that, until death, you will have to write me down your lover.'

She looked at me, with wide open eyes,—as if I almost frightened her. To be frank, that was what I wished to do.

'Mr Atherton!'

'Miss Lindon?'

'That is not like you at all.'

'We seem to be making each other's acquaintance for the first time.'

She continued to gaze at me with her big eyes,—which, to be candid, I found it difficult to meet. On a sudden her face was lighted by a smile,—which I resented.

'Not after all these years,—not after all these years! I know you, and though I daresay you're not flawless, I fancy you'll be found to ring pretty true.'

Her manner was almost sisterly,—elder-sisterly. I could have shaken her. Hartridge coming to claim his dance gave me an opportunity to escape with such remnants of dignity as I could gather about me. He dawdled up,—his thumbs, as usual, in his waistcoat pockets.

'I believe, Miss Lindon, this is our dance.'

She acknowledged it with a bow, and rose to take his arm. I got up, and left her, without a word.

As I crossed the hall I chanced on Percy Woodville. He was in his familiar state of fluster, and was gaping about him as if he had mislaid the Koh-i-noor, and wondered where in thunder it had got to. When he saw it was I he caught me by the arm.

'I say, Atherton, have you seen Miss Lindon?'

'I have.'

'No!—Have you?—By Jove!—Where? I've been looking for her all over the place, except in the cellars and the attics,—and I was just going to

commence on them. This is our dance.'

'In that case, she's shunted you.'

'No!—Impossible!' His mouth went like an O,—and his eyes ditto, his eyeglass clattering down on to his shirt front. 'I expect the mistake's mine. Fact is, I've made a mess of my programme. It's either the last dance, or this dance, or the next, that I've booked with her, but I'm hanged if I know which. Just take a squint at it, there's a good chap, and tell me which one you think it is.'

I 'took a squint'—since he held the thing within an inch of my nose I could hardly help it; one 'squint,' and that was enough—and more. Some men's ball programmes are studies in impressionism, Percy's seemed to me to be a study in madness. It was covered with hieroglyphics, but what they meant, or what they did there anyhow, it was absurd to suppose that I could tell,—I never put them there!—Proverbially, the man's a champion hasher.

'I regret, my dear Percy, that I am not an expert in cuneiform writing. If you have any doubt as to which dance is yours, you'd better ask the lady,—she'll feel flattered.'

Leaving him to do his own addling I went to find my coat,—I panted to get into the open air; as for dancing I felt that I loathed it. Just as I neared the cloak-room someone stopped me. It was Dora Grayling.

'Have you forgotten that this is our dance?'

I had forgotten,—clean. And I was not obliged by her remembering. Though as I looked at her sweet, grey eyes, and at the soft contours of her gentle face, I felt that I deserved well kicking. She is an angel,—one of the best!—but I was in no mood for angels. Not for a very great deal would I have gone through that dance just then, nor, with Dora Grayling, of all women in the world, would I have sat it out.—So I was a brute and blundered.

'You must forgive me, Miss Grayling, but—I am not feeling very well, and—I don't think I'm up to any more dancing.—Good-night.'

CHAPTER XI

A MIDNIGHT EPISODE

The weather out of doors was in tune with my frame of mind,—I was in a deuce of a temper, and it was a deuce of a night. A keen north-east wind, warranted to take the skin right off you, was playing catch-who-catch-can with intermittent gusts of blinding rain. Since it was not fit for a dog to walk, none of your cabs for me,—nothing would serve but pedestrian exercise.

So I had it.

I went down Park Lane,—and the wind and rain went with me,—also, thoughts of Dora Grayling. What a bounder I had been,—and was! If there is anything in worse taste than to book a lady for a dance, and then to leave her in the lurch, I should like to know what that thing is,—when found it ought to be made a note of. If any man of my acquaintance allowed himself to be guilty of such a felony in the first degree, I should cut him. I wished someone would try to cut me,—I should like to see him at it.

It was all Marjorie's fault,—everything! past, present, and to come. I had known that girl when she was in long frocks—I had, at that period of our acquaintance, pretty recently got out of them; when she was advanced to short ones; and when, once more, she returned to long. And all that time,—well, I was nearly persuaded that the whole of the time I had loved her. If I had not mentioned it, it was because I had suffered my affection, 'like the worm, to lie hidden in the bud,'—or whatever it is the fellow says.

At any rate, I was perfectly positive that if I had had the faintest notion that she would ever seriously consider such a man as Lessingham I should have loved her long ago. Lessingham! Why, he was old enough to be her father,—at least he was a good many years older than I was. And a wretched Radical! It is true that on certain points I, also, am what some people would call a Radical,—but not a Radical of the kind he is. Thank Heaven, no! No doubt I have admired traits in his character, until I learnt this thing of him. I am even prepared to admit that he is a man of ability,—in his way! which is, emphatically, not mine. But to think of him in connection with such a girl as Marjorie Lindon,—preposterous! Why, the man's as dry as a stick,—drier! And cold as an iceberg. Nothing but a politician, absolutely. He a lover!—how I could fancy such a stroke of humour setting all the benches in a roar. Both by education, and by nature, he was incapable of even playing such a part; as for being the thing,—absurd! If you were to sink a shaft from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, you would find inside him nothing but the dry bones of parties and of politics.

What my Marjorie—if everyone had his own, she is mine, and, in that sense, she always will be mine—what my Marjorie could see in such a dry-as-dust out of which even to construct the rudiments of a husband was beyond my fathoming.

Suchlike agreeable reflections were fit company for the wind and the wet, so they bore me company all down the lane. I crossed at the corner, going round the hospital towards the square. This brought me to the abiding-place of Paul the Apostle. Like the idiot I was, I went out into the middle of the street, and stood awhile in the mud to curse him and his house,—on the whole, when one considers that that is the kind of man I can be, it is, perhaps, not surprising that Marjorie disdained me.

'May your following,' I cried,—it is an absolute fact that the words were shouted!—"both in the House and out of it, no longer regard you as a leader! May your party follow after other gods! May your political aspirations wither, and your speeches be listened to by empty benches! May the Speaker persistently and strenuously refuse to allow you to catch his eye, and, at the next election, may your constituency reject you!—Jehoram!—what's that?'

I might well ask. Until that moment I had appeared to be the only lunatic at large, either outside the house or in it, but, on a sudden, a second lunatic came on the scene, and that with a vengeance. A window was crashed open from within,—the one over the front door, and someone came plunging through it on to the top of the portico. That it was a case of intended suicide I made sure,—and I began to be in hopes that I was about to witness the suicide of Paul. But I was not so assured of the intention when the individual in question began to scramble down the pillar of the porch in the most extraordinary fashion I ever witnessed,—I was not even convinced of a suicidal purpose when he came tumbling down, and lay sprawling in the mud at my feet.

I fancy, if I had performed that portion of the act I should have lain quiet for a second or two, to consider whereabouts I was, and which end of me was uppermost. But there was no nonsense of that sort about that singularly agile stranger,—if he was not made of india-rubber he ought to have been. So to speak, before he was down he was up,—it was all I could do to grab at him before he was off like a rocket.

Such a figure as he presented is seldom seen,—at least, in the streets of London. What he had done with the rest of his apparel I am not in a position to say,—all that was left of it was a long, dark cloak which he strove to wrap round him. Save for that,—and mud!—he was bare as the palm of my hand, Yet it was his face that held me. In my time I have seen strange expressions on men's faces, but never before one such as I saw on his. He looked like a man might look who, after living a life of undiluted crime, at last finds himself face to face with the devil. It was not the look of a madman,—far from it; it was something worse.

It was the expression on the man's countenance, as much as anything else, which made me behave as I did. I said something to him,—some nonsense, I know not what. He regarded me with a silence which was supernatural. I spoke to him again;—not a word issued from those rigid lips; there was not a tremor of those awful eyes,—eyes which I was tolerably convinced saw something which I had never seen, or ever should. Then I took my hand from off his shoulder, and let him go. I know not why,—I did.

He had remained as motionless as a statue while I held him,—indeed, for any evidence of life he gave, he might have been a statue; but, when my grasp was loosed, how he ran! He had turned the corner and was out of sight before I could say, 'How do!'

It was only then,—when he had gone, and I had realised the extra-double-express-flash-of-lightning rate at which he had taken his departure—that it occurred to me of what an extremely sensible act I had been guilty in letting him go at all. Here was an individual who had been committing burglary, or something very like it, in the house of a budding cabinet minister, and who had tumbled plump into my arms, so that all I had to do was to call a policeman and get him quodded,—and all that I had done was something of a totally different kind.

'You're a nice type of an ideal citizen!' I was addressing myself, 'A first chop specimen of a low-down idiot,—to connive at the escape of the robber who's been robbing Paul. Since you've let the villain go, the least you can do is to leave a card on the Apostle, and inquire how he's feeling.'

I went to Lessingham's front door and knocked,—I knocked once, I knocked twice, I knocked thrice, and the third time, I give you my word, I made the echoes ring,—but still there was not a soul that answered.

'If this is a case of a seven or seventy-fold murder, and the gentleman in the cloak has made a fair clearance of every living creature the house contains, perhaps it's just as well I've chanced upon the scene,—still I do think that one of the corpses might get up to answer the door. If it is possible to make noise enough to waken the dead, you bet I'm on to it.'

And I was,—I punished that knocker! until I warrant the pounding I gave it was audible on the other side of Green Park. And, at last, I woke the dead,—or, rather, I roused Matthews to a consciousness that something was going on. Opening the door about six inches, through the interstice he protruded his ancient nose.

'Who's there?'

'Nothing, my dear sir, nothing and no one. It must have been your vigorous imagination which induced you to suppose that there was,—you let it run away with you.'

Then he knew me,—and opened the door about two feet.

'Oh, it's you, Mr Atherton. I beg your pardon, sir,—I thought it might have been the police.'

'What then? Do you stand in terror of the minions of the law,—at last?'

A most discreet servant, Matthews,—just the fellow for a budding cabinet minister. He glanced over his shoulder,—I had suspected the presence of a colleague at his back, now I was assured. He put his hand up to his mouth,—and I thought how exceedingly discreet he looked, in his trousers and his stockinged feet, and with his hair all ruffled, and his braces dangling behind, and his nightshirt creased.

'Well, sir, I have received instructions not to admit the police.'

'The deuce you have!—From whom?'

Coughing behind his hand, leaning forward, he addressed me with an air which was flatteringly confidential.

'From Mr Lessingham, sir.'

'Possibly Mr Lessingham is not aware that a robbery has been committed on his premises, that the burglar has just come out of his drawing-room window with a hop, skip, and a jump, bounded out of the window like a tennis-ball, flashed round the corner like a rocket.'

Again Matthews glanced over his shoulder, as if not clear which way discretion lay, whether fore or aft.

'Thank you, sir. I believe that Mr Lessingham is aware of something of the kind.' He seemed to come to a sudden resolution, dropping his voice to a whisper. 'The fact is, sir, that I fancy Mr Lessingham's a good deal upset.'

'Upset?' I stared at him. There was something in his manner I did not understand. 'What do you mean by upset? Has the scoundrel attempted violence?'

'Who's there?'

The voice was Lessingham's, calling to Matthews from the staircase, though, for an instant, I hardly recognised it, it was so curiously petulant. Pushing past Matthews, I stepped into the hall. A young man, I suppose a footman, in the same undress as Matthews, was holding a candle,—it seemed the only light about the place. By its glimmer I perceived Lessingham standing half-way up the stairs. He was in full war paint,—as he is not the sort of man who dresses for the House, I took it that he had been mixing pleasure with business.

'It's I, Lessingham,—Atherton. Do you know that a fellow has jumped out of your drawing-room window?'

It was a second or two before he answered. When he did, his voice had lost its petulance.

'Has he escaped?'

'Clean,—he's a mile away by now.'

It seemed to me that in his tone, when he spoke again, there was a note of relief.

'I wondered if he had. Poor fellow! more sinned against than sinning! Take my advice, Atherton, and keep out of politics. They bring you into contact with all the lunatics at large. Good night! I am much obliged to you for knocking us up. Matthews, shut the door.'

Tolerably cool, on my honour,—a man who brings news big with the fate of Rome does not expect to receive such treatment. He expects to be listened to with deference, and to hear all that there is to hear, and not to be sent to the right-about before he has had a chance of really opening his lips. Before I knew it—almost!—the door was shut, and I was on the doorstep.

Confound the Apostle's impudence! next time he might have his house burnt down—and him in it!—before I took the trouble to touch his dirty knocker.

What did he mean by his allusion to lunatics in politics,—did he think to fool me? There was more in the business than met the eye,—and a good deal more than he wished to meet mine,—hence his insolence. The creature.

What Marjorie Lindon could see in such an opusculum surpassed my comprehension; especially when there was a man of my sort walking about, who adored the very ground she trod upon.

CHAPTER XII

A MORNING VISITOR

All through the night, waking and sleeping, and in my dreams, I wondered what Marjorie could see in him! In those same dreams I satisfied myself that she could, and did, see nothing in him, but everything in me,—oh the comfort! The misfortune was that when I awoke I knew it was the other way round,—so that it was a sad awakening. An awakening to thoughts of murder.

So, swallowing a mouthful and a peg, I went into my laboratory to plan murder—legalised murder—on the biggest scale it ever has been planned. I was on the track of a weapon which would make war not only an affair of a single campaign, but of a single half-hour. It would not want an army to work it either. Once let an individual, or two or three at most, in possession of my weapon-that-was-to-be, get within a mile or so of even the largest body of disciplined troops that ever yet a nation put into the field, and—pouf!—in about the time it takes you to say that they would be all dead men. If weapons of precision, which may be relied upon to slay, are preservers of the peace—and the man is a fool who says that they are not!—then I was within reach of the finest preserver of the peace imagination ever yet conceived.

What a sublime thought to think that in the hollow of your own hand lies the life and death of nations,—and it was almost in mine.

I had in front of me some of the finest destructive agents you could wish to light upon—carbon-monoxide, chlorine-trioxide, mercuric-oxide, conine, potassamide, potassium-carboxide, cyanogen—when Edwards entered. I

was wearing a mask of my own invention, a thing that covered ears and head and everything, something like a diver's helmet—I was dealing with gases a sniff of which meant death; only a few days before, unmasked, I had been doing some fool's trick with a couple of acids—sulphuric and cyanide of potassium—when, somehow, my hand slipped, and, before I knew it, minute portions of them combined. By the mercy of Providence I fell backwards instead of forwards;—sequel, about an hour afterwards Edwards found me on the floor, and it took the remainder of that day, and most of the doctors in town, to bring me back to life again.

Edwards announced his presence by touching me on the shoulder,—when I am wearing that mask it isn't always easy to make me hear.

'Someone wishes to see you, sir.'

'Then tell someone that I don't wish to see him.'

Well-trained servant, Edwards,—he walked off with the message as decorously as you please. And then I thought there was an end,—but there wasn't.

I was regulating the valve of a cylinder in which I was fusing some oxides when, once more, someone touched me on the shoulder. Without turning I took it for granted it was Edwards back again.

'I have only to give a tiny twist to this tap, my good fellow, and you will be in the land where the bogies bloom. Why will you come where you're not wanted?' Then I looked round. 'Who the devil are you?'

For it was not Edwards at all, but quite a different class of character.

I found myself confronting an individual who might almost have sat for one of the bogies I had just alluded to. His costume was reminiscent of the 'Algerians' whom one finds all over France, and who are the most persistent, insolent and amusing of pedlars. I remember one who used to haunt the repetitions at the Alcazar at Tours,—but there! This individual was like the originals, yet unlike,—he was less gaudy, and a good deal dingier, than his Gallic prototypes are apt to be. Then he wore a burnoose,

—the yellow, grimy-looking article of the Arab of the Soudan, not the spick and span Arab of the boulevard. Chief difference of all, his face was clean shaven,—and whoever saw an Algerian of Paris whose chiefest glory was not his well-trimmed moustache and beard?

I expected that he would address me in the lingo which these gentlemen call French,—but he didn't.

'You are Mr Atherton?'

'And you are Mr—Who?—how did you come here? Where's my servant?'

The fellow held up his hand. As he did so, as if in accordance with a pre-arranged signal, Edwards came into the room looking excessively startled. I turned to him.

'Is this the person who wished to see me?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Didn't I tell you to say that I didn't wish to see him?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then why didn't you do as I told you?'

'I did, sir.'

'Then how comes he here?'

'Really, sir,'—Edwards put his hand up to his head as if he was half asleep—'I don't quite know.'

'What do you mean by you don't know? Why didn't you stop him?'

'I think, sir, that I must have had a touch of sudden faintness, because I tried to put out my hand to stop him, and—I couldn't.'

'You're an idiot.—Go!' And he went. I turned to the stranger. 'Pray, sir, are you a magician?'

He replied to my question with another.

'You, Mr Atherton,—are you also a magician?'

He was staring at my mask with an evident lack of comprehension.

'I wear this because, in this place, death lurks in so many subtle forms, that, without it, I dare not breathe,' He inclined his head—though I doubt if he understood. 'Be so good as to tell me, briefly, what it is you wish with me.'

He slipped his hand into the folds of his burnoose, and, taking out a slip of paper, laid it on the shelf by which we were standing. I glanced at it, expecting to find on it a petition, or a testimonial, or a true statement of his sad case; instead it contained two words only,—'Marjorie Lindon.' The unlooked-for sight of that well-loved name brought the blood into my cheeks.

'You come from Miss Lindon?' He narrowed his shoulders, brought his finger-tips together, inclined his head, in a fashion which was peculiarly Oriental, but not particularly explanatory,—so I repeated my question.

'Do you wish me to understand that you do come from Miss Lindon?'

Again he slipped his hand into his burnoose, again he produced a slip of paper, again he laid it on the shelf, again I glanced at it, again nothing was written on it but a name,—'Paul Lessingham.'

'Well?—I see,—Paul Lessingham.—What then?'

'She is good,—he is bad,—is it not so?'

He touched first one scrap of paper, then the other. I stared.

'Pray how do you happen to know?'

'He shall never have her,—eh?'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'Ah!—what do I mean!'

'Precisely, what do you mean? And also, and at the same time, who the devil are you?'

'It is as a friend I come to you.'

'Then in that case you may go; I happen to be over-stocked in that line just now.'

'Not with the kind of friend I am!'

'The saints forefend!'

'You love her,—you love Miss Lindon! Can you bear to think of him in her arms?'

I took off my mask,—feeling that the occasion required it. As I did so he brushed aside the hanging folds of the hood of his burnoose, so that I saw more of his face. I was immediately conscious that in his eyes there was, in an especial degree, what, for want of a better term, one may call the mesmeric quality. That his was one of those morbid organisations which are oftener found, thank goodness, in the east than in the west, and which are apt to exercise an uncanny influence over the weak and the foolish folk with whom they come in contact,—the kind of creature for whom it is always just as well to keep a seasoned rope close handy. I was, also, conscious that he was taking advantage of the removal of my mask to try his strength on me,—than which he could not have found a tougher job. The sensitive something which is found in the hypnotic subject happens, in me, to be wholly absent.

'I see you are a mesmerist.'

He started.

'I am nothing,—a shadow!'

'And I'm a scientist. I should like, with your permission—or without it!—to try an experiment or two on you.'

He moved further back. There came a gleam into his eyes which suggested that he possessed his hideous power to an unusual degree,—that, in the estimation of his own people, he was qualified to take his standing as a regular devil-doctor.

'We will try experiments together, you and I,—on Paul Lessingham.'

'Why on him?'

'You do not know?'

'I do not.'

'Why do you lie to me?'

'I don't lie to you,—I haven't the faintest notion what is the nature of your interest in Mr Lessingham.'

'My interest?—that is another thing; it is your interest of which we are speaking.'

'Pardon me,—it is yours.'

'Listen! you love her,—and he! But at a word from you he shall not have her,—never! It is I who say it,—I!'

'And, once more, sir, who are you?'

'I am of the children of Isis!'

'Is that so?—It occurs to me that you have made a slight mistake,—this is London, not a dog-hole in the desert.'

'Do I not know?—what does it matter?—you shall see! There will come a time when you will want me,—you will find that you cannot bear to think

of him in her arms,—her whom you love! You will call to me, and I shall come, and of Paul Lessingham there shall be an end.'

While I was wondering whether he was really as mad as he sounded, or whether he was some impudent charlatan who had an axe of his own to grind, and thought that he had found in me a grindstone, he had vanished from the room. I moved after him.

'Hang it all!—stop!' I cried.

He must have made pretty good travelling, because, before I had a foot in the hall, I heard the front door slam, and, when I reached the street, intent on calling him back, neither to the right nor to the left was there a sign of him to be seen.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PICTURE

'I wonder what that nice-looking beggar really means, and who he happens to be?' That was what I said to myself when I returned to the laboratory. 'If it is true that, now and again, Providence does write a man's character on his face, then there can't be the slightest shred of a doubt that a curious one's been written on his. I wonder what his connection has been with the Apostle,—or if it's only part of his game of bluff.'

I strode up and down,—for the moment my interest in the experiments I was conducting had waned.

'If it was all bluff I never saw a better piece of acting,—and yet what sort of finger can such a precisian as St Paul have in such a pie? The fellow seemed to squirm at the mere mention of the rising-hope-of-the-Radicals' name. Can the objection be political? Let me consider,—what has Lessingham done which could offend the religious or patriotic susceptibilities of the most fanatical of Orientals? Politically, I can recall nothing. Foreign affairs, as a rule, he has carefully eschewed. If he has offended—and if he hasn't the seeming was uncommonly good!—the cause will have to be sought upon some other track. But, then, what track?'

The more I strove to puzzle it out, the greater the puzzlement grew.

'Absurd!—The rascal has had no more connection with St Paul than St Peter. The probability is that he's a crackpot; and if he isn't, he has some little game on foot—in close association with the hunt of the oof-bird!—which he tried to work off on me, but couldn't. As for—for Marjorie—my

Marjorie!—only she isn't mine, confound it!—if I had had my senses about me, I should have broken his head in several places for daring to allow her name to pass his lips,—the unbaptised Mohammedan!—Now to return to the chase of splendid murder!

I snatched up my mask—one of the most ingenious inventions, by the way, of recent years; if the armies of the future wear my mask they will defy my weapon!—and was about to re-adjust it in its place, when someone knocked at the door.

'Who's there?—Come in!'

It was Edwards. He looked round him as if surprised.

'I beg your pardon, sir,—I thought you were engaged. I didn't know that—that gentleman had gone.'

'He went up the chimney, as all that kind of gentlemen do.—Why the deuce did you let him in when I told you not to?' 'Really, sir, I don't know. I gave him your message, and—he looked at me, and—that is all I remember till I found myself standing in this room.'

Had it not been Edwards I might have suspected him of having had his palm well greased,—but, in his case, I knew better. It was as I thought,—my visitor was a mesmerist of the first class; he had actually played some of his tricks, in broad daylight, on my servant, at my own front door,—a man worth studying. Edwards continued.

'There is someone else, sir, who wishes to see you,—Mr Lessingham.'

'Mr Lessingham!' At that moment the juxtaposition seemed odd, though I daresay it was so rather in appearance than in reality. 'Show him in.'

Presently in came Paul.

I am free to confess,—I have owned it before!—that, in a sense, I admire that man,—so long as he does not presume to thrust himself into a certain position. He possesses physical qualities which please my eye—speaking as

a mere biologist like the suggestion conveyed by his every pose, his every movement, of a tenacious hold on life,—of reserve force, of a repository of bone and gristle on which he can fall back at pleasure. The fellow's lithe and active; not hasty, yet agile; clean built, well hung,—the sort of man who might be relied upon to make a good recovery. You might beat him in a sprint,—mental or physical—though to do that you would have to be spry!—but in a staying race he would see you out. I do not know that he is exactly the kind of man whom I would trust,—unless I knew that he was on the job,—which knowledge, in his case, would be uncommonly hard to attain. He is too calm; too self-contained; with the knack of looking all round him even in moments of extremest peril,—and for whatever he does he has a good excuse. He has the reputation, both in the House and out of it, of being a man of iron nerve,—and with some reason; yet I am not so sure. Unless I read him wrongly his is one of those individualities which, confronted by certain eventualities, collapse,—to rise, the moment of trial having passed, like Phoenix from her ashes. However it might be with his adherents, he would show no trace of his disaster.

And this was the man whom Marjorie loved. Well, she could show some cause. He was a man of position,—destined, probably, to rise much higher; a man of parts,—with capacity to make the most of them; not ill-looking; with agreeable manners,—when he chose; and he came within the lady's definition of a gentleman, 'he always did the right thing, at the right time, in the right way.' And yet—! Well, I take it that we are all cads, and that we most of us are prigs; for mercy's sake do not let us all give ourselves away.

He was dressed as a gentleman should be dressed,—black frock coat, black vest, dark grey trousers, stand-up collar, smartly-tied bow, gloves of the proper shade, neatly brushed hair, and a smile, which if was not childlike, at any rate was bland.

'I am not disturbing you?'

'Not at all.'

'Sure?—I never enter a place like this, where a man is matching himself with nature, to wrest from her her secrets, without feeling that I am crossing the threshold of the unknown. The last time I was in this room was just after

you had taken out the final patents for your System of Telegraphy at Sea, which the Admiralty purchased,—wisely—What is it, now?

'Death.'

'No?—really?—what do you mean?'

'If you are a member of the next government, you will possibly learn; I may offer them the refusal of a new wrinkle in the art of murder.'

'I see,—a new projectile.—How long is this race to continue between attack and defence?'

'Until the sun grows cold.'

'And then?'

'There'll be no defence,—nothing to defend.'

He looked at me with his calm, grave eyes.

'The theory of the Age of Ice towards which we are advancing is not a cheerful one.' He began to finger a glass retort which lay upon a table. 'By the way, it was very good of you to give me a look in last night. I am afraid you thought me peremptory,—I have come to apologise.'

'I don't know that I thought you peremptory; I thought you—queer.'

'Yes.' He glanced at me with that expressionless look upon his face which he could summon at will, and which is at the bottom of the superstition about his iron nerve. 'I was worried, and not well. Besides, one doesn't care to be burgled, even by a maniac.'

'Was he a maniac?'

'Did you see him?'

'Very clearly.'

'Where?'

'In the street.'

'How close were you to him?'

'Closer than I am to you.'

'Indeed. I didn't know you were so close to him as that. Did you try to stop him?'

'Easier said than done,—he was off at such a rate.'

'Did you see how he was dressed,—or, rather, undressed?'

'I did.'

'In nothing but a cloak on such a night. Who but a fanatic would have attempted burglary in such a costume?'

'Did he take anything?'

'Absolutely nothing.'

'It seems to have been a curious episode.'

He moved his eyebrows,—according to members of the House the only gesture in which he has been known to indulge.

'We become accustomed to curious episodes. Oblige me by not mentioning it to anyone,—to anyone.' He repeated the last two words, as if to give them emphasis. I wondered if he was thinking of Marjorie. 'I am communicating with the police. Until they move I don't want it to get into the papers,—or to be talked about. It's a worry,—you understand?'

I nodded. He changed the theme.

'This that you're engaged upon,—is it a projectile or a weapon?'

'If you are a member of the next government you will possibly know; if you aren't you possibly won't.'

'I suppose you have to keep this sort of thing secret?'

'I do. It seems that matters of much less moment you wish to keep secret.'

'You mean that business of last night? If a trifle of that sort gets into the papers, or gets talked about,—which is the same thing!—you have no notion how we are pestered. It becomes an almost unbearable nuisance. Jones the Unknown can commit murder with less inconvenience to himself than Jones the Notorious can have his pocket picked,—there is not so much exaggeration in that as there sounds.—Good-bye,—thanks for your promise.' I had given him no promise, but that was by the way. He turned as to go,—then stopped. 'There's another thing,—I believe you're a specialist on questions of ancient superstitions and extinct religions.'

'I am interested in such subjects, but I am not a specialist.'

'Can you tell me what were the exact tenets of the worshippers of Isis?'

'Neither I nor any man,—with scientific certainty. As you know, she had a brother; the cult of Osiris and Isis was one and the same. What, precisely, were its dogmas, or its practices, or anything about it, none, now, can tell. The Papyri, hieroglyphics, and so on, which remain are very far from being exhaustive, and our knowledge of those which do remain, is still less so.'

'I suppose that the marvels which are told of it are purely legendary?'

'To what marvels do you particularly refer?'

'Weren't supernatural powers attributed to the priests of Isis?'

'Broadly speaking, at that time, supernatural powers were attributed to all the priests of all the creeds.'

'I see.' Presently he continued. 'I presume that her cult is long since extinct,—that none of the worshippers of Isis exist to-day.'

I hesitated,—I was wondering why he had hit on such a subject; if he really had a reason, or if he was merely asking questions as a cover for something else,—you see, I knew my Paul.

'That is not so sure.'

He looked at me with that passionless, yet searching glance of his.

'You think that she still is worshipped?

'I think it possible, even probable, that, here and there, in Africa—Africa is a large order!—homage is paid to Isis, quite in the good old way.'

'Do you know that as a fact?'

'Excuse me, but do you know it as a fact?—Are you aware that you are treating me as if I was on the witness stand?—Have you any special purpose in making these inquiries?'

He smiled.

'In a kind of a way I have. I have recently come across rather a curious story; I am trying to get to the bottom of it.'

'What is the story?'

'I am afraid that at present I am not at liberty to tell it you; when I am I will. You will find it interesting,—as an instance of a singular survival.—Didn't the followers of Isis believe in transmigration?'

'Some of them,—no doubt.'

'What did they understand by transmigration?'

'Transmigration.'

'Yes,—but of the soul or of the body?'

'How do you mean?—transmigration is transmigration. Are you driving at something in particular? If you'll tell me fairly and squarely what it is I'll do my best to give you the information you require; as it is, your questions are a bit perplexing.'

'Oh, it doesn't matter,—as you say, "transmigration is transmigration." I was eyeing him keenly; I seemed to detect in his manner an odd reluctance to enlarge on the subject he himself had started. He continued to trifle with the retort upon the table. 'Hadn't the followers of Isis a—what shall I say?—a sacred emblem?'

'How?'

'Hadn't they an especial regard for some sort of a—wasn't it some sort of a—beetle?'

'You mean *Scarabaeus sacer*,—according to Latreille, *Scarabaeus Egyptiorum*? Undoubtedly,—the scarab was venerated throughout Egypt,—indeed, speaking generally, most things that had life, for instance, cats; as you know, Orisis continued among men in the figure of Apis, the bull.'

'Weren't the priests of Isis—or some of them—supposed to assume, after death, the form of a—scarabaeus?'

'I never heard of it.'

'Are you sure?—think!'

'I shouldn't like to answer such a question positively, offhand, but I don't, on the spur of the moment, recall any supposition of the kind.'

'Don't laugh at me—I'm not a lunatic!—but I understand that recent researches have shown that even in some of the most astounding of the ancient legends there was a substratum of fact. Is it absolutely certain that there could be no shred of truth in such a belief?'

'In what belief?'

'In the belief that a priest of Isis—or anyone—assumed after death the form of a scarabaeus?'

'It seems to me, Lessingham, that you have lately come across some uncommonly interesting data, of a kind, too, which it is your bounden duty to give to the world,—or, at any rate, to that portion of the world which is represented by me. Come,—tell us all about it!—what are you afraid of?'

'I am afraid of nothing,—and some day you shall be told,—but not now. At present, answer my question.'

'Then repeat your question,—clearly.'

'Is it absolutely certain that there could be no foundation of truth in the belief that a priest of Isis—or anyone—assumed after death the form of a beetle?'

'I know no more than the man in the moon,—how the dickens should I? Such a belief may have been symbolical. Christians believe that after death the body takes the shape of worms—and so, in a sense, it does,—and, sometimes, eels.'

'That is not what I mean.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'Listen. If a person, of whose veracity there could not be a vestige of a doubt, assured you that he had seen such a transformation actually take place, could it conceivably be explained on natural grounds?'

'Seen a priest of Isis assume the form of a beetle?'

'Or a follower of Isis?'

'Before, or after death?'

He hesitated. I had seldom seen him wear such an appearance of interest,—to be frank, I was keenly interested too!—but, on a sudden there came into

his eyes a glint of something that was almost terror. When he spoke, it was with the most unwonted awkwardness.

'In—in the very act of dying.'

'In the very act of dying?'

'If—he had seen a follower of Isis in—the very act of dying, assume—the form of a—a beetle, on any conceivable grounds would such a transformation be susceptible of a natural explanation?'

I stared,—as who would not? Such an extraordinary question was rendered more extraordinary by coming from such a man,—yet I was almost beginning to suspect that there was something behind it more extraordinary still.

'Look here, Lessingham, I can see you've a capital tale to tell,—so tell it, man! Unless I'm mistaken, it's not the kind of tale in which ordinary scruples can have any part or parcel,—anyhow, it's hardly fair of you to set my curiosity all agog, and then to leave it unappeased.'

He eyed me steadily, the appearance of interest fading more and more, until, presently, his face assumed its wonted expressionless mask,—somehow I was conscious that what he had seen in my face was not altogether to his liking. His voice was once more bland and self-contained.

'I perceive you are of opinion that I have been told a taradiddle. I suppose I have.'

'But what is the taradiddle?—don't you see I'm burning?'

'Unfortunately, Atherton, I am on my honour. Until I have permission to unloose it, my tongue is tied.' He picked up his hat and umbrella from where he had placed them on the table. Holding them in his left hand, he advanced to me with his right outstretched. 'It is very good of you to suffer my continued interruption; I know, to my sorrow, what such interruptions mean,—believe me, I am not ungrateful. What is this?'

On the shelf, within a foot or so of where I stood, was a sheet of paper,—the size and shape of half a sheet of post note. At this he stooped to glance. As he did so, something surprising occurred. On the instant a look came on to his face which, literally, transfigured him. His hat and umbrella fell from his grasp on to the floor. He retreated, gibbering, his hands held out as if to ward something off from him, until he reached the wall on the other side of the room. A more amazing spectacle than he presented I never saw.

'Lessingham!' I exclaimed. 'What's wrong with you?'

My first impression was that he was struck by a fit of epilepsy,—though anyone less like an epileptic subject it would be hard to find. In my bewilderment I looked round to see what could be the immediate cause. My eye fell upon the sheet of paper, I stared at it with considerable surprise. I had not noticed it there previously, I had not put it there,—where had it come from? The curious thing was that, on it, produced apparently by some process of photogravure, was an illustration of a species of beetle with which I felt that I ought to be acquainted, and yet was not. It was of a dull golden green; the colour was so well brought out,—even to the extent of seeming to scintillate, and the whole thing was so dexterously done that the creature seemed alive. The semblance of reality was, indeed, so vivid that it needed a second glance to be assured that it was a mere trick of the reproducer. Its presence there was odd,—after what we had been talking about it might seem to need explanation; but it was absurd to suppose that that alone could have had such an effect on a man like Lessingham.

With the thing in my hand, I crossed to where he was,—pressing his back against the wall, he had shrunk lower inch by inch till he was actually crouching on his haunches.

'Lessingham!—come, man, what's wrong with you?'

Taking him by the shoulder, I shook him with some vigour. My touch had on him the effect of seeming to wake him out of a dream, of restoring him to consciousness as against the nightmare horrors with which he was struggling. He gazed up at me with that look of cunning on his face which one associates with abject terror.

'Atherton?—Is it you?—It's all right,—quite right.—I'm well,—very well.'

As he spoke, he slowly drew himself up, till he was standing erect.

'Then, in that case, all I can say is that you have a queer way of being very well.'

He put his hand up to his mouth, as if to hide the trembling of his lips.

'It's the pressure of overwork,—I've had one or two attacks like this,—but it's nothing, only—a local lesion.'

I observed him keenly; to my thinking there was something about him which was very odd indeed.

'Only a local lesion!—If you take my strongly-urged advice you'll get a medical opinion without delay,—if you haven't been wise enough to have done so already.'

'I'll go to-day;—at once; but I know it's only mental overstrain.'

'You're sure it's nothing to do with this?'

I held out in front of him the photogravure of the beetle. As I did so he backed away from me, shrieking, trembling as with palsy.

'Take it away! take it away!' he screamed.

I stared at him, for some seconds, astonished into speechlessness. Then I found my tongue.

'Lessingham!—It's only a picture!—Are you stark mad?'

He persisted in his ejaculations.

'Take it away! take it away!—Tear it up!—Burn it!'

His agitation was so unnatural,—from whatever cause it arose!—that, fearing the recurrence of the attack from which he had just recovered, I did

as he bade me. I tore the sheet of paper into quarters, and, striking a match, set fire to each separate piece. He watched the process of incineration as if fascinated. When it was concluded, and nothing but ashes remained, he gave a gasp of relief.

'Lessingham,' I said, 'you're either mad already, or you're going mad,—which is it?'

'I think it's neither. I believe I am as sane as you. It's—it's that story of which I was speaking; it—it seems curious, but I'll tell you all about it—some day. As I observed, I think you will find it an interesting instance of a singular survival.' He made an obvious effort to become more like his usual self. 'It is extremely unfortunate, Atherton, that I should have troubled you with such a display of weakness,—especially as I am able to offer you so scant an explanation. One thing I would ask of you,—to observe strict confidence. What has taken place has been between ourselves. I am in your hands, but you are my friend, I know I can rely on you not to speak of it to anyone,—and, in particular, not to breathe a hint of it to Miss Lindon.'

'Why, in particular, not to Miss Lindon?'

'Can you not guess?'

I hunched my shoulder.

'If what I guess is what you mean is not that a cause the more why silence would be unfair to her?'

'It is for me to speak, if for anyone. I shall not fail to do what should be done.—Give me your promise that you will not hint a word to her of what you have so unfortunately seen?'

I gave him the promise he required.

.....

There was no more work for me that day. The Apostle, his divagations, his example of the coleoptera, his Arabian friend,—these things were as

microbes which, acting on a system already predisposed for their reception, produced high fever; I was in a fever,—of unrest. Brain in a whirl!—Marjorie, Paul, Isis, beetle, mesmerism, in delirious jumble. Love's upsetting!—in itself a sufficiently severe disease; but when complications intervene, suggestive of mystery and novelties, so that you do not know if you are moving in an atmosphere of dreams or of frozen facts,—if, then, your temperature does not rise, like that rocket of M. Verne's,—which reached the moon, then you are a freak of an entirely genuine kind, and if the surgeons do not preserve you, and place you on view, in pickle, they ought to, for the sake of historical doubters, for no one will believe that there ever was a man like you, unless you yourself are somewhere around to prove them Thomases.

Myself,—I am not that kind of man. When I get warm I grow heated, and when I am heated there is likely to be a variety show of a gaudy kind. When Paul had gone I tried to think things out, and if I had kept on trying something would have happened—so I went on the river instead.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DUCHESS' BALL

That night was the Duchess of Datchet's ball—the first person I saw as I entered the dancing-room was Dora Grayling.

I went straight up to her.

'Miss Grayling, I behaved very badly to you last night, I have come to make to you my apologies,—to sue for your forgiveness!'

'My forgiveness?' Her head went back,—she has a pretty bird-like trick of cocking it a little on one side. 'You were not well. Are you better?'

'Quite.—You forgive me? Then grant me plenary absolution by giving me a dance for the one I lost last night.'

She rose. A man came up,—a stranger to me; she's one of the best hunted women in England,—there's a million with her.

'This is my dance, Miss Grayling.'

She looked at him.

'You must excuse me. I am afraid I have made a mistake. I had forgotten that I was already engaged.'

I had not thought her capable of it. She took my arm, and away we went, and left him staring.

'It's he who's the sufferer now,' I whispered, as we went round,—she can waltz!

'You think so? It was I last night,—I did not mean, if I could help it, to suffer again. To me a dance with you means something.' She went all red,—adding, as an afterthought, 'Nowadays so few men really dance. I expect it's because you dance so well.'

'Thank you.'

We danced the waltz right through, then we went to an impromptu shelter which had been rigged up on a balcony. And we talked. There's something sympathetic about Miss Grayling which leads one to talk about one's self,—before I was half aware of it I was telling her of all my plans and projects,—actually telling her of my latest notion which, ultimately, was to result in the destruction of whole armies as by a flash of lightning. She took an amount of interest in it which was surprising.

'What really stands in the way of things of this sort is not theory but practice,—one can prove one's facts on paper, or on a small scale in a room; what is wanted is proof on a large scale, by actual experiment. If, for instance, I could take my plant to one of the forests of South America, where there is plenty of animal life but no human, I could demonstrate the soundness of my position then and there.'

'Why don't you?'

'Think of the money it would cost.'

'I thought I was a friend of yours.'

'I had hoped you were.'

'Then why don't you let me help you?'

'Help me?—How?'

'By letting you have the money for your South American experiment;—it would be an investment on which I should expect to receive good interest.'

I fidgeted.

'It is very good of you, Miss Grayling, to talk like that.'

She became quite frigid.

'Please don't be absurd!—I perceive quite clearly that you are snubbing me, and that you are trying to do it as delicately as you know how.'

'Miss Grayling!'

'I understand that it was an impertinence on my part to volunteer assistance which was unasked; you have made that sufficiently plain.'

'I assure you—'

'Pray don't. Of course, if it had been Miss Lindon it would have been different; she would at least have received a civil answer. But we are not all Miss Lindon.'

I was aghast. The outburst was so uncalled for,—I had not the faintest notion what I had said or done to cause it; she was in such a surprising passion—and it suited her!—I thought I had never seen her look prettier,—I could do nothing else but stare. So she went on,—with just as little reason.

'Here is someone coming to claim this dance,—I can't throw all my partners over. Have I offended you so irremediably that it will be impossible for you to dance with me again?'

'Miss Grayling!—I shall be only too delighted.' She handed me her card.
'Which may I have?'

'For your own sake you had better place it as far off as you possibly can.'

'They all seem taken.'

'That doesn't matter; strike off any name you please, anywhere and put your own instead.'

It was giving me an almost embarrassingly free hand. I booked myself for the next waltz but two—who it was who would have to give way to me I did not trouble to inquire.

'Mr Atherton!—is that you?'

It was,—it was also she. It was Marjorie! And so soon as I saw her I knew that there was only one woman in the world for me,—the mere sight of her sent the blood tingling through my veins. Turning to her attendant cavalier, she dismissed him with a bow.

'Is there an empty chair?'

She seated herself in the one Miss Grayling had just vacated. I sat down beside her. She glanced at me, laughter in her eyes. I was all in a stupid tremblement.

'You remember that last night I told you that I might require your friendly services in diplomatic intervention?' I nodded,—I felt that the allusion was unfair. 'Well, the occasion's come,—or, at least, it's very near.' She was still,—and I said nothing to help her. 'You know how unreasonable papa can be.'

I did,—never a more pig-headed man in England than Geoffrey Lindon,—or, in a sense, a duller. But, just then, I was not prepared to admit it to his child.

'You know what an absurd objection he has to—Paul.'

There was an appreciative hesitation before she uttered the fellow's Christian name,—when it came it was with an accent of tenderness which stung me like a gadfly. To speak to me—of all men,—of the fellow in such a tone was—like a woman.

'Has Mr Lindon no notion of how things stand between you?'

'Except what he suspects. That is just where you are to come in, papa thinks so much of you—I want you to sound Paul's praises in his ear—to prepare him for what must come.' Was ever rejected lover burdened with such a

task? Its enormity kept me still. 'Sydney, you have always been my friend, —my truest, dearest friend. When I was a little girl you used to come between papa and me, to shield me from his wrath. Now that I am a big girl I want you to be on my side once more, and to shield me still.'

Her voice softened. She laid her hand upon my arm. How, under her touch, I burned.

'But I don't understand what cause there has been for secrecy,—why should there have been any secrecy from the first?'

'It was Paul's wish that papa should not be told.'

'Is Mr Lessingham ashamed of you?'

'Sydney!'

'Or does he fear your father?'

'You are unkind. You know perfectly well that papa has been prejudiced against him all along, you know that his political position is just now one of the greatest difficulty, that every nerve and muscle is kept on the continual strain, that it is in the highest degree essential that further complications of every and any sort should be avoided. He is quite aware that his suit will not be approved of by papa, and he simply wishes that nothing shall be said about it till the end of the session,—that is all'

'I see! Mr Lessingham is cautious even in love-making,—politician first, and lover afterwards.'

'Well!—why not?—would you have him injure the cause he has at heart for want of a little patience?'

'It depends what cause it is he has at heart.'

'What is the matter with you?—why do you speak to me like that?—it is not like you at all.' She looked at me shrewdly, with flashing eyes. 'Is it possible that you are—jealous?—that you were in earnest in what you said last night?—I thought that was the sort of thing you said to every girl.'

I would have given a great deal to take her in my arms, and press her to my bosom then and there,—to think that she should taunt me with having said to her the sort of thing I said to every girl.

'What do you know of Mr Lessingham?'

'What all the world knows,—that history will be made by him.'

'There are kinds of history in the making of which one would not desire to be associated. What do you know of his private life,—it was to that that I was referring.'

'Really,—you go too far. I know that he is one of the best, just as he is one of the greatest, of men; for me, that is sufficient.'

'If you do know that, it is sufficient.'

'I do know it,—all the world knows it. Everyone with whom he comes in contact is aware—must be aware, that he is incapable of a dishonourable thought or action.'

'Take my advice, don't appreciate any man too highly. In the book of every man's life there is a page which he would wish to keep turned down.'

'There is no such page in Paul's,—there may be in yours; I think that probable.'

'Thank you. I fear it is more than probable. I fear that, in my case, the page may extend to several. There is nothing Apostolic about me,—not even the name.'

'Sydney!—you are unendurable!—It is the more strange to hear you talk like this since Paul regards you as his friend.'

'He flatters me.'

'Are you not his friend?'

'Is it not sufficient to be yours?'

'No,—who is against Paul is against me.'

'That is hard.'

'How is it hard? Who is against the husband can hardly be for the wife,—when the husband and the wife are one.'

'But as yet you are not one.—Is my cause so hopeless?'

'What do you call your cause?—are you thinking of that nonsense you were talking about last night?'

She laughed!

'You call it nonsense.—You ask for sympathy, and give—so much!'

'I will give you all the sympathy you stand in need of,—I promise it! My poor, dear Sydney!—don't be so absurd! Do you think that I don't know you? You're the best of friends, and the worst of lovers,—as the one, so true; so fickle as the other. To my certain knowledge, with how many girls have you been in love,—and out again. It is true that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, you have never been in love with me before,—but that's the merest accident. Believe me, my dear, dear Sydney, you'll be in love with someone else tomorrow,—if you're not half-way there to-night. I confess, quite frankly, that, in that direction, all the experience I have had of you has in nowise strengthened my prophetic instinct. Cheer up!—one never knows!—Who is this that's coming?'

It was Dora Grayling who was coming,—I went off with her without a word,—we were half-way through the dance before she spoke to me.

'I am sorry that I was cross to you just now, and—disagreeable. Somehow I always seem destined to show to you my most unpleasant side.'

'The blame was mine,—what sort of side do I show you? You are far kinder to me than I deserve,—now, and always. 'That is what you say.'

'Pardon me, it's true,—else how comes it that, at this time of day, I'm without a friend in all the world?'

'You!—without a friend!—I never knew a man who had so many!—I never knew a person of whom so many men and women join in speaking well!'

'Miss Grayling!'

'As for never having done anything worth doing, think of what you have done. Think of your discoveries, think of your inventions, think of—but never mind! The world knows you have done great things, and it confidently looks to you to do still greater. You talk of being friendless, and yet when I ask, as a favour—as a great favour!—to be allowed to do something to show my friendship, you—well, you snub me.'

'I snub you!'

'You know you snubbed me.'

'Do you really mean that you take an interest in—in my work?'

'You know I mean it.'

She turned to me, her face all glowing,—and I did know it.

'Will you come to my laboratory to-morrow morning?'

'Will I!—won't I!'

'With your aunt?'

'Yes, with my aunt.'

'I'll show you round, and tell you all there is to be told, and then if you still think there's anything in it, I'll accept your offer about that South American experiment,—that is, if it still holds good.'

'Of course it still holds good.'

'And we'll be partners.'

'Partners?—Yes,—we will be partners.'

'It will cost a terrific sum.'

'There are some things which never can cost too much.'

'That's not my experience.'

'I hope it will be mine.'

'It's a bargain?'

'On my side, I promise you that it's a bargain.'

When I got outside the room I found that Percy Woodville was at my side. His round face was, in a manner of speaking as long as my arm. He took his glass out of his eye, and rubbed it with his handkerchief,—and directly he put it back he took it out and rubbed it again, I believe that I never saw him in such a state of fluster,—and, when one speaks of Woodville, that means something.

'Atherton, I am in a devil of a stew.' He looked it. 'All of a heap!—I've had a blow which I shall never get over!'

'Then get under.'

Woodville is one of those fellows who will insist on telling me their most private matters,—even to what they owe their washerwomen for the ruination of their shirts. Why, goodness alone can tell,—heaven knows I am not sympathetic.

'Don't be an idiot!—you don't know what I'm suffering!—I'm as nearly as possible stark mad.'

'That's all right, old chap,—I've seen you that way more than once before.'

'Don't talk like that,—you're not a perfect brute!'

'I bet you a shilling that I am.'

'Don't torture me,—you're not. Atherton!' He seized me by the lapels of my coat, seeming half beside himself,—fortunately he had drawn me into a recess, so that we were noticed by few observers. 'What do you think has happened?'

'My dear chap, how on earth am I to know?'

'She's refused me!'

'Has she!—Well I never!—Buck up,—try some other address,—there are quite as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.'

'Atherton, you're a blackguard.'

He had crumpled his handkerchief into a ball, and was actually bobbing at his eyes with it,—the idea of Percy Woodville being dissolved in tears was excruciatingly funny,—but, just then, I could hardly tell him so.

'There's not a doubt of it,—it's my way of being sympathetic. Don't be so down, man,—try her again!'

'It's not the slightest use—I know it isn't—from the way she treated me.'

'Don't be so sure—women often say what they mean least. Who's the lady?'

'Who?—Is there more women in the world than one for me, or has there ever been? You ask me who! What does the word mean to me but Marjorie Lindon!'

'Marjorie Lindon?'

I fancy that my jaw dropped open,—that, to use his own vernacular, I was 'all of a heap.' I felt like it.

I strode away—leaving him mazed—and all but ran into Marjorie's arms.

'I'm just leaving. Will you see me to the carriage, Mr Atherton?' I saw her to the carriage. 'Are you off?—can I give you a lift?'

'Thank you,—I am not thinking of being off.'

'I'm going to the House of Commons,—won't you come?'

'What are you going there for?'

Directly she spoke of it I knew why she was going,—and she knew that I knew, as her words showed.

'You are quite well aware of what the magnet is. You are not so ignorant as not to know that the Agricultural Amendment Act is on to-night, and that Paul is to speak. I always try to be there when Paul is to speak, and I mean to always keep on trying.'

'He is a fortunate man.'

'Indeed,—and again indeed. A man with such gifts as his is inadequately described as fortunate.—But I must be off. He expected to be up before, but I heard from him a few minutes ago that there has been a delay, but that he will be up within half-an-hour.—Till our next meeting.'

As I returned into the house, in the hall I met Percy Woodville. He had his hat on.

'Where are you off to?'

'I'm off to the House.'

'To hear Paul Lessingham?'

'Damn Paul Lessingham!'

'With all my heart!'

'There's a division expected,—I've got to go.'

'Someone else has gone to hear Paul Lessingham,—Marjorie Lindon.'

'No!—you don't say so!—by Jove!—I say, Atherton, I wish I could make a speech,—I never can. When I'm electioneering I have to have my speeches written for me, and then I have to read 'em. But, by Jove, if I knew Miss Lindon was in the gallery, and if I knew anything about the thing, or could get someone to tell me something, hang me if I wouldn't speak,—I'd show her I'm not the fool she thinks I am!'

'Speak, Percy, speak!—you'd knock 'em silly, sir!—I tell you what I'll do,—I'll come with you! I'll to the House as well!—Paul Lessingham shall have an audience of three.'

CHAPTER XV

MR LESSINGHAM SPEAKS

The House was full. Percy and I went upstairs,—to the gallery which is theoretically supposed to be reserved for what are called 'distinguished strangers,'—those curious animals. Trumperton was up, hammering out those sentences which smell, not so much of the lamp as of the dunderhead. Nobody was listening,—except the men in the Press Gallery; where is the brain of the House, and ninety per cent, of its wisdom.

It was not till Trumperton had finished that I discovered Lessingham. The tedious ancient resumed his seat amidst a murmur of sounds which, I have no doubt, some of the press-men interpreted next day as 'loud and continued applause.' There was movement in the House, possibly expressive of relief; a hum of voices; men came flocking in. Then, from the Opposition benches, there rose a sound which was applause,—and I perceived that, on a cross bench close to the gangway, Paul Lessingham was standing up bareheaded.

I eyed him critically,—as a collector might eye a valuable specimen, or a pathologist a curious subject. During the last four and twenty hours my interest in him had grown apace. Just then, to me, he was the most interesting man the world contained.

When I remembered how I had seen him that same morning, a nerveless, terror-stricken wretch, grovelling, like some craven cur, upon the floor, frightened, to the verge of imbecility, by a shadow, and less than a shadow, I was confronted by two hypotheses. Either I had exaggerated his condition then, or I exaggerated his condition now. So far as appearance went, it was incredible that this man could be that one.

I confess that my feeling rapidly became one of admiration. I love the fighter. I quickly recognised that here we had him in perfection. There was no seeming about him then,—the man was to the manner born. To his finger-tips a fighting man. I had never realised it so clearly before. He was coolness itself. He had all his faculties under complete command. While never, for a moment, really exposing himself, he would be swift in perceiving the slightest weakness in his opponents' defence, and, so soon as he saw it, like lightning, he would slip in a telling blow. Though defeated, he would hardly be disgraced; and one might easily believe that their very victories would be so expensive to his assailants, that, in the end, they would actually conduce to his own triumph.

'Hang me!' I told myself, 'if, after all, I am surprised if Marjorie does see something in him.' For I perceived how a clever and imaginative young woman, seeing him at his best, holding his own, like a gallant knight, against overwhelming odds, in the lists in which he was so much at home, might come to think of him as if he were always and only there, ignoring altogether the kind of man he was when the joust was finished.

It did me good to hear him, I do know that,—and I could easily imagine the effect he had on one particular auditor who was in the Ladies' Cage. It was very far from being an 'oration' in the American sense; it had little or nothing of the fire and fury of the French Tribune; it was marked neither by the ponderosity nor the sentiment of the eloquent German; yet it was as satisfying as are the efforts of either of the three, producing, without doubt, precisely the effect which the speaker intended. His voice was clear and calm, not exactly musical, yet distinctly pleasant, and it was so managed that each word he uttered was as audible to every person present as if it had been addressed particularly to him. His sentences were short and crisp; the words which he used were not big ones, but they came from him with an agreeable ease; and he spoke just fast enough to keep one's interest alert without invoking a strain on the attention.

He commenced by making, in the quietest and most courteous manner, sarcastic comments on the speeches and methods of Trumperton and his friends which tickled the House amazingly. But he did not make the mistake of pushing his personalities too far. To a speaker of a certain sort nothing is

easier than to sting to madness. If he likes, his every word is barbed. Wounds so given fester; they are not easily forgiven;—it is essential to a politician that he should have his firmest friends among the fools; or his climbing days will soon be over. Soon his sarcasms were at an end. He began to exchange them for sweet-sounding phrases. He actually began to say pleasant things to his opponents; apparently to mean them. To put them in a good conceit with themselves. He pointed out how much truth there was in what they said; and then, as if by accident, with what ease and at how little cost, amendments might be made. He found their arguments, and took them for his own, and flattered them, whether they would or would not, by showing how firmly they were founded upon fact; and grafted other arguments upon them, which seemed their natural sequelae; and transformed them, and drove them hither and thither; and brought them—their own arguments!—to a round, irrefragable conclusion, which was diametrically the reverse of that to which they themselves had brought them. And he did it all with an aptness, a readiness, a grace, which was incontestable. So that, when he sat down, he had performed that most difficult of all feats, he had delivered what, in a House of Commons' sense, was a practical, statesmanlike speech, and yet one which left his hearers in an excellent humour.

It was a great success,—an immense success. A parliamentary triumph of almost the highest order. Paul Lessingham had been coming on by leaps and bounds. When he resumed his seat, amidst applause which, this time, really was applause, there were, probably, few who doubted that he was destined to go still farther. How much farther it is true that time alone could tell; but, so far as appearances went, all the prizes, which are as the crown and climax of a statesman's career, were well within his reach.

For my part, I was delighted. I had enjoyed an intellectual exercise,—a species of enjoyment not so common as it might be. The Apostle had almost persuaded me that the political game was one worth playing, and that its triumphs were things to be desired. It is something, after all, to be able to appeal successfully to the passions and aspirations of your peers; to gain their plaudits; to prove your skill at the game you yourself have chosen; to be looked up to and admired. And when a woman's eyes look down on you, and her ears drink in your every word, and her heart beats time with yours,

—each man to his own temperament, but when that woman is the woman whom you love, to know that your triumph means her glory, and her gladness, to me that would be the best part of it all.

In that hour,—the Apostle's hour!—I almost wished that I were a politician too!

The division was over. The business of the night was practically done. I was back again in the lobby! The theme of conversation was the Apostle's speech,—on every side they talked of it.

Suddenly Marjorie was at my side. Her face was glowing. I never saw her look more beautiful,—or happier. She seemed to be alone.

'So you have come, after all!—Wasn't it splendid?—wasn't it magnificent? Isn't it grand to have such great gifts, and to use them to such good purpose?—Speak, Sydney! Don't feign a coolness which is foreign to your nature!'

I saw that she was hungry for me to praise the man whom she delighted to honour. But, somehow, her enthusiasm cooled mine.

'It was not a bad speech, of a kind.'

'Of a kind!' How her eyes flashed fire! With what disdain she treated me! 'What do you mean by "of a kind?" My dear Sydney, are you not aware that it is an attribute of small minds to attempt to belittle those which are greater? Even if you are conscious of inferiority, it's unwise to show it. Mr Lessingham's was a great speech, of any kind; your incapacity to recognise the fact simply reveals your lack of the critical faculty.'

'It is fortunate for Mr Lessingham that there is at least one person in whom the critical faculty is so bountifully developed. Apparently, in your judgment, he who discriminates is lost.'

I thought she was going to burst into passion. But, instead, laughing, she placed her hand upon my shoulder.

'Poor Sydney!—I understand!—It is so sad!—Do you know you are like a little boy who, when he is beaten, declares that the victor has cheated him. Never mind! as you grow older, you will learn better.'

She stung me almost beyond bearing,—I cared not what I said.

'You, unless I am mistaken, will learn better before you are older.'

'What do you mean?'

Before I could have told her—if I had meant to tell; which I did not—Lessingham came up.

'I hope I have not kept you waiting; I have been delayed longer than I expected.'

'Not at all,—though I am quite ready to get away; it's a little tiresome waiting here.'

This with a mischievous glance towards me,—a glance which compelled Lessingham to notice me.

'You do not often favour us.'

'I don't. I find better employment for my time.'

'You are wrong. It's the cant of the day to underrate the House of Commons, and the work which it performs; don't you suffer yourself to join in the chorus of the simpletons. Your time cannot be better employed than in endeavouring to improve the body politic.'

'I am obliged to you.—I hope you are feeling better than when I saw you last.'

A gleam came into his eyes, fading as quickly as it came. He showed no other sign of comprehension, surprise, or resentment.

'Thank you.—I am very well.'

Marjorie perceived that I meant more than met the eye, and that what I meant was meant unpleasantly.

'Come,—let us be off. It is Mr Atherton to-night who is not well.'

She had just slipped her arm through Lessingham's when her father approached. Old Lindon stared at her on the Apostle's arm, as if he could hardly believe that it was she.

'I thought that you were at the Duchess?'

'So I have been, papa; and now I'm here.'

'Here!' Old Lindon began to stutter and stammer, and to grow red in the face, as is his wont when at all excited. 'W—what do you mean by here?—wh—where's the carriage?'

'Where should it be, except waiting for me outside,—unless the horses have run away.'

'I—I—I'll take you down to it. I—I don't approve of y—your w—w—waiting in a place like this.'

'Thank you, papa, but Mr Lessingham is going to take me down.—I shall see you afterwards.—Good bye.'

Anything cooler than the way in which she walked off I do not think I ever saw. This is the age of feminine advancement. Young women think nothing of twisting their mothers round their fingers, let alone their fathers; but the fashion in which that young woman walked off, on the Apostle's arm, and left her father standing there, was, in its way, a study.

Lindon seemed scarcely able to realise that the pair of them had gone. Even after they had disappeared in the crowd he stood staring after them, growing redder and redder, till the veins stood out upon his face, and I thought that an apopleptic seizure threatened. Then, with a gasp, he turned to me.

'Damned scoundrel!' I took it for granted that he alluded to the gentleman, —even though his following words hardly suggested it. 'Only this morning

I forbade her to have anything to do with him, and n—now he's w—walked off with her! C—confounded adventurer! That's what he is, an adventurer, and before many hours have passed I'll take the liberty to tell him so!

Jamming his fists into his pockets, and puffing like a grampus in distress, he took himself away,—and it was time he did, for his words were as audible as they were pointed, and already people were wondering what the matter was. Woodville came up as Lindon was going,—just as sorely distressed as ever.

'She went away with Lessingham,—did you see her?'

'Of course I saw her. When a man makes a speech like Lessingham's any girl would go away with him,—and be proud to. When you are endowed with such great powers as he is, and use them for such lofty purposes, she'll walk away with you,—but, till then, never.'

He was at his old trick of polishing his eyeglass.

'It's bitter hard. When I knew that she was there, I'd half a mind to make a speech myself, upon my word I had, only I didn't know what to speak about, and I can't speak anyhow,—how can a fellow speak when he's shoved into the gallery?'

'As you say, how can he?—he can't stand on the railing and shout,—even with a friend holding him behind.'

'I know I shall speak one day,—bound to; and then she won't be there.'

'It'll be better for you if she isn't.'

'Think so?—Perhaps you're right. I'd be safe to make a mess of it, and then, if she were to see me at it, it'd be the devil! 'Pon my word, I've been wishing, lately, I was clever.'

He rubbed his nose with the rim of his eyeglass, looking the most comically disconsolate figure.

'Put black care behind you, Percy!—buck up, my boy! The division's over
—you are free—now we'll go "on the fly."'

And we did 'go on the fly.'

CHAPTER XVI

ATHERTON'S MAGIC VAPOUR

I bore him off to supper at the Helicon. All the way in the cab he was trying to tell me the story of how he proposed to Marjorie,—and he was very far from being through with it when we reached the club. There was the usual crowd of supperites, but we got a little table to ourselves, in a corner of the room, and before anything was brought for us to eat he was at it again. A good many of the people were pretty near to shouting, and as they seemed to be all speaking at once, and the band was playing, and as the Helicon supper band is not piano, Percy did not have it quite all to himself, but, considering the delicacy of his subject, he talked as loudly as was decent,—getting more so as he went on. But Percy is peculiar.

'I don't know how many times I've tried to tell her,—over and over again.'

'Have you now?'

'Yes, pretty near every time I met her,—but I never seemed to get quite to it, don't you know.'

'How was that?'

'Why, just as I was going to say, "Miss Lindon, may I offer you the gift of my affection—"'

'Was that how you invariably intended to begin?'

'Well, not always—one time like that, another time another way. Fact is, I got off a little speech by heart, but I never got a chance to reel it off, so I

made up my mind to just say anything.'

'And what did you say?'

'Well, nothing,—you see, I never got there. Just as I was feeling my way, she'd ask me if I preferred big sleeves to little ones, or top hats to billycocks, or some nonsense of the kind.'

'Would she now?'

'Yes,—of course I had to answer, and by the time I'd answered the chance was lost.' Percy was polishing his eye-glass. 'I tried to get there so many times, and she choked me off so often, that I can't help thinking that she suspected what it was that I was after.'

'You think she did?'

'She must have done. Once I followed her down Piccadilly, and chivied her into a glove shop in the Burlington Arcade. I meant to propose to her in there,—I hadn't had a wink of sleep all night through dreaming of her, and I was just about desperate.'

'And did you propose?'

'The girl behind the counter made me buy a dozen pairs of gloves instead. They turned out to be three sizes too large for me when they came home. I believe she thought I'd gone to spoon the glove girl,—she went out and left me there. That girl loaded me with all sorts of things when she was gone,—I couldn't get away. She held me with her blessed eye. I believe it was a glass one.'

'Miss Linden's—or the glove girl's?'

'The glove girl's. She sent me home a whole cartload of green ties, and declared I'd ordered them. I shall never forget that day. I've never been up the Arcade since, and never mean to.'

'You gave Miss Lindon a wrong impression.'

'I don't know. I was always giving her wrong impressions. Once she said that she knew I was not a marrying man, that I was the sort of chap who never would marry, because she saw it in my face.'

'Under the circumstances, that was trying.'

'Bitter hard.' Percy sighed again. 'I shouldn't mind if I wasn't so gone. I'm not a fellow who does get gone, but when I do get gone, I get so beastly gone.'

'I tell you what, Percy,—have a drink!'

'I'm a teetotaler,—you know I am.'

'You talk of your heart being broken, and of your being a teetotaler in the same breath,—if your heart were really broken you'd throw teetotalism to the winds.'

'Do you think so,—why?'

'Because you would,—men whose hearts are broken always do,—you'd swallow a magnum at the least.'

Percy groaned.

'When I drink I'm always ill,—but I'll have a try.'

He had a try,—making a good beginning by emptying at a draught the glass which the waiter had just now filled. Then he relapsed into melancholy.

'Tell me, Percy,—honest Indian!—do you really love her?'

'Love her?' His eyes grew round as saucers. 'Don't I tell you that I love her?'

'I know you tell me, but that sort of thing is easy telling. What does it make you feel like, this love you talk so much about?'

'Feel like?—Just anyhow,—and nohow. You should look inside me, and then you'd know.'

'I see.—It's like that, is it?—Suppose she loved another man, what sort of feeling would you feel towards him?'

'Does she love another man?'

'I say, suppose.'

'I dare say she does. I expect that's it.—What an idiot I am not to have thought of that before.' He sighed,—and refilled his glass. 'He's a lucky chap, whoever he is. I'd—I'd like to tell him so.'

'You'd like to tell him so?'

'He's such a jolly lucky chap, you know.'

'Possibly,—but his jolly good luck is your jolly bad luck. Would you be willing to resign her to him without a word?'

'If she loves him.'

'But you say you love her.'

'Of course I do.'

'Well then?'

'You don't suppose that, because I love her, I shouldn't like to see her happy?—I'm not such a beast!—I'd sooner see her happy than anything else in all the world.'

'I see,—Even happy with another?—I'm afraid that my philosophy is not like yours. If I loved Miss Lindon, and she loved, say, Jones, I'm afraid I shouldn't feel like that towards Jones at all.'

'What would you feel like?'

'Murder.—Percy, you come home with me,—we've begun the night together, let's end it together,—and I'll show you one of the finest notions for committing murder on a scale of real magnificence you ever dreamed

of. I should like to make use of it to show my feelings towards the supposititious Jones,—he'd know what I felt for him when once he had been introduced to it.'

Percy went with me without a word. He had not had much to drink, but it had been too much for him, and he was in a condition of maundering sentimentality. I got him into a cab. We dashed along Piccadilly.

He was silent, and sat looking in front of him with an air of vacuous sullenness which ill-became his cast of countenance. I bade the cabman pass though Lowndes Square. As we passed the Apostle's I pulled him up. I pointed out the place to Woodville.

'You see, Percy, that's Lessingham's house!—that's the house of the man who went away with Marjorie!'

'Yes.' Words came from him slowly, with a quite unnecessary stress on each. 'Because he made a speech.—I'd like to make a speech.—One day I'll make a speech.'

'Because he made a speech,—only that, and nothing more! When a man speaks with an Apostle's tongue, he can witch any woman in the land.—Hallo, who's that?—Lessingham, is that you?'

I saw, or thought I saw, someone, or something, glide up the steps, and withdraw into the shadow of the doorway, as if unwilling to be seen. When I hailed no one answered. I called again.

'Don't be shy, my friend!'

I sprang out of the cab, ran across the pavement, and up the steps. To my surprise, there was no one in the doorway. It seemed incredible, but the place was empty. I felt about me with my hands, as if I had been playing at blind man's buff, and grasped at vacancy. I came down a step or two.

'Ostensibly, there's a vacuum,—which nature abhors.—I say, driver, didn't you see someone come up the steps?'

'I thought I did, sir,—I could have sworn I did.'

'So could I.—It's very odd.'

'Perhaps whoever it was has gone into the 'ouse, sir.'

'I don't see how. We should have heard the door open, if we hadn't seen it,—and we should have seen it, it's not so dark as that.—I've half a mind to ring the bell and inquire.'

'I shouldn't do that if I was you, sir,—you jump in, and I'll get along. This is Mr Lessingham's,—the great Mr Lessingham's.'

I believe the cabman thought that I was drunk,—and not respectable enough to claim acquaintance with the great Mr Lessingham.

'Wake up, Woodville! Do you know I believe there's some mystery about this place,—I feel assured of it. I feel as if I were in the presence of something uncanny,—something which I can neither see, nor touch, nor hear.'

The cabman bent down from his seat, wheedling me.

'Jump in, sir, and we'll be getting along.'

I jumped in, and we got along,—but not far. Before we had gone a dozen yards, I was out again, without troubling the driver to stop. He pulled up, aggrieved.

'Well, sir, what's the matter now? You'll be damaging yourself before you've done, and then you'll be blaming me.'

I had caught sight of a cat crouching in the shadow of the railings,—a black one. That cat was my quarry. Either the creature was unusually sleepy, or slow, or stupid, or it had lost its wits—which a cat seldom does lose!—anyhow, without making an attempt to escape it allowed me to grab it by the nape of the neck.

So soon as we were inside my laboratory, I put the cat into my glass box. Percy stared.

'What have you put it there for?'

'That, my dear Percy, is what you are shortly about to see. You are about to be the witness of an experiment which, to a legislator—such as you are!—ought to be of the greatest possible interest. I am going to demonstrate, on a small scale, the action of the force which, on a large scale, I propose to employ on behalf of my native land.'

He showed no signs of being interested. Sinking into a chair, he recommenced his wearisome reiteration.

'I hate cats!—Do let it go!—I'm always miserable when there's a cat in the room.'

'Nonsense,—that's your fancy! What you want's a taste of whisky—you'll be as chirpy as a cricket.'

'I don't want anything more to drink!—I've had too much already!'

I paid no heed to what he said. I poured two stiff doses into a couple of tumblers. Without seeming to be aware of what it was that he was doing he disposed of the better half of the one I gave him at a draught. Putting his glass upon the table, he dropped his head upon his hands, and groaned.

'What would Marjorie think of me if she saw me now?'

'Think?—nothing. Why should she think of a man like you, when she has so much better fish to fry?'

'I'm feeling frightfully ill!—I'll be drunk before I've done!'

'Then be drunk!—only, for gracious sake, be lively drunk, not deadly doleful.—Cheer up, Percy!' I clapped him on the shoulder,—almost knocking him off his seat on to the floor. 'I am now going to show you that little experiment of which I was speaking!—You see that cat?'

'Of course I see it!—the beast!—I wish you'd let it go!'

'Why should I let it go?—Do you know whose cat that is? That cat's Paul Lessingham's.'

'Paul Lessingham's?'

'Yes, Paul Lessingham's,—the man who made the speech,—the man whom Marjorie went away with.'

'How do you know it's his?'

'I don't know it is, but I believe it is,—I choose to believe it is!—I intend to believe it is!—It was outside his house, therefore it's his cat,—that's how I argue. I can't get Lessingham inside that box, so I get his cat instead.'

'Whatever for?'

'You shall see.—You observe how happy it is?'

'It don't seem happy.'

'We've all our ways of seeming happy,—that's its way,'

The creature was behaving like a cat gone mad, dashing itself against the sides of its glass prison, leaping to and fro, and from side to side, squealing with rage, or with terror, or with both. Perhaps it foresaw what was coming,—there is no fathoming the intelligence of what we call the lower animals.

'It's a funny way.'

'We some of us have funny ways, beside cats. Now, attention! Observe this little toy,—you've seen something of its kind before. It's a spring gun; you pull the spring—drop the charge into the barrel—release the spring—and the charge is fired. I'll unlock this safe, which is built into the wall. It's a letter lock, the combination just now, is "whisky,"—you see, that's a hint to you. You'll notice the safe is strongly made,—it's air-tight, fire-proof, the outer casing is of triple-plated drill-proof steel,—the contents are valuable—to me!—and devilish dangerous,—I'd pity the thief who, in his innocent

ignorance, broke in to steal. Look inside—you see it's full of balls,—glass balls, each in its own little separate nest; light as feathers; transparent,—you can see right through them. Here are a couple, like tiny pills. They contain neither dynamite, nor cordite, nor anything of the kind, yet, given a fair field and no favour, they'll work more mischief than all the explosives man has fashioned. Take hold of one—you say your heart is broken!—squeeze this under your nose—it wants but a gentle pressure—and in less time than no time you'll be in the land where they say there are no broken hearts.'

He shrunk back.

'I don't know what you're talking about.—I don't want the thing.—Take it away.'

'Think twice,—the chance may not recur.'

'I tell you I don't want it.'

'Sure?—Consider!'

'Of course I'm sure!'

'Then the cat shall have it.'

'Let the poor brute go!'

'The poor brute's going,—to the land which is so near, and yet so far. Once more, if you please, attention. Notice what I do with this toy gun. I pull back the spring; I insert this small glass pellet; I thrust the muzzle of the gun through the opening in the glass box which contains the Apostle's cat,—you'll observe it fits quite close, which, on the whole, is perhaps as well for us.—I am about to release the spring.—Close attention, please.—Notice the effect.'

'Atherton, let the brute go!'

'The brute's gone! I've released the spring—the pellet has been discharged—it has struck against the roof of the glass box—it has been broken by the contact,—and, hey presto! the cat lies dead,—and that in face of its nine

lives. You perceive how still it is,—how still! Let's hope that, now, it's really happy. The cat which I choose to believe is Paul Lessingham's has received its quietus; in the morning I'll send it back to him, with my respectful compliments. He'll miss it if I don't.—Reflect! think of a huge bomb, filled with what we'll call Atherton's Magic Vapour, fired, say, from a hundred and twenty ton gun, bursting at a given elevation over the heads of an opposing force. Properly managed, in less than an instant of time, a hundred thousand men,—quite possibly more!—would drop down dead, as if smitten by the lightning of the skies. Isn't that something like a weapon, sir?'

'I'm not well!—I want to get away!—I wish I'd never come!'

That was all Woodville had to say.

'Rubbish!—You're adding to your stock of information every second, and, in these days, when a member of Parliament is supposed to know all about everything, information's the one thing wanted. Empty your glass, man,—that's the time of day for you!'

I handed him his tumbler. He drained what was left of its contents, then, in a fit of tipsy, childish temper he flung the tumbler from him. I had placed—carelessly enough—the second pellet within a foot of the edge of the table. The shock of the heavy beaker striking the board close to it, set it rolling. I was at the other side. I started forward to stop its motion, but I was too late. Before I could reach the crystal globule, it had fallen off the edge of the table on to the floor at Woodville's feet, and smashed in falling. As it smashed, he was looking down, wondering, no doubt, in his stupidity, what the pother was about,—for I was shouting, and making something of a clatter in my efforts to prevent the catastrophe which I saw was coming. On the instant, as the vapour secreted in the broken pellet gained access to the air, he fell forward on to his face. Rushing to him, I snatched his senseless body from the ground, and dragged it, staggeringly, towards the door which opened on to the yard. Flinging the door open, I got him into the open air.

As I did so, I found myself confronted by someone who stood outside. It was Lessingham's mysterious Egypto-Arabian friend,—my morning's visitor.

CHAPTER XVII

MAGIC?—OR MIRACLE?

The passage into the yard from the electrically lit laboratory was a passage from brilliancy to gloom. The shrouded figure, standing in the shadow, was like some object in a dream. My own senses reeled. It was only because I had resolutely held my breath, and kept my face averted that I had not succumbed to the fate which had overtaken Woodville. Had I been a moment longer in gaining the open air, it would have been too late. As it was, in placing Woodville on the ground, I stumbled over him. My senses left me. Even as they went I was conscious of exclaiming,—remembering the saying about the engineer being hoist by his own petard,

'Atherton's Magic Vapour!'

My sensations on returning to consciousness were curious. I found myself being supported in someone's arms, a stranger's face was bending over me, and the most extraordinary pair of eyes I had ever seen were looking into mine.

'Who the deuce are you?' I asked.

Then, understanding that it was my uninvited visitor, with scant ceremony I drew myself away from him. By the light which was streaming through the laboratory door I saw that Woodville was lying close beside me,—stark and still.

'Is he dead?' I cried. 'Percy.—speak, man!—it's not so bad with you as that!'

But it was pretty bad,—so bad that, as I bent down and looked at him, my heart beat uncomfortably fast lest it was as bad as it could be. His heart seemed still,—the vapour took effect directly on the cardiac centres. To revive their action and that instantly, was indispensable. Yet my brain was in such a whirl that I could not even think of how to set about beginning. Had I been alone, it is more than probable Woodville would have died. As I stared at him, senselessly, aimlessly, the stranger, passing his arms beneath his body, extended himself at full length upon his motionless form. Putting his lips to Percy's, he seemed to be pumping life from his own body into the unconscious man's. As I gazed bewildered, surprised, presently there came a movement of Percy's body. His limbs twitched, as if he was in pain. By degrees, the motions became convulsive,—till on a sudden he bestirred himself to such effect that the stranger was rolled right off him. I bent down,—to find that the young gentleman's condition still seemed very far from satisfactory. There was a rigidity about the muscles of his face, a clamminess about his skin, a disagreeable suggestiveness about the way in which his teeth and the whites of his eyes were exposed, which was uncomfortable to contemplate.

The stranger must have seen what was passing through my mind,—not a very difficult thing to see. Pointing to the recumbent Percy, he said, with that queer foreign twang of his, which, whatever it had seemed like in the morning, sounded musical enough just then.

'All will be well with him.'

'I am not so sure.'

The stranger did not deign to answer. He was kneeling on one side of the victim of modern science, I on the other. Passing his hand to and fro in front of the unconscious countenance, as if by magic all semblance of discomfort vanished from Percy's features, and, to all appearances, he was placidly asleep.

'Have you hypnotised him?'

'What does it matter?'

If it was a case of hypnotism, it was very neatly done. The conditions were both unusual and trying, the effect produced seemed all that could be desired,—the change brought about in half a dozen seconds was quite remarkable. I began to be aware of a feeling of quasi-respect for Paul Lessingham's friend. His morals might be peculiar, and manners he might have none, but in this case, at any rate, the end seemed to have justified the means. He went on.

'He sleeps. When he awakes he will remember nothing that has been. Leave him,—the night is warm,—all will be well.'

As he said, the night was warm,—and it was dry. Percy would come to little harm by being allowed to enjoy, for a while, the pleasant breezes. So I acted on the stranger's advice, and left him lying in the yard, while I had a little interview with the impromptu physician.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE BEETLE

The laboratory door was closed. The stranger was standing a foot or two away from it. I was further within the room, and was subjecting him to as keen a scrutiny as circumstances permitted. Beyond doubt he was conscious of my observation, yet he bore himself with an air of indifference, which was suggestive of perfect unconcern. The fellow was oriental to the fingertips,—that much was certain; yet in spite of a pretty wide personal knowledge of oriental people I could not make up my mind as to the exact part of the east from which he came. He was hardly an Arab, he was not a fellah,—he was not, unless I erred, a Mohammedan at all. There was something about him which was distinctly not Mussulmanic. So far as looks were concerned, he was not a flattering example of his race, whatever his race might be. The portentous size of his beak-like nose would have been, in itself, sufficient to damn him in any court of beauty. His lips were thick and shapeless,—and this, joined to another peculiarity in his appearance, seemed to suggest that, in his veins there ran more than a streak of negro blood. The peculiarity alluded to was his semblance of great age. As one eyed him one was reminded of the legends told of people who have been supposed to have retained something of their pristine vigour after having lived for centuries. As, however, one continued to gaze, one began to wonder if he really was so old as he seemed,—if, indeed, he was exceptionally old at all. Negroes, and especially negresses, are apt to age with extreme rapidity. Among coloured folk one sometimes encounters women whose faces seem to have been lined by the passage of centuries, yet whose actual tale of years would entitle them to regard themselves, here in England, as in the prime of life. The senility of the fellow's countenance, besides, was contradicted by the juvenescence of his eyes. No really old

man could have had eyes like that. They were curiously shaped, reminding me of the elongated, faceted eyes of some queer creature, with whose appearance I was familiar, although I could not, at the instant, recall its name. They glowed not only with the force and fire, but, also, with the frenzy of youth. More uncanny-looking eyes I had never encountered,—their possessor could not be, in any sense of the word, a clubable person. Owing, probably, to some peculiar formation of the optic-nerve one felt, as one met his gaze, that he was looking right through you. More obvious danger signals never yet were placed in a creature's head. The individual who, having once caught sight of him, still sought to cultivate their owner's acquaintance, had only himself to thank if the very worst results of frequenting evil company promptly ensued.

It happens that I am myself endowed with an unusual tenacity of vision. I could, for instance, easily outstare any man I ever met. Yet, as I continued to stare at this man, I was conscious that it was only by an effort of will that I was able to resist a baleful something which seemed to be passing from his eyes to mine. It might have been imagination, but, in that sense, I am not an imaginative man; and, if it was, it was imagination of an unpleasantly vivid kind. I could understand how, in the case of a nervous, or a sensitive temperament, the fellow might exercise, by means of the peculiar quality of his glance alone, an influence of a most disastrous sort, which given an appropriate subject in the manifestation of its power might approach almost to the supernatural. If ever man was endowed with the traditional evil eye, in which Italians, among modern nations, are such profound believers, it was he.

When we had stared at each other for, I daresay, quite five minutes, I began to think I had had about enough of it. So, by way of breaking the ice, I put to him a question.

'May I ask how you found your way into my back yard?'

He did not reply in words, but, raising his hands he lowered them, palms downward, with a gesture which was peculiarly oriental.

'Indeed?—Is that so?—Your meaning may be lucidity itself to you, but, for my benefit, perhaps you would not mind translating it into words. Once

more I ask, how did you find your way into my back yard?'

Again nothing but the gesture.

'Possibly you are not sufficiently acquainted with English manners and customs to be aware that you have placed yourself within reach of the pains and penalties of the law. Were I to call in the police you would find yourself in an awkward situation,—and, unless you are presently more explanatory, called in they will be.'

By way of answer he indulged in a distortion of the countenance which might have been meant for a smile,—and which seemed to suggest that he regarded the police with a contempt which was too great for words.

'Why do you laugh—do you think that being threatened with the police is a joke? You are not likely to find it so.—Have you suddenly been bereft of the use of your tongue?'

He proved that he had not by using it.

'I have still the use of my tongue.'

'That, at least, is something. Perhaps, since the subject of how you got into my back yard seems to be a delicate one, you will tell me why you got there.'

'You know why I have come.'

'Pardon me if I appear to flatly contradict you, but that is precisely what I do not know.'

'You do know.'

'Do I?—Then, in that case, I presume that you are here for the reason which appears upon the surface,—to commit a felony.'

'You call me thief?'

'What else are you?'

'I am no thief.—You know why I have come.'

He raised his head a little. A look came into his eyes which I felt that I ought to understand, yet to the meaning of which I seemed, for the instant, to have mislaid the key. I shrugged my shoulders.

'I have come because you wanted me.'

'Because I wanted you!—On my word!—That's sublime!'

'All night you have wanted me,—do I not know? When she talked to you of him, and the blood boiled in your veins; when he spoke, and all the people listened, and you hated him, because he had honour in her eyes.'

I was startled. Either he meant what it appeared incredible that he could mean, or—there was confusion somewhere.

'Take my advice, my friend, and don't try to come the bunco-steerer over me,—I'm a bit in that line myself, you know.'

This time the score was mine,—he was puzzled.

'I know not what you talk of.'

'In that case, we're equal,—I know not what you talk of either.'

His manner, for him, was childlike and bland.

'What is it you do not know? This morning did I not say,—if you want me, then I come?'

'I fancy I have some faint recollection of your being so good as to say something of the kind, but—where's the application?'

'Do you not feel for him the same as I?'

'Who's the him?'

'Paul Lessingham.'

It was spoken quietly, but with a degree of—to put it gently—spitefulness which showed that at least the will to do the Apostle harm would not be lacking.

'And, pray, what is the common feeling which we have for him?'

'Hate.'

Plainly, with this gentleman, hate meant hate,—in the solid oriental sense. I should hardly have been surprised if the mere utterance of the words had seared his lips.

'I am by no means prepared to admit that I have this feeling which you attribute to me, but, even granting that I have, what then?'

'Those who hate are kin.'

'That, also, I should be slow to admit; but—to go a step farther—what has all this to do with your presence on my premises at this hour of the night?'

'You love her.' This time I did not ask him to supply the name,—being unwilling that it should be soiled by the traffic of his lips. 'She loves him,—that is not well. If you choose, she shall love you,—that will be well.'

'Indeed.—And pray how is this consummation which is so devoutly to be desired to be brought about?'

'Put your hand into mine. Say that you wish it. It shall be done.'

Moving a step forward, he stretched out his hand towards me. I hesitated. There was that in the fellow's manner which, for the moment, had for me an unwholesome fascination. Memories flashed through my mind of stupid stories which have been told of compacts made with the devil. I almost felt as if I was standing in the actual presence of one of the powers of evil. I thought of my love for Marjorie,—which had revealed itself after all these years; of the delight of holding her in my arms, of feeling the pressure of her lips to mine. As my gaze met his, the lower side of what the conquest of

this fair lady would mean, burned in my brain; fierce imaginings blazed before my eyes. To win her,—only to win her!

What nonsense he was talking! What empty brag it was! Suppose, just for the sake of the joke, I did put my hand in his, and did wish, right out, what it was plain he knew. If I wished, what harm would it do! It would be the purest jest. Out of his own mouth he would be confounded, for it was certain that nothing would come of it. Why should I not do it then?

I would act on his suggestion,—I would carry the thing right through. Already I was advancing towards him, when—I stopped. I don't know why. On the instant, my thoughts went off at a tangent.

What sort of a blackguard did I call myself that I should take a woman's name in vain for the sake of playing fool's tricks with such scum of the earth as the hideous vagabond in front of me,—and that the name of the woman whom I loved? Rage took hold of me.

'You hound!' I cried.

In my sudden passage from one mood to another, I was filled with the desire to shake the life half out of him. But so soon as I moved a step in his direction, intending war instead of peace, he altered the position of his hand, holding it out towards me as if forbidding my approach. Directly he did so, quite involuntarily, I pulled up dead,—as if my progress had been stayed by bars of iron and walls of steel.

For the moment, I was astonished to the verge of stupefaction. The sensation was peculiar. I was as incapable of advancing another inch in his direction as if I had lost the use of my limbs,—I was even incapable of attempting to attempt to advance. At first I could only stare and gape. Presently I began to have an inkling of what had happened.

The scoundrel had almost succeeded in hypnotising me.

That was a nice thing to happen to a man of my sort at my time of life. A shiver went down my back,—what might have occurred if I had not pulled up in time! What pranks might a creature of that character not have been

disposed to play. It was the old story of the peril of playing with edged tools; I had made the dangerous mistake of underrating the enemy's strength. Evidently, in his own line, the fellow was altogether something out of the usual way.

I believe that even as it was he thought he had me. As I turned away, and leaned against the table at my back, I fancy that he shivered,—as if this proof of my being still my own master was unexpected. I was silent,—it took some seconds to enable me to recover from the shock of the discovery of the peril in which I had been standing. Then I resolved that I would endeavour to do something which should make me equal to this gentleman of many talents.

'Take my advice, my friend, and don't attempt to play that hankey pankey off on to me again.'

'I don't know what you talk of.'

'Don't lie to me,—or I'll burn you into ashes.'

Behind me was an electrical machine, giving an eighteen inch spark. It was set in motion by a lever fitted into the table, which I could easily reach from where I sat. As I spoke the visitor was treated to a little exhibition of electricity. The change in his bearing was amusing. He shook with terror. He salaamed down to the ground.

'My lord!—my lord!—have mercy, oh my lord!'

'Then you be careful, that's all. You may suppose yourself to be something of a magician, but it happens, unfortunately for you, that I can do a bit in that line myself,—perhaps I'm a trifle better at the game than you are. Especially as you have ventured into my stronghold, which contains magic enough to make a show of a hundred thousand such as you.'

Taking down a bottle from a shelf, I sprinkled a drop or two of its contents on the floor. Immediately flames arose, accompanied by a blinding vapour. It was a sufficiently simple illustration of one of the qualities of phosphorous-bromide, but its effect upon my visitor was as startling as it

was unexpected. If I could believe the evidence of my own eyesight, in the very act of giving utterance to a scream of terror he disappeared, how, or why, or whither, there was nothing to show,—in his place, where he had been standing, there seemed to be a dim object of some sort in a state of frenzied agitation on the floor. The phosphorescent vapour was confusing; the lights appeared to be suddenly burning low; before I had sense enough to go and see if there was anything there, and, if so, what, the flames had vanished, the man himself had reappeared, and, prostrated on his knees, was salaaming in a condition of abject terror.

'My lord! my lord!' he whined. 'I entreat you, my lord, to use me as your slave!'

'I'll use you as my slave!' Whether he or I was the more agitated it would have been difficult to say,—but, at least, it would not have done to betray my feelings as he did his.

'Stand up!'

He stood up. I eyed him as he did with an interest which, so far as I was concerned, was of a distinctly new and original sort. Whether or not I had been the victim of an ocular delusion I could not be sure. It was incredible to suppose that he could have disappeared as he had seemed to disappear,—it was also incredible that I could have imagined his disappearance. If the thing had been a trick, I had not the faintest notion how it had been worked; and, if it was not a trick, then what was it? Was it something new in scientific marvels? Could he give me as much instruction in the qualities of unknown forces as I could him?

In the meanwhile he stood in an attitude of complete submission, with downcast eyes, and hands crossed upon his breast. I started to cross-examine him.

'I am going to ask you some questions. So long as you answer them promptly, truthfully, you will be safe. Otherwise you had best beware.'

'Ask, oh my lord.'

'What is the nature of your objection to Mr Lessingham?'

'Revenge.'

'What has he done to you that you should wish to be revenged on him?'

'It is the feud of the innocent blood.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'On his hands is the blood of my kin. It cries aloud for vengeance.'

'Who has he killed?'

'That, my lord, is for me,—and for him.'

'I see.—Am I to understand that you do not choose to answer me, and that I am again to use my—magic?'

I saw that he quivered.

'My lord, he has spilled the blood of her who has lain upon his breast.'

I hesitated. What he meant appeared clear enough. Perhaps it would be as well not to press for further details. The words pointed to what it might be courteous to call an Eastern Romance,—though it was hard to conceive of the Apostle figuring as the hero of such a theme. It was the old tale retold, that to the life of every man there is a background,—that it is precisely in the unlikeliest cases that the background's darkest. What would that penny-plain-and-twopence-coloured bogey, the Nonconformist Conscience, make of such a story if it were blazoned through the land. Would Paul not come down with a run?

""Spilling blood" is a figure of speech; pretty, perhaps, but vague. If you mean that Mr Lessingham has been killing someone, your surest and most effectual revenge would be gained by an appeal to the law.'

'What has the Englishman's law to do with me?'

'If you can prove that he has been guilty of murder it would have a great deal to do with you. I assure you that at any rate, in that sense, the Englishman's law is no respecter of persons. Show him to be guilty, and it would hang Paul Lessingham as indifferently, and as cheerfully, as it would hang Bill Brown.'

'Is that so?'

'It is so, as, if you choose, you will be easily able to prove to your own entire satisfaction.'

He had raised his head, and was looking at something which he seemed to see in front of him with a maleficent glare in his sensitive eyes which it was not nice to see.

'He would be shamed?'

'Indeed he would be shamed.'

'Before all men?'

'Before all men,—and, I take it, before all women too.'

'And he would hang?'

'If shown to have been guilty of wilful murder,—yes.'

His hideous face was lighted up by a sort of diabolical exultation which made it, if that were possible, more hideous still. I had apparently given him a wrinkle which pleased him most consummately.

'Perhaps I will do that in the end,—in the end!' He opened his eyes to their widest limits, then shut them tight,—as if to gloat on the picture which his fancy painted. Then reopened them. 'In the meantime I will have vengeance in my own fashion. He knows already that the avenger is upon him,—he has good reason to know it. And through the days and the nights the knowledge shall be with him still, and it shall be to him as the bitterness of death,—aye, of many deaths. For he will know that escape there is none, and that for him there shall be no more sun in the sky, and that the terror

shall be with him by night and by day, at his rising up and at his lying down, wherever his eyes shall turn it shall be there,—yet, behold, the sap and the juice of my vengeance is in this, in that though he shall be very sure that the days that are, are as the days of his death, yet shall he know that THE DEATH, THE GREAT DEATH, is coming—coming—and shall be on him—when I will!

The fellow spoke like an inspired maniac. If he meant half what he said,—and if he did not then his looks and his tones belied him!—then a promising future bade fair to be in store for Mr Lessingham,—and, also, circumstances being as they were, for Marjorie. It was this latter reflection which gave me pause. Either this imprecatory fanatic would have to be disposed of, by Lessingham himself, or by someone acting on his behalf, and, so far as their power of doing mischief went, his big words proved empty windbags, or Marjorie would have to be warned that there was at least one passage in her suitor's life, into which, ere it was too late, it was advisable that inquiry should be made. To allow Marjorie to irrevocably link her fate with the Apostle's, without being first of all made aware that he was, to all intents and purposes, a haunted man—that was not to be thought of.

'You employ large phrases.'

My words cooled the other's heated blood. Once more his eyes were cast down, his hands crossed upon his breast

'I crave my lord's pardon. My wound is ever new.'

'By the way, what was the secret history, this morning, of that little incident of the cockroach?'

He glanced up quickly.

'Cockroach?—I know not what you say.'

'Well,—was it beetle, then?'

'Beetle!'

He seemed, all at once, to have lost his voice,—the word was gasped.

'After you went we found, upon a sheet of paper, a capitally executed drawing of a beetle, which, I fancy, you must have left behind you,—Scaraboeus sacer, wasn't it?'

'I know not what you talk of.'

'Its discovery seemed to have quite a singular effect on Mr Lessingham. Now, why was that?'

'I know nothing.'

'Oh yes you do,—and, before you go, I mean to know something too.'

The man was trembling, looking this way and that, showing signs of marked discomfiture. That there was something about that ancient scarab, which figures so largely in the still unravelled tangles of the Egyptian mythologies, and the effect which the mere sight of its cartouch—for the drawing had resembled something of the kind—had had on such a seasoned vessel as Paul Lessingham, which might be well worth my finding out, I felt convinced,—the man's demeanour, on my recurring to the matter, told its own plain tale. I made up my mind, if possible, to probe the business to the bottom, then and there.

'Listen to me, my friend. I am a plain man, and I use plain speech,—it's a kind of hobby I have. You will give me the information I require, and that at once, or I will pit my magic against yours,—in which case I think it extremely probable that you will come off worst from the encounter.'

I reached out for the lever, and the exhibition of electricity recommenced. Immediately his tremors were redoubled.

'My lord, I know not of what you talk.'

'None of your lies for me.—Tell me why, at the sight of the thing on that sheet of paper, Paul Lessingham went green and yellow.'

'Ask him, my lord.'

'Probably, later on, that is what I shall do. In the meantime, I am asking you. Answer,—or look out for squalls.'

The electrical exhibition was going on. He was glaring at it as if he wished that it would stop. As if ashamed of his cowardice, plainly, on a sudden, he made a desperate effort to get the better of his fears,—and succeeded better than I had expected or desired. He drew himself up with what, in him, amounted to an air of dignity.

'I am a child of Isis!'

It struck me that he made this remark, not so much to impress me, as with a view of elevating his own low spirits,

'Are you?—Then, in that case, I regret that I am unable to congratulate the lady on her offspring.'

When I said that, a ring came into his voice which I had not heard before.

'Silence!—You know not of what you speak!—I warn you, as I warned Paul Lessingham, be careful not to go too far. Be not like him,—heed my warning.'

'What is it I am being warned against,—the beetle?'

'Yes,—the beetle!'

Were I upon oath, and this statement being made, in the presence of witnesses, say, in a solicitor's office, I standing in fear of pains and penalties, I think that, at this point, I should leave the paper blank. No man likes to own himself a fool, or that he ever was a fool,—and ever since I have been wondering whether, on that occasion, that 'child of Isis' did, or did not, play the fool with me. His performance was realistic enough at the time, heaven knows. But, as it gets farther and farther away, I ask myself, more and more confidently, as time effluxes, whether, after all, it was not clever juggling,—superhumanly clever juggling, if you will; that, and nothing more. If it was something more, then, with a vengeance! there is

more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in our philosophy. The mere possibility opens vistas which the sane mind fears to contemplate.

Since, then, I am not on oath, and, should I fall short of verbal accuracy, I do not need to fear the engines of the law, what seemed to happen was this.

He was standing within about ten feet of where I leaned against the edge of the table. The light was full on, so that it was difficult to suppose that I could make a mistake as to what took place in front of me. As he replied to my mocking allusion to the beetle by echoing my own words, he vanished,—or, rather, I saw him taking a different shape before my eyes. His loose draperies all fell off him, and, as they were in the very act of falling, there issued, or there seemed to issue out of them, a monstrous creature of the beetle type,—the man himself was gone. On the point of size I wish to make myself clear. My impression, when I saw it first, was that it was as large as the man had been, and that it was, in some way, standing up on end, the legs towards me. But, the moment it came in view, it began to dwindle, and that so rapidly that, in a couple of seconds at most, a little heap of drapery was lying on the floor, on which was a truly astonishing example of the coleoptera. It appeared to be a beetle. It was, perhaps, six or seven inches high, and about a foot in length. Its scales were of a vivid golden green. I could distinctly see where the wings were sheathed along the back, and, as they seemed to be slightly agitated, I looked, every moment, to see them opened, and the thing take wing.

I was so astonished,—as who would not have been?—that for an appreciable space of time I was practically in a state of stupefaction. I could do nothing but stare. I was acquainted with the legendary transmigrations of Isis, and with the story of the beetle which issues from the woman's womb through all eternity, and with the other pretty tales, but this, of which I was an actual spectator, was something new, even in legends. If the man, with whom I had just been speaking, was gone, where had he gone to? If this glittering creature was there, in his stead, whence had it come?

I do protest this much, that, after the first shock of surprise had passed, I retained my presence of mind. I felt as an investigator might feel, who has stumbled, haphazard, on some astounding, some epoch-making, discovery. I was conscious that I should have to make the best use of my mental

faculties if I was to take full advantage of so astonishing an accident. I kept my glance riveted on the creature, with the idea of photographing it on my brain. I believe that if it were possible to take a retinal print—which it someday will be—you would have a perfect picture of what it was I saw, Beyond doubt it was a lamellicorn, one of the copridae. With the one exception of its monstrous size, there were the characteristics in plain view;—the convex body, the large head, the projecting clypeus. More, its smooth head and throat seemed to suggest that it was a female. Equally beyond a doubt, apart from its size, there were unusual features present too. The eyes were not only unwontedly conspicuous, they gleamed as if they were lighted by internal flames,—in some indescribable fashion they reminded me of my vanished visitor. The colouring was superb, and the creature appeared to have the chameleon-like faculty of lightening and darkening the shades at will. Its not least curious feature was its restlessness. It was in a state of continual agitation; and, as if it resented my inspection, the more I looked at it the more its agitation grew. As I have said, I expected every moment to see it take wing and circle through the air.

All the while I was casting about in my mind as to what means I could use to effect its capture. I did think of killing it, and, on the whole, I rather wish that I had at any rate attempted slaughter,—there were dozens of things, lying ready to my hand, any one of which would have severely tried its constitution;—but, on the spur of the moment, the only method of taking it alive which occurred to me, was to pop over it a big tin canister which had contained soda-lime. This canister was on the floor to my left. I moved towards it, as nonchalantly as I could, keeping an eye on that shining wonder all the time. Directly I moved, its agitation perceptibly increased,—it was, so to speak, all one whirr of tremblement; it scintillated, as if its coloured scales had been so many prisms; it began to unsheath its wings, as if it had finally decided that it would make use of them. Picking up the tin, disembarassing it of its lid, I sprang towards my intended victim. Its wings opened wide; obviously it was about to rise; but it was too late. Before it had cleared the ground, the tin was over it.

It remained over it, however, for an instant only. I had stumbled, in my haste, and, in my effort to save myself from falling face foremost on to the floor, I was compelled to remove my hands from the tin. Before I was able

to replace them, the tin was sent flying, and, while I was still partially recumbent, within eighteen inches of me, that beetle swelled and swelled, until it had assumed its former portentous dimensions, when, as it seemed, it was enveloped by a human shape, and in less time than no time, there stood in front of me, naked from top to toe, my truly versatile oriental friend. One startling fact nudity revealed,—that I had been egregiously mistaken on the question of sex. My visitor was not a man, but a woman, and, judging from the brief glimpse which I had of her body, by no means old or ill-shaped either.

If that transformation was not a bewildering one, then two and two make five. The most level-headed scientist would temporarily have lost his mental equipoise on witnessing such a quick change as that within a span or two of his own nose I was not only witless, I was breathless too,—I could only gape. And, while I gaped, the woman, stooping down, picking up her draperies, began to huddle them on her anyhow,—and, also, to skeddadle towards the door which led into the yard. When I observed this last manoeuvre, to some extent I did rise to the requirements of the situation. Leaping up, I rushed to stay her flight.

'Stop!' I shouted.

But she was too quick for me. Ere I could reach her, she had opened the door, and was through it,—and, what was more, she had slammed it in my face. In my excitement, I did some fumbling with the handle. When, in my turn, I was in the yard, she was out of sight. I did fancy I saw a dim form disappearing over the wall at the further side, and I made for it as fast as I knew how. I clambered on to the wall, looking this way and that, but there was nothing and no one to be seen. I listened for the sound of retreating footsteps, but all was still. Apparently I had the entire neighbourhood to my own sweet self. My visitor had vanished. Time devoted to pursuit I felt would be time ill-spent.

As I returned across the yard, Woodville, who still was taking his rest under the open canopy of heaven, sat up. Seemingly my approach had roused him out of slumber. At sight of me he rubbed his eyes, and yawned, and blinked.

'I say,' he remarked, not at all unreasonably, 'where am I?'

'You're on holy—or on haunted ground,—hang me if I quite know which!—but that's where you are, my boy.'

'By Jove!—I am feeling queer!—I have got a headache, don't you know.'

'I shouldn't be in the least surprised at anything you have, or haven't,—I'm beyond surprise. It's a drop of whisky you are wanting,—and what I'm

wanting too,—only, for goodness sake, drop me none of your drops! Mine is a case for a bottle at the least.'

I put my arm through his, and went with him into the laboratory. And, when we were in, I shut, and locked, and barred the door.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LADY RAGES

Dora Grayling stood in the doorway.

'I told your servant he need not trouble to show me in,—and I've come without my aunt. I hope I'm not intruding.'

She was—confoundedly; and it was on the tip of my tongue to tell her so. She came into the room, with twinkling eyes, looking radiantly happy,—that sort of look which makes even a plain young woman prepossessing.

'Am I intruding?—I believe I am.'

She held out her hand, while she was still a dozen feet away, and when I did not at once dash forward to make a clutch at it, she shook her head and made a little mouth at me.

'What's the matter with you?—Aren't you well?'

I was not well,—I was very far from well. I was as unwell as I could be without being positively ill, and any person of common discernment would have perceived it at a glance. At the same time I was not going to admit anything of the kind to her.

'Thank you,—I am perfectly well.'

'Then, if I were you, I would endeavour to become imperfectly well; a little imperfection in that direction might make you appear to more advantage.'

'I am afraid that that I am not one of those persons who ever do appear to much advantage,—did I not tell you so last night?'

'I believe you did say something of the kind,—it's very good of you to remember. Have you forgotten something else which you said to me last night?'

'You can hardly expect me to keep fresh in my memory all the follies of which my tongue is guilty.'

'Thank you.—That is quite enough.—Good-day.'

She turned as if to go.

'Miss Grayling!'

'Mr Atherton?'

'What's the matter?—What have I been saying now?'

'Last night you invited me to come and see you this morning,—is that one of the follies of which your tongue was guilty?'

The engagement had escaped my recollection—it is a fact—and my face betrayed me.

'You had forgotten?' Her cheeks flamed; her eyes sparkled. 'You must pardon my stupidity for not having understood that the imitation was of that general kind which is never meant to be acted on.'

She was half way to the door before I stopped her,—I had to take her by the shoulder to do it.

'Miss Grayling!—You are hard on me.'

'I suppose I am.—Is anything harder than to be intruded on by an undesired, and unexpected, guest?'

'Now you are harder still.—If you knew what I have gone through since our conversation of last night, in your strength you would be merciful.'

'Indeed?—What have you gone through?'

I hesitated. What I actually had gone through I certainly did not propose to tell her. Other reasons apart I did not desire to seem madder than I admittedly am,—and I lacked sufficient plausibility to enable me to concoct, on the spur of the moment, a plain tale of the doings of my midnight visitor which would have suggested that the narrator was perfectly sane. So I fenced,—or tried to.

'For one thing,—I have had no sleep.'

I had not,—not one single wink. When I did get between the sheets, 'all night I lay in agony,' I suffered from that worst form of nightmare,—the nightmare of the man who is wide awake. There was continually before my fevered eyes the strange figure of that Nameless Thing. I had often smiled at tales of haunted folk,—here was I one of them. My feelings were not rendered more agreeable by a strengthening conviction that if I had only retained the normal attitude of a scientific observer I should, in all probability, have solved the mystery of my oriental friend, and that his example of the genus of copridae might have been pinned,—by a very large pin!—on a piece—a monstrous piece!—of cork. It was galling to reflect that he and I had played together a game of bluff,—a game at which civilisation was once more proved to be a failure.

She could not have seen all this in my face; but she saw something—because her own look softened.

'You do look tired.' She seemed to be casting about in her own mind for a cause. 'You have been worrying.' She glanced round the big laboratory. 'Have you been spending the night in this—wizard's cave?'

'Pretty well'

'Oh!'

The monosyllable, as she uttered it, was big with meaning. Uninvited, she seated herself in an arm-chair, a huge old thing, of shagreen leather, which would have held half a dozen of her. Demure in it she looked, like an agreeable reminiscence, alive, and a little up-to-date, of the women of long ago. Her dove grey eyes seemed to perceive so much more than they cared to show.

'How is it that you have forgotten that you asked me to come?—didn't you mean it?'

'Of course I meant it.'

'Then how is it you've forgotten?'

'I didn't forget.'

'Don't tell fibs.—Something is the matter,—tell me what it is.—Is it that I am too early?'

'Nothing of the sort,—you couldn't be too early.'

'Thank you.—When you pay a compliment, even so neat an one as that, sometimes, you should look as if you meant it.—It is early,—I know it's early, but afterwards I want you to come to lunch. I told aunt that I would bring you back with me.'

'You are much better to me than I deserve.'

'Perhaps.' A tone came into her voice which was almost pathetic. 'I think that to some men women are almost better than they deserve. I don't know why. I suppose it pleases them. It is odd.' There was a different intonation, —a dryness. 'Have you forgotten what I came for?'

'Not a bit of it,—I am not quite the brute I seem. You came to see an illustration of that pleasant little fancy of mine for slaughtering my fellows. The fact is, I'm hardly in a mood for that just now,—I've been illustrating it too much already.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, for one thing it's been murdering Lessingham's cat.'

'Mr Lessingham's cat?'

'Then it almost murdered Percy Woodville.'

'Mr Atherton!—I wish you wouldn't talk like that.'

'It's a fact. It was a question of a little matter in a wrong place, and, if it hadn't been for something very like a miracle, he'd be dead.'

'I wish you wouldn't have anything to do with such things—I hate them.'

I stared.

'Hate them?—I thought you'd come to see an illustration.'

'And pray what was your notion of an illustration?'

'Well, another cat would have had to be killed, at least.'

'And do you suppose that I would have sat still while a cat was being killed for my—edification?'

'It needn't necessarily have been a cat, but something would have had to be killed,—how are you going to illustrate the death-dealing propensities of a weapon of that sort without it?'

'Is it possible that you imagine that I came here to see something killed?'

'Then for what did you come?'

I do not know what there was about the question which was startling, but as soon as it was out, she went a fiery red.

'Because I was a fool.'

I was bewildered. Either she had got out of the wrong side of bed, or I had, —or we both had. Here she was, assailing me, hammer and tongs, so far as

I could see, for absolutely nothing.

'You are pleased to be satirical at my expense.'

'I should not dare. Your detection of me would be so painfully rapid.'

I was in no mood for jangling. I turned a little away from her. Immediately she was at my elbow.

'Mr Atherton?'

'Miss Grayling.'

'Are you cross with me?'

'Why should I be? If it pleases you to laugh at my stupidity you are completely justified.'

'But you are not stupid.'

'No?—Nor you satirical.'

'You are not stupid,—you know you are not stupid; it was only stupidity on my part to pretend that you were.'

'It is very good of you to say so.—But I fear that I am an indifferent host. Although you would not care for an illustration, there may be other things which you might find amusing.'

'Why do you keep on snubbing me?'

'I keep on snubbing you!'

'You are always snubbing me,—you know you are. Some times I feel as if I hated you.'

'Miss Grayling!'

'I do! I do! I do!'

'After all, it is only natural.'

'That is how you talk,—as if I were a child, and you were,—oh I don't know what.—Well, Mr Atherton, I am sorry to be obliged to leave you. I have enjoyed my visit very much. I only hope I have not seemed too intrusive.'

She flounced—'flounce' was the only appropriate word!—out of the room before I could stop her. I caught her in the passage.

'Miss Grayling, I entreat you—'

'Pray do not entreat me, Mr Atherton.' Standing still she turned to me. 'I would rather show myself to the door as I showed myself in, but, if that is impossible, might I ask you not to speak to me between this and the street?'

The hint was broad enough, even for me. I escorted her through the hall without a word,—in perfect silence she shook the dust of my abode from off her feet.

I had made a pretty mess of things. I felt it as I stood on the top of the steps and watched her going,—she was walking off at four miles an hour; I had not even ventured to ask to be allowed to call a hansom.

It was beginning to occur to me that this was a case in which another blow upon the river might be, to say the least of it, advisable—and I was just returning into the house with the intention of putting myself into my flannels, when a cab drew up, and old Lindon got out of it.

CHAPTER XX

A HEAVY FATHER

Mr Lindon was excited,—there is no mistaking it when he is, because with him excitement means perspiration, and as soon as he was out of the cab he took off his hat and began to wipe the lining.

'Atherton, I want to speak to you—most particularly—somewhere in private.'

I took him into my laboratory. It is my rule to take no one there; it is a workshop, not a playroom,—the place is private; but, recently, my rules had become dead letters. Directly he was inside, Lindon began puffing and stewing, wiping his forehead, throwing out his chest, as if he were oppressed by a sense of his own importance. Then he started off talking at the top of his voice,—and it is not a low one either.

'Atherton, I—I've always looked on you as a—a kind of a son.'

'That's very kind of you.'

'I've always regarded you as a—a level-headed fellow; a man from whom sound advice can be obtained when sound advice—is—is most to be desired.'

'That also is very kind of you.'

'And therefore I make no apology for coming to you at—at what may be regarded as a—a strictly domestic crisis; at a moment in the history of the Lindons when delicacy and common sense are—are essentially required.'

This time I contented myself with nodding. Already I perceived what was coming; somehow, when I am with a man I feel so much more clear-headed than I do when I am with a woman,—realise so much better the nature of the ground on which I am standing.

'What do you know of this man Lessingham?'

I knew it was coming.

'What all the world knows.'

'And what does all the world know of him?—I ask you that! A flashy, plausible, shallow-pated, carpet-bagger,—that is what all the world knows of him. The man's a political adventurer,—he snatches a precarious, and criminal, notoriety, by trading on the follies of his fellow-countrymen. He is devoid of decency, destitute of principle, and impervious to all the feelings of a gentleman. What do you know of him besides this?'

'I am not prepared to admit that I do know that.'

'Oh yes you do!—don't talk nonsense!—you choose to screen the fellow! I say what I mean,—I always have said, and I always shall say.—What do you know of him outside politics,—of his family—of his private life?'

'Well,—not very much.'

'Of course you don't!—nor does anybody else! The man's a mushroom,—or a toadstool, rather!—sprung up in the course of a single night, apparently out of some dirty ditch.—Why, sir, not only is he without ordinary intelligence, he is even without a Brummagen substitute for manners.'

He had worked himself into a state of heat in which his countenance presented a not too agreeable assortment of scarlets and purples. He flung himself into a chair, threw his coat wide open, and his arms too, and started off again.

'The family of the Lindons is, at this moment, represented by a—a young woman,—by my daughter, sir. She represents me, and it's her duty to

represent me adequately—adequately, sir! And what's more, between ourselves, sir, it's her duty to marry. My property's my own, and I wouldn't have it pass to either of my confounded brothers on any account. They're next door to fools, and—and they don't represent me in any possible sense of the word. My daughter, sir, can marry whom she pleases,—whom she pleases! There's no one in England, peer or commoner, who would not esteem it an honour to have her for his wife—I've told her so,—yes, sir, I've told her, though you—you'd think that she, of all people in the world, wouldn't require telling. Yet what do you think she does? She—she actually carries on what I—I can't help calling a—a compromising acquaintance with this man Lessingham!

'No!'

'But I say yes!—and I wish to heaven I didn't. I—I've warned her against the scoundrel more than once; I—I've told her to cut him dead. And yet, as—as you saw yourself, last night, in—in the face of the assembled House of Commons, after that twaddling clap-trap speech of his, in which there was not one sound sentiment, nor an idea which—which would hold water, she positively went away with him, in—in the most ostentatious and—and disgraceful fashion, on—on his arm, and—and actually snubbed her father.—It is monstrous that a parent—a father!—should be subjected to such treatment by his child.'

The poor old boy polished his brow with his pocket-handkerchief.

'When I got home I—I told her what I thought of her, I promise you that,—and I told her what I thought of him,—I didn't mince my words with her. There are occasions when plain speaking is demanded,—and that was one. I positively forbade her to speak to the fellow again, or to recognise him if she met him in the street. I pointed out to her, with perfect candour, that the fellow was an infernal scoundrel,—that and nothing else!—and that he would bring disgrace on whoever came into contact with him, even with the end of a barge pole.—And what do you think she said?'

'She promised to obey you, I make no doubt.'

'Did she, sir!—By gad, did she!—That shows how much you know her!—She said, and, by gad, by her manner, and—and the way she went on, you'd—you'd have thought that she was the parent and I was the child—she said that I—I grieved her, that she was disappointed in me, that times have changed,—yes, sir, she said that times have changed!—that, nowadays, parents weren't Russian autocrats—no, sir, not Russian autocrats!—that—she was sorry she couldn't oblige me,—yes, sir, that was how she put it,—she was sorry she couldn't oblige me, but it was altogether out of the question to suppose that she could put a period to a friendship which she valued, simply on account of-of my unreasonable prejudices,—and—and—and, in short, she—she told me to go the devil, sir!'

'And did you—'

I was on the point of asking him if he went,—but I checked myself in time.

'Let us look at the matter as men of the world. What do you know against Lessingham, apart from his politics?'

'That's just it,—I know nothing.'

'In a sense, isn't that in his favour?'

'I don't see how you make that out. I—I don't mind telling you that I—I've had inquiries made. He's not been in the House six years—this is his second Parliament—he's jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box. His first constituency was Harwich—they've got him still, and much good may he do 'em!—but how he came to stand for the place,—or who, or what, or where he was before he stood for the place, no one seems to have the faintest notion.'

'Hasn't he been a great traveller?'

'I never heard of it.'

'Not in the East?'

'Has he told you so?'

'No,—I was only wondering. Well, it seems to me that to find out that nothing is known against him is something in his favour!'

'My dear Sydney, don't talk nonsense. What it proves is simply,—that he's a nothing and a nobody. Had he been anything or anyone, something would have been known about him, either for or against. I don't want my daughter to marry a man who—who—who's shot up through a trap, simply because nothing is known against him. Ha-hang me, if I wouldn't ten times sooner she should marry you.'

When he said that, my heart leaped in my bosom. I had to turn away.

'I am afraid that is out of the question.'

He stopped in his tramping, and looked at me askance.

'Why?'

I felt that, if I was not careful, I should be done for,—and, probably, in his present mood, Marjorie too.

'My dear Lindon, I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for your suggestion, but I can only repeat that—unfortunately, anything of the kind is out of the question.'

'I don't see why.'

'Perhaps not.'

'You—you're a pretty lot, upon my word!'

'I'm afraid we are.'

'I—I want you to tell her that Lessingham is a damned scoundrel.'

'I see.—But I would suggest that if I am to use the influence with which you credit me to the best advantage, or to preserve a shred of it, I had hardly better state the fact quite so bluntly as that.'

'I don't care how you state it,—state it as you like. Only—only I want you to soak her mind with a loathing of the fellow; I—I—I want you to paint him in his true colours; in—in—in fact, I—I want you to choke him off.'

While he still struggled with his words, and with the perspiration on his brow, Edwards entered. I turned to him.

'What is it?'

'Miss Lindon, sir, wishes to see you particularly, and at once.'

At that moment I found the announcement a trifle perplexing,—it delighted Lindon. He began to stutter and to stammer.

'T-the very thing!—c-couldn't have been better!—show her in here! H—hide me somewhere,—I don't care where,—behind that screen! Y-you use your influence with her;—g-give her a good talking to;—t-tell her what I've told you; and at—at the critical moment I'll come in, and then—then if we can't manage her between us, it'll be a wonder.'

The proposition staggered me.

'But, my dear Mr Lindon, I fear that I cannot—'

He cut me short.

'Here she comes!'

Ere I could stop him he was behind the screen,—I had not seen him move with such agility before!—and before I could expostulate Marjorie was in the room. Something which was in her bearing, in her face, in her eyes, quickened the beating of my pulses,—she looked as if something had come into her life, and taken the joy clean out of it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TERROR IN THE NIGHT

'Sydney!' she cried, 'I'm so glad that I can see you!'

She might be,—but, at that moment, I could scarcely assert that I was a sharer of her joy.

'I told you that if trouble overtook me I should come to you, and—I'm in trouble now. Such strange trouble.'

So was I,—and in perplexity as well. An idea occurred to me,—I would outwit her eavesdropping father.

'Come with me into the house,—tell me all about it there.'

She refused to budge.

'No,—I will tell you all about it here.' She looked about her,—as it struck me queerly. 'This is just the sort of place in which to unfold a tale like mine. It looks uncanny.'

'But—'

""But me no buts!" Sydney, don't torture me,—let me stop here where I am, —don't you see I'm haunted?'

She had seated herself. Now she stood up, holding her hands out in front of her in a state of extraordinary agitation, her manner as wild as her words.

'Why are you staring at me like that? Do you think I'm mad?—I wonder if I'm going mad.—Sydney, do people suddenly go mad? You're a bit of everything, you're a bit of a doctor too, feel my pulse,—there it is!—tell me if I'm ill!'

I felt her pulse,—it did not need its swift beating to inform me that fever of some sort was in her veins. I gave her something in a glass. She held it up to the level of her eyes.

'What's this?'

'It's a decoction of my own. You might not think it, but my brain sometimes gets into a whirl. I use it as a sedative. It will do you good.'

She drained the glass.

'It's done me good already,—I believe it has; that's being something like a doctor.—Well, Sydney, the storm has almost burst. Last night papa forbade me to speak to Paul Lessingham—by way of a prelude.'

'Exactly. Mr Lindon—'

'Yes, Mr Lindon,—that's papa. I fancy we almost quarrelled. I know papa said some surprising things,—but it's a way he has,—he's apt to say surprising things. He's the best father in the world, but—it's not in his nature to like a really clever person; your good high dried old Tory never can;—I've always thought that that's why he's so fond of you.'

'Thank you, I presume that is the reason, though it had not occurred to me before.'

Since her entry, I had, to the best of my ability, been turning the position over in my mind. I came to the conclusion that, all things considered, her father had probably as much right to be a sharer of his daughter's confidence as I had, even from the vantage of the screen,—and that for him to hear a few home truths proceeding from her lips might serve to clear the air. From such a clearance the lady would not be likely to come off worst. I had not the faintest inkling of what was the actual purport of her visit.

She started off, as it seemed to me, at a tangent.

'Did I tell you last night about what took place yesterday morning,—about the adventure of my finding the man?'

'Not a word.'

'I believe I meant to,—I'm half disposed to think he's brought me trouble. Isn't there some superstition about evil befalling whoever shelters a homeless stranger?'

'We'll hope not, for humanity's sake.'

'I fancy there is,—I feel sure there is.—Anyhow, listen to my story. Yesterday morning, before breakfast,—to be accurate, between eight and nine, I looked out of the window, and I saw a crowd in the street. I sent Peter out to see what was the matter. He came back and said there was a man in a fit. I went out to look at the man in the fit. I found, lying on the ground, in the centre of the crowd, a man who, but for the tattered remnants of what had apparently once been a cloak, would have been stark naked. He was covered with dust, and dirt, and blood,—a dreadful sight. As you know, I have had my smattering of instruction in First Aid to the Injured, and that kind of thing, so, as no one else seemed to have any sense, and the man seemed as good as dead, I thought I would try my hand. Directly I knelt down beside him, what do you think he said?'

'Thank you.'

'Nonsense.—He said, in such a queer, hollow, croaking voice, "Paul Lessingham." I was dreadfully startled. To hear a perfect stranger, a man in his condition, utter that name in such a fashion—to me, of all people in the world!—took me aback. The policeman who was holding his head remarked, "That's the first time he's opened his mouth. I thought he was dead." He opened his mouth a second time. A convulsive movement went all over him, and he exclaimed, with the strangest earnestness, and so loudly that you might have heard him at the other end of the street, "Be warned, Paul Lessingham, be warned!" It was very silly of me, perhaps, but I cannot tell you how his words, and his manner—the two together—

affected me.—Well, the long and the short of it was, that I had him taken into the house, and washed, and put to bed,—and I had the doctor sent for. The doctor could make nothing of it at all. He reported that the man seemed to be suffering from some sort of cataleptic seizure,—I could see that he thought it likely to turn out almost as interesting a case as I did.'

'Did you acquaint your father with the addition to his household?'

She looked at me, quizzically.

'You see, when one has such a father as mine one cannot tell him everything, at once. There are occasions on which one requires time.'

I felt that this would be wholesome hearing for old Lindon.

'Last night, after papa and I had exchanged our little courtesies,—which, it is to be hoped, were to papa's satisfaction, since they were not to be mine—I went to see the patient. I was told that he had neither eaten nor drunk, moved nor spoken. But, so soon as I approached his bed, he showed signs of agitation. He half raised himself upon his pillow, and he called out, as if he had been addressing some large assembly—I can't describe to you the dreadful something which was in his voice, and on his face,—"Paul Lessingham!—Beware!—The Beetle!"'

When she said that, I was startled.

'Are you sure those were the words he used?'

'Quite sure. Do you think I could mistake them,—especially after what has happened since? I hear them singing in my ears,—they haunt me all the time.'

She put her hands up to her face, as if to veil something from her eyes. I was becoming more and more convinced that there was something about the Apostle's connection with his Oriental friend which needed probing to the bottom.

'What sort of a man is he to look at, this patient of yours?'

I had my doubts as to the gentleman's identity,—which her words dissolved; only, however, to increase my mystification in another direction.

'He seems to be between thirty and forty. He has light hair, and straggling sandy whiskers. He is so thin as to be nothing but skin and bone,—the doctor says it's a case of starvation.'

'You say he has light hair, and sandy whiskers. Are you sure the whiskers are real?'

She opened her eyes.

'Of course they're real. Why shouldn't they be real?'

'Does he strike you as being a—foreigner?'

'Certainly not. He looks like an Englishman, and he speaks like one, and not, I should say, of the lowest class. It is true that there is a very curious, a weird, quality in his voice, what I have heard of it, but it is not un-English. If it is catalepsy he is suffering from, then it is a kind of catalepsy I never heard of. Have you ever seen a clairvoyant?' I nodded. 'He seems to me to be in a state of clairvoyance. Of course the doctor laughed when I told him so, but we know what doctors are, and I still believe that he is in some condition of the kind. When he said that last night he struck me as being under what those sort of people call 'influence,' and that whoever had him under influence was forcing him to speak against his will, for the words came from his lips as if they had been wrung from him in agony.'

Knowing what I did know, that struck me as being rather a remarkable conclusion for her to have reached, by the exercise of her own unaided powers of intuition,—but I did not choose to let her know I thought so.

'My dear Marjorie!—you who pride yourself on having your imagination so strictly under control!—on suffering it to take no errant flights!'

'Is not the fact that I do so pride myself proof that I am not likely to make assertions wildly,—proof, at any rate, to you? Listen to me. When I left that unfortunate creature's room,—I had had a nurse sent for, I left him in her

charge—and reached my own bedroom, I was possessed by a profound conviction that some appalling, intangible, but very real danger, was at that moment threatening Paul.'

'Remember,—you had had an exciting evening; and a discussion with your father. Your patient's words came as a climax.'

'That is what I told myself,—or, rather, that was what I tried to tell myself; because, in some extraordinary fashion, I had lost the command of my powers of reflection.'

'Precisely.'

'It was not precisely,—or, at least, it was not precisely in the sense you mean. You may laugh at me, Sydney, but I had an altogether indescribable feeling, a feeling which amounted to knowledge, that I was in the presence of the supernatural.'

'Nonsense!'

'It was not nonsense,—I wish it had been nonsense. As I have said, I was conscious, completely conscious, that some frightful peril was assailing Paul. I did not know what it was, but I did know that it was something altogether awful, of which merely to think was to shudder. I wanted to go to his assistance, I tried to, more than once; but I couldn't, and I knew that I couldn't,—I knew that I couldn't move as much as a finger to help him.—Stop,—let me finish!—I told myself that it was absurd, but it wouldn't do; absurd or not, there was the terror with me in the room. I knelt down, and I prayed, but the words wouldn't come. I tried to ask God to remove this burden from my brain, but my longings wouldn't shape themselves into words, and my tongue was palsied. I don't know how long I struggled, but, at last, I came to understand that, for some cause, God had chosen to leave me to fight the fight alone. So I got up, and undressed, and went to bed,—and that was the worst of all. I had sent my maid away in the first rush of my terror, afraid, and, I think, ashamed, to let her see my fear. Now I would have given anything to summon her back again, but I couldn't do it, I couldn't even ring the bell. So, as I say, I got into bed.'

She paused, as if to collect her thoughts. To listen to her words, and to think of the suffering which they meant to her, was almost more than I could endure. I would have thrown away the world to have been able to take her in my arms, and soothe her fears. I knew her to be, in general, the least hysterical of young women; little wont to become the prey of mere delusions; and, incredible though it sounded, I had an innate conviction that, even in its wildest periods, her story had some sort of basis in solid fact. What that basis amounted to, it would be my business, at any and every cost, quickly to determine.

'You know how you have always laughed at me because of my objection to—cockroaches, and how, in spring, the neighbourhood of May-bugs has always made me uneasy. As soon as I got into bed I felt that something of the kind was in the room.'

'Something of what kind?'

'Some kind of—beetle. I could hear the whirring of its wings; I could hear its droning in the air; I knew that it was hovering above my head; that it was coming lower and lower, nearer and nearer. I hid myself; I covered myself all over with the clothes,—then I felt it bumping against the coverlet. And, Sydney!' She drew closer. Her blanched cheeks and frightened eyes made my heart bleed. Her voice became but an echo of itself. 'It followed me.'

'Marjorie!'

'It got into the bed.'

'You imagined it.'

'I didn't imagine it. I heard it crawl along the sheets, till it found a way between them, and then it crawled towards me. And I felt it—against my face.—And it's there now.'

'Where?'

She raised the forefinger of her left hand.

'There!—Can't you hear it droning?'

She listened, intently. I listened too. Oddly enough, at that instant the droning of an insect did become audible.

'It's only a bee, child, which has found its way through the open window.'

'I wish it were only a bee, I wish it were.—Sydney, don't you feel as if you were in the presence of evil? Don't you want to get away from it, back into the presence of God?'

'Marjorie!'

'Pray, Sydney, pray!—I can't!—I don't know why, but I can't!

She flung her arms about my neck, and pressed herself against me in paroxysmal agitation. The violence of her emotion bade fair to unman me too. It was so unlike Marjorie,—and I would have given my life to save her from a toothache. She kept repeating her own words,—as if she could not help it.

'Pray, Sydney, pray!'

At last I did as she wished me. At least, there is no harm in praying,—I never heard of its bringing hurt to anyone. I repeated aloud the Lord's Prayer,—the first time for I know not how long. As the divine sentences came from my lips, hesitatingly enough, I make no doubt, her tremors ceased. She became calmer. Until, as I reached the last great petition, 'Deliver us from evil,' she loosed her arms from about my neck, and dropped upon her knees, close to my feet. And she joined me in the closing words, as a sort of chorus.

'For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for ever and ever. Amen.'

When the prayer was ended, we both of us were still. She with her head bowed, and her hands clasped; and I with something tugging at my heart-strings which I had not felt there for many and many a year, almost as if it

had been my mother's hand;—I daresay that sometimes she does stretch out her hand, from her place among the angels, to touch my heart-strings, and I know nothing of it all the while.

As the silence still continued, I chanced to glance up, and there was old Lindon peeping at us from his hiding-place behind the screen. The look of amazed perplexity which was on his big red face struck me with such a keen sense of the incongruous that it was all I could do to keep from laughter. Apparently the sight of us did nothing to lighten the fog which was in his brain, for he stammered out, in what was possibly intended for a whisper,

'Is—is she m-mad?'

The whisper,—if it was meant for a whisper—was more than sufficiently audible to catch his daughter's ears. She started—raised her head—sprang to her feet—turned—and saw her father.

'Papa!'

Immediately her sire was seized with an access of stuttering.

'W-w-what the d-devil's the—the m-m-meaning of this?'

Her utterance was clear enough,—I fancy her parent found it almost painfully clear.

'Rather it is for me to ask, what is the meaning of this! Is it possible, that, all the time, you have actually been concealed behind that—screen?'

Unless I am mistaken the old gentleman cowered before the directness of his daughter's gaze,—and endeavoured to conceal the fact by an explosion of passion.

'Do-don't you s-speak to me li-like that, you un-undutiful girl! I—I'm your father!'

'You certainly are my father; though I was unaware until now that my father was capable of playing the part of eavesdropper.'

Rage rendered him speechless,—or, at any rate, he chose to let us believe that that was the determining cause of his continuing silence. So Marjorie turned to me,—and, on the whole, I had rather she had not. Her manner was very different from what it had been just now,—it was more than civil, it was freezing.

'Am I to understand, Mr Atherton, that this has been done with your cognisance? That while you suffered me to pour out my heart to you unchecked, you were aware, all the time, that there was a listener behind the screen?'

I became keenly aware, on a sudden, that I had borne my share in playing her a very shabby trick,—I should have liked to throw old Lindon through the window.

'The thing was not of my contriving. Had I had the opportunity I would have compelled Mr Lindon to face you when you came in. But your distress caused me to lose my balance. And you will do me the justice to remember that I endeavoured to induce you to come with me into another room.'

'But I do not seem to remember your hinting at there being any particular reason why I should have gone.'

'You never gave me a chance.'

'Sydney!—I had not thought you would have played me such a trick!'

When she said that—in such a tone!—the woman whom I loved!—I could have hammered my head against the wall. The hound I was to have treated her so scurvily!

Perceiving I was crushed she turned again to face her father, cool, calm, stately;—she was, on a sudden, once more, the Marjorie with whom I was familiar. The demeanour of parent and child was in striking contrast. If appearances went for aught, the odds were heavy that in any encounter which might be coming the senior would suffer.

'I hope, papa, that you are going to tell me that there has been some curious mistake, and that nothing was farther from your intention than to listen at a keyhole. What would you have thought—and said—if I had attempted to play the spy on you? And I have always understood that men were so particular on points of honour.'

Old Lindon was still hardly fit to do much else than splutter,—certainly not qualified to chop phrases with this sharp-tongued maiden.

'D-don't talk to me li-like that, girl!—I—I believe you're s-stark mad!' He turned to me. 'W-what was that tomfoolery she was talking to you about?'

'To what do you allude?'

'About a rub-rubbishing b-beetle, and g-goodness alone knows what,—d-diseased and m-morbid imagination,—r-reared on the literature of the gutter!—I never thought that a child of mine could have s-sunk to such a depth!—Now, Atherton, I ask you to t-tell me frankly,—what do you think of a child who behaves as she has done? Who t-takes a nameless vagabond into the house and con-conceals his presence from her father? And m-mark the sequel! even the vagabond warns her against the r-rascal Lessingham!—Now, Atherton, tell me what you think of a girl who behaves like that?' I shrugged my shoulders. 'I—I know very well what you d-do think of her,—don't be afraid to say it out because she's present.'

'No; Sydney, don't be afraid.'

I saw that her eyes were dancing,—in a manner of speaking, her looks brightened under the sunshine of her father's displeasure.

'Let's hear what you think of her as a—as a m-man of the world!'

'Pray, Sydney, do!'

'What you feel for her in your—your heart of hearts!'

'Yes, Sydney, what do you feel for me in your heart of hearts?'

The baggage beamed with heartless sweetness,—she was making a mock of me. Her father turned as if he would have rent her.

'D-don't you speak until you're spoken to! Atherton, I—I hope I'm not deceived in you; I—I hope you're the man I—I took you for; that you're willing and—and ready to play the part of a-a-an honest friend to this misguided simpleton. T-this is not the time for mincing words, it—it's the time for candid speech. Tell this—this weak minded young woman, right out, whether this man Lessingham is, or is not, a damned scoundrel.'

'Papa!—Do you really think that Sydney's opinion, or your opinion, is likely to alter facts?'

'Do you hear, Atherton, tell this wretched girl the truth!'

'My dear Mr Lindon, I have already told you that I know nothing either for or against Mr Lessingham except what is known to all the world.'

'Exactly,—and all the world knows him to be a miserable adventurer who is scheming to entrap my daughter.'

'I am bound to say, since you press me, that your language appears to me to be unnecessarily strong.'

'Atherton, I—I'm ashamed of you!'

'You see, Sydney, even papa is ashamed of you; now you are outside the pale.—My dear papa, if you will allow me to speak, I will tell you what I know to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.—That Mr Lessingham is a man with great gifts goes without saying,—permit me, papa! He is a man of genius. He is a man of honour. He is a man of the loftiest ambitions, of the highest aims. He has dedicated his whole life to the improvement of the conditions amidst which the less fortunate of his fellow countrymen are at present compelled to exist. That seems to me to be an object well worth having. He has asked me to share his life-work, and I have told him that I will; when, and where, and how, he wants me to. And I will. I do not suppose his life has been free from peccadilloes. I have no delusion on the point. What man's life has? Who among men can claim to

be without sin? Even the members of our highest families sometimes hide behind screens. But I know that he is, at least, as good a man as I ever met, I am persuaded that I shall never meet a better; and I thank God that I have found favour in his eyes.—Good-bye, Sydney.—I suppose I shall see you again, papa.'

With the merest inclination of her head to both of us she straightway left the room. Lindon would have stopped her.

'S-stay, y-y-y-you—' he stuttered.

But I caught him by the arm.

'If you will be advised by me, you will let her go. No good purpose will be served by a multiplication of words.'

'Atherton, I—I'm disappointed in you. You—you haven't behaved as I expected. I—I haven't received from you the assistance which I looked for.'

'My dear Lindon, it seems to me that your method of diverting the young lady from the path which she has set herself to tread is calculated to send her furiously along it.'

'C-confound the women! c-confound the women! I don't mind telling you, in c-confidence, that at—at times, her mother was the devil, and I'll be—I'll be hanged if her daughter isn't worse.—What was the tomfoolery she was talking to you about? Is she mad?'

'No,—I don't think she's mad.'

'I never heard such stuff, it made my blood run cold to hear her. What's the matter with the girl?'

'Well,—you must excuse my saying that I don't fancy you quite understand women.'

'I—I don't,—and I—I—I don't want to either.'

I hesitated; then resolved on a taradiddle,—in Marjorie's interest.

'Marjorie is high-strung,—extremely sensitive. Her imagination is quickly aflame. Perhaps, last night, you drove her as far as was safe. You heard for yourself how, in consequence, she suffered. You don't want people to say you have driven her into a lunatic asylum.'

'I—good heavens, no! I—I'll send for the doctor directly I get home,—I—I'll have the best opinion in town.'

'You'll do nothing of the kind,—you'll only make her worse. What you have to do is to be patient with her, and let her have peace.—As for this affair of Lessingham's, I have a suspicion that it may not be all such plain sailing as she supposes.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean nothing. I only wish you to understand that until you hear from me again you had better let matters slide. Give the girl her head.'

'Give the girl her head! H-haven't I—I g-given the g-girl her h-head all her l-life!' He looked at his watch. 'Why, the day's half gone!' He began scurrying towards the front door, I following at his heels. 'I've got a committee meeting on at the club,—m-most important! For weeks they've been giving us the worst food you ever tasted in your life,—p-played havoc with my digestion, and I—I'm going to tell them if—things aren't changed, they—they'll have to pay my doctor's bills.—As for that man, Lessingham —'

As he spoke, he himself opened the hall door, and there, standing on the step was 'that man Lessingham' himself. Lindon was a picture. The Apostle was as cool as a cucumber. He held out his hand.

'Good morning, Mr Lindon. What delightful weather we are having.'

Lindon put his hand behind his back,—and behaved as stupidly as he very well could have done.

'You will understand, Mr Lessingham, that, in future, I don't know you, and that I shall decline to recognise you anywhere; and that what I say applies

equally to any member of my family.'

With his hat very much on the back of his head he went down the steps like an inflated turkeycock.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HAUNTED MAN

To have received the cut discourteous from his future father-in-law might have been the most commonplace of incidents,—Lessingham evinced not a trace of discomposure. So far as I could judge, he took no notice of the episode whatever, behaving exactly as if nothing had happened. He merely waited till Mr Lindon was well off the steps; then, turning to me, he placidly observed,

'Interrupting you again, you see.—May I?'

The sight of him had set up such a turmoil in my veins, that, for the moment, I could not trust myself to speak. I felt, acutely, that an explanation with him was, of all things, the thing most to be desired,—and that quickly. Providence could not have thrown him more opportunely in the way. If, before he went away, we did not understand each other a good deal more clearly, upon certain points, the fault should not be mine. Without a responsive word, turning on my heels, I led the way into the laboratory.

Whether he noticed anything peculiar in my demeanour, I could not tell. Within he looked about him with that purely facial smile, the sight of which had always engendered in me a certain distrust of him.

'Do you always receive visitors in here?'

'By no means.'

'What is this?'

Stooping down, he picked up something from the floor. It was a lady's purse,—a gorgeous affair, of crimson leather and gleaming gold. Whether it was Marjorie's or Miss Grayling's I could not tell. He watched me as I examined it.

'Is it yours?'

'No. It is not mine.'

Placing his hat and umbrella on one chair, he placed himself upon another,—very leisurely. Crossing his legs, laying his folded hands upon his knees, he sat and looked at me. I was quite conscious of his observation; but endured it in silence, being a little wishful that he should begin.

Presently he had, as I suppose, enough of looking at me, and spoke.

'Atherton, what is the matter with you?—Have I done something to offend you too?'

'Why do you ask?'

'Your manner seems a little singular.'

'You think so?'

'I do.'

'What have you come to see me about?'

'Just now, nothing.—I like to know where I stand.'

His manner was courteous, easy, even graceful. I was outmanoeuvred. I understood the man sufficiently well to be aware that when once he was on the defensive, the first blow would have to come from me. So I struck it.

'I, also, like to know where I stand.—Lessingham, I am aware, and you know that I am aware, that you have made certain overtures to Miss Lindon. That is a fact in which I am keenly interested.'

'As—how?'

'The Lindons and the Athertons are not the acquaintances of one generation only. Marjorie Lindon and I have been friends since childhood. She looks upon me as a brother—'

'As a brother?'

'As a brother.'

'Yes.'

'Mr Lindon regains me as a son. He has given me his confidence; as I believe you are aware, Marjorie has given me hers; and now I want you to give me yours.'

'What do you want to know?'

'I wish to explain my position before I say what I have to say, because I want you to understand me clearly.—I believe, honestly, that the thing I most desire in this world is to see Marjorie Lindon happy. If I thought she would be happy with you, I should say, God speed you both! and I should congratulate you with all my heart, because I think that you would have won the best girl in the whole world to be your wife.'

'I think so too.'

'But, before I did that, I should have to see, at least, some reasonable probability that she would be happy with you.'

'Why should she not?'

'Will you answer a question?'

'What is the question?'

'What is the story in your life of which you stand in such hideous terror?'

There was a perceptible pause before he answered.

'Explain yourself.'

'No explanation is needed,—you know perfectly well what I mean.'

'You credit me with miraculous acumen.'

'Don't juggle, Lessingham,—be frank!'

'The frankness should not be all on one side.—There is that in your frankness, although you may be unconscious of it, which some men might not unreasonably resent.'

'Do you resent it?'

'That depends. If you are arrogating to yourself the right to place yourself between Miss Lindon and me, I do resent it, strongly.'

'Answer my question!'

'I answer no question which is addressed to me in such a tone.'

He was as calm as you please. I recognised that already I was in peril of losing my temper,—which was not at all what I desired. I eyed him intently, he returning me look for look. His countenance betrayed no sign of a guilty conscience; I had not seen him more completely at his ease. He smiled,—facially, and also, as it seemed to me, a little derisively. I am bound to admit that his bearing showed not the faintest shadow of resentment, and that in his eyes there was a gentleness, a softness, which I had not observed in them before,—I could almost have suspected him of being sympathetic.

'In this matter, you must know, I stand in the place of Mr Lindon.'

'Well?'

'Surely you must understand that before anyone is allowed to think of marriage with Marjorie Lindon he will have to show that his past, as the advertisements have it, will bear the fullest investigation.'

'Is that so?—Will your past bear the fullest investigation?'

I winced.

'At any rate, it is known to all the world.'

'Is it?—Forgive me if I say, I doubt it. I doubt if, of any wise man, that can be said with truth. In all our lives there are episodes which we keep to ourselves.'

I felt that that was so true that, for the instant, I hardly knew what to say.

'But there are episodes and episodes, and when it comes to a man being haunted one draws the line.'

'Haunted?'

'As you are.'

He got up.

'Atherton, I think that I understand you, but I fear that you do not understand me.' He went to where a self-acting mercurial air-pump was standing on a shelf. 'What is this curious arrangement of glass tubes and bulbs?'

'I do not think that you do understand me, or you would know that I am in no mood to be trifled with.'

'Is it some kind of an exhauster?'

'My dear Lessingham, I am entirely at your service. I intend to have an answer to my question before you leave this room, but, in the meanwhile, your convenience is mine. There are some very interesting things here which you might care to see.'

'Marvellous, is it not, how the human intellect progresses,—from conquest unto conquest.'

'Among the ancients the progression had proceeded farther than with us.'

'In what respect?'

'For instance, in the affair of the Apotheosis of the Beetle;—I saw it take place last night.'

'Where?'

'Here,—within a few feet of where you are standing.'

'Are you serious?'

'Perfectly.'

'What did you see?'

'I saw the legendary Apotheosis of the Beetle performed, last night, before my eyes, with a gaudy magnificence at which the legends never hinted.'

'That is odd. I once thought that I saw something of the kind myself.'

'So I understand.'

'From whom?'

'From a friend of yours.'

'From a friend of mine?—Are you sure it was from a friend of mine?'

The man's attempt at coolness did him credit,—but it did not deceive me. That he thought I was endeavouring to bluff him out of his secret I perceived quite clearly; that it was a secret which he would only render with his life I was beginning to suspect. Had it not been for Marjorie, I should have cared nothing,—his affairs were his affairs; though I realised perfectly well that there was something about the man which, from the scientific explorer's point of view, might be well worth finding out. Still, as I say, if it had not been for Marjorie, I should have let it go; but, since she was so intimately concerned in it, I wondered more and more what it could be.

My attitude towards what is called the supernatural is an open one. That all things are possible I unhesitatingly believe,—I have, even in my short time, seen so many so-called impossibilities proved possible. That we know everything, I doubt;—that our great-great-great-great-grandfathers, our forebears of thousands of years ago, of the extinct civilisations, knew more on some subjects than we do, I think is, at least, probable. All the legends can hardly be false.

Because men claimed to be able to do things in those days which we cannot do, and which we do not know how they did we profess to think that their claims are finally dismissed by exclaiming—lies! But it is not so sure.

For my part, what I had seen I had seen. I had seen some devil's trick played before my very eyes. Some trick of the same sort seemed to have been played upon my Marjorie,—I repeat that I write 'my Marjorie' because, to me, she will always be 'my' Marjorie! It had driven her half out of her senses. As I looked at Lessingham, I seemed to see her at his side, as I had seen her not long ago, with her white, drawn face, and staring eyes, dumb with an agony of fear. Her life was bidding fair to be knit with his,—what Upas tree of horror was rooted in his very bones? The thought that her sweet purity was likely to be engulfed in a devil's slough in which he was wallowing was not to be endured. As I realised that the man was more than my match at the game which I was playing—in which such vital interests were at stake!—my hands itched to clutch him by the throat, and try another way.

Doubtless my face revealed my feelings, because, presently, he said,

'Are you aware how strangely you are looking at me, Atherton? Were my countenance a mirror I think you would be surprised to see in it your own.'

I drew back from him,—I daresay, sullenly.

'Not so surprised as, yesterday morning, you would have been to have seen yours,—at the mere sight of a pictured scarab.'

'How easily you quarrel.'

'I do not quarrel.'

'Then perhaps it's I. If that is so, then, at once, the quarrel's ended,—pouf! it's done. Mr Lindon, I fear, because, politically, we differ, regards me as anathema. Has he put some of his spirit into you?—You are a wiser man.'

'I am aware that you are an adept with words. But this is a case in which words only will not serve.'

'Then what will serve?'

'I am myself beginning to wonder.'

'And I.'

'As you so courteously suggest, I believe I am wiser than Lindon. I do not care for your politics, or for what you call your politics, one fig. I do not care if you are as other men are, as I am,—not unspotted from the world! But I do care if you are leprous. And I believe you are.'

'Atherton!'

'Ever since I have known you I have been conscious of there being something about you which I found it difficult to diagnose;—in an unwholesome sense, something out of the common, non-natural; an atmosphere of your own. Events, so far as you are concerned, have, during the last few days moved quickly. They have thrown an uncomfortably lurid light on that peculiarity of yours which I have noticed. Unless you can explain them to my satisfaction, you will withdraw your pretensions to Miss Lindon's hand, or I shall place certain facts before that lady, and, if necessary, publish them to the world.'

He grew visibly paler but he smiled—facially.

'You have your own way of conducting a conversation, Mr Atherton.—What are the events to whose rapid transit you are alluding?'

'Who was the individual, practically stark naked, who came out of your house, in such singular fashion, at dead of night?'

'Is that one of the facts with which you propose to tickle the public ear?'

'Is that the only explanation which you have to offer?'

'Proceed, for the present, with your indictment.'

'I am not so unobservant as you appear to imagine. There were features about the episode which struck me forcibly at the time, and which have struck me more forcibly since. To suggest, as you did yesterday morning, that it was an ordinary case of burglary, or that the man was a lunatic, is an absurdity.'

'Pardon me,—I did nothing of the kind.'

'Then what do you suggest?'

'I suggested, and do suggest, nothing. All the suggestions come from you.'

'You went very much out of your way to beg me to keep the matter quiet. There is an appearance of suggestion about that.'

'You take a jaundiced view of all my actions, Mr Atherton. Nothing, to me, could seem more natural.—However,—proceed.'

He had his hands behind his back, and rested them on the edge of the table against which he was leaning. He was undoubtedly ill at ease; but so far I had not made the impression on him, either mentally or morally, which I desired.

'Who is your Oriental friend?'

'I do not follow you.'

'Are you sure?'

'I am certain. Repeat your question.'

'Who is your Oriental friend?'

'I was not aware that I had one.'

'Do you swear that?'

He laughed, a strange laugh.

'Do you seek to catch me tripping? You conduct your case with too much animus. You must allow me to grasp the exact purport of your inquiry before I can undertake to reply to it on oath.'

'Are you not aware that at present there is in London an individual who claims to have had a very close, and a very curious, acquaintance with you in the East?'

'I am not.'

'That you swear?'

'That I do swear.'

'That is singular.'

'Why is it singular?'

'Because I fancy that that individual haunts you.'

'Haunts me?'

'Haunts you.'

'You jest.'

'You think so?—You remember that picture of the scarabaeus which, yesterday morning, frightened you into a state of semi-idiocy.'

'You use strong language.—I know what you allude to.'

'Do you mean to say that you don't know that you were indebted for that to your Oriental friend?'

'I don't understand you.'

'Are you sure?'

'Certainly I am sure.—It occurs to me, Mr Atherton, that an explanation is demanded from you rather than from me. Are you aware that the purport of my presence here is to ask you how that picture found its way into your room?'

'It was projected by the Lord of the Beetle.'

The words were chance ones,—but they struck a mark.

'The Lord—' He faltered,—and stopped. He showed signs of discomposure. 'I will be frank with you,—since frankness is what you ask.' His smile, that time, was obviously forced. 'Recently I have been the victim of delusions;' there was a pause before the word, 'of a singular kind. I have feared that they were the result of mental overstrain. Is it possible that you can enlighten me as to their source?'

I was silent. He was putting a great strain upon himself, but the twitching of his lips betrayed him. A little more, and I should reach the other side of Mr Lessingham,—the side which he kept hidden from the world.

'Who is this—individual whom you speak of as my—Oriental friend?'

'Being your friend, you should know better than I do.'

'What sort of man is he to look at?'

'I did not say it was a man.'

'But I presume it is a man.'

'I did not say so.'

He seemed, for a moment, to hold his breath,—and he looked at me with eyes which were not friendly. Then, with a display of self-command which did him credit, he drew himself upright, with an air of dignity which well became him.

'Atherton, consciously, or unconsciously, you are doing me a serious injustice. I do not know what conception it is which you have formed of me, or on what the conception is founded, but I protest that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I am as reputable, as honest, and as clean a man as you are.'

'But you're haunted.'

'Haunted?' He held himself erect, looking me straight in the face. Then a shiver went all over him; the muscles of his mouth twitched; and, in an instant, he was livid. He staggered against the table. 'Yes, God knows it's true,—I'm haunted.'

'So either you're mad, and therefore unfit to marry; or else you've done something which places you outside the tolerably generous boundaries of civilised society, and are therefore still more unfit to marry. You're on the horns of a dilemma.'

'I—I'm the victim of a delusion.'

'What is the nature of the delusion? Does it take the shape of a—beetle?'

'Atherton!'

Without the slightest warning, he collapsed,—was transformed; I can describe the change which took place in him in no other way. He sank in a heap on the floor; he held up his hands above his head; and he gibbered,—like some frenzied animal. A more uncomfortable spectacle than he presented it would be difficult to find. I have seen it matched in the padded rooms of lunatic asylums, but nowhere else. The sight of him set every nerve of my body on edge.

'In Heaven's name, what is the matter with you, man? Are you stark, staring mad? Here,—drink this!'

Filling a tumbler with brandy, I forced it between his quivering fingers. Then it was some moments before I could get him to understand what it was I wanted him to do. When he did get the glass to his lips, he swallowed its contents as if they were so much water. By degrees his senses returned to him. He stood up. He looked about him, with a smile which was positively ghastly.

'It's—it's a delusion.'

'It's a very queer kind of a delusion, if it is.'

I eyed him, curiously. He was evidently making the most strenuous efforts to regain his self-control,—all the while with that horrible smile about his lips.

'Atherton, you—you take me at an advantage.' I was still. 'Who—who's your Oriental friend?'

'My Oriental friend?—you mean yours. I supposed, at first, that the individual in question was a man; but it appears that she's a woman.'

'A woman?—Oh.—How do you mean?'

'Well, the face is a man's—of an uncommonly disagreeable type, of which the powers forbid that there are many!—and the voice is a man's,—also of a kind!—but the body, as, last night, I chanced to discover, is a woman's.'

'That sounds very odd.' He closed his eyes. I could see that his cheeks were clammy. 'Do you—do you believe in witchcraft?'

'That depends.'

'Have you heard of Obi?'

'I have.'

'I have been told that an Obeah man can put a spell upon a person which compels a person to see whatever he—the Obeah man—may please. Do you think that's possible?'

'It is not a question to which I should be disposed to answer either yes or no.'

He looked at me out of his half-closed eyes. It struck me that he was making conversation,—saying anything for the sake of gaining time.

'I remember reading a book entitled "Obscure Diseases of the Brain." It contained some interesting data on the subject of hallucinations.'

'Possibly.'

'Now, candidly, would you recommend me to place myself in the hands of a mental pathologist?'

'I don't think that you're insane, if that's what you mean.'

'No?—That is good hearing. Of all diseases insanity is the most to be dreaded.—Well, Atherton, I'm keeping you. The truth is that, insane or not, I am very far from well. I think I must give myself a holiday.'

He moved towards his hat and umbrella.

'There is something else which you must do.'

'What is that?'

'You must resign your pretensions to Miss Lindon's hand.'

'My dear Atherton, if my health is really failing me, I shall resign everything,—everything!'

He repeated his own word with a little movement of his hands which was pathetic.

'Understand me, Lessingham. What else you do is no affair of mine. I am concerned only with Miss Lindon. You must give me your definite promise, before you leave this room, to terminate your engagement with her before to-night.'

His back was towards me.

'There will come a time when your conscience will prick you because of your treatment of me; when you will realise that I am the most unfortunate of men.'

'I realise that now. It is because I realise it that I am so desirous that the shadow of your evil fortune shall not fall upon an innocent girl.'

He turned.

'Atherton, what is your actual position with reference to Marjorie Lindon?'

'She regards me as a brother.'

'And do you regard her as a sister? Are your sentiments towards her purely fraternal?'

'You know that I love her.'

'And do you suppose that my removal will clear the path for you?'

'I suppose nothing of the kind. You may believe me or not, but my one desire is for her happiness, and surely, if you love her, that is your desire too.'

'That is so.' He paused. An expression of sadness stole over his face of which I had not thought it capable. 'That is so to an extent of which you do not dream. No man likes to have his hand forced, especially by one whom he regards—may I say it?—as a possible rival. But I will tell you this much. If the blight which has fallen on my life is likely to continue, I would not wish,—God forbid that I should wish to join her fate with mine,—not for all that the world could offer me.'

He stopped. And I was still. Presently he continued.

'When I was younger I was subject to a—similar delusion. But it vanished, —I saw no trace of it for years,—I thought that I had done with it for good. Recently, however, it has returned,—as you have witnessed. I shall institute inquiries into the cause of its reappearance; if it seems likely to be irremovable, or even if it bids fair to be prolonged, I shall not only, as you phrase it, withdraw my pretensions to Miss Linden's hand, but to all my other ambitions. In the interim, as regards Miss Lindon I shall be careful to hold myself on the footing of a mere acquaintance.'

'You promise me?'

'I do.—And on your side, Atherton, in the meantime, deal with me more gently. Judgment in my case has still to be given. You will find that I am not the guilty wretch you apparently imagine. And there are few things more disagreeable to one's self-esteem than to learn, too late, that one has persisted in judging another man too harshly. Think of all that the world has, at this moment, to offer me, and what it will mean if I have to turn my back on it,—owing to a mischievous twist of fortune's wheel.'

He turned, as if to go. Then stopped, and looked round, in an attitude of listening.

'What's that?'

There was a sound of droning,—I recalled what Marjorie had said of her experiences of the night before, it was like the droning of a beetle. The instant the Apostle heard it, the fashion of his countenance began to change,—it was pitiable to witness. I rushed to him.

'Lessingham!—don't be a fool!—play the man!'

He gripped my left arm with his right hand till it felt as if it were being compressed in a vice.

'Then—I shall have to have some more brandy.'

Fortunately the bottle was within reach from where I stood, otherwise I doubt if he would have released my arm to let me get at it. I gave him the decanter and the glass. He helped himself to a copious libation. By the time that he had swallowed it the droning sound had gone. He put down the empty tumbler.

'When a man has to resort to alcohol to keep his nerves up to concert pitch, things are in a bad way with him, you may be sure of that,—but then you have never known what it is to stand in momentary expectation of a tete-a-tete with the devil.'

Again he turned to leave the room,—and this time he actually went. I let him go alone. I heard his footsteps passing along the passage, and the hall-door close. Then I sat in an arm-chair, stretched my legs out in front of me, thrust my hands in my trouser pockets, and—I wondered.

I had been there, perhaps, four or five minutes, when there was a slight noise at my side. Glancing round, I saw a sheet of paper come fluttering through the open window. It fell almost at my feet. I picked it up. It was a picture of a beetle,—a facsimile of the one which had had such an extraordinary effect on Mr Lessingham the day before.

'If this was intended for St Paul, it's a trifle late;—unless—'

I could hear that someone was approaching along the corridor. I looked up, expecting to see the Apostle reappear;—in which expectation I was agreeably disappointed. The newcomer was feminine. It was Miss Grayling. As she stood in the open doorway, I saw that her cheeks were red as roses.

'I hope I am not interrupting you again, but—I left my purse here.' She stopped; then added, as if it were an afterthought, 'And—I want you to come and lunch with me.'

I locked the picture of the beetle in the drawer,—and I lunched with Dora Grayling.

BOOK III

The Terror by Night and the Terror by Day

Miss Marjorie Lindon tells the Tale

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WAY HE TOLD HER

I am the happiest woman in the world! I wonder how many women have said that of themselves in their time,—but I am. Paul has told me that he loves me. How long I have made inward confession of my love for him, I should be ashamed to say. It sounds prosaic, but I believe it is a fact that the first stirring of my pulses was caused by the report of a speech of his which I read in the Times. It was on the Eight Hours' Bill. Papa was most unflattering. He said that he was an oily spouter, an ignorant agitator, an irresponsible firebrand, and a good deal more to the same effect. I remember very well how papa fidgeted with the paper, declaring that it read even worse than it had sounded, and goodness knew that it had sounded bad enough. He was so very emphatic that when he had gone I thought I would see what all the pother was about, and read the speech for myself. So I read it. It affected me quite differently. The speaker's words showed such knowledge, charity, and sympathy that they went straight to my heart.

After that I read everything of Paul Lessingham's which I came across. And the more I read the more I was impressed. But it was some time before we met. Considering what papa's opinions were, it was not likely that he would go out of his way to facilitate a meeting. To him, the mere mention of the name was like a red rag to a bull. But at last we did meet. And then I knew that he was stronger, greater, better even than his words. It is so often the other way; one finds that men, and women too, are so apt to put their best, as it were, into their shop windows, that the discovery was as novel as it was delightful.

When the ice was once broken, we often met. I do not know how it was. We did not plan our meetings,—at first, at any rate. Yet we seemed always meeting. Seldom a day passed on which we did not meet,—sometimes twice or thrice. It was odd how we were always coming across each other in the most unlikely places. I believe we did not notice it at the time, but looking back I can see that we must have managed our engagements so that somewhere, somehow, we should be certain to have an opportunity of exchanging half a dozen words. Those constant encounters could not have all been chance ones.

But I never supposed he loved me,—never. I am not even sure that, for some time, I was aware that I loved him. We were great on friendship, both of us.—I was quite aware that I was his friend,—that he regarded me as his friend; he told me so more than once.

'I tell you this,' he would say, referring to this, that, or the other, 'because I know that, in speaking to you, I am speaking to a friend.'

With him those were not empty words. All kinds of people talk to one like that,—especially men; it is a kind of formula which they use with every woman who shows herself disposed to listen. But Paul is not like that. He is chary of speech; not by any means a woman's man. I tell him that is his weakest point. If legend does not lie more even than is common, few politicians have achieved prosperity without the aid of women. He replies that he is not a politician; that he never means to be a politician. He simply wishes to work for his country; if his country does not need his services—well, let it be. Papa's political friends have always so many axes of their own to grind, that, at first, to hear a member of Parliament talk like that was almost disquieting. I had dreamed of men like that; but I never encountered one till I met Paul Lessingham.

Our friendship was a pleasant one. It became pleasanter and pleasanter. Until there came a time when he told me everything; the dreams he dreamed; the plans which he had planned; the great purposes which, if health and strength were given him, he intended to carry to a great fulfilment. And, at last, he told me something else.

It was after a meeting at a Working Women's Club in Westminster. He had spoken, and I had spoken too. I don't know what papa would have said, if he had known, but I had. A formal resolution had been proposed, and I had seconded it,—in perhaps a couple of hundred words; but that would have been quite enough for papa to have regarded me as an Abandoned Wretch, —papa always puts those sort of words into capitals. Papa regards a speechifying woman as a thing of horror,—I have known him look askance at a Primrose Dame.

The night was fine. Paul proposed that I should walk with him down the Westminster Bridge Road, until we reached the House, and then he would see me into a cab. I did as he suggested. It was still early, not yet ten, and the streets were alive with people. Our conversation, as we went, was entirely political. The Agricultural Amendment Act was then before the Commons, and Paul felt very strongly that it was one of those measures which give with one hand, while taking with the other. The committee stage was at hand, and already several amendments were threatened, the effect of which would be to strengthen the landlord at the expense of the tenant. More than one of these, and they not the most moderate, were to be proposed by papa. Paul was pointing out how it would be his duty to oppose these tooth and nail, when, all at once, he stopped.

'I sometimes wonder how you really feel upon this matter.'

'What matter?'

'On the difference of opinion, in political matters, which exists between your father and myself. I am conscious that Mr Lindon regards my action as a personal question, and resents it so keenly, that I am sometimes moved to wonder if at least a portion of his resentment is not shared by you.'

'I have explained; I consider papa the politician as one person, and papa the father as quite another.'

'You are his daughter.'

'Certainly I am;—but would you, on that account, wish me to share his political opinions, even though I believe them to be wrong?'

'You love him.'

'Of course I do,—he is the best of fathers.'

'Your defection will be a grievous disappointment.'

I looked at him out of the corner of my eye. I wondered what was passing through his mind. The subject of my relations with papa was one which, without saying anything at all about it, we had consented to taboo.

'I am not so sure. I am permeated with a suspicion that papa has no politics.'

'Miss Lindon!—I fancy that I can adduce proof to the contrary.'

'I believe that if papa were to marry again, say, a Home Ruler, within three weeks his wife's politics would be his own.'

Paul thought before he spoke; then he smiled.

'I suppose that men sometimes do change their coats to please their wives, —even their political ones.'

'Papa's opinions are the opinions of those with whom he mixes. The reason why he consorts with Tories of the crusted school is because he fears that if he associated with anybody else—with Radicals, say,—before he knew it, he would be a Radical too. With him, association is synonymus with logic.'

Paul laughed outright. By this time we had reached Westminster Bridge. Standing, we looked down upon the river. A long line of lanterns was gliding mysteriously over the waters; it was a tug towing a string of barges. For some moments neither spoke. Then Paul recurred to what I had just been saying.

'And you,—do you think marriage would colour your convictions?'

'Would it yours?'

'That depends.' He was silent. Then he said, in that tone which I had learned to look for when he was most in earnest, 'It depends on whether you would

marry me.'

I was still. His words were so unexpected that they took my breath away. I knew not what to make of them. My head was in a whirl. Then he addressed to me a monosyllabic interrogation.

'Well?'

'I found my voice,—or a part of it.

'Well?—to what?'

He came a little closer.

'Will you be my wife?'

The part of my voice which I had found, was lost again. Tears came into my eyes. I shivered. I had not thought that I could be so absurd. Just then the moon came from behind a cloud; the rippling waters were tipped with silver. He spoke again, so gently that his words just reached my ears.

'You know that I love you.'

Then I knew that I loved him too. That what I had fancied was a feeling of friendship was something very different. It was as if somebody, in tearing a veil from before my eyes, had revealed a spectacle which dazzled me. I was speechless. He misconstrued my silence.

'Have I offended you?'

'No.'

I fancy that he noted the tremor which was in my voice, and read it rightly. For he too was still. Presently his hand stole along the parapet, and fastened upon mine, and held it tight.

And that was how it came about. Other things were said; but they were hardly of the first importance. Though I believe we took some time in saying them. Of myself I can say with truth, that my heart was too full for

copious speech; I was dumb with a great happiness. And, I believe, I can say the same of Paul. He told me as much when we were parting.

It seemed that we had only just come there when Paul started. Turning, he stared up at Big Ben.

'Midnight!—The House up!—Impossible!'

But it was more than possible, it was fact. We had actually been on the Bridge two hours, and it had not seemed ten minutes. Never had I supposed that the flight of time could have been so entirely unnoticed. Paul was considerably taken aback. His legislative conscience pricked him. He excused himself—in his own fashion.

'Fortunately, for once in a way, my business in the House was not so important as my business out of it.'

He had his arm through mine. We were standing face to face.

'So you call this business!'

He laughed.

He not only saw me into a cab, but he saw me home in it. And in the cab he kissed me. I fancy I was a little out of sorts that night. My nervous system was, perhaps, demoralised. Because, when he kissed me, I did a thing which I never do,—I have my own standard of behaviour, and that sort of thing is quite outside of it; I behaved like a sentimental chit. I cried. And it took him all the way to my father's door to comfort me.

I can only hope that, perceiving the singularity of the occasion, he consented to excuse me.

CHAPTER XXIV

A WOMAN'S VIEW

Sydney Atherton has asked me to be his wife. It is not only annoying; worse, it is absurd.

This is the result of Paul's wish that our engagement should not be announced. He is afraid of papa;—not really, but for the moment. The atmosphere of the House is charged with electricity. Party feeling runs high. They are at each other, hammer and tongs, about this Agricultural Amendment Act. The strain on Paul is tremendous. I am beginning to feel positively concerned. Little things which I have noticed about him lately convince me that he is being overwrought. I suspect him of having sleepless nights. The amount of work which he has been getting through lately has been too much for any single human being, I care not who he is. He himself admits that he shall be glad when the session is at an end. So shall I.

In the meantime, it is his desire that nothing shall be said about our engagement until the House rises. It is reasonable enough. Papa is sure to be violent,—lately, the barest allusion to Paul's name has been enough to make him explode. When the discovery does come, he will be unmanageable,—I foresee it clearly. From little incidents which have happened recently I predict the worst. He will be capable of making a scene within the precincts of the House. And, as Paul says, there is some truth in the saying that the last straw breaks the camel's back. He will be better able to face papa's wild wrath when the House has risen.

So the news is to bide a wee. Of course Paul is right. And what he wishes I wish too. Still, it is not all such plain sailing for me as he perhaps thinks.

The domestic atmosphere is almost as electrical as that in the House. Papa is like the terrier who scents a rat,—he is always sniffing the air. He has not actually forbidden me to speak to Paul,—his courage is not quite at the sticking point; but he is constantly making uncomfortable allusions to persons who number among their acquaintance 'political adventurers,' 'grasping carpet-baggers,' 'Radical riff-raff,' and that kind of thing. Sometimes I venture to call my soul my own; but such a tempest invariably follows that I become discreet again as soon as I possibly can. So, as a rule, I suffer in silence.

Still, I would with all my heart that the concealment were at an end. No one need imagine that I am ashamed of being about to marry Paul,—papa least of all. On the contrary, I am as proud of it as a woman can be. Sometimes, when he has said or done something unusually wonderful, I fear that my pride will out,—I do feel it so strong within me. I should be delighted to have a trial of strength with papa; anywhere, at any time,—I should not be so rude to him as he would be to me. At the bottom of his heart papa knows that I am the more sensible of the two; after a pitched battle or so he would understand it better still. I know papa! I have not been his daughter for all these years in vain. I feel like hot-blooded soldiers must feel, who, burning to attack the enemy in the open field, are ordered to skulk behind hedges, and be shot at.

One result is that Sydney has actually made a proposal of marriage,—he of all people! It is too comical. The best of it was that he took himself quite seriously. I do not know how many times he has confided to me the sufferings which he has endured for love of other women—some of them, I am sorry to say, decent married women too; but this is the first occasion on which the theme has been a personal one. He was so frantic, as he is wont to be, that, to calm him, I told him about Paul,—which, under the circumstances, to him I felt myself at liberty to do. In return, he was melodramatic; hinting darkly at I know not what, I was almost cross with him.

He is a curious person, Sydney Atherton. I suppose it is because I have known him all my life, and have always looked upon him, in cases of necessity, as a capital substitute for a brother, that I criticise him with so

much frankness. In some respects, he is a genius; in others—I will not write fool, for that he never is, though he has often done some extremely foolish things. The fame of his inventions is in the mouths of all men; though the half of them has never been told. He is the most extraordinary mixture. The things which most people would like to have proclaimed in the street, he keeps tightly locked in his own bosom; while those which the same persons would be only too glad to conceal, he shouts from the roofs. A very famous man once told me that if Mr Atherton chose to become a specialist, to take up one branch of inquiry, and devote his life to it, his fame, before he died, would bridge the spheres. But sticking to one thing is not in Sydney's line at all. He prefers, like the bee, to roam from flower to flower.

As for his being in love with me, it is ridiculous. He is as much in love with the moon. I cannot think what has put the idea into his head. Some girl must have been ill-using him, or he imagines that she has. The girl whom he ought to marry, and whom he ultimately will marry, is Dora Grayling. She is young, charming, immensely rich, and over head and ears in love with him;—if she were not, then he would be over head and ears in love with her. I believe he is very near it as it is,—sometimes he is so very rude to her. It is a characteristic of Sydney's, that he is apt to be rude to a girl whom he really likes. As for Dora, I suspect she dreams of him. He is tall, straight, very handsome, with a big moustache, and the most extraordinary eyes;—I fancy that those eyes of his have as much to do with Dora's state as anything. I have heard it said that he possesses the hypnotic power to an unusual degree, and that, if he chose to exercise it, he might become a danger to society. I believe he has hypnotised Dora.

He makes an excellent brother. I have gone to him, many and many a time, for help,—and some excellent advice I have received. I daresay I shall consult him still. There are matters of which one would hardly dare to talk to Paul. In all things he is the great man. He could hardly condescend to chiffons. Now Sydney can and does. When he is in the mood, on the vital subject of trimmings a woman could not appeal to a sounder authority. I tell him, if he had been a dressmaker, he would have been magnificent. I am sure he would.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN IN THE STREET

This morning I had an adventure.

I was in the breakfast-room. Papa, as usual, was late for breakfast, and I was wondering whether I should begin without him, when, chancing to look round, something caught my eye in the street. I went to the window to see what it was. A small crowd of people was in the middle of the road, and they were all staring at something which, apparently, was lying on the ground. What it was I could not see.

The butler happened to be in the room. I spoke to him.

'Peter, what is the matter in the street? Go and see.'

He went and saw; and, presently, he returned. Peter is an excellent servant; but the fashion of his speech, even when conveying the most trivial information, is slightly sesquipedalian. He would have made a capital cabinet minister at question time,—he wraps up the smallest petitions of meaning in the largest possible words.

'An unfortunate individual appears to have been the victim of a catastrophe. I am informed that he is dead. The constable asserts that he is drunk.'

'Drunk?—dead? Do you mean that he is dead drunk?—at this hour!'

'He is either one or the other. I did not behold the individual myself. I derived my information from a bystander.'

That was not sufficiently explicit for me. I gave way to a, seemingly, quite causeless impulse of curiosity, I went out into the street, just as I was, to see for myself. It was, perhaps, not the most sensible thing I could have done, and papa would have been shocked; but I am always shocking papa. It had been raining in the night, and the shoes which I had on were not so well suited as they might have been for an encounter with the mud.

I made my way to the point of interest.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

A workman, with a bag of tools over his shoulder, answered me.

'There's something wrong with someone. Policeman says he's drunk, but he looks to me as if he was something worse.'

'Will you let me pass, please?'

When they saw I was a woman, they permitted me to reach the centre of the crowd.

A man was lying on his back, in the grease and dirt of the road. He was so plastered with mud, that it was difficult, at first, to be sure that he really was a man. His head and feet were bare. His body was partially covered by a long ragged cloak. It was obvious that that one wretched, dirt-stained, sopping wet rag was all the clothing he had on. A huge constable was holding his shoulders in his hands, and was regarding him as if he could not make him out at all. He seemed uncertain as to whether it was or was not a case of shamming.

He spoke to him as if he had been some refractory child.

'Come, my lad, this won't do!—Wake up!—What's the matter?'

But he neither woke up, nor explained what was the matter. I took hold of his hand. It was icy cold. Apparently the wrist was pulseless. Clearly this was no ordinary case of drunkenness.

'There is something seriously wrong, officer. Medical assistance ought to be had at once.'

'Do you think he's in a fit, miss?'

'That a doctor should be able to tell you better than I can. There seems to be no pulse. I should not be surprised to find that he was—'

The word 'dead' was actually on my lips, when the stranger saved me from making a glaring exposure of my ignorance by snatching his wrist away from me, and sitting up in the mud. He held out his hands in front of him, opened his eyes, and exclaimed, in a loud, but painfully raucous tone of voice, as if he was suffering from a very bad cold,

'Paul Lessingham!'

I was so surprised that I all but sat down in the mud. To hear Paul—my Paul!—apostrophised by an individual of his appearance, in that fashion, was something which I had not expected. Directly the words were uttered, he closed his eyes again, sank backward, and seemingly relapsed into unconsciousness,—the constable gripping him by the shoulder just in time to prevent him banging the back of his head against the road.

The officer shook him,—scarcely gently.

'Now, my lad, it's plain that you're not dead!—What's the meaning of this?—Move yourself!'

Looking round I found that Peter was close behind. Apparently he had been struck by the singularity of his mistress' behaviour, and had followed to see that it did not meet with the reward which it deserved. I spoke to him.

'Peter, let someone go at once for Dr Cotes!'

Dr Cotes lives just round the corner, and since it was evident that the man's lapse into consciousness had made the policeman sceptical as to his case being so serious as it seemed, I thought it might be advisable that a competent opinion should be obtained without delay.

Peter was starting, when again the stranger returned to consciousness,—that is, if it really was consciousness, as to which I was more than a little in doubt. He repeated his previous pantomime; sat up in the mud, stretched out his arms, opened his eyes unnaturally wide,—and yet they appeared unseeing!—a sort of convulsion went all over him, and he shrieked—it really amounted to shrieking—as a man might shriek who was in mortal terror.

'Be warned, Paul Lessingham—be warned!'

For my part, that settled it. There was a mystery here which needed to be unravelled. Twice had he called upon Paul's name,—and in the strangest fashion! It was for me to learn the why and the wherefore; to ascertain what connection there was between this lifeless creature and Paul Lessingham. Providence might have cast him there before my door. I might be entertaining an angel unawares. My mind was made up on the instant.

'Peter, hasten for Dr Cotes.' Peter passed the word, and immediately a footman started running as fast as his legs would carry him. 'Officer, I will have this man taken into my father's house.—Will some of you men help to carry him?'

There were volunteers enough, and to spare. I spoke to Peter in the hall.

'Is papa down yet?'

'Mr Lindon has sent down to say that you will please not wait for him for breakfast. He has issued instructions to have his breakfast conveyed to him upstairs.'

'That's all right.' I nodded towards the poor wretch who was being carried through the hall. 'You will say nothing to him about this unless he particularly asks. You understand?'

Peter bowed. He is discretion itself. He knows I have my vagaries, and it is not his fault if the savour of them travels to papa.

The doctor was in the house almost as soon as the stranger.

'Wants washing,' he remarked, directly he saw him.

And that certainly was true,—I never saw a man who stood more obviously in need of the good offices of soap and water. Then he went through the usual medical formula, I watching all the while. So far as I could see the man showed not the slightest sign of life.

'Is he dead?'

'He will be soon, if he doesn't have something to eat. The fellow's starving.'

The doctor asked the policeman what he knew of him.

That sagacious officer's reply was vague. A boy had run up to him crying that a man was lying dead in the street. He had straightway followed the boy, and discovered the stranger. That was all he knew.

'What is the matter with the man?' I inquired of the doctor, when the constable had gone.

'Don't know.—It may be catalepsy, and it mayn't.—When I do know, you may ask again.'

Dr Cotes' manner was a trifle brusque,—particularly, I believe, to me. I remember that once he threatened to box my ears. When I was a small child I used to think nothing of boxing his.

Realising that no satisfaction was to be got out of a speechless man—particularly as regards his mysterious references to Paul—I went upstairs. I found that papa was under the impression that he was suffering from a severe attack of gout. But as he was eating a capital breakfast, and apparently enjoying it,—while I was still fasting—I ventured to hope that the matter was not so serious as he feared.

I mentioned nothing to him about the person whom I had found in the street,—lest it should aggravate his gout. When he is like that, the slightest thing does.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FATHER'S NO

Paul has stormed the House of Commons with one of the greatest speeches which even he has delivered, and I have quarrelled with papa. And, also, I have very nearly quarrelled with Sydney.

Sydney's little affair is nothing. He actually still persists in thinking himself in love with me,—as if, since last night, when he what he calls 'proposed' to me, he has not time to fall out of love, and in again, half a dozen times; and, on the strength of it, he seems to consider himself entitled to make himself as disagreeable as he can. That I should not mind,—for Sydney disagreeable is about as nice as Sydney any other way; but when it comes to his shooting poisoned shafts at Paul, I object. If he imagines that anything he can say, or hint, will lessen my estimation of Paul Lessingham by one hair's breadth, he has less wisdom even than I gave him credit for. By the way, Percy Woodville asked me to be his wife tonight,—which, also, is nothing; he has been trying to do it for the last three years,—though, under the circumstances, it is a little trying; but he would not spit venom merely because I preferred another man,—and he, I believe, does care for me.

Papa's affair is serious. It is the first clashing of the foils,—and this time, I imagine, the buttons are really off. This morning he said a few words, not so much to, as at me. He informed me that Paul was expected to speak tonight,—as if I did not know it!—and availed himself of the opening to load him with the abuse which, in his case, he thinks is not unbecoming to a gentleman. I don't know—or, rather, I do know what he would think, if he heard another man use, in the presence of a woman, the kind of language

which he habitually employs. However, I said nothing. I had a motive for allowing the chaff to fly before the wind.

But, to-night, issue was joined.

I, of course, went to hear Paul speak,—as I have done over and over again before. Afterwards, Paul came and fetched me from the cage. He had to leave me for a moment, while he gave somebody a message; and in the lobby, there was Sydney,—all sneers! I could have pinched him. Just as I was coming to the conclusion that I should have to stick a pin into his arm, Paul returned,—and, positively, Sydney was rude to him. I was ashamed, if Mr Atherton was not. As if it was not enough that he should be insulted by a mere popinjay, at the very moment when he had been adding another stone to the fabric of his country's glory,—papa came up. He actually wanted to take me away from Paul. I should have liked to see him do it. Of course I went down with Paul to the carriage, leaving papa to follow if he chose. He did not choose,—but, none the less, he managed to be home within three minutes after I had myself returned.

Then the battle began.

It is impossible for me to give an idea of papa in a rage. There may be men who look well when they lose their temper, but, if there are, papa is certainly not one. He is always talking about the magnificence, and the high breeding of the Lindons, but anything less high-bred than the head of the Lindons, in his moments of wrath, it would be hard to conceive. His language I will not attempt to portray,—but his observations consisted, mainly, of abuse of Paul, glorification of the Lindons, and orders to me.

'I forbid you—I forbid you—' when papa wishes to be impressive he repeats his own words three or four times over; I don't know if he imagines that they are improved by repetition; if he does, he is wrong—'I forbid you ever again to speak to that—that—that—'

Here followed language.

I was silent.

My cue was to keep cool. I believe that, with the exception, perhaps, of being a little white, and exceedingly sorry that papa should so forget himself, I was about the same as I generally am.

'Do you hear me?—do you hear what I say?—do you hear me, miss?'

'Yes, papa; I hear you.'

'Then—then—then promise me!—promise that you will do as I tell you!—mark my words, my girl, you shall promise before you leave this room!'

'My dear papa!—do you intend me to spend the remainder of my life in the drawing-room?'

'Don't you be impertinent!—do-do-don't you speak to me like that!—I—I—I won't have it!'

'I tell you what it is, papa, if you don't take care you'll have another attack of gout.'

'Damn gout.'

That was the most sensible thing he said; if such a tormentor as gout can be consigned to the nether regions by the mere utterance of a word, by all means let the word be uttered. Off he went again.

'The man's a ruffianly, rascally,—' and so on. 'There's not such a villainous vagabond—' and all the rest of it. 'And I order you,—I'm a Lindon, and I order you! I'm your father, and I order you!—I order you never to speak to such a—such a'—various vain repetitions—'again, and—and—and I order you never to look at him!'

'Listen to me, papa. I will promise you never to speak to Paul Lessingham again, if you will promise me never to speak to Lord Cantilever again,—or to recognise him if you meet him in the street.'

'You should have seen how papa glared. Lord Cantilever is the head of his party. Its august, and, I presume, revered leader. He is papa's particular fetish. I am not sure that he does regard him as being any lower than the

angels, but if he does it is certainly something in decimals. My suggestion seemed as outrageous to him as his suggestion seemed to me. But it is papa's misfortune that he can only see one side of a question,—and that's his own.'

'You—you dare to compare Lord Cantilever to—to that—that—that—!'

'I am not comparing them. I am not aware of there being anything in particular against Lord Cantilever,—that is against his character. But, of course, I should not dream of comparing a man of his calibre, with one of real ability, like Paul Lessingham. It would be to treat his lordship with too much severity.'

I could not help it,—but that did it. The rest of papa's conversation was a jumble of explosions. It was all so sad.

Papa poured all the vials of his wrath upon Paul,—to his own sore disfigurement. He threatened me with all the pains and penalties of the inquisition if I did not immediately promise to hold no further communication with Mr Lessingham,—of course I did nothing of the kind. He cursed me, in default, by bell, book, and candle,—and by ever so many other things beside. He called me the most dreadful names,—me! his only child. He warned me that I should find myself in prison before I had done,—I am not sure that he did not hint darkly at the gallows. Finally, he drove me from the room in a whirlwind of anathemas.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TERROR BY NIGHT

When I left papa,—or, rather, when papa had driven me from him—I went straight to the man whom I had found in the street. It was late, and I was feeling both tired and worried, so that I only thought of seeing for myself how he was. In some way, he seemed to be a link between Paul and myself, and as, at that moment, links of that kind were precious, I could not have gone to bed without learning something of his condition.

The nurse received me at the door.

'Well, nurse, how's the patient?'

Nurse was a plump, motherly woman, who had attended more than one odd protege of mine, and whom I kept pretty constantly at my beck and call. She held out her hands.

'It's hard to tell. He hasn't moved since I came.'

'Not moved?—Is he still insensible?'

'He seems to me to be in some sort of trance. He does not appear to breathe, and I can detect no pulsation, but the doctor says he's still alive,—it's the queerest case I ever saw.'

I went farther into the room. Directly I did so the man in the bed gave signs of life which were sufficiently unmistakable. Nurse hastened to him.

'Why,' she exclaimed, 'he's moving!—he might have heard you enter!'

He not only might have done, but it seemed possible that that was what he actually had done. As I approached the bed, he raised himself to a sitting posture, as, in the morning, he had done in the street, and he exclaimed, as if he addressed himself to someone whom he saw in front of him,—I cannot describe the almost more than human agony which was in his voice,

'Paul Lessingham!—Beware!—The Beetle!'

What he meant I had not the slightest notion. Probably that was why what seemed more like a pronouncement of delirium than anything else had such an extraordinary effect upon my nerves. No sooner had he spoken than a sort of blank horror seemed to settle down upon my mind. I actually found myself trembling at the knees. I felt, all at once, as if I was standing in the immediate presence of something awful yet unseen.

As for the speaker, no sooner were the words out of his lips, than, as was the case in the morning, he relapsed into a condition of trance. Nurse, bending over him, announced the fact.

'He's gone off again!—What an extraordinary thing!—I suppose it is real.' It was clear, from the tone of her voice, that she shared the doubt which had troubled the policeman, 'There's not a trace of a pulse. From the look of things he might be dead. Of one thing I'm sure, that there's something unnatural about the man. No natural illness I ever heard of, takes hold of a man like this.'

Glancing up, she saw that there was something unusual in my face; an appearance which startled her.

'Why, Miss Marjorie, what's the matter!—You look quite ill!'

I felt ill, and worse than ill; but, at the same time, I was quite incapable of describing what I felt to nurse. For some inscrutable reason I had even lost the control of my tongue,—I stammered.

'I—I—I'm not feeling very well, nurse; I—I—I think I'll be better in bed.'

As I spoke, I staggered towards the door, conscious, all the while, that nurse was staring at me with eyes wide open, When I got out of the room, it seemed, in some incomprehensible fashion, as if something had left it with me, and that It and I were alone together in the corridor. So overcome was I by the consciousness of its immediate propinquity, that, all at once, I found myself cowering against the wall,—as if I expected something or someone to strike me.

How I reached my bedroom I do not know. I found Fanchette awaiting me. For the moment her presence was a positive comfort,—until I realised the amazement with which she was regarding me.

'Mademoiselle is not well?'

'Thank you, Fanchette, I—I am rather tired. I will undress myself to-night—you can go to bed.'

'But if mademoiselle is so tired, will she not permit me to assist her?'

The suggestion was reasonable enough,—and kindly too; for, to say the least of it, she had as much cause for fatigue as I had. I hesitated. I should have liked to throw my arms about her neck, and beg her not to leave me; but, the plain truth is, I was ashamed. In my inner consciousness I was persuaded that the sense of terror which had suddenly come over me was so absolutely causeless, that I could not bear the notion of playing the craven in my maid's eyes. While I hesitated, something seemed to sweep past me through the air, and to brush against my cheek in passing. I caught at Fanchette's arm.

'Fanchette!—Is there something with us in the room?'

'Something with us in the room?—Mademoiselle?—What does mademoiselle mean?'

She looked disturbed,—which was, on the whole, excusable. Fanchette is not exactly a strong-minded person, and not likely to be much of a support when a support was most required. If I was going to play the fool, I would be my own audience. So I sent her off.

'Did you not hear me tell you that I will undress myself?—you are to go to bed.'

She went to bed,—with quite sufficient willingness.

The instant that she was out of the room I wished that she was back again. Such a paroxysm of fear came over me, that I was incapable of stirring from the spot on which I stood, and it was all I could do to prevent myself from collapsing in heap on the floor. I had never, till then, had reason to suppose that I was a coward. Nor to suspect myself of being the possessor of 'nerves.' I was as little likely as anyone to be frightened by shadows. I told myself that the whole thing was sheer absurdity, and that I should be thoroughly ashamed of my own conduct when the morning came. 'If you don't want to be self-branded as a contemptible idiot, Marjorie Lindon, you will call up your courage, and these foolish fears will fly.' But it would not do. Instead of flying, they grew worse. I became convinced,—and the process of conviction was terrible beyond words!—that there actually was something with me in the room, some invisible horror,—which, at any moment, might become visible. I seemed to understand—with a sense of agony which nothing can describe!—that this thing which was with me was with Paul. That we were linked together by the bond of a common, and a dreadful terror. That, at that moment, that same awful peril which was threatening me, was threatening him, and that I was powerless to move a finger in his aid. As with a sort of second sight, I saw out of the room in which I was, into another, in which Paul was crouching on the floor, covering his face with his hands, and shrieking. The vision came again and again with a degree of vividness of which I cannot give the least conception. At last the horror, and the reality of it, goaded me to frenzy. 'Paul! Paul!' I screamed. As soon as I found my voice, the vision faded. Once more I understood that, as a matter of simple fact, I was standing in my own bedroom; that the lights were burning brightly; that I had not yet commenced to remove a particle of dress. 'Am I going mad?' I wondered. I had heard of insanity taking extraordinary forms, but what could have caused softening of the brain in me I had not the faintest notion. Surely that sort of thing does not come on one—in such a wholly unmitigated form!—without the slightest notice,—and that my mental faculties were sound enough a few minutes back I was certain. The first premonition of anything

of the kind had come upon me with the melodramatic utterance of the man I had found in the street.

'Paul Lessingham!—Beware!—The Beetle!'

The words were ringing in my ears.—What was that?—. There was a buzzing sound behind me. I turned to see what it was. It moved as I moved, so that it was still at my back. I swung, swiftly, right round on my heels. It still eluded me,—it was still behind.

I stood and listened,—what was it that hovered so persistently at my back?

The buzzing was distinctly audible. It was like the humming of a bee. Or—could it be a beetle?

My whole life long I have had an antipathy to beetles,—of any sort or kind. I have objected neither to rats nor mice, nor cows, nor bulls, nor snakes, nor spiders, nor toads, nor lizards, nor any of the thousand and one other creatures, animate or otherwise, to which so many people have a rooted, and, apparently, illogical dislike. My pet—and only—horror has been beetles. The mere suspicion of a harmless, and, I am told, necessary cockroach, being within several feet has always made me seriously uneasy. The thought that a great, winged beetle—to me, a flying beetle is the horror of horrors!—was with me in my bedroom,—goodness alone knew how it had got there!—was unendurable. Anyone who had beheld me during the next few moments would certainly have supposed I was deranged. I turned and twisted, sprang from side to side, screwed myself into impossible positions, in order to obtain a glimpse of the detested visitant,—but in vain. I could hear it all the time; but see it—never! The buzzing sound was continually behind.

The terror returned,—I began to think that my brain must be softening. I dashed to the bed. Flinging myself on my knees, I tried to pray. But I was speechless,—words would not come; my thoughts would not take shape. I all at once became conscious, as I struggled to ask help of God, that I was wrestling with something evil,—that if I only could ask kelp of Him, evil would flee. But I could not. I was helpless,—overmastered. I hid my face in

the bedclothes, cramming my fingers into my ears. But the buzzing was behind me all the time.

I sprang up, striking out, blindly, wildly, right and left, hitting nothing,—the buzzing always came from a point at which, at the moment, I was not aiming.

I tore off my clothes. I had on a lovely frock which I had worn for the first time that night; I had had it specially made for the occasion of the Duchess' ball, and—more especially—in honour of Paul's great speech. I had said to myself, when I saw my image in a mirror, that it was the most exquisite gown I had ever had, that it suited me to perfection, and that it should continue in my wardrobe for many a day, if only as a souvenir of a memorable night. Now, in the madness of my terror, all reflections of that sort were forgotten. My only desire was to away with it. I tore it off anyhow, letting it fall in rags on the floor at my feet. All else that I had on I flung in the same way after it; it was a veritable holocaust of dainty garments,—I acting as relentless executioner who am, as a rule, so tender with my things. I leaped upon the bed, switched off the electric light, hurried into bed, burying myself, over head and all, deep down between the sheets.

I had hoped that by shutting out the light, I might regain my senses. That in the darkness I might have opportunity for sane reflection. But I had made a grievous error. I had exchanged bad for worse. The darkness lent added terrors. The light had not been out five seconds before I would have given all that I was worth to be able to switch it on again.

As I cowered beneath the bedclothes I heard the buzzing sound above my head,—the sudden silence of the darkness had rendered it more audible than it had been before. The thing, whatever it was, was hovering above the bed. It came nearer and nearer; it grew clearer and clearer. I felt it alight upon the coverlet;—shall I ever forget the sensations with which I did feel it? It weighed upon me like a ton of lead. How much of the seeming weight was real, and how much imaginary, I cannot pretend to say; but that it was much heavier than any beetle I have ever seen or heard of, I am sure.

For a time it was still,—and during that time I doubt if I even drew my breath. Then I felt it begin to move, in wobbling fashion, with awkward, ungainly gait, stopping every now and then, as if for rest. I was conscious that it was progressing, slowly, yet surely, towards the head of the bed. The emotion of horror with which I realised what this progression might mean, will be, I fear, with me to the end of my life,—not only in dreams, but too often, also, in my waking hours. My heart, as the Psalmist has it, melted like wax within me, I was incapable of movement,—dominated by something as hideous as, and infinitely more powerful than, the fascination of the serpent.

When it reached the head of the bed, what I feared—with what a fear!—would happen, did happen. It began to find its way inside,—to creep between the sheets; the wonder is I did not die! I felt it coming nearer and nearer, inch by inch; I knew that it was upon me, that escape there was none; I felt something touch my hair.

And then oblivion did come to my aid. For the first time in my life I swooned.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRANGE STORY OF THE MAN IN THE STREET

I have been anticipating for some weeks past, that things would become exciting,—and they have. But hardly in the way which I foresaw. It is the old story of the unexpected happening. Suddenly events of the most extraordinary nature have come crowding on me from the most unlooked-for quarters.

Let me try to take them in something like their proper order.

To begin with, Sydney has behaved very badly. So badly that it seems likely that I shall have to re-cast my whole conception of his character. It was nearly nine o'clock this morning when I,—I cannot say woke up, because I do not believe that I had really been asleep—but when I returned to consciousness. I found myself sitting up in bed, trembling like some frightened child. What had actually happened to me I did not know,—could not guess. I was conscious of an overwhelming sense of nausea, and, generally, I was feeling very far from well. I endeavoured to arrange my thoughts, and to decide upon some plan of action. Finally, I decided to go for advice and help where I had so often gone before,—to Sydney Atherton.

I went to him. I told him the whole gruesome story. He saw, he could not help but see what a deep impress the events of the night had made on me. He heard me to the end with every appearance of sympathy,—and then all at once I discovered that all the time papa had been concealed behind a large screen which was in the room, listening to every word I had been uttering. That I was dumfounded, goes without saying. It was bad enough in papa, but in Sydney it seemed, and it was, such treachery. He and I have

told each other secrets all our lives; it has never entered my imagination, as he very well knows, to play him false, in one jot or tittle; and I have always understood that, in this sort of matter, men pride themselves on their sense of honour being so much keener than women's. I told them some plain truths; and I fancy that I left them both feeling heartily ashamed of themselves.

One result the experience had on me,—it wound me up. It had on me the revivifying effect of a cold douche. I realised that mine was a situation in which I should have to help myself.

When I returned home I learned that the man whom I had found in the street was himself again, and was as conscious as he was ever likely to be. Burning with curiosity to learn the nature of the connection which existed between Paul and him, and what was the meaning of his oracular apostrophes, I merely paused to remove my hat before hastening into his apartment.

When he saw me, and heard who I was, the expressions of his gratitude were painful in their intensity. The tears streamed down his cheeks. He looked to me like a man who had very little life left in him. He looked weak, and white, and worn to a shadow. Probably he never had been robust, and it was only too plain that privation had robbed him of what little strength he had ever had. He was nothing else but skin and bone. Physical and mental debility was written large all over him.

He was not bad-looking,—in a milk and watery sort of way. He had pale blue eyes and very fair hair, and, I daresay, at one time, had been a spruce enough clerk. It was difficult to guess his age, one ages so rapidly under the stress of misfortune, but I should have set him down as being about forty. His voice, though faint enough at first, was that of an educated man, and as he went on, and gathered courage, and became more and more in earnest, he spoke with a simple directness which was close akin to eloquence. It was a curious story which he had to tell.

So curious, so astounding indeed, that, by the time it was finished, I was in such a state of mind, that I could perceive no alternative but to forgive Sydney, and, in spite of his recent, and scandalous misbehaviour, again

appeal to him for assistance. It seemed, if the story told by the man whom I had found in the street was true,—and incredible though it sounded, he spoke like a truthful man!—that Paul was threatened by some dreadful, and, to me, wholly incomprehensible danger; that it was a case in which even moments were precious; and I felt that, with the best will in the world, it was a position in which I could not move alone. The shadow of the terror of the night was with me still, and with that fresh in my recollection how could I hope, single-handed, to act effectually against the mysterious being of whom this amazing tale was told? No! I believed that Sydney did care for me, in his own peculiar way; I knew that he was quick, and cool, and fertile in resource, and that he showed to most advantage in a difficult situation; it was possible that he had a conscience, of a sort, and that, this time, I might not appeal to it in vain.

So I sent a servant off to fetch him, helter skelter.

As luck would have it, the servant returned with him within five minutes. It appeared that he had been lunching with Dora Grayling, who lives just at the end of the street, and the footman had met him coming down the steps. I had him shown into my own room.

'I want you to go to the man whom I found in the street, and listen to what he has to say.'

'With pleasure.'

'Can I trust you?'

'To listen to what he has to say?—I believe so.'

'Can I trust you to respect my confidence?'

He was not at all abashed,—I never saw Sydney Atherton when he was abashed. Whatever the offence of which he has been guilty, he always seems completely at his ease. His eyes twinkled.

'You can,—I will not breathe a syllable even to papa.'

'In that case, come! But, you understand, I am going to put to the test the affirmations which you have made during all these years, and to prove if you have any of the feeling for me which you pretend.'

Directly we were in the stranger's room, Sydney marched straight up to the bed, stared at the man who was lying in it, crammed his hands into his trouser pockets, and whistled. I was amazed.

'So!' he exclaimed. 'It's you!'

'Do you know this man?' I asked.

'I am hardly prepared to go so far as to say that I know him, but, I chance to have a memory for faces, and it happens that I have met this gentleman on at least one previous occasion. Perhaps he remembers me.—Do you?'

The stranger seemed uneasy,—as if he found Sydney's tone and manner disconcerting.

'I do. You are the man in the street.'

'Precisely. I am that—individual. And you are the man who came through the window. And in a much more comfortable condition you appear to be than when first I saw you.' Sydney turned to me. 'It is just possible, Miss Lindon, that I may have a few remarks to make to this gentleman which would be better made in private,—if you don't mind.'

'But I do mind,—I mind very much. What do you suppose I sent for you here for?'

Sydney smiled that absurd, provoking smile of his,—as if the occasion were not sufficiently serious.

'To show that you still repose in me a vestige of your confidence.'

'Don't talk nonsense. This man has told me a most extraordinary story, and I have sent for you—as you may believe, not too willingly!—Sydney bowed—'in order that he may repeat it in your presence, and in mine.'

'Is that so?—Well!—Permit me to offer you a chair,—this tale may turn out to be a trifle long.'

To humour him I accepted the chair he offered, though I should have preferred to stand;—he seated himself on the side of the bed, fixing on the stranger those keen, quizzical, not too merciful, eyes of his.

'Well, sir, we are at your service,—if you will be so good as to favour us with a second edition of that pleasant yarn you have been spinning. But—let us begin at the right end!—what's your name?'

'My name is Robert Holt.'

'That so?—Then, Mr Robert Holt,—let her go!'

Thus encouraged, Mr Holt repeated the tale which he had told me, only in more connected fashion than before. I fancy that Sydney's glances exercised on him a sort of hypnotic effect, and this kept him to the point,—he scarcely needed a word of prompting from the first syllable to the last.

He told how, tired, wet, hungry, desperate, despairing, he had been refused admittance to the casual ward,—that unfailing resource, as one would have supposed, of those who had abandoned even hope. How he had come upon an open window in an apparently empty house, and, thinking of nothing but shelter from the inclement night, he had clambered through it. How he had found himself in the presence of an extraordinary being, who, in his debilitated and nervous state, had seemed to him to be only half human. How this dreadful creature had given utterance to wild sentiments of hatred towards Paul Lessingham,—my Paul! How he had taken advantage of Holt's enfeebled state to gain over him the most complete, horrible, and, indeed, almost incredible ascendancy. How he actually had sent Holt, practically naked, into the storm-driven streets, to commit burglary at Paul's house,—and how he,—Holt,—had actually gone without being able to offer even a shadow of opposition. How Paul, suddenly returning home, had come upon Holt engaged in the very act of committing burglary, and how, on his hearing Holt make a cabalistic reference to some mysterious beetle, the manhood had gone out of him, and he had suffered the intruder to make good his escape without an effort to detain him.

The story had seemed sufficiently astonishing the first time, it seemed still more astonishing the second,—but, as I watched Sydney listening, what struck me chiefly was the conviction that he had heard it all before. I charged him with it directly Holt had finished.

'This is not the first time you have been told this tale.'

'Pardon me,—but it is. Do you suppose I live in an atmosphere of fairy tales?'

Something in his manner made me feel sure he was deceiving me.

'Sydney!—Don't tell me a story!—Paul has told you!'

'I am not telling you a story,—at least, on this occasion; and Mr Lessingham has not told me. Suppose we postpone these details to a little later. And perhaps, in the interim, you will permit me to put a question or two to Mr Holt.'

I let him have his way,—though I knew he was concealing something from me; that he had a more intimate acquaintance with Mr Holt's strange tale than he chose to confess. And, for some cause, his reticence annoyed me.

He looked at Mr Holt in silence for a second or two.

Then he said, with the quizzical little air of bland impertinence which is peculiarly his own,

'I presume, Mr Holt, you have been entertaining us with a novelty in fables, and that we are not expected to believe this pleasant little yarn of yours.'

'I expect nothing. But I have told you the truth. And you know it.'

This seemed to take Sydney aback.

'I protest that, like Miss Lindon, you credit me with a more extensive knowledge than I possess. However, we will let that pass.—I take it that you paid particular attention to this mysterious habitant of this mysterious dwelling.'

I saw that Mr Holt shuddered.

'I am not likely ever to forget him.'

'Then, in that case, you will be able to describe him to us.'

'To do so adequately would be beyond my powers. But I will do my best.'

If the original was more remarkable than the description which he gave of him, then he must have been remarkable indeed. The impression conveyed to my mind was rather of a monster than a human being. I watched Sydney attentively as he followed Mr Holt's somewhat lurid language, and there was something in his demeanour which made me more and more persuaded that he was more behind the scenes in this strange business than he pretended, or than the speaker suspected. He put a question which seemed uncalled for by anything which Mr Holt had said.

'You are sure this thing of beauty was a man?'

'No, sir, that is exactly what I am not sure.'

There was a note in Sydney's voice which suggested that he had received precisely the answer which he had expected.

'Did you think it was a woman?'

'I did think so, more than once. Though I can hardly explain what made me think so. There was certainly nothing womanly about the face.' He paused, as if to reflect. Then added, 'I suppose it was a question of instinct.'

'I see.—Just so.—It occurs to me, Mr Holt, that you are rather strong on questions of instinct.' Sydney got off the bed. He stretched himself, as if fatigued,—which is a way he has. 'I will not do you the injustice to hint that I do not believe a word of your charming, and simple, narrative. On the contrary, I will demonstrate my perfect credence by remarking that I have not the slightest doubt that you will be able to point out to me, for my particular satisfaction, the delightful residence on which the whole is founded.'

Mr Holt coloured,—Sydney's tone could scarcely have been more significant.

'You must remember, sir, that it was a dark night, that I had never been in that neighbourhood before, and that I was not in a condition to pay much attention to locality.'

'All of which is granted, but—how far was it from Hammersmith Workhouse?'

'Possibly under half a mile.'

'Then, in that case, surely you can remember which turning you took on leaving Hammersmith Workhouse,—I suppose there are not many turnings you could have taken.'

'I think I could remember.'

'Then you shall have an opportunity to try. It isn't a very far cry to Hammersmith,—don't you think you are well enough to drive there now, just you and I together in a cab?'

'I should say so. I wished to get up this morning. It is by the doctor's orders I have stayed in bed.'

'Then, for once in a while, the doctor's orders shall be ignored,—I prescribe fresh air.' Sydney turned to me. 'Since Mr Holt's wardrobe seems rather to seek, don't you think a suit of one of the men might fit him,—if Mr Holt wouldn't mind making shift for the moment?—Then, by the time you've finished dressing, Mr Holt, I shall be ready.'

While they were ascertaining which suit of clothes would be best adapted to his figure, I went with Sydney to my room. So soon as we were in, I let him know that this was not a matter in which I intended to be trifled with.

'Of course you understand, Sydney, that I am coming with you.'

He pretended not to know what I meant.

'Coming with me?—I am delighted to hear it,—but where?'

'To the house of which Mr Holt has been speaking.'

'Nothing could give me greater pleasure, but—might I point out?—Mr Holt has to find it yet?'

'I will come to help you to help him find it.'

Sydney laughed,—but I could see he did not altogether relish the suggestion.

'Three in a hansom?'

'There is such a thing as a four-wheeled cab,—or I could order a carriage if you'd like one.'

Sydney looked at me out of the corners of his eyes; then began to walk up and down the room, with his hands in his trouser pockets. Presently he began to talk nonsense.

'I need not say with what a sensation of joy I should anticipate the delights of a drive with you,—even in a four-wheeled cab; but, were I in your place, I fancy that I should allow Holt and your humble servant to go hunting out this house of his alone. It may prove a more tedious business than you imagine. I promise that, after the hunt is over, I will describe the proceedings to you with the most literal accuracy.'

'I daresay.—Do you think I don't know you've been deceiving me all the time?'

'Deceiving you?—I!'

'Yes,—you! Do you think I'm quite an idiot?'

'My dear Marjorie!'

'Do you think I can't see that you know all about what Mr Holt has been telling us,—perhaps more about it than he knows himself?'

'On my word!—With what an amount of knowledge you do credit me.'

'Yes, I do,—or discredit you, rather. If I were to trust you, you would tell me just as much as you chose,—which would be nothing. I'm coming with you,—so there's an end.'

'Very well.—Do you happen to know if there are any revolvers in the house?'

'Revolvers?—whatever for?'

'Because I should like to borrow one. I will not conceal from you—since you press me—that this is a case in which a revolver is quite likely to be required.'

'You are trying to frighten me.'

'I am doing nothing of the kind, only, under the circumstances, I am bound to point out to you what it is you may expect.'

'Oh, you think that you're bound to point that out, do you,—then now your bounden duty's done. As for there being any revolvers in the house, papa has a perfect arsenal,—would you like to take them all?'

'Thanks, but I daresay I shall be able to manage with one,—unless you would like one too. You may find yourself in need of it.'

'I am obliged to you, but, on this occasion, I don't think I'll trouble. I'll run the risk.—Oh, Sydney, what a hypocrite you are!'

'It's for your sake, if I seem to be. I tell you most seriously, that I earnestly advise you to allow Mr Holt and I to manage this affair alone. I don't mind going so far as to say that this is a matter with which, in days to come, you will wish that you had not allowed yourself to be associated.'

'What do you mean by that? Do you dare to insinuate anything against—Paul?'

'I insinuate nothing. What I mean, I say right out; and, my dear Marjorie, what I actually do mean is this,—that if, in spite of my urgent solicitations, you will persist in accompanying us, the expedition, so far as I am concerned, will be postponed.'

'That is what you do mean, is it? Then that's settled.' I rang the bell. The servant came. 'Order a four-wheeled cab at once. And let me know the moment Mr Holt is ready.' The servant went. I turned to Sydney. 'If you will excuse me, I will go and put my hat on. You are, of course, at liberty to please yourself as to whether you will or will not go, but, if you don't, then I shall go with Mr Holt alone.'

I moved to the door. He stopped me.

'My dear Marjorie, why will you persist in treating me with such injustice? Believe me, you have no idea what sort of adventure this is which you are setting out upon,—or you would hear reason. I assure you that you are gratuitously proposing to thrust yourself into imminent peril.'

'What sort of peril? Why do you beat about the bush,—why don't you speak right out?'

'I can't speak right out, there are circumstances which render it practically impossible—and that's the plain truth,—but the danger is none the less real on that account. I am not jesting,—I am in earnest; won't you take my word for it?'

'It is not a question of taking your word only,—it is a question of something else beside. I have not forgotten my adventures of last night,—and Mr Holt's story is mysterious enough in itself; but there is something more mysterious still at the back of it,—something which you appear to suggest points unpleasantly at Paul. My duty is clear, and nothing you can say will turn me from it. Paul, as you are very well aware, is already over-weighted with affairs of state, pretty nearly borne down by them,—or I would take the tale to him, and he would talk to you after a fashion of his own. Things being as they are, I propose to show you that, although I am not yet Paul's wife, I can make his interests my own as completely as though I were. I

can, therefore, only repeat that it is for you to decide what you intend to do; but, if you prefer to stay, I shall go with Mr Holt,—alone.'

'Understand that, when the time for regret comes—as it will come!—you are not to blame me for having done what I advised you not to do.'

'My dear Mr Atherton, I will undertake to do my utmost to guard your spotless reputation; I should be sorry that anyone should hold you responsible for anything I either said or did.'

'Very well!—Your blood be on your own head!'

'My blood?'

'Yes,—your blood. I shouldn't be surprised if it comes to blood before we're through.—Perhaps you'll oblige me with the loan of one of that arsenal of revolvers of which you spoke.'

I let him have his old revolver,—or, rather, I let him have one of papa's new ones. He put it in the hip pocket in his trousers. And the expedition started,—in a four-wheeled car.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE HOUSE ON THE ROAD FROM THE WORKHOUSE

Mr Holt looked as if he was in somebody else's garments. He was so thin, and worn, and wasted, that the suit of clothes which one of the men had lent him hung upon him as on a scarecrow. I was almost ashamed of myself for having incurred a share of the responsibility of taking him out of bed. He seemed so weak and bloodless that I should not have been surprised if he had fainted on the road. I had taken care that he should eat as much as he could eat before we started—the suggestion of starvation which he had conveyed to one's mind was dreadful!—and I had brought a flask of brandy in case of accidents, but, in spite of everything, I could not conceal from myself that he would be more at home in a sick-bed than in a jolting cab.

It was not a cheerful drive. There was in Sydney's manner towards me an air of protection which I instinctively resented,—he appeared to be regarding me as a careful, and anxious, nurse might regard a wrong-headed and disobedient child. Conversation distinctly languished. Since Sydney seemed disposed to patronise me, I was bent on snubbing him. The result was, that the majority of the remarks which were uttered were addressed to Mr Holt.

The cab stopped,—after what had appeared to me to be an interminable journey. I was rejoiced at the prospect of its being at an end. Sydney put his head out of the window. A short parley with the driver ensued.

'This is 'Ammersmith Workhouse, it's a large place, sir,—which part of it might you be wanting?'

Sydney appealed to Mr Holt. He put his head out of the window in his turn,—he did not seem to recognise our surroundings at all.

'We have come a different way,—this is not the way I went; I went through Hammersmith,—and to the casual ward; I don't see that here.'

Sydney spoke to the cabman.

'Driver, where's the casual ward?'

'That's the other end, sir.'

'Then take us there.'

He took us there. Then Sydney appealed again to Mr Holt.

'Shall I dismiss the cabman,—or don't you feel equal to walking?'

'Thank you, I feel quite equal to walking,—I think the exercise will do me good.'

So the cabman was dismissed,—a step which we—and I, in particular—had subsequent cause to regret. Mr Holt took his bearings. He pointed to a door which was just in front of us.

'That's the entrance to the casual ward, and that, over it, is the window through which the other man threw a stone. I went to the right,—back the way I had come.' We went to the right. 'I reached this corner.' We had reached a corner. Mr Holt looked about him, endeavouring to recall the way he had gone. A good many roads appeared to converge at that point, so that he might have wandered in either of several directions.

Presently he arrived at something like a decision.

'I think this is the way I went,—I am nearly sure it is.'

He led the way, with something of an air of dubitation, and we followed. The road he had chosen seemed to lead to nothing and nowhere. We had not gone many yards from the workhouse gates before we were confronted by

something like chaos. In front and on either side of us were large spaces of waste land. At some more or less remote period attempts appeared to have been made at brick-making,—there were untidy stacks of bilious-looking bricks in evidence. Here and there enormous weather-stained boards announced that 'This Desirable Land was to be Let for Building Purposes.' The road itself was unfinished. There was no pavement, and we had the bare uneven ground for sidewalk. It seemed, so far as I could judge, to lose itself in space, and to be swallowed up by the wilderness of 'Desirable Land' which lay beyond. In the near distance there were houses enough, and to spare—of a kind. But they were in other roads. In the one in which we actually were, on the right, at the end, there was a row of unfurnished carcasses, but only two buildings which were in anything like a fit state for occupation. One stood on either side, not facing each other,—there was a distance between them of perhaps fifty yards. The sight of them had a more exciting effect on Mr Holt than it had on me. He moved rapidly forward,—coming to a standstill in front of the one upon our left, which was the nearer of the pair.

'This is the house!' he exclaimed.

He seemed almost exhilarated,—I confess that I was depressed. A more dismal-looking habitation one could hardly imagine. It was one of those dreadful jerry-built houses which, while they are still new, look old. It had quite possibly only been built a year or two, and yet, owing to neglect, or to poverty of construction, or to a combination of the two, it was already threatening to tumble down. It was a small place, a couple of storeys high, and would have been dear—I should think!—at thirty pounds a year. The windows had surely never been washed since the house was built,—those on the upper floor seemed all either cracked or broken. The only sign of occupancy consisted in the fact that a blind was down behind the window of the room on the ground floor. Curtains there were none. A low wall ran in front, which had apparently at one time been surmounted by something in the shape of an iron railing,—a rusty piece of metal still remained on one end; but, since there was only about a foot between it and the building, which was practically built upon the road,—whether the wall was intended to ensure privacy, or was merely for ornament, was not clear.

'This is the house!' repeated Mr Holt, showing more signs of life than I had hitherto seen in him.

Sydney looked it up and down,—it apparently appealed to his aesthetic sense as little as it did to mine.

'Are you sure?'

'I am certain.'

'It seems empty.'

'It seemed empty to me that night,—that is why I got into it in search of shelter.'

'Which is the window which served you as a door?'

'This one.' Mr Holt pointed to the window on the ground floor,—the one which was screened by a blind. 'There was no sign of a blind when I first saw it, and the sash was up,—it was that which caught my eye.'

Once more Sydney surveyed the place, in comprehensive fashion, from roof to basement,—then he scrutinisingly regarded Mr Holt.

'You are quite sure this is the house? It might be awkward if you proved mistaken. I am going to knock at the door, and if it turns out that that mysterious acquaintance of yours does not, and never has lived here, we might find an explanation difficult.'

'I am sure it is the house,—certain! I know it,—I feel it here,—and here.'

Mr Holt touched his breast, and his forehead. His manner was distinctly odd. He was trembling, and a fevered expression had come into his eyes. Sydney glanced at him, for a moment, in silence. Then he bestowed his attention upon me.

'May I ask if I may rely upon your preserving your presence of mind?'

The mere question ruffled my plumes.

'What do you mean?'

'What I say. I am going to knock at that door, and I am going to get through it, somehow. It is quite within the range of possibility that, when I am through, there will be some strange happenings,—as you have heard from Mr Holt. The house is commonplace enough without; you may not find it so commonplace within. You may find yourself in a position in which it will be in the highest degree essential that you should keep your wits about you.'

'I am not likely to let them stray.'

'Then that's all right.—Do I understand that you propose to come in with me?'

'Of course I do,—what do you suppose I've come for? What nonsense you are talking.

'I hope that you will still continue to consider it nonsense by the time this little adventure's done.'

That I resented his impertinence goes without saying—to be talked to in such a strain by Sydney Atherton, whom I had kept in subjection ever since he was in knickerbockers, was a little trying,—but I am forced to admit that I was more impressed by his manner, or his words, or by Mr Holt's manner, or something, than I should have cared to own. I had not the least notion what was going to happen, or what horrors that woebegone-looking dwelling contained. But Mr Holt's story had been of the most astonishing sort, my experiences of the previous night were still fresh, and, altogether, now that I was in such close neighbourhood with the Unknown—with a capital U!—although it was broad daylight, it loomed before me in a shape for which,—candidly!—I was not prepared.

A more disreputable-looking front door I have not seen,—it was in perfect harmony with the remainder of the establishment. The paint was off; the woodwork was scratched and dented; the knocker was red with rust. When Sydney took it in his hand I was conscious of quite a little thrill. As he brought it down with a sharp rat-tat, I half expected to see the door fly open, and disclose some gruesome object glaring out at us. Nothing of the kind

took place; the door did not budge,—nothing happened. Sydney waited a second or two, then knocked again; another second or two, then another knock. There was still no sign of any notice being taken of our presence. Sydney turned to Mr Holt.

'Seems as if the place was empty.'

Mr Holt was in the most singular condition of agitation,—it made me uncomfortable to look at him.

'You do not know,—you cannot tell; there may be someone there who hears and pays no heed.'

'I'll give them another chance.'

Sydney brought down the knocker with thundering reverberations. The din must have been audible half a mile away. But from within the house there was still no sign that any heard. Sydney came down the step.

'I'll try another way,—I may have better fortune at the back.'

He led the way round to the rear, Mr Holt and I following in single file. There the place seemed in worse case even than in the front. There were two empty rooms on the ground floor at the back,—there was no mistake about their being empty, without the slightest difficulty we could see right into them. One was apparently intended for a kitchen and wash-house combined, the other for a sitting-room. There was not a stick of furniture in either, nor the slightest sign of human habitation. Sydney commented on the fact.

'Not only is it plain that no one lives in these charming apartments, but it looks to me uncommonly as if no one ever had lived in them.'

To my thinking Mr Holt's agitation was increasing every moment. For some reason of his own, Sydney took no notice of it whatever,—possibly because he judged that to do so would only tend to make it worse. An odd change had even taken place in Mr Holt's voice,—he spoke in a sort of tremulous falsetto.

'It was only the front room which I saw.'

'Very good; then, before very long, you shall see that front room again.'

Sydney rapped with his knuckles on the glass panels of the back door. He tried the handle; when it refused to yield he gave it a vigorous shaking. He saluted the dirty windows,—so far as succeeding in attracting attention was concerned, entirely in vain. Then he turned again to Mr Holt,—half mockingly.

'I call you to witness that I have used every lawful means to gain the favourable notice of your mysterious friend. I must therefore beg to stand excused if I try something slightly unlawful for a change. It is true that you found the window already open; but, in my case, it soon will be.'

He took a knife out of his pocket, and, with the open blade, forced back the catch,—as I am told that burglars do. Then he lifted the sash.

'Behold!' he exclaimed. 'What did I tell you?—Now, my dear Marjorie, if I get in first and Mr Holt gets in after me, we shall be in a position to open the door for you.'

I immediately saw through his design.

'No, Mr Atherton; you will get in first, and I will get in after you, through the window,—before Mr Holt. I don't intend to wait for you to open the door.'

Sydney raised his hands and opened his eyes, as if grieved at my want of confidence. But I did not mean to be left in the lurch, to wait their pleasure, while on pretence of opening the door, they searched the house. So Sydney climbed in first, and I second,—it was not a difficult operation, since the window-sill was under three feet from the ground—and Mr Holt last. Directly we were in, Sydney put his hand up to his mouth, and shouted.

'Is there anybody in this house? If so, will he kindly step this way, as there is someone wishes to see him.'

His words went echoing through the empty rooms in a way which was almost uncanny. I suddenly realised that if, after all, there did happen to be somebody in the house, and he was at all disagreeable, our presence on his premises might prove rather difficult to explain. However, no one answered. While I was waiting for Sydney to make the next move, he diverted my attention to Mr Holt.

'Hollo, Holt, what's the matter with you? Man, don't play the fool like that!'

Something was the matter with Mr Holt. He was trembling all over as if attacked by a shaking palsy. Every muscle in his body seemed twitching at once. A strained look had come on his face, which was not nice to see. He spoke as with an effort.

'I'm all right.—It's nothing.'

'Oh, is it nothing? Then perhaps you'll drop it. Where's that brandy?' I handed Sydney the flask. 'Here, swallow this.'

Mr Holt swallowed the cupful of neat spirit which Sydney offered without an attempt at parley. Beyond bringing some remnants of colour to his ashen cheeks it seemed to have no effect on him whatever. Sydney eyed him with a meaning in his glance which I was at a loss to understand.

'Listen to me, my lad. Don't think you can deceive me by playing any of your fool tricks, and don't delude yourself into supposing that I shall treat you as anything but dangerous if you do. I've got this.' He showed the revolver of papa's which I had lent him. 'Don't imagine that Miss Lindon's presence will deter me from using it.'

Why he addressed Mr Holt in such a strain surpassed my comprehension. Mr Holt, however, evinced not the faintest symptoms of resentment,—he had become, on a sudden, more like an automaton than a man. Sydney continued to gaze at him as if he would have liked his glance to penetrate to his inmost soul.

'Keep in front of me, if you please, Mr Holt, and lead the way to this mysterious apartment in which you claim to have had such a remarkable

experience.'

Of me he asked in a whisper,

'Did you bring a revolver?'

I was startled.

'A revolver?—The idea!—How absurd you are!'

Sydney said something which was so rude—and so uncalled for!—that it was worthy of papa in his most violent moments.

'I'd sooner be absurd than a fool in petticoats.' I was so angry that I did not know what to say,—and before I could say it he went on. 'Keep your eyes and ears well open; be surprised at nothing you see or hear. Stick close to me. And for goodness sake remain mistress of as many of your senses as you conveniently can.'

I had not the least idea what was the meaning of it all. To me there seemed nothing to make such a pother about. And yet I was conscious of a fluttering of the heart as if there soon might be something, I knew Sydney sufficiently well to be aware that he was one of the last men in the world to make a fuss without reason,—and that he was as little likely to suppose that there was a reason when as a matter of fact there was none.

Mr Holt led the way, as Sydney desired—or, rather, commanded, to the door of the room which was in front of the house. The door was closed. Sydney tapped on a panel. All was silence. He tapped again.

'Anyone in there?' he demanded.

As there was still no answer, he tried the handle. The door was locked.

'The first sign of the presence of a human being we have had,—doors don't lock themselves. It's just possible that there may have been someone or something about the place, at some time or other, after all.'

Grasping the handle firmly, he shook it with all his might,—as he had done with the door at the back. So flimsily was the place constructed that he made even the walls to tremble.

'Within there!—if anyone is in there!—if you don't open this door, I shall.'

There was no response.

So be it!—I'm going to pursue my wild career of defiance of established law and order, and gain admission in one way, if I can't in another.'

Putting his right shoulder against the door, he pushed with his whole force. Sydney is a big man, and very strong, and the door was weak. Shortly, the lock yielded before the continuous pressure, and the door flew open. Sydney whistled.

'So!—It begins to occur to me, Mr Holt, that that story of yours may not have been such pure romance as it seemed.'

It was plain enough that, at any rate, this room had been occupied, and that recently,—and, if his taste in furniture could be taken as a test, by an eccentric occupant to boot. My own first impression was that there was someone, or something, living in it still,—an uncomfortable odour greeted our nostrils, which was suggestive of some evil-smelling animal. Sydney seemed to share my thought.

'A pretty perfume, on my word! Let's shed a little more light on the subject, and see what causes it. Marjorie, stop where you are until I tell you.'

I had noticed nothing, from without, peculiar about the appearance of the blind which screened the window, but it must have been made of some unusually thick material, for, within, the room was strangely dark. Sydney entered, with the intention of drawing up the blind, but he had scarcely taken a couple of steps when he stopped.

'What's that?'

'It's it,' said Mr Holt, in a voice which was so unlike his own that it was scarcely recognisable.

'It?—What do you mean by it?'

'The Beetle!'

Judging from the sound of his voice Sydney was all at once in a state of odd excitement.

'Oh, is it!—Then, if this time I don't find out the how and the why and the wherefore of that charming conjuring trick, I'll give you leave to write me down an ass,—with a great, big A.'

He rushed farther into the room,—apparently his efforts to lighten it did not meet with the immediate success which he desired.

'What's the matter with this confounded blind? There's no cord! How do you pull it up?—What the—'

In the middle of his sentence Sydney ceased speaking. Suddenly Mr Holt, who was standing by my side on the threshold of the door, was seized with such a fit of trembling, that, fearing he was going to fall, I caught him by the arm. A most extraordinary look was on his face. His eyes were distended to their fullest width, as if with horror at what they saw in front of them. Great beads of perspiration were on his forehead.

'It's coming!' he screamed.

Exactly what happened I do not know. But, as he spoke, I heard, proceeding from the room, the sound of the buzzing of wings. Instantly it recalled my experiences of the night before,—as it did so I was conscious of a most unpleasant qualm. Sydney swore a great oath, as if he were beside himself with rage.

'If you won't go up, you shall come down.'

I suppose, failing to find a cord, he seized the blind from below, and dragged it down,—it came, roller and all, clattering to the floor. The room

was all in light. I hurried in. Sydney was standing by the window, with a look of perplexity upon his face which, under any other circumstances, would have been comical. He was holding papa's revolver in his hand, and was glaring round and round the room, as if wholly at a loss to understand how it was he did not see what he was looking for.

'Marjorie!' he exclaimed. 'Did you hear anything?'

'Of course I did. It was that which I heard last night,—which so frightened me.'

'Oh, was it? Then, by—' in his excitement he must have been completely oblivious of my presence, for he used the most terrible language, 'when I find it there'll be a small discussion. It can't have got out of the room,—I know the creature's here; I not only heard it, I felt it brush against my face.—Holt, come inside and shut that door.'

Mr Holt raised his arms, as if he were exerting himself to make a forward movement,—but he remained rooted to the spot on which he stood.

'I can't!' he cried.

'You can't.'—Why?'

'It won't let me.'

'What won't let you?'

'The Beetle!'

Sydney moved till he was close in front of him. He surveyed him with eager eyes. I was just at his back. I heard him murmur,—possibly to me.

'By George!—It's just as I thought!—The beggar's hypnotised!'

Then he said aloud,

'Can you see it now?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'Behind you.'

As Mr Holt spoke, I again heard, quite close to me, that buzzing sound. Sydney seemed to hear it too,—it caused him to swing round so quickly that he all but whirled me off my feet.

'I beg your pardon, Marjorie, but this is of the nature of an unparalleled experience,—didn't you hear something then?'

'I did,—distinctly; it was close to me,—within an inch or two of my face.'

We stared about us, then back at each other,—there was nothing else to be seen. Sydney laughed, doubtfully.

'It's uncommonly queer. I don't want to suggest that there are visions about, or I might suspect myself of softening of the brain. But—it's queer. There's a trick about it somewhere, I am convinced; and no doubt it's simple enough when you know how it's done,—but the difficulty is to find that out.—Do you think our friend over there is acting?'

'He looks to me as if he were ill.'

'He does look ill. He also looks as if he were hypnotised. If he is, it must be by suggestion,—and that's what makes me doubtful, because it will be the first plainly established case of hypnotism by suggestion I've encountered.—Holt!'

'Yes.'

'That,' said Sydney in my ear, 'is the voice and that is the manner of a hypnotised man, but, on the other hand, a person under influence generally responds only to the hypnotist,—which is another feature about our peculiar friend which arouses my suspicions.' Then, aloud, 'Don't stand there like an idiot,—come inside.'

Again Mr Holt made an apparently futile effort to do as he was bid. It was painful to look at him,—he was like a feeble, frightened, tottering child, who would come on, but cannot.

'I can't.'

'No nonsense, my man! Do you think that this is a performance in a booth, and that I am to be taken in by all the humbug of the professional mesmerist? Do as I tell you,—come into the room.'

There was a repetition, on Mr Holt's part, of his previous pitiful struggle; this time it was longer sustained than before,—but the result was the same.

'I can't!' he wailed.

'Then I say you can,—and shall! If I pick you up, and carry you, perhaps you will not find yourself so helpless as you wish me to suppose.'

Sydney moved forward to put his threat into execution. As he did so, a strange alteration took place in Mr Holt's demeanour.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SINGULAR BEHAVIOUR OF MR HOLT

I was standing in the middle of the room, Sydney was between the door and me; Mr Holt was in the hall, just outside the doorway, in which he, so to speak, was framed. As Sydney advanced towards him he was seized with a kind of convulsion,—he had to lean against the side of the door to save himself from falling. Sydney paused, and watched. The spasm went as suddenly as it came,—Mr Holt became as motionless as he had just now been the other way. He stood in an attitude of febrile expectancy,—his chin raised, his head thrown back, his eyes glancing upwards,—with the dreadful fixed glare which had come into them ever since we had entered the house. He looked to me as if his every faculty was strained in the act of listening,—not a muscle in his body seemed to move; he was as rigid as a figure carved in stone. Presently the rigidity gave place to what, to an onlooker, seemed causeless agitation.

'I hear!' he exclaimed, in the most curious voice I had ever heard. 'I come!'

It was as though he was speaking to someone who was far away. Turning, he walked down the passage to the front door.

'Hollo!' cried Sydney. 'Where are you off to?'

We both of us hastened to see. He was fumbling with the latch; before we could reach him, the door was open, and he was through it. Sydney, rushing after him, caught him on the step and held him by the arm.

'What's the meaning of this little caper?—Where do you think you're going now?'

Mr Holt did not condescend to turn and look at him. He said, in the same dreamy, faraway, unnatural tone of voice,—and he kept his unwavering gaze fixed on what was apparently some distant object which was visible only to himself.

'I am going to him. He calls me.'

'Who calls you?'

'The Lord of the Beetle.'

Whether Sydney released his arm or not I cannot say. As he spoke, he seemed to me to slip away from Sydney's grasp. Passing through the gateway, turning to the right, he commenced to retrace his steps in the direction we had come. Sydney stared after him in unequivocal amazement. Then he looked at me.

'Well!—this is a pretty fix!—now what's to be done?'

'What's the matter with him?' I inquired. 'Is he mad?'

'There's method in his madness if he is. He's in the same condition in which he was that night I saw him come out of the Apostle's window.' Sydney has a horrible habit of calling Paul 'the Apostle'; I have spoken to him about it over and over again,—but my words have not made much impression. 'He ought to be followed,—he may be sailing off to that mysterious friend of his this instant.—But, on the other hand, he mayn't, and it may be nothing but a trick of our friend the conjurer's to get us away from this elegant abode of his. He's done me twice already, I don't want to be done again,—and I distinctly do not want him to return and find me missing. He's quite capable of taking the hint, and removing himself into the Ewigkeit,—when the clue to as pretty a mystery as ever I came across will have vanished.'

'I can stay,' I said.

'You?—Alone?'

He eyed me doubtingly,—evidently not altogether relishing the proposition.

'Why not? You might send the first person you meet,—policeman, cabman, or whoever it is—to keep me company. It seems a pity now that we dismissed that cab.'

'Yes, it does seem a pity.' Sydney was biting his lip. 'Confound that fellow! how fast he moves.'

Mr Holt was already nearing the end of the road.

'If you think it necessary, by all means follow to see where he goes,—you are sure to meet somebody whom you will be able to send before you have gone very far.'

'I suppose I shall.—You won't mind being left alone?'

'Why should I?—I'm not a child.'

Mr Holt, reaching the corner, turned it, and vanished out of sight. Sydney gave an exclamation of impatience.

'If I don't make haste I shall lose him. I'll do as you suggest—dispatch the first individual I come across to hold watch and ward with you.'

'That'll be all right.'

He started off at a run,—shouting to me as he went.

'It won't be five minutes before somebody comes!'

I waved my hand to him. I watched him till he reached the end of the road. Turning, he waved his hand to me. Then he vanished, as Mr Holt had done.

And I was alone.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TERROR BY DAY

My first impulse, after Sydney's disappearance, was to laugh. Why should he display anxiety on my behalf merely because I was to be the sole occupant of an otherwise empty house for a few minutes more or less,—and in broad daylight too! To say the least, the anxiety seemed unwarranted.

I lingered at the gate, for a moment or two, wondering what was at the bottom of Mr Holt's singular proceedings, and what Sydney really proposed to gain by acting as a spy upon his wanderings. Then I turned to re-enter the house. As I did so, another problem suggested itself to my mind,—what connection, of the slightest importance, could a man in Paul Lessingham's position have with the eccentric being who had established himself in such an unsatisfactory dwelling-place? Mr Holt's story I had only dimly understood,—it struck me that it would require a deal of understanding. It was more like a farrago of nonsense, an outcome of delirium, than a plain statement of solid facts. To tell the truth, Sydney had taken it more seriously than I expected. He seemed to see something in it which I emphatically did not. What was double Dutch to me, seemed clear as print to him. So far as I could judge, he actually had the presumption to imagine that Paul—my Paul!—Paul Lessingham!—the great Paul Lessingham!—was mixed up in the very mysterious adventures of poor, weak-minded, hysterical Mr Holt, in a manner which was hardly to his credit.

Of course, any idea of the kind was purely and simply balderdash. Exactly what bee Sydney had got in his bonnet, I could not guess. But I did know Paul. Only let me find myself face to face with the fantastic author of Mr Holt's weird tribulations, and I, a woman, single-handed, would do my best

to show him that whoever played pranks with Paul Lessingham trifled with edged tools.

I had returned to that historical front room which, according to Mr Holt, had been the scene of his most disastrous burglarious entry. Whoever had furnished it had had original notions of the resources of modern upholstery. There was not a table in the place,—no chair or couch, nothing to sit down upon except the bed. On the floor there was a marvellous carpet which was apparently of eastern manufacture. It was so thick, and so pliant to the tread, that moving over it was like walking on thousand-year-old turf. It was woven in gorgeous colours, and covered with—

When I discovered what it actually was covered with, I was conscious of a disagreeable sense of surprise.

It was covered with beetles!

All over it, with only a few inches of space between each, were representations of some peculiar kind of beetle,—it was the same beetle, over, and over, and over. The artist had woven his undesirable subject into the warp and woof of the material with such cunning skill that, as one continued to gaze, one began to wonder if by any possibility the creatures could be alive.

In spite of the softness of the texture, and the art—of a kind!—which had been displayed in the workmanship, I rapidly arrived at the conclusion that it was the most uncomfortable carpet I had ever seen. I wagged my finger at the repeated portrayals of the—to me!—unspeakable insect.

'If I had discovered that you were there before Sydney went, I think it just possible that I should have hesitated before I let him go.'

Then there came a revulsion of feeling. I shook myself.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Marjorie Lindon, to even think such nonsense. Are you all nerves and morbid imaginings,—you who have prided yourself on being so strong-minded! A pretty sort you are to do battle for anyone.—Why, they're only make-believes!'

Half involuntarily, I drew my foot over one of the creatures. Of course, it was nothing but imagination; but I seemed to feel it squelch beneath my shoe. It was disgusting.

'Come!' I cried. 'This won't do! As Sydney would phrase it,—am I going to make an idiot of myself?'

I turned to the window,—looking at my watch.

'It's more than five minutes ago since Sydney went. That companion of mine ought to be already on the way. I'll go and see if he is coming.'

I went to the gate. There was not a soul in sight. It was with such a distinct sense of disappointment that I perceived this was so, that I was in two minds what to do. To remain where I was, looking, with gaping eyes, for the policeman, or the cabman, or whoever it was Sydney was dispatching to act as my temporary associate, was tantamount to acknowledging myself a simpleton,—while I was conscious of a most unmistakable reluctance to return within the house.

Common sense, or what I took for common sense, however, triumphed, and, after loitering for another five minutes, I did go in again.

This time, ignoring, to the best of my ability, the beetles on the floor, I proceeded to expend my curiosity—and occupy my thoughts—in an examination of the bed. It only needed a very cursory examination, however, to show that the seeming bed was, in reality, none at all,—or if it was a bed after the manner of the Easterns it certainly was not after the fashion of the Britons. There was no framework,—nothing to represent the bedstead. It was simply a heap of rugs piled apparently indiscriminately upon the floor. A huge mass of them there seemed to be; of all sorts, and shapes, and sizes,—and materials too.

The top one was of white silk,—in quality, exquisite. It was of huge size, yet, with a little compression, one might almost have passed it through the proverbial wedding ring. So far as space admitted I spread it out in front of me. In the middle was a picture,—whether it was embroidered on the substance or woven in it, I could not quite make out. Nor, at first, could I

gather what it was the artist had intended to depict,—there was a brilliancy about it which was rather dazzling. By degrees, I realised that the lurid hues were meant for flames,—and, when one had got so far, one perceived that they were by no means badly imitated either. Then the meaning of the thing dawned on me,—it was a representation of a human sacrifice. In its way, as ghastly a piece of realism as one could see.

On the right was the majestic seated figure of a goddess. Her hands were crossed upon her knees, and she was naked from her waist upwards. I fancied it was meant for Isis. On her brow was perched a gaily-apparelled beetle—that ubiquitous beetle!—forming a bright spot of colour against her coppery skin,—it was an exact reproduction of the creatures which were imaged on the carpet. In front of the idol was an enormous fiery furnace. In the very heart of the flames was an altar. On the altar was a naked white woman being burned alive. There could be no doubt as to her being alive, for she was secured by chains in such a fashion that she was permitted a certain amount of freedom, of which she was availing herself to contort and twist her body into shapes which were horribly suggestive of the agony which she was enduring,—the artist, indeed, seemed to have exhausted his powers in his efforts to convey a vivid impression of the pains which were tormenting her.

'A pretty picture, on my word! A pleasant taste in art the garnitures of this establishment suggest! The person who likes to live with this kind of thing, especially as a covering to his bed, must have his own notions as to what constitute agreeable surroundings.'

As I continued staring at the thing, all at once it seemed as if the woman on the altar moved. It was preposterous, but she appeared to gather her limbs together, and turn half over.

'What can be the matter with me? Am I going mad? She can't be moving!'

If she wasn't, then certainly something was,—she was lifted right into the air. An idea occurred to me. I snatched the rug aside.

The mystery was explained!

A thin, yellow, wrinkled hand was protruding from amidst the heap of rugs,—it was its action which had caused the seeming movement of the figure on the altar. I stared, confounded. The hand was followed by an arm; the arm by a shoulder; the shoulder by a head,—and the most awful, hideous, wicked-looking face I had ever pictured even in my most dreadful dreams. A pair of baleful eyes were glaring up at mine.

I understood the position in a flash of startled amazement.

Sydney, in following Mr Holt, had started on a wild goose chase after all. I was alone with the occupant of that mysterious house,—the chief actor in Mr Holt's astounding tale. He had been hidden in the heap of rugs all the while.

BOOK IV

In Pursuit

The Conclusion of the Matter is extracted from the Case-Book of the Hon. Augustus Champnell, Confidential Agent.

CHAPTER XXXII

A NEW CLIENT

On the afternoon of Friday, June 2, 18—, I was entering in my case-book some memoranda having reference to the very curious matter of the Duchess of Datchet's Deed-box. It was about two o'clock. Andrews came in and laid a card upon my desk. On it was inscribed 'Mr Paul Lessingham.'

'Show Mr Lessingham in.'

Andrews showed him in. I was, of course, familiar with Mr Lessingham's appearance, but it was the first time I had had with him any personal communication. He held out his hand to me.

'You are Mr Champnell?'

'I am.'

'I believe that I have not had the honour of meeting you before, Mr Champnell, but with your father, the Earl of Glenlivet, I have the pleasure of some acquaintance.'

I bowed. He looked at me, fixedly, as if he were trying to make out what sort of man I was. 'You are very young, Mr Champnell.'

'I have been told that an eminent offender in that respect once asserted that youth is not of necessity a crime.'

'And you have chosen a singular profession,—one in which one hardly looks for juvenility.'

'You yourself, Mr Lessingham, are not old. In a statesman one expects grey hairs.—I trust that I am sufficiently ancient to be able to do you service.'

He smiled.

'I think it possible. I have heard of you more than once, Mr Champnell, always to your advantage. My friend, Sir John Seymour, was telling me, only the other day, that you have recently conducted for him some business, of a very delicate nature, with much skill and tact; and he warmly advised me, if ever I found myself in a predicament, to come to you. I find myself in a predicament now.'

Again I bowed.

'A predicament, I fancy, of an altogether unparalleled sort. I take it that anything I may say to you will be as though it were said to a father confessor.'

'You may rest assured of that.'

'Good.—Then, to make the matter clear to you I must begin by telling you a story,—if I may trespass on your patience to that extent. I will endeavour not to be more verbose than the occasion requires.'

I offered him a chair, placing it in such a position that the light from the window would have shone full upon his face. With the calmest possible air, as if unconscious of my design, he carried the chair to the other side of my desk, twisting it right round before he sat on it,—so that now the light was at his back and on my face. Crossing his legs, clasping his hands about his knee, he sat in silence for some moments, as if turning something over in his mind. He glanced round the room.

'I suppose, Mr Champnell, that some singular tales have been told in here.'

'Some very singular tales indeed. I am never appalled by singularity. It is my normal atmosphere.'

'And yet I should be disposed to wager that you have never listened to so strange a story as that which I am about to tell you now. So astonishing, indeed, is the chapter in my life which I am about to open out to you, that I have more than once had to take myself to task, and fit the incidents together with mathematical accuracy in order to assure myself of its perfect truth.'

He paused. There was about his demeanour that suggestion of reluctance which I not uncommonly discover in individuals who are about to take the skeletons from their cupboards and parade them before my eyes. His next remark seemed to point to the fact that he perceived what was passing through my thoughts.

'My position is not rendered easier by the circumstance that I am not of a communicative nature. I am not in sympathy with the spirit of the age which craves for personal advertisement. I hold that the private life even of a public man should be held inviolate. I resent, with peculiar bitterness, the attempts of prying eyes to peer into matters which, as it seems to me, concern myself alone. You must, therefore, bear with me, Mr Champnell, if I seem awkward in disclosing to you certain incidents in my career which I had hoped would continue locked in the secret depository of my own bosom, at any rate till I was carried to the grave. I am sure you will suffer me to stand excused if I frankly admit that it is only an irresistible chain of incidents which has constrained me to make of you a confidant.'

'My experience tells me, Mr Lessingham, that no one ever does come to me until they are compelled. In that respect I am regarded as something worse even than a medical man.'

A wintry smile flitted across his features,—it was clear that he regarded me as a good deal worse than a medical man. Presently he began to tell me one of the most remarkable tales which even I had heard. As he proceeded I understood how strong, and how natural, had been his desire for reticence. On the mere score of credibility he must have greatly preferred to have kept his own counsel. For my part I own, unreservedly, that I should have deemed the tale incredible had it been told me by Tom, Dick, or Harry, instead of by Paul Lessingham.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT CAME OF LOOKING THROUGH A LATTICE

He began in accents which halted not a little. By degrees his voice grew firmer. Words came from him with greater fluency.

'I am not yet forty. So when I tell you that twenty years ago I was a mere youth I am stating what is a sufficiently obvious truth. It is twenty years ago since the events of which I am going to speak transpired.

'I lost both my parents when I was quite a lad, and by their death I was left in a position in which I was, to an unusual extent in one so young, my own master. I was ever of a rambling turn of mind, and when, at the mature age of eighteen, I left school, I decided that I should learn more from travel than from sojourn at a university. So, since there was no one to say me nay, instead of going either to Oxford or Cambridge, I went abroad. After a few months I found myself in Egypt,—I was down with fever at Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo. I had caught it by drinking polluted water during an excursion with some Bedouins to Palmyra.

'When the fever had left me I went out one night into the town in search of amusement. I went, unaccompanied, into the native quarter, not a wise thing to do, especially at night, but at eighteen one is not always wise, and I was weary of the monotony of the sick-room, and eager for something which had in it a spice of adventure, I found myself in a street which I have reason to believe is no longer existing. It had a French name, and was called the Rue de Rabagas,—I saw the name on the corner as I turned into it, and it has left an impress on the tablets of my memory which is never likely to be obliterated.

'It was a narrow street, and, of course, a dirty one, ill-lit, and, apparently, at the moment of my appearance, deserted. I had gone, perhaps, half-way down its tortuous length, blundering more than once into the kennel, wondering what fantastic whim had brought me into such unsavoury quarters, and what would happen to me if, as seemed extremely possible, I lost my way. On a sudden my ears were saluted by sounds which proceeded from a house which I was passing,—sounds of music and of singing.

'I paused. I stood awhile to listen.

'There was an open window on my right, which was screened by latticed blinds. From the room which was behind these blinds the sounds were coming. Someone was singing, accompanied by an instrument resembling a guitar,—singing uncommonly well.'

Mr Lessingham stopped. A stream of recollection seemed to come flooding over him. A dreamy look came into his eyes.

'I remember it all as clearly as if it were yesterday. How it all comes back,—the dirty street, the evil smells, the imperfect light, the girl's voice filling all at once the air. It was a girl's voice,—full, and round, and sweet; an organ seldom met with, especially in such a place as that. She sang a little chansonnette, which, just then, half Europe was humming,—it occurred in an opera which they were acting at one of the Boulevard theatres,—"La P'tite Voyageuse." The effect, coming so unexpectedly, was startling. I stood and heard her to an end.

'Inspired by I know not what impulse of curiosity, when the song was finished, I moved one of the lattice blinds a little aside, so as to enable me to get a glimpse of the singer. I found myself looking into what seemed to be a sort of cafe,—one of those places which are found all over the Continent, in which women sing in order to attract custom. There was a low platform at one end of the room, and on it were seated three women. One of them had evidently just been accompanying her own song,—she still had an instrument of music in her hands, and was striking a few idle notes. The other two had been acting as audience. They were attired in the fantastic apparel which the women who are found in such places generally wear. An

old woman was sitting knitting in a corner, whom I took to be the inevitable patronne. With the exception of these four the place was empty.

'They must have heard me touch the lattice, or seen it moving, for no sooner did I glance within than the three pairs of eyes on the platform were raised and fixed on mine. The old woman in the corner alone showed no consciousness of my neighbourhood. We eyed one another in silence for a second or two. Then the girl with the harp,—the instrument she was manipulating proved to be fashioned more like a harp than a guitar—called out to me,

"Entrez, monsieur!—Soye le bienvenu!"

'I was a little tired. Rather curious as to whereabouts I was,—the place struck me, even at that first momentary glimpse, as hardly in the ordinary line of that kind of thing. And not unwilling to listen to a repetition of the former song, or to another sung by the same singer.

"On condition," I replied, "that you sing me another song."

"Ah, monsieur, with the greatest pleasure in the world I will sing you twenty."

'She was almost, if not quite, as good as her word. She entertained me with song after song. I may safely say that I have seldom if ever heard melody more enchanting. All languages seemed to be the same to her. She sang in French and Italian, German and English,—in tongues with which I was unfamiliar. It was in these Eastern harmonies that she was most successful. They were indescribably weird and thrilling, and she delivered them with a verve and sweetness which was amazing. I sat at one of the little tables with which the room was dotted, listening entranced.

'Time passed more rapidly than I supposed. While she sang I sipped the liquor with which the old woman had supplied me. So enthralled was I by the display of the girl's astonishing gifts that I did not notice what it was I was drinking. Looking back I can only surmise that it was some poisonous concoction of the creature's own. That one small glass had on me the strangest effect. I was still weak from the fever which I had only just

succeeded in shaking off, and that, no doubt, had something to do with the result. But, as I continued to sit, I was conscious that I was sinking into a lethargic condition, against which I was incapable of struggling.

'After a while the original performer ceased her efforts, and, her companions taking her place, she came and joined me at the little table. Looking at my watch I was surprised to perceive the lateness of the hour. I rose to leave. She caught me by the wrist.

"Do not go," she said;—she spoke English of a sort, and with the queerest accent. "All is well with you. Rest awhile."

'You will smile,—I should smile, perhaps, were I the listener instead of you, but it is the simple truth that her touch had on me what I can only describe as a magnetic influence. As her fingers closed upon my wrist, I felt as powerless in her grasp as if she held me with bands of steel. What seemed an invitation was virtually a command. I had to stay whether I would or wouldn't. She called for more liquor, and at what again was really her command I drank of it. I do not think that after she touched my wrist I uttered a word. She did all the talking. And, while she talked, she kept her eyes fixed on my face. Those eyes of hers! They were a devil's. I can positively affirm that they had on me a diabolical effect. They robbed me of my consciousness, of my power of volition, of my capacity to think,—they made me as wax in her hands. My last recollection of that fatal night is of her sitting in front of me, bending over the table, stroking my wrist with her extended fingers, staring at me with her awful eyes. After that, a curtain seems to descend. There comes a period of oblivion.'

Mr Lessingham ceased. His manner was calm and self-contained enough; but, in spite of that I could see that the mere recollection of the things which he told me moved his nature to its foundations. There was eloquence in the drawn lines about his mouth, and in the strained expression of his eyes.

So far his tale was sufficiently commonplace. Places such as the one which he described abound in the Cairo of to-day; and many are the Englishmen who have entered them to their exceeding bitter cost. With that keen intuition which has done him yeoman's service in the political arena, Mr Lessingham at once perceived the direction my thoughts were taking.

'You have heard this tale before?—No doubt. And often. The traps are many, and the fools and the unwary are not a few. The singularity of my experience is still to come. You must forgive me if I seem to stumble in the telling. I am anxious to present my case as baldly, and with as little appearance of exaggeration as possible. I say with as little appearance, for some appearance of exaggeration I fear is unavoidable. My case is so unique, and so out of the common run of our every-day experience, that the plainest possible statement must smack of the sensational.

'As, I fancy, you have guessed, when understanding returned to me, I found myself in an apartment with which I was unfamiliar. I was lying, undressed, on a heap of rugs in a corner of a low-pitched room which was furnished in a fashion which, when I grasped the details, filled me with amazement. By my side knelt the Woman of the Songs. Leaning over, she wooed my mouth with kisses. I cannot describe to you the sense of horror and of loathing with which the contact of her lips oppressed me. There was about her something so unnatural, so inhuman, that I believe even then I could have destroyed her with as little sense of moral turpitude as if she had been some noxious insect.

""Where am I?" I exclaimed.

""You are with the children of Isis," she replied. What she meant I did not know, and do not to this hour. "You are in the hands of the great goddess,—of the mother of men."

""How did I come here?"

""By the loving kindness of the great mother."

'I do not, of course, pretend to give you the exact text of her words, but they were to that effect.

'Half raising myself on the heap of rugs, I gazed about me,—and was astounded at what I saw.

'The place in which I was, though the reverse of lofty, was of considerable size,—I could not conceive whereabouts it could be. The walls and roof

were of bare stone,—as though the whole had been hewed out of the solid rock. It seemed to be some sort of temple, and was redolent with the most extraordinary odour. An altar stood about the centre, fashioned out of a single block of stone. On it a fire burned with a faint blue flame,—the fumes which rose from it were no doubt chiefly responsible for the prevailing perfumes. Behind it was a huge bronze figure, more than life size. It was in a sitting posture, and represented a woman. Although it resembled no portrayal of her I have seen either before or since, I came afterwards to understand that it was meant for Isis. On the idol's brow was poised a beetle. That the creature was alive seemed clear, for, as I looked at it, it opened and shut its wings.

'If the one on the forehead of the goddess was the only live beetle which the place contained, it was not the only representation. It was modelled in the solid stone of the roof, and depicted in flaming colours on hangings which here and there were hung against the walls. Wherever the eye turned it rested on a scarab. The effect was bewildering. It was as though one saw things through the distorted glamour of a nightmare. I asked myself if I were not still dreaming; if my appearance of consciousness were not after all a mere delusion; if I had really regained my senses.

'And, here, Mr Champnell, I wish to point out, and to emphasise the fact, that I am not prepared to positively affirm what portion of my adventures in that extraordinary, and horrible place, was actuality, and what the product of a feverish imagination. Had I been persuaded that all I thought I saw, I really did see, I should have opened my lips long ago, let the consequences to myself have been what they might. But there is the crux. The happenings were of such an incredible character, and my condition was such an abnormal one,—I was never really myself from the first moment to the last—that I have hesitated, and still do hesitate, to assert where, precisely, fiction ended and fact began.

'With some misty notion of testing my actual condition I endeavoured to get off the heap of rugs on which I reclined. As I did so the woman at my side laid her hand against my chest, lightly. But, had her gentle pressure been the equivalent of a ton of iron, it could not have been more effectual. I collapsed, sank back upon the rugs, and lay there, panting for breath,

wondering if I had crossed the border line which divides madness from sanity.

"Let me get up!—let me go!" I gasped.

"Nay," she murmured, "stay with me yet awhile, O my beloved."

'And again she kissed me.'

Once more Mr Lessingham paused. An involuntary shudder went all over him. In spite of the evidently great effort which he was making to retain his self-control his features were contorted by an anguished spasm. For some seconds he seemed at a loss to find words to enable him to continue.

When he did go on, his voice was harsh and strained.

'I am altogether incapable of even hinting to you the nauseous nature of that woman's kisses. They filled me with an indescribable repulsion. I look back at them with a feeling of physical, mental, and moral horror, across an interval of twenty years. The most dreadful part of it was that I was wholly incapable of offering even the faintest resistance to her caresses. I lay there like a log. She did with me as she would, and in dumb agony I endured.'

He took his handkerchief from his pocket, and, although the day was cool, with it he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

'To dwell in detail on what occurred during my involuntary sojourn in that fearful place is beyond my power. I cannot even venture to attempt it. The attempt, were it made, would be futile, and, to me, painful beyond measure. I seem to have seen all that happened as in a glass darkly,—with about it all an element of unreality. As I have already remarked, the things which revealed themselves, dimly, to my perception, seemed too bizarre, too hideous, to be true.

'It was only afterwards, when I was in a position to compare dates, that I was enabled to determine what had been the length of my imprisonment. It appears that I was in that horrible den more than two months,—two unspeakable months. And the whole time there were comings and goings, a

phantasmagoric array of eerie figures continually passed to and fro before my hazy eyes. What I judge to have been religious services took place; in which the altar, the bronze image, and the beetle on its brow, figure largely. Not only were they conducted with a bewildering confusion of mysterious rites, but, if my memory is in the least degree trustworthy, they were orgies of nameless horrors. I seem to have seen things take place at them at the mere thought of which the brain reels and trembles.

'Indeed it is in connection with the cult of the obscene deity to whom these wretched creatures paid their scandalous vows that my most awful memories seem to have been associated. It may have been—I hope it was, a mirage born of my half delirious state, but it seemed to me that they offered human sacrifices.'

When Mr Lessingham said this, I pricked up my ears. For reasons of my own, which will immediately transpire, I had been wondering if he would make any reference to a human sacrifice. He noted my display of interest,—but misapprehended the cause.

'I see you start, I do not wonder. But I repeat that unless I was the victim of some extraordinary species of double sight—in which case the whole business would resolve itself into the fabric of a dream, and I should indeed thank God!—I saw, on more than one occasion, a human sacrifice offered on that stone altar, presumably to the grim image which looked down on it. And, unless I err, in each case the sacrificial object was a woman, stripped to the skin, as white as you or I,—and before they burned her they subjected her to every variety of outrage of which even the minds of demons could conceive. More than once since then I have seemed to hear the shrieks of the victims ringing through the air, mingled with the triumphant cries of her frenzied murderers, and the music of their harps.

'It was the cumulative horrors of such a scene which gave me the strength, or the courage, or the madness, I know not which it was, to burst the bonds which bound me, and which, even in the bursting, made of me, even to this hour, a haunted man.

'There had been a sacrifice,—unless, as I have repeatedly observed, the whole was nothing but a dream. A woman—a young and lovely

Englishwoman, if I could believe the evidence of my own eyes, had been outraged, and burnt alive, while I lay there helpless, looking on. The business was concluded. The ashes of the victim had been consumed by the participants. The worshippers had departed. I was left alone with the woman of the songs, who apparently acted as the guardian of that worse than slaughterhouse. She was, as usual after such an orgie, rather a devil than a human being, drunk with an insensate frenzy, delirious with inhuman longings. As she approached to offer to me her loathed caresses, I was on a sudden conscious of something which I had not felt before when in her company. It was as though something had slipped away from me,—some weight which had oppressed me, some bond by which I had been bound. I was aroused, all at once, to a sense of freedom; to a knowledge that the blood which coursed through my veins was after all my own, that I was master of my own honour.

'I can only suppose that through all those weeks she had kept me there in a state of mesmeric stupor. That, taking advantage of the weakness which the fever had left behind, by the exercise of her diabolical arts, she had not allowed me to pass out of a condition of hypnotic trance. Now, for some reason, the cord was loosed. Possibly her absorption in her religious duties had caused her to forget to tighten it. Anyhow, as she approached me, she approached a man, and one who, for the first time for many a day, was his own man. She herself seemed wholly unconscious of anything of the kind. As she drew nearer to me, and nearer, she appeared to be entirely oblivious of the fact that I was anything but the fibreless, emasculated creature which, up to that moment, she had made of me.

'But she knew it when she touched me,—when she stooped to press her lips to mine. At that instant the accumulating rage which had been smouldering in my breast through all those leaden torturing hours, sprang into flame. Leaping off my couch of rugs, I flung my hands about her throat,—and then she knew I was awake. Then she strove to tighten the cord which she had suffered to become unduly loose. Her baleful eyes were fixed on mine. I knew that she was putting out her utmost force to trick me of my manhood. But I fought with her like one possessed, and I conquered—in a fashion. I compressed her throat with my two hands as with an iron vice. I knew that I was struggling for more than life, that the odds were all against me, that I

was staking my all upon the casting of a die,—I stuck at nothing which could make me victor.

'Tighter and tighter my pressure grew,—I did not stay to think if I was killing her—till on a sudden—'

Mr Lessingham stopped. He stared with fixed, glassy eyes, as if the whole was being re-enacted in front of him. His voice faltered. I thought he would break down. But, with an effort, he continued.

'On a sudden, I felt her slipping from between my fingers. Without the slightest warning, in an instant she had vanished, and where, not a moment before, she herself had been, I found myself confronting a monstrous beetle,—a huge, writhing creation of some wild nightmare.

'At first the creature stood as high as I did. But, as I stared at it, in stupefied amazement,—as you may easily imagine,—the thing dwindled while I gazed. I did not stop to see how far the process of dwindling continued,—a stark raving madman for the nonce, I fled as if all the fiends in hell were at my heels.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

'How I reached the open air I cannot tell you,—I do not know. I have a confused recollection of rushing through vaulted passages, through endless corridors, of trampling over people who tried to arrest my passage,—and the rest is blank.

'When I again came to myself I was lying in the house of an American missionary named Clements. I had been found, at early dawn, stark naked, in a Cairo street, and picked up for dead. Judging from appearances I must have wandered for miles, all through the night. Whence I had come, or whither I was going, none could tell,—I could not tell myself. For weeks I hovered between life and death. The kindness of Mr and Mrs Clements was not to be measured by words. I was brought to their house a penniless, helpless, battered stranger, and they gave me all they had to offer, without money and without price,—with no expectation of an earthly reward. Let no one pretend that there is no Christian charity under the sun. The debt I owed that man and woman I was never able to repay. Before I was properly myself again, and in a position to offer some adequate testimony of the gratitude I felt, Mrs Clements was dead, drowned during an excursion on the Nile, and her husband had departed on a missionary expedition into Central Africa, from which he never returned.

'Although, in a measure, my physical health returned, for months after I had left the roof of my hospitable hosts, I was in a state of semi-imbecility. I suffered from a species of aphasia. For days together I was speechless, and could remember nothing,—not even my own name. And, when that stage had passed, and I began to move more freely among my fellows, for years I

was but a wreck of my former self. I was visited, at all hours of the day and night, by frightful—I know not whether to call them visions, they were real enough to me, but since they were visible to no one but myself, perhaps that is the word which best describes them. Their presence invariably plunged me into a state of abject terror, against which I was unable to even make a show of fighting. To such an extent did they embitter my existence, that I voluntarily placed myself under the treatment of an expert in mental pathology. For a considerable period of time I was under his constant supervision, but the visitations were as inexplicable to him as they were to me.

'By degrees, however, they became rarer and rarer, until at last I flattered myself that I had once more become as other men. After an interval, to make sure, I devoted myself to politics. Thenceforward I have lived, as they phrase it, in the public eye. Private life, in any peculiar sense of the term, I have had none.'

Mr Lessingham ceased. His tale was not uninteresting, and, to say the least of it, was curious. But I still was at a loss to understand what it had to do with me, or what was the purport of his presence in my room. Since he remained silent, as if the matter, so far as he was concerned, was at an end, I told him so.

'I presume, Mr Lessingham, that all this is but a prelude to the play. At present I do not see where it is that I come in.'

Still for some seconds he was silent. When he spoke his voice was grave and sombre, as if he were burdened by a weight of woe.

'Unfortunately, as you put it, all this has been but a prelude to the play. Were it not so I should not now stand in such pressing want of the services of a confidential agent,—that is, of an experienced man of the world, who has been endowed by nature with phenomenal perceptive faculties, and in whose capacity and honour I can place the completest confidence.'

I smiled,—the compliment was a pointed one.

'I hope your estimate of me is not too high.'

'I hope not,—for my sake, as well as for your own. I have heard great things of you. If ever man stood in need of all that human skill and acumen can do for him, I certainly am he.'

His words aroused my curiosity. I was conscious of feeling more interested than heretofore.

'I will do my best for you. Man can do no more. Only give my best a trial.'

'I will. At once.'

He looked at me long and earnestly. Then, leaning forward, he said, lowering his voice perhaps unconsciously,

'The fact is, Mr Champnell, that quite recently events have happened which threaten to bridge the chasm of twenty years, and to place me face to face with that plague spot of the past. At this moment I stand in imminent peril of becoming again the wretched thing I was when I fled from that den of all the devils. It is to guard me against this that I have come to you. I want you to unravel the tangled thread which threatens to drag me to my doom,—and, when unravelled to sunder it—for ever, if God wills!—in twain.'

'Explain.'

To be frank, for the moment I thought him mad. He went on.

'Three weeks ago, when I returned late one night from a sitting in the House of Commons, I found, on my study table, a sheet of paper on which there was a representation—marvellously like!—of the creature into which, as it seemed to me, the woman of the songs was transformed as I clutched her throat between my hands. The mere sight of it brought back one of those visitations of which I have told you, and which I thought I had done with for ever,—I was convulsed by an agony of fear, thrown into a state approximating to a paralysis both of mind and body.'

'But why?'

'I cannot tell you. I only know that I have never dared to allow my thoughts to recur to that last dread scene, lest the mere recurrence should drive me mad.'

'What was this you found upon your study table,—merely a drawing?'

'It was a representation, produced by what process I cannot say, which was so wonderfully, so diabolically, like the original, that for a moment I thought the thing itself was on my table.'

'Who put it there?'

'That is precisely what I wish you to find out,—what I wish you to make it your instant business to ascertain. I have found the thing, under similar circumstances, on three separate occasions, on my study table,—and each time it has had on me the same hideous effect.'

'Each time after you have returned from a late sitting in the House of Commons?'

'Exactly.'

'Where are these—what shall I call them—delineations?'

'That, again, I cannot tell you.'

'What do you mean?'

'What I say. Each time, when I recovered, the thing had vanished.'

'Sheet of paper and all?'

'Apparently,—though on that point I could not be positive. You will understand that my study table is apt to be littered with sheets of paper, and I could not absolutely determine that the thing had not stared at me from one of those. The delineation itself, to use your word, certainly had vanished.'

I began to suspect that this was a case rather for a doctor than for a man of my profession. And hinted as much.

'Don't you think it is possible, Mr Lessingham, that you have been overworking yourself—that you have been driving your brain too hard, and that you have been the victim of an optical delusion?'

'I thought so myself; I may say that I almost hoped so. But wait till I have finished. You will find that there is no loophole in that direction.'

He appeared to be recalling events in their due order. His manner was studiously cold,—as if he were endeavouring, despite the strangeness of his story, to impress me with the literal accuracy of each syllable he uttered.

'The night before last, on returning home, I found in my study a stranger.'

'A stranger?'

'Yes.—In other words, a burglar.'

'A burglar?—I see.—Go on.'

He had paused. His demeanour was becoming odder and odder.

'On my entry he was engaged in forcing an entry into my bureau. I need hardly say that I advanced to seize him. But—I could not.'

'You could not?—How do you mean you could not?'

'I mean simply what I say. You must understand that this was no ordinary felon. Of what nationality he was I cannot tell you. He only uttered two words, and they were certainly in English, but apart from that he was dumb. He wore no covering on his head or feet. Indeed, his only garment was a long dark flowing cloak which, as it fluttered about him, revealed that his limbs were bare.'

'An unique costume for a burglar.'

'The instant I saw him I realised that he was in some way connected with that adventure in the Rue de Rabagas. What he said and did, proved it to the hilt.'

'What did he say and do?'

'As I approached to effect his capture, he pronounced aloud two words which recalled that awful scene the recollection of which always lingers in my brain, and of which I never dare to permit myself to think. Their very utterance threw me into a sort of convulsion.'

'What were the words?'

Mr Lessingham opened his mouth,—and shut it. A marked change took place in the expression of his countenance. His eyes became fixed and staring,—resembling the glassy orbs of the somnambulist. For a moment I feared that he was going to give me an object lesson in the 'visitations' of which I had heard so much. I rose, with a view of offering him assistance. He motioned me back.

'Thank you.—It will pass away.'

His voice was dry and husky,—unlike his usual silvern tones. After an uncomfortable interval he managed to continue.

'You see for yourself, Mr Champnell, what a miserable weakling, when this subject is broached, I still remain. I cannot utter the words the stranger uttered, I cannot even write them down. For some inscrutable reason they have on me an effect similar to that which spells and incantations had on people in tales of witchcraft.'

'I suppose, Mr Lessingham, that there is no doubt that this mysterious stranger was not himself an optical delusion?'

'Scarcely. There is the evidence of my servants to prove the contrary.'

'Did your servants see him?'

'Some of them,—yes. Then there is the evidence of the bureau. The fellow had smashed the top right in two. When I came to examine the contents I learned that a packet of letters was missing. They were letters which I had received from Miss Lindon, a lady whom I hope to make my wife. This, also, I state to you in confidence.'

'What use would he be likely to make of them?'

'If matters stand as I fear they do, he might make a very serious misuse of them. If the object of these wretches, after all these years, is a wild revenge, they would be capable, having discovered what she is to me, of working Miss Lindon a fatal mischief,—or, at the very least, of poisoning her mind.'

'I see.—How did the thief escape,—did he, like the delineation, vanish into air?'

'He escaped by the much more prosaic method of dashing through the drawing-room window, and clambering down from the verandah into the street, where he ran right into someone's arms.'

'Into whose arms,—a constable's?'

'No; into Mr Atherton's,—Sydney Atherton's.'

'The inventor?'

'The same.—Do you know him?'

'I do. Sydney Atherton and I are friends of a good many years' standing.—But Atherton must have seen where he came from;—and, anyhow, if he was in the state of undress which you have described, why didn't he stop him?'

'Mr Atherton's reasons were his own. He did not stop him, and, so far as I can learn, he did not attempt to stop him. Instead, he knocked at my hall door to inform me that he had seen a man climb out of my window.'

'I happen to know that, at certain seasons, Atherton is a queer fish,—but that sounds very queer indeed.'

'The truth is, Mr Champnell, that, if it were not for Mr Atherton, I doubt if I should have troubled you even now. The accident of his being an acquaintance of yours makes my task easier.'

He drew his chair closer to me with an air of briskness which had been foreign to him before. For some reason, which I was unable to fathom, the introduction of Atherton's name seemed to have enlivened him. However, I was not long to remain in darkness. In half a dozen sentences he threw more light on the real cause of his visit to me than he had done in all that had gone before. His bearing, too, was more businesslike and to the point. For the first time I had some glimmerings of the politician,—alert, keen, eager,—as he is known to all the world.

'Mr Atherton, like myself, has been a postulant for Miss Lindon's hand. Because I have succeeded where he has failed, he has chosen to be angry. It seems that he has had dealings, either with my visitor of Tuesday night, or with some other his acquaintance, and he proposes to use what he has gleaned from him to the disadvantage of my character. I have just come from Mr Atherton. From hints he dropped I conclude that, probably during the last few hours, he has had an interview with someone who was connected in some way with that lurid patch in my career; that this person made so-called revelations, which were nothing but a series of monstrous lies; and these so-called revelations Mr Atherton has threatened, in so many words, to place before Miss Lindon. That is an eventuality which I wish to avoid. My own conviction is that there is at this moment in London an emissary from that den in the whilom Rue de Rabagas—for all I know it may be the Woman of the Songs herself. Whether the sole purport of this individual's presence is to do me injury, I am, as yet, in no position to say, but that it is proposed to work me mischief, at any rate, by the way, is plain. I believe that Mr Atherton knows more about this person's individuality and whereabouts than he has been willing, so far, to admit. I want you, therefore, to ascertain these things on my behalf; to find out what, and where, this person is, to drag her!—or him;—out into the light of day. In short, I want you to effectually protect me from the terrorism which threatens once more to overwhelm my mental and my physical powers,—which bids fair to destroy my intellect, my career, my life, my all.'

'What reason have you for suspecting that Mr Atherton has seen this individual of whom you speak,—has he told you so?'

'Practically,—yes.'

'I know Atherton well. In his not infrequent moments of excitement he is apt to use strong language, but it goes no further. I believe him to be the last person in the world to do anyone an intentional injustice, under any circumstances whatever. If I go to him, armed with credentials from you, when he understands the real gravity of the situation,—which it will be my business to make him do, I believe that, spontaneously, of his own accord, he will tell me as much about this mysterious individual as he knows himself.'

'Then go to him at once.'

'Good. I will. The result I will communicate to you.'

I rose from my seat. As I did so, someone rushed into the outer office with a din and a clatter. Andrews' voice, and another, became distinctly audible,—Andrews' apparently raised in vigorous expostulation. Raised, seemingly, in vain, for presently the door of my own particular sanctum was thrown open with a crash, and Mr Sydney Atherton himself came dashing in,—evidently conspicuously under the influence of one of those not infrequent 'moments of excitement' of which I had just been speaking.

CHAPTER XXXV

A BRINGER OF TIDINGS

Atherton did not wait to see who might or might not be present, but, without even pausing to take breath, he broke into full cry on the instant,—as is occasionally his wont.

'Champnell!—Thank goodness I've found you in!—I want you!—At once!—Don't stop to talk, but stick your hat on, and put your best foot forward, —I'll tell you all about it in the cab.'

I endeavoured to call his attention to Mr Lessingham's presence,—but without success.

'My dear fellow—'

When I had got as far as that he cut me short.

'Don't "dear fellow" me!—None of your jabber! And none of your excuses either! I don't care if you've got an engagement with the Queen, you'll have to chuck it. Where's that dashed hat of yours,—or are you going without it? Don't I tell you that every second cut to waste may mean the difference between life and death?—Do you want me to drag you down to the cab by the hair of your head?'

'I will try not to constrain you to quite so drastic a resource,—and I was coming to you at once in any case. I only want to call your attention to the fact that I am not alone.—Here is Mr Lessingham.'

In his harum-scarum haste Mr Lessingham had gone unnoticed. Now that his observation was particularly directed to him, Atherton started, turned, and glared at my latest client in a fashion which was scarcely flattering.

'Oh!—It's you, is it?—What the deuce are you doing here?'

Before Lessingham could reply to this most unceremonious query, Atherton, rushing forward, gripped him by the arm.

'Have you seen her?'

Lessingham, not unnaturally nonplussed by the other's curious conduct, stared at him in unmistakable amazement.

'Have I seen whom?'

'Marjorie Lindon!'

'Marjorie Lindon?'

Lessingham paused. He was evidently asking himself what the inquiry meant.

'I have not seen Miss Lindon since last night. Why do you ask?'

'Then Heaven help us!—As I'm a living man I believe he, she, or it has got her!'

His words were incomprehensible enough to stand in copious need of explanation,—as Mr Lessingham plainly thought.

'What is it that you mean, sir?'

'What I say,—I believe that that Oriental friend of yours has got her in her clutches,—if it is a "her;" goodness alone knows what the infernal conjurer's real sex may be.'

'Atherton!—Explain yourself!'

On a sudden Lessingham's tones rang out like a trumpet call.

'If damage comes to her I shall be fit to cut my throat,—and yours!'

Mr Lessingham's next proceeding surprised me,—I imagine it surprised Atherton still more. Springing at Sydney like a tiger, he caught him by the throat.

'You—you hound! Of what wretched folly have you been guilty? If so much as a hair of her head is injured you shall repay it me ten thousandfold!—You mischief-making, intermeddling, jealous fool!'

He shook Sydney as if he had been a rat,—then flung him from him headlong on to the floor. It reminded me of nothing so much as Othello's treatment of Iago. Never had I seen a man so transformed by rage. Lessingham seemed to have positively increased in stature. As he stood glowering down at the prostrate Sydney, he might have stood for a materialistic conception of human retribution.

Sydney, I take it, was rather surprised than hurt. For a moment or two he lay quite still. Then, lifting his head, he looked up his assailant. Then, raising himself to his feet, he shook himself,—as if with a view of learning if all his bones were whole. Putting his hands up to his neck, he rubbed it, gently. And he grinned.

'By God, Lessingham, there's more in you than I thought. After all, you are a man. There's some holding power in those wrists of yours,—they've nearly broken my neck. When this business is finished, I should like to put on the gloves with you, and fight it out. You're clean wasted upon politics,—Damn it, man, give me your hand!'

Mr Lessingham did not give him his hand. Atherton took it,—and gave it a hearty shake with both of his.

If the first paroxysm of his passion had passed, Lessingham was still sufficiently stern.

'Be so good as not to trifle, Mr Atherton. If what you say is correct, and the wretch to whom you allude really has Miss Lindon at her mercy, then the woman I love—and whom you also pretend to love!—stands in imminent peril not only of a ghastly death, but of what is infinitely worse than death.'

'The deuce she does!' Atherton wheeled round towards me. 'Champnell, haven't you got that dashed hat of yours yet? Don't stand there like a tailor's dummy, keeping me on tenter-hooks,—move yourself! I'll tell you all about it in the cab.—And, Lessingham, if you'll come with us I'll tell you too.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

WHAT THE TIDINGS WERE

Three in a hansom cab is not, under all circumstances, the most comfortable method of conveyance,—when one of the trio happens to be Sydney Atherton in one of his 'moments of excitement' it is distinctly the opposite; as, on that occasion, Mr Lessingham and I both quickly found. Sometimes he sat on my knees, sometimes on Lessingham's, and frequently, when he unexpectedly stood up, and all but precipitated himself on to the horse's back, on nobody's. In the eagerness of his gesticulations, first he knocked off my hat, then he knocked off Lessingham's, then his own, then all three together,—once, his own hat rolling into the mud, he sprang into the road, without previously going through the empty form of advising the driver of his intention, to pick it up. When he turned to speak to Lessingham, he thrust his elbow into my eye; and when he turned to speak to me, he thrust it into Lessingham's. Never, for one solitary instant, was he at rest, or either of us at ease. The wonder is that the gymnastics in which he incessantly indulged did not sufficiently attract public notice to induce a policeman to put at least a momentary period to our progress. Had speed not been of primary importance I should have insisted on the transference of the expedition to the somewhat wider limits of a four-wheeler.

His elucidation of the causes of his agitation was apparently more comprehensible to Lessingham than it was to me. I had to piece this and that together under considerable difficulties. By degrees I did arrive at something like a clear notion of what had actually taken place.

He commenced by addressing Lessingham,—and thrusting his elbow into my eye.

'Did Marjorie tell you about the fellow she found in the street?' Up went his arm to force the trap-door open overhead,—and off went my hat. 'Now then, William Henry!—let her go!—if you kill the horse I'll buy you another!'

We were already going much faster than, legally, we ought to have done,—but that, seemingly to him was not a matter of the slightest consequence. Lessingham replied to his inquiry.

'She did not.'

'You know the fellow I saw coming out of your drawing-room window?'

'Yes.'

'Well, Marjorie found him the morning after in front of her breakfast-room window—in the middle of the street. Seems he had been wandering about all night, unclothed,—in the rain and the mud, and all the rest of it,—in a condition of hypnotic trance.'

'Who is the——gentleman you are alluding to?'

'Says his name's Holt, Robert Holt.'

'Holt?—Is he an Englishman?'

'Very much so,—City quill-driver out of a shop,—stony broke absolutely! Got the chuck from the casual ward,—wouldn't let him in,—house full, and that sort of thing,—poor devil! Pretty passes you politicians bring men to!'

'Are you sure?'

'Of what?'

'Are you sure that this man, Robert Holt, is the same person whom, as you put it, you saw coming out of my drawing-room window?'

'Sure!—Of course I'm sure!—Think I didn't recognise him?—Besides, there was the man's own tale,—owned to it himself,—besides all the rest, which

sent one rushing Fulham way.'

'You must remember, Mr Atherton, that I am wholly in the dark as to what has happened. What has the man, Holt, to do with the errand on which we are bound?'

'Am I not coming to it? If you would let me tell the tale in my own way I should get there in less than no time, but you will keep on cutting in,—how the deuce do you suppose Champnell is to make head or tail of the business if you will persist in interrupting?—Marjorie took the beggar in,—he told his tale to her,—she sent for me—that was just now; caught me on the steps after I had been lunching with Dora Grayling. Holt re-dished his yarn—I smelt a rat—saw that a connection possibly existed between the thief who'd been playing confounded conjuring tricks off on to me and this interesting party down Fulham way—'

'What party down Fulham way?'

'This friend of Holt's—am I not telling you? There you are, you see,—won't let me finish! When Holt slipped through the window—which is the most sensible thing he seems to have done; if I'd been in his shoes I'd have slipped through forty windows!—dusky coloured charmer caught him on the hop,—doctored him—sent him out to commit burglary by deputy. I said to Holt, "Show us this agreeable little crib, young man." Holt was game—then Marjorie chipped in—she wanted to go and see it too. I said, "You'll be sorry if you do,"—that settled it! After that she'd have gone if she'd died,—I never did have a persuasive way with women. So off we toddled, Marjorie, Holt, and I, in a growler,—spotted the crib in less than no time,—invited ourselves in by the kitchen window—house seemed empty. Presently Holt became hypnotised before my eyes,—the best established case of hypnotism by suggestion I ever yet encountered—started off on a pilgrimage of one. Like an idiot I followed, leaving Marjorie to wait for me—'

'Alone?'

'Alone!—Am I not telling you?—Great Scott, Lessingham, in the House of Commons they must be hazy to think you smart! I said, "I'll send the first

sane soul I meet to keep you company." As luck would have it, I never met one,—only kids, and a baker, who wouldn't leave his cart, or take it with him either. I'd covered pretty nearly two miles before I came across a peeler,—and when I did the man was cracked—and he thought me mad, or drunk, or both. By the time I'd got myself within nodding distance of being run in for obstructing the police in the execution of their duty, without inducing him to move a single one of his twenty-four-inch feet, Holt was out of sight. So, since all my pains in his direction were clean thrown away, there was nothing left for me but to scurry back to Marjorie,—so I scurried, and I found the house empty, no one there, and Marjorie gone.'

'But, I don't quite follow—'

Atherton impetuously declined to allow Mr Lessingham to conclude.

'Of course you don't quite follow, and you'll follow still less if you will keep getting in front. I went upstairs and downstairs, inside and out—shouted myself hoarse as a crow—nothing was to be seen of Marjorie,—or heard; until, as I was coming down the stairs for about the five-and-fiftieth time, I stepped on something hard which was lying in the passage. I picked it up,—it was a ring; this ring. Its shape is not just what it was,—I'm not as light as gossamer, especially when I come jumping downstairs six at a time,—but what's left of it is here.'

Sydney held something in front of him. Mr Lessingham wriggled to one side to enable him to see. Then he made a snatch at it.

'It's mine!'

Sydney dodged it out of his reach.

'What do you mean, it's yours?'

'It's the ring I gave Marjorie for an engagement ring. Give it me, you hound!—unless you wish me to do you violence in the cab.'

With complete disregard of the limitations of space,—or of my comfort,—Lessingham thrust him vigorously aside. Then gripping Sydney by the

wrist, he seized the gaud,—Sydney yielding it just in time to save himself from being precipitated into the street. Ravished of his treasure, Sydney turned and surveyed the ravisher with something like a glance of admiration.

'Hang me, Lessingham, if I don't believe there is some warm blood in those fishlike veins of yours. Please the piper, I'll live to fight you after all,—with the bare ones, sir, as a gentleman should do.'

Lessingham seemed to pay no attention to him whatever. He was surveying the ring, which Sydney had trampled out of shape, with looks of the deepest concern.

'Marjorie's ring!—The one I gave her! Something serious must have happened to her before she would have dropped my ring, and left it lying where it fell.'

Atherton went on.

'That's it!—What has happened to her!—I'll be dashed if I know!—When it was clear that there she wasn't, I tore off to find out where she was. Came across old Lindon,—he knew nothing;—I rather fancy I startled him in the middle of Pall Mall, when I left he stared after me like one possessed, and his hat was lying in the gutter. Went home,—she wasn't there. Asked Dora Grayling,—she'd seen nothing of her. No one had seen anything of her,—she had vanished into air. Then I said to myself, "You're a first-class idiot, on my honour! While you're looking for her, like a lost sheep, the betting is that the girl's in Holt's friend's house the whole jolly time. When you were there, the chances are that she'd just stepped out for a stroll, and that now she's back again, and wondering where on earth you've gone!" So I made up my mind that I'd fly back and see,—because the idea of her standing on the front doorstep looking for me, while I was going off my nut looking for her, commended itself to what I call my sense of humour; and on my way it struck me that it would be the part of wisdom to pick up Champnell, because if there is a man who can be backed to find a needle in any amount of hay-stacks it is the great Augustus.—That horse has moved itself after all, because here we are. Now, cabman, don't go driving further on,—you'll

have to put a girdle round the earth if you do; because you'll have to reach this point again before you get your fare.—This is the magician's house!

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHAT WAS HIDDEN UNDER THE FLOOR

The cab pulled up in front of a tumbledown cheap 'villa' in an unfinished cheap neighbourhood,—the whole place a living monument of the defeat of the speculative builder.

Atherton leaped out on to the grass-grown rubble which was meant for a footpath.

'I don't see Marjorie looking for me on the doorstep.'

Nor did I,—I saw nothing but what appeared to be an unoccupied ramshackle brick abomination. Suddenly Sydney gave an exclamation.

'Hullo!—The front door's closed!'

I was hard at his heels.

'What do you mean?'

'Why, when I went I left the front door open. It looks as if I've made an idiot of myself after all, and Marjorie's returned,—let's hope to goodness that I have.'

He knocked. While we waited for a response I questioned him.

'Why did you leave the door open when you went?'

'I hardly know,—I imagine that it was with some dim idea of Marjorie's being able to get in if she returned while I was absent,—but the truth is I was in such a condition of helter skelter that I am not prepared to swear that I had any reasonable reason.'

'I suppose there is no doubt that you did leave it open?'

'Absolutely none,—on that I'll stake my life.'

'Was it open when you returned from your pursuit of Holt?'

'Wide open,—I walked straight in expecting to find her waiting for me in the front room,—I was struck all of a heap when I found she wasn't there.'

'Were there any signs of a struggle?'

'None,—there were no signs of anything. Everything was just as I had left it, with the exception of the ring which I trod on in the passage, and which Lessingham has.'

'If Miss Lindon has returned, it does not look as if she were in the house at present.'

It did not,—unless silence had such meaning. Atherton had knocked loudly three times without succeeding in attracting the slightest notice from within.

'It strikes me that this is another case of seeking admission through that hospitable window at the back.'

Atherton led the way to the rear. Lessingham and I followed. There was not even an apology for a yard, still less a garden,—there was not even a fence of any sort, to serve as an enclosure, and to shut off the house from the wilderness of waste land. The kitchen window was open. I asked Sydney if he had left it so.

'I don't know,—I dare say we did; I don't fancy that either of us stood on the order of his coming.'

While he spoke, he scrambled over the sill. We followed. When he was in, he shouted at the top of his voice,

'Marjorie! Marjorie! Speak to me, Marjorie,—it is I,—Sydney!'

The words echoed through the house. Only silence answered. He led the way to the front room. Suddenly he stopped.

'Hollo!' he cried. 'The blind's down!' I had noticed, when we were outside, that the blind was down at the front room window. 'It was up when I went, that I'll swear. That someone has been here is pretty plain,—let's hope it's Marjorie.'

He had only taken a step forward into the room when he again stopped short to exclaim.

'My stars!—here's a sudden clearance!—Why, the place is empty,—everything's clean gone!'

'What do you mean?—was it furnished when you left?'

The room was empty enough then.

'Furnished?—I don't know that it was exactly what you'd call furnished,—the party who ran this establishment had a taste in upholstery which was all his own,—but there was a carpet, and a bed, and—and lots of things,—for the most part, I should have said, distinctly Eastern curiosities. They seem to have evaporated into smoke,—which may be a way which is common enough among Eastern curiosities, though it's queer to me.'

Atherton was staring about him as if he found it difficult to credit the evidence of his own eyes.

'How long ago is it since you left?'

He referred to his watch.

'Something over an hour,—possibly an hour and a half; I couldn't swear to the exact moment, but it certainly isn't more.'

'Did you notice any signs of packing up?'

'Not a sign.' Going to the window he drew up the blind,—speaking as he did so. 'The queer thing about this business is that when we first got in this blind wouldn't draw up a little bit, so, since it wouldn't go up I pulled it down, roller and all, now it draws up as easily and smoothly as if it had always been the best blind that ever lived.'

Standing at Sydney's back I saw that the cabman on his box was signalling to us with his outstretched hand. Sydney perceived him too. He threw up the sash.

'What's the matter with you?'

'Excuse me, sir, but who's the old gent?'

'What old gent?'

'Why the old gent peeping through the window of the room upstairs?'

The words were hardly out of the driver's mouth when Sydney was through the door and flying up the staircase. I followed rather more soberly,—his methods were a little too flighty for me. When I reached the landing, dashing out of the front room he rushed into the one at the back,—then through a door at the side. He came out shouting.

'What's the idiot mean!—with his old gent! I'd old gent him if I got him!—There's not a creature about the place!'

He returned into the front room,—I at his heels. That certainly was empty, —and not only empty, but it showed no traces of recent occupation. The dust lay thick upon the floor,—there was that mouldy, earthy smell which is so frequently found in apartments which have been long untenanted.

'Are you sure, Atherton, that there is no one at the back?'

'Of course I'm sure,—you can go and see for yourself if you like; do you think I'm blind? Jehu's drunk.' Throwing up the sash he addressed the

driver. 'What do you mean with your old gent at the window?—what window?'

'That window, sir.'

'Go to!—you're dreaming, man!—there's no one here.'

'Begging your pardon, sir, but there was someone there not a minute ago.'

'Imagination, cabman,—the slant of the light on the glass,—or your eyesight's defective.'

'Excuse me, sir, but it's not my imagination, and my eyesight's as good as any man's in England,—and as for the slant of the light on the glass, there ain't much glass for the light to slant on. I saw him peeping through that bottom broken pane on your left hand as plainly as I see you. He must be somewhere about,—he can't have got away,—he's at the back. Ain't there a cupboard nor nothing where he could hide?'

The cabman's manner was so extremely earnest that I went myself to see. There was a cupboard on the landing, but the door of that stood wide open, and that obviously was bare. The room behind was small, and, despite the splintered glass in the window frame, stuffy. Fragments of glass kept company with the dust on the floor, together with a choice collection of stones, brickbats, and other missiles,—which not improbably were the cause of their being there. In the corner stood a cupboard,—but a momentary examination showed that that was as bare as the other. The door at the side, which Sydney had left wide open, opened on to a closet, and that was empty. I glanced up,—there was no trap door which led to the roof. No practicable nook or cranny, in which a living being could lie concealed, was anywhere at hand.

I returned to Sydney's shoulder to tell the cabman so.

'There is no place in which anyone could hide, and there is no one in either of the rooms,—you must have been mistaken, driver.'

The man waxed wroth.

'Don't tell me! How could I come to think I saw something when I didn't?'

'One's eyes are apt to play us tricks;—how could you see what wasn't there?'

'That's what I want to know. As I drove up, before you told me to stop, I saw him looking through the window,—the one at which you are. He'd got his nose glued to the broken pane, and was staring as hard as he could stare. When I pulled up, off he started,—I saw him get up off his knees, and go to the back of the room. When the gentleman took to knocking, back he came, —to the same old spot, and flopped down on his knees. I didn't know what caper you was up to,—you might be bum bailiffs for all I knew!—and I supposed that he wasn't so anxious to let you in as you might be to get inside, and that was why he didn't take no notice of your knocking, while all the while he kept a eye on what was going on. When you goes round to the back, up he gets again, and I reckoned that he was going to meet yer, and perhaps give yer a bit of his mind, and that presently I should hear a shindy, or that something would happen. But when you pulls up the blind downstairs, to my surprise back he come once more. He shoves his old nose right through the smash in the pane, and wags his old head at me like a chattering magpie. That didn't seem to me quite the civil thing to do,—I hadn't done no harm to him; so I gives you the office, and lets you know that he was there. But for you to say that he wasn't there, and never had been,—blimey! that cops the biscuit. If he wasn't there, all I can say is I ain't here, and my 'orse ain't here, and my cab ain't neither,—damn it!—the house ain't here, and nothing ain't!'

He settled himself on his perch with an air of the most extreme ill usage,—he had been standing up to tell his tale. That the man was serious was unmistakable. As he himself suggested, what inducement could he have had to tell a lie like that? That he believed himself to have seen what he declared he saw was plain. But, on the other hand, what could have become—in the space of fifty seconds!—of his 'old gent'?

Atherton put a question.

'What did he look like,—this old gent of yours?'

'Well, that I shouldn't hardly like to say. It wasn't much of his face I could see, only his face and his eyes,—and they wasn't pretty. He kept a thing over his head all the time, as if he didn't want too much to be seen.'

'What sort of a thing?'

'Why,—one of them cloak sort of things, like them Arab blokes used to wear what used to be at Earl's Court Exhibition,—you know!'

This piece of information seemed to interest my companions more than anything he had said before.

'A burnoose do you mean?'

'How am I to know what the thing's called? I ain't up in foreign languages,—'tain't likely! All I know that them Arab blokes what was at Earl's Court used to walk about in them all over the place,—sometimes they wore them over their heads, and sometimes they didn't. In fact if you'd asked me, instead of trying to make out as I sees double, or things what was only inside my own noddle, or something or other, I should have said this here old gent what I've been telling you about was a Arab bloke,—when he gets off his knees to sneak away from the window, I could see that he had his cloak thing, what was over his head, wrapped all round him.'

Mr Lessingham turned to me, all quivering with excitement.

'I believe that what he says is true!'

'Then where can this mysterious old gentleman have got to,—can you suggest an explanation? It is strange, to say the least of it, that the cabman should be the only person to see or hear anything of him.'

'Some devil's trick has been played,—I know it, I feel it!—my instinct tells me so!'

I stared. In such a matter one hardly expects a man of Paul Lessingham's stamp to talk of 'instinct.' Atherton stared too. Then, on a sudden, he burst out,

'By the Lord, I believe the Apostle's right,—the whole place reeks to me of hankey-pankey,—it did as soon as I put my nose inside. In matters of prestidigitation, Champnell, we Westerns are among the rudiments,—we've everything to learn,—Orientals leave us at the post. If their civilisation's what we're pleased to call extinct, their conjuring—when you get to know it!—is all alive oh!'

He moved towards the door. As he went he slipped, or seemed to, all but stumbling on to his knees.

'Something tripped me up,—what's this?' He was stamping on the floor with his foot. 'Here's a board loose. Come and lend me a hand, one of you fellows, to get it up. Who knows what mystery's beneath?'

I went to his aid. As he said, a board in the floor was loose. His stepping on it unawares had caused his stumble. Together we prised it out of its place,—Lessingham standing by and watching us the while. Having removed it, we peered into the cavity it disclosed.

There was something there.

'Why,' cried Atherton 'it's a woman's clothing!'

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE REST OF THE FIND

It was a woman's clothing, beyond a doubt, all thrown in anyhow,—as if the person who had placed it there had been in a desperate hurry. An entire outfit was there, shoes, stockings, body linen, corsets, and all,—even to hat, gloves, and hairpins;—these latter were mixed up with the rest of the garments in strange confusion. It seemed plain that whoever had worn those clothes had been stripped to the skin.

Lessingham and Sydney stared at me in silence as I dragged them out and laid them on the floor. The dress was at the bottom,—it was an alpaca, of a pretty shade in blue, bedecked with lace and ribbons, as is the fashion of the hour, and lined with sea-green silk. It had perhaps been a 'charming confection' once—and that a very recent one!—but now it was all soiled and creased and torn and tumbled. The two spectators made a simultaneous pounce at it as I brought it to the light.

'My God!' cried Sydney, 'it's Marjorie's!—she was wearing it when I saw her last!'

'It's Marjorie's!' gasped Lessingham,—he was clutching at the ruined costume, staring at it like a man who has just received sentence of death. 'She wore it when she was with me yesterday,—I told her how it suited her, and how pretty it was!'

There was silence,—it was an eloquent find; it spoke for itself. The two men gazed at the heap of feminine glories,—it might have been the most

wonderful sight they ever had seen. Lessingham was the first to speak,—his face had all at once grown grey and haggard.

'What has happened to her?'

I replied to his question with another.

'Are you sure this is Miss Linden's dress?'

'I am sure,—and were proof needed, here it is.'

He had found the pocket, and was turning out the contents. There was a purse, which contained money and some visiting cards on which were her name and address; a small bunch of keys, with her nameplate attached; a handkerchief, with her initials in a corner. The question of ownership was placed beyond a doubt.

'You see,' said Lessingham, exhibiting the money which was in the purse, 'it is not robbery which has been attempted. Here are two ten-pound notes, and one for five, besides gold and silver,—over thirty pounds in all.'

Atherton, who had been turning over the accumulation of rubbish between the joists, proclaimed another find.

'Here are her rings, and watch, and a bracelet,—no, it certainly does not look as if theft had been an object.'

Lessingham was glowering at him with knitted brows.

'I have to thank you for this.'

Sydney was unwontedly meek.

'You are hard on me, Lessingham, harder than I deserve,—I had rather have thrown away my own life than have suffered misadventure to have come to her.'

'Yours are idle words. Had you not meddled this would not have happened. A fool works more mischief with his folly than of malice prepense. If hurt

has befallen Marjorie Lindon you shall account for it to me with your life's blood.'

'Let it be so,' said Sydney. 'I am content. If hurt has come to Marjorie, God knows that I am willing enough that death should come to me.'

While they wrangled, I continued to search. A little to one side, under the flooring which was still intact, I saw something gleam. By stretching out my hand, I could just manage to reach it,—it was a long plait of woman's hair. It had been cut off at the roots,—so close to the head in one place that the scalp itself had been cut, so that the hair was clotted with blood.

They were so occupied with each other that they took no notice of me. I had to call their attention to my discovery.

'Gentlemen, I fear that I have here something which will distress you,—is not this Miss Lindon's hair?'

They recognised it on the instant. Lessingham, snatching it from my hands, pressed it to his lips.

'This is mine,—I shall at least have something.' He spoke with a grimness which was a little startling. He held the silken tresses at arm's length. 'This points to murder,—foul, cruel, causeless murder. As I live, I will devote my all,—money, time, reputation!—to gaining vengeance on the wretch who did this deed.'

Atherton chimed in.

'To that I say, Amen!' He lifted his hand. 'God is my witness!'

'It seems to me, gentlemen, that we move too fast,—to my mind it does not by any means of necessity point to murder. On the contrary, I doubt if murder has been done. Indeed, I don't mind owning that I have a theory of my own which points all the other way.'

Lessingham caught me by the sleeve.

'Mr Champnell, tell me your theory.'

'I will, a little later. Of course it may be altogether wrong;—though I fancy it is not; I will explain my reasons when we come to talk of it. But, at present, there are things which must be done.'

'I vote for tearing up every board in the house!' cried Sydney. 'And for pulling the whole infernal place to pieces. It's a conjurer's den.—I shouldn't be surprised if cabby's old gent is staring at us all the while from some peephole of his own.'

We examined the entire house, methodically, so far as we were able, inch by inch. Not another board proved loose,—to lift those which were nailed down required tools, and those we were without. We sounded all the walls, —with the exception of the party walls they were the usual lath and plaster constructions, and showed no signs of having been tampered with. The ceilings were intact; if anything was concealed in them it must have been there some time,—the cement was old and dirty. We took the closet to pieces; examined the chimneys; peered into the kitchen oven and the copper;—in short, we pried into everything which, with the limited means at our disposal, could be pried into,—without result. At the end we found ourselves dusty, dirty, and discomfited. The cabman's 'old gent' remained as much a mystery as ever, and no further trace had been discovered of Miss Lindon.

Atherton made no effort to disguise his chagrin.

'Now what's to be done? There seems to be just nothing in the place at all, and yet that there is, and that it's the key to the whole confounded business I should be disposed to swear.'

'In that case I would suggest that you should stay and look for it. The cabman can go and look for the requisite tools, or a workman to assist you, if you like. For my part it appears to me that evidence of another sort is, for the moment, of paramount importance; and I propose to commence my search for it by making a call at the house which is over the way.'

I had observed, on our arrival, that the road only contained two houses which were in anything like a finished state,—that which we were in, and

another, some fifty or sixty yards further down, on the opposite side. It was to this I referred. The twain immediately proffered their companionship.

'I will come with you,' said Mr Lessingham.

'And I,' echoed Sydney. 'We'll leave this sweet homestead in charge of the cabman,—I'll pull it to pieces afterwards.' He went out and spoke to the driver. 'Cabby, we're going to pay a visit to the little crib over there,—you keep an eye on this one. And if you see a sign of anyone being about the place,—living, or dead, or anyhow—you give me a yell. I shall be on the lookout, and I'll be with you before you can say Jack Robinson.'

'You bet I'll yell,—I'll raise the hair right off you.' The fellow grinned. 'But I don't know if you gents are hiring me by the day,—I want to change my horse; he ought to have been in his stable a couple of hours ago.'

'Never mind your horse,—let him rest a couple of hours extra to-morrow to make up for those he has lost to-day. I'll take care you don't lose anything by this little job,—or your horse either.—By the way, look here,—this will be better than yelling.'

Taking a revolver out of his trousers' pocket he handed it up to the grinning driver.

'If that old gent of yours does appear, you have a pop at him,—I shall hear that easier than a yell. You can put a bullet through him if you like,—I give you my word it won't be murder.'

'I don't care if it is,' declared the cabman, handling the weapon like one who was familiar with arms of precision. 'I used to fancy my revolver shooting when I was with the colours, and if I do get a chance I'll put a shot through the old hunks, if only to prove to you that I'm no liar.'

Whether the man was in earnest or not I could not tell,—nor whether Atherton meant what he said in answer.

'If you shoot him I'll give you fifty pounds.'

'All right!' The driver laughed. 'I'll do my best to earn that fifty!'

CHAPTER XXXIX

MISS LOUISA COLEMAN

That the house over the way was tenanted was plain to all the world,—at least one occupant sat gazing through the window of the first floor front room. An old woman in a cap,—one of those large old-fashioned caps which our grandmothers used to wear, tied with strings under the chin. It was a bow window, and as she was seated in the bay looking right in our direction she could hardly have failed to see us as we advanced,—indeed she continued to stare at us all the while with placid calmness. Yet I knocked once, twice, and yet again without the slightest notice being taken of my summons.

Sydney gave expression to his impatience in his own peculiar vein.

'Knockers in this part of the world seem intended for ornament only,—nobody seems to pay any attention to them when they're used. The old lady upstairs must be either deaf or dotty.' He went out into the road to see if she still was there. 'She's looking at me as calmly as you please,—what does she think we're doing here, I wonder; playing a tune on her front door by way of a little amusement?—Madam!' He took off his hat and waved it to her. 'Madam! might I observe that if you won't condescend to notice that we're here your front door will run the risk of being severely injured!—She don't care for me any more than if I was nothing at all,—sound another tattoo upon that knocker. Perhaps she's so deaf that nothing short of a cataclysmal uproar will reach her auditory nerves.'

She immediately proved, however, that she was nothing of the sort. Hardly had the sounds of my further knocking died away than, throwing up the

window, she thrust out her head and addressed me in a fashion which, under the circumstances, was as unexpected as it was uncalled for.

'Now, young man, you needn't be in such a hurry!'

Sydney explained.

'Pardon me, madam, it's not so much a hurry we're in as pressed for time,—this is a matter of life and death.'

She turned her attention to Sydney,—speaking with a frankness for which, I imagine, he was unprepared.

'I don't want none of your imperence, young man. I've seen you before,—you've been hanging about here the whole day long!—and I don't like the looks of you, and so I'll let you know. That's my front door, and that's my knocker,—I'll come down and open when I like, but I'm not going to be hurried, and if the knocker's so much as touched again, I won't come down at all.'

She closed the window with a bang. Sydney seemed divided between mirth and indignation.

'That's a nice old lady, on my honour,—one of the good old crusty sort. Agreeable characters this neighbourhood seems to grow,—a sojourn hereabouts should do one good. Unfortunately I don't feel disposed just now to stand and kick my heels in the road.' Again saluting the old dame by raising his hat he shouted to her at the top of his voice. 'Madam, I beg ten thousand pardons for troubling you, but this is a matter in which every second is of vital importance,—would you allow me to ask you one or two questions?'

Up went the window; out came the old lady's head.

'Now, young man, you needn't put yourself out to holler at me,—I won't be hollered at! I'll come down and open that door in five minutes by the clock on my mantelpiece, and not a moment before.'

The fiat delivered, down came the window. Sydney looked rueful,—he consulted his watch.

'I don't know what you think, Champnell, but I really doubt if this comfortable creature can tell us anything worth waiting another five minutes to hear. We mustn't let the grass grow under our feet, and time is getting on.'

I was of a different opinion,—and said so.

'I'm afraid, Atherton, that I can't agree with you. She seems to have noticed you hanging about all day; and it is at least possible that she has noticed a good deal which would be well worth our hearing. What more promising witness are we likely to find?—her house is the only one which overlooks the one we have just quitted. I am of opinion that it may not only prove well worth our while to wait five minutes, but also that it would be as well, if possible, not to offend her by the way. She's not likely to afford us the information we require if you do.'

'Good. If that's what you think I'm sure I'm willing to wait,—only it's to be hoped that that clock upon her mantelpiece moves quicker than its mistress.'

Presently, when about a minute had gone, he called to the cabman.

'Seen a sign of anything?'

The cabman shouted back.

'Ne'er a sign,—you'll hear a sound of popguns when I do.'

Those five minutes did seem long ones. But at last Sydney, from his post of vantage in the road, informed us that the old lady was moving.

'She's getting up;—she's leaving the window;—let's hope to goodness she's coming down to open the door. That's been the longest five minutes I've known.'

I could hear uncertain footsteps descending the stairs. They came along the passage. The door was opened—'on the chain.' The old lady peered at us

through an aperture of about six inches.

'I don't know what you young men think you're after, but have all three of you in my house I won't. I'll have him and you'—a skinny finger was pointed to Lessingham and me; then it was directed towards Atherton—'but have him I won't. So if it's anything particular you want to say to me, you'll just tell him to go away.'

On hearing this Sydney's humility was abject. His hat was in his hand,—he bent himself double.

'Suffer me to make you a million apologies, madam, if I have in any way offended you; nothing, I assure you, could have been farther from my intention, or from my thoughts.'

'I don't want none of your apologies, and I don't want none of you neither; I don't like the looks of you, and so I tell you. Before I let anybody into my house you'll have to sling your hook.'

The door was banged in our faces. I turned to Sydney.

'The sooner you go the better it will be for us. You can wait for us over the way.'

He shrugged his shoulders, and groaned,—half in jest, half in earnest.

'If I must I suppose I must,—it's the first time I've been refused admittance to a lady's house in all my life! What have I done to deserve this thing?—If you keep me waiting long I'll tear that infernal den to pieces!'

He sauntered across the road, viciously kicking the stones as he went. The door reopened.

'Has that other young man gone?'

'He has.'

'Then now I'll let you in. Have him inside my house I won't.'

The chain was removed. Lessingham and I entered. Then the door was refastened and the chain replaced. Our hostess showed us into the front room on the ground floor; it was sparsely furnished and not too clean,—but there were chairs enough for us to sit upon; which she insisted on our occupying.

'Sit down, do,—I can't abide to see folks standing; it gives me the fidgets.'

So soon as we were seated, without any overture on our parts she plunged in medias res.

'I know what it is you've come about,—I know! You want me to tell you who it is as lives in the house over the road. Well, I can tell you,—and I dare bet a shilling that I'm about the only one who can.'

I inclined my head.

'Indeed. Is that so, madam?'

She was huffed at once.

'Don't madam me,—I can't bear none of your lip service. I'm a plain-spoken woman, that's what I am, and I like other people's tongues to be as plain as mine. My name's Miss Louisa Coleman; but I'm generally called Miss Coleman,—I'm only called Louisa by my relatives.'

Since she was apparently between seventy and eighty—and looked every year of her apparent age—I deemed that possible. Miss Coleman was evidently a character. If one was desirous of getting information out of her it would be necessary to allow her to impart it in her own manner,—to endeavour to induce her to impart it in anybody else's would be time clean wasted. We had Sydney's fate before our eyes.

She started with a sort of roundabout preamble.

'This property is mine; it was left me by my uncle, the late George Henry Jobson,—he's buried in Hammersmith Cemetery just over the way,—he left me the whole of it. It's one of the finest building sites near London, and it

increases in value every year, and I'm not going to let it for another twenty, by which time the value will have more than trebled,—so if that is what you've come about, as heaps of people do, you might have saved yourselves the trouble. I keep the boards standing, just to let people know that the ground is to let,—though, as I say, it won't be for another twenty years, when it'll be for the erection of high-class mansions only, same as there is in Grosvenor Square,—no shops or public houses, and none of your shanties. I live in this place just to keep an eye upon the property,—and as for the house over the way, I've never tried to let it, and it never has been let, not until a month ago, when, one morning, I had this letter. You can see it if you like.'

She handed me a greasy envelope which she ferreted out of a capacious pocket which was suspended from her waist, and which she had to lift up her skirt to reach. The envelope was addressed, in unformed characters, 'Miss Louisa Coleman, The Rhododendrons, Convolvulus Avenue, High Oaks Park, West Kensington.'—I felt, if the writer had not been of a humorous turn of mind, and drawn on his imagination, and this really was the lady's correct address, then there must be something in a name.

The letter within was written in the same straggling, characterless caligraphy,—I should have said, had I been asked offhand, that the whole thing was the composition of a servant girl. The composition was about on a par with the writing.

'The undersigned would be obliged if Miss Coleman would let her empty house. I do not know the rent but send fifty pounds. If more will send. Please address, Mohamed el Kheir, Post Office, Sligo Street, London.'

It struck me as being as singular an application for a tenancy as I remembered to have encountered. When I passed it on to Lessingham, he seemed to think so too.

'This is a curious letter, Miss Coleman.'

'So I thought,—and still more so when I found the fifty pounds inside. There were five ten-pound notes, all loose, and the letter not even registered. If I had been asked what was the rent of the house, I should have

said, at the most, not more than twenty pounds,—because, between you and me, it wants a good bit of doing up, and is hardly fit to live in as it stands.'

I had had sufficient evidence of the truth of this altogether apart from the landlady's frank admission.

'Why, for all he could have done to help himself I might have kept the money, and only sent him a receipt for a quarter. And some folks would have done,—but I'm not one of that sort myself, and shouldn't care to be. So I sent this here party,—I never could pronounce his name, and never shall—a receipt for a year.'

Miss Coleman paused to smooth her apron, and consider.

'Well, the receipt should have reached this here party on the Thursday morning, as it were,—I posted it on the Wednesday night, and on the Thursday, after breakfast, I thought I'd go over the way to see if there was any little thing I could do,—because there wasn't hardly a whole pane of glass in the place,—when I all but went all of a heap. When I looked across the road, blessed it the party wasn't in already,—at least as much as he ever was in, which, so far as I can make out, never has been anything particular,—though how he had got in, unless it was through a window in the middle of the night, is more than I should care to say,—there was nobody in the house when I went to bed, that I could pretty nearly take my Bible oath,—yet there was the blind up at the parlour, and, what's more, it was down, and it's been down pretty nearly ever since.

""Well," I says to myself, "for right down imperence this beats anything,—why he's in the place before he knows if I'll let him have it. Perhaps he thinks I haven't got a word to say in the matter,—fifty pounds or no fifty pounds, I'll soon show him." So I slips on my bonnet, and I walks over the road, and I hammers at the door.

'Well, I have seen people hammering since then, many a one, and how they've kept it up has puzzled me,—for an hour, some of them,—but I was the first one as begun it. I hammers, and I hammers, and I kept on hammering, but it wasn't no more use than if I'd been hammering at a tombstone. So I starts rapping at the window, but that wasn't no use neither.

So I goes round behind, and I hammers at the back door,—but there, I couldn't make anyone hear nohow. So I says to myself, "Perhaps the party as is in, ain't in, in a manner of speaking; but I'll keep an eye on the house, and when he is in I'll take care that he ain't out again before I've had a word to say."

'So I come back home, and as I said I would, I kept an eye on the house the whole of that livelong day, but never a soul went either out or in. But the next day, which it was a Friday, I got out of bed about five o'clock, to see if it was raining, through my having an idea of taking a little excursion if the weather was fine, when I see a party coming down the road. He had on one of them dirty-coloured bed-cover sort of things, and it was wrapped all over his head and round his body, like, as I have been told, them there Arabs wear,—and, indeed, I've seen them in them myself at West Brompton, when they was in the exhibition there. It was quite fine, and broad day, and I see him as plainly as I see you,—he comes skimming along at a tear of a pace, pulls up at the house over the way, opens the front door, and lets himself in.

"So," I says to myself, "there you are. Well, Mr Arab, or whatever, or whoever, you may be, I'll take good care that you don't go out again before you've had a word from me. I'll show you that landladies have their rights, like other Christians, in this country, however it may be in yours." So I kept an eye on the house, to see that he didn't go out again, and nobody never didn't, and between seven and eight I goes and I knocks at the door,—because I thought to myself that the earlier I was the better it might be.

'If you'll believe me, no more notice was taken of me than if I was one of the dead. I hammers, and I hammers, till my wrist was aching, I daresay I hammered twenty times,—and then I went round to the back door, and I hammers at that,—but it wasn't the least good in the world. I was that provoked to think I should be treated as if I was nothing and nobody, by a dirty foreigner, who went about in a bed-gown through the public streets, that it was all I could do to hold myself.

'I comes round to the front again, and I starts hammering at the window, with every knuckle on my hands, and I calls out, "I'm Miss Louisa Coleman, and I'm the owner of this house, and you can't deceive me,—I

saw you come in, and you're in now, and if you don't come and speak to me this moment I'll have the police."

'All of a sudden, when I was least expecting it, and was hammering my very hardest at the pane, up goes the blind, and up goes the window too, and the most awful-looking creature ever I heard of, not to mention seeing, puts his head right into my face,—he was more like a hideous baboon than anything else, let alone a man. I was struck all of a heap, and plumps down on the little wall, and all but tumbles head over heels backwards, And he starts shrieking, in a sort of a kind of English, and in such a voice as I'd never heard the like,—it was like a rusty steam engine.

"Go away! go away! I don't want you! I will not have you,—never! You have your fifty pounds,—you have your money,—that is the whole of you,—that is all you want! You come to me no more!—never!—never no more!—or you be sorry!—Go away!"

'I did go away, and that as fast as ever my legs would carry me,—what with his looks, and what with his voice, and what with the way that he went on, I was nothing but a mass of trembling. As for answering him back, or giving him a piece of my mind, as I had meant to, I wouldn't have done it not for a thousand pounds. I don't mind confessing, between you and me, that I had to swallow four cups of tea, right straight away, before my nerves was steady.

"Well," I says to myself, when I did feel, as it might be, a little more easy, "you never have let that house before, and now you've let it with a vengeance,—so you have. If that there new tenant of yours isn't the greatest villain that ever went unhung it must be because he's got near relations what's as bad as himself,—because two families like his I'm sure there can't be. A nice sort of Arab party to have sleeping over the road he is!"

'But after a time I cools down, as it were,—because I'm one of them sort as likes to see on both sides of a question. "After all," I says to myself, "he has paid his rent, and fifty pounds is fifty pounds,—I doubt if the whole house is worth much more, and he can't do much damage to it whatever he does."

'I shouldn't have minded, so far as that went, if he'd set fire to the place, for, between ourselves, it's insured for a good bit over its value. So I decided that I'd let things be as they were, and see how they went on. But from that hour to this I've never spoken to the man, and never wanted to, and wouldn't, not of my own free will, not for a shilling a time,—that face of his will haunt me if I live till Noah, as the saying is. I've seen him going in and out at all hours of the day and night,—that Arab party's a mystery if ever there was one,—he always goes tearing along as if he's flying for his life. Lots of people have come to the house, all sorts and kinds, men and women—they've been mostly women, and even little children. I've seen them hammer and hammer at that front door, but never a one have I seen let in,—or yet seen taken any notice of, and I think I may say, and yet tell no lie, that I've scarcely took my eye off the house since he's been inside it, over and over again in the middle of the night have I got up to have a look, so that I've not missed much that has took place.

'What's puzzled me is the noises that's come from the house. Sometimes for days together there's not been a sound, it might have been a house of the dead; and then, all through the night, there've been yells and screeches, squawks and screams,—I never heard nothing like it. I have thought, and more than once, that the devil himself must be in that front room, let alone all the rest of his demons. And as for cats!—where they've come from I can't think. I didn't use to notice hardly a cat in the neighbourhood till that there Arab party came,—there isn't much to attract them; but since he came there's been regiments. Sometimes at night there's been troops about the place, screeching like mad,—I've wished them farther, I can tell you. That Arab party must be fond of 'em. I've seen them inside the house, at the windows, upstairs and downstairs, as it seemed to me, a dozen at a time.

CHAPTER XL

WHAT MISS COLEMAN SAW THROUGH THE WINDOW

As Miss Coleman had paused, as if her narrative was approaching a conclusion, I judged it expedient to make an attempt to bring the record as quickly as possible up to date.

'I take it, Miss Coleman, that you have observed what has occurred in the house to-day.'

She tightened her nut-cracker jaws and glared at me disdainfully,—her dignity was ruffled.

'I'm coming to it, aren't I?—if you'll let me. If you've got no manners I'll learn you some. One doesn't like to be hurried at my time of life, young man.'

I was meekly silent;—plainly, if she was to talk, every one else must listen.

'During the last few days there have been some queer goings on over the road,—out of the common queer, I mean, for goodness knows that they always have been queer enough. That Arab party has been flitting about like a creature possessed,—I've seen him going in and out twenty times a day. This morning—'

She paused,—to fix her eyes on Lessingham. She apparently observed his growing interest as she approached the subject which had brought us there,—and resented it.

'Don't look at me like that, young man, because I won't have it. And as for questions, I may answer questions when I'm done, but don't you dare to ask me one before, because I won't be interrupted.'

Up to then Lessingham had not spoken a word,—but it seemed as if she was endowed with the faculty of perceiving the huge volume of the words which he had left unuttered.

'This morning—as I've said already,—' she glanced at Lessingham as if she defied his contradiction—'when that Arab party came home it was just on the stroke of seven. I know what was the exact time because, when I went to the door to the milkman, my clock was striking the half hour, and I always keep it thirty minutes fast. As I was taking the milk, the man said to me, "Hollo, Miss Coleman, here's your friend coming along." "What friend?" I says,—for I ain't got no friends, as I know, round here, nor yet, I hope no enemies neither.

'And I looks round, and there was the Arab party coming tearing down the road, his bedcover thing all flying in the wind, and his arms straight out in front of him,—I never did see anyone go at such a pace. "My goodness," I says, "I wonder he don't do himself an injury." "I wonder someone else don't do him an injury," says the milkman. "The very sight of him is enough to make my milk go sour." And he picked up his pail and went away quite grumpy,—though what that Arab party's done to him is more than I can say.—I have always noticed that milkman's temper's short like his measure. I wasn't best pleased with him for speaking of that Arab party as my friend, which he never has been, and never won't be, and never could be neither.

'Five persons went to the house after the milkman was gone, and that there Arab party was safe inside,—three of them was commercials, that I know, because afterwards they came to me. But of course they none of them got no chance with that there Arab party except of hammering at his front door, which ain't what you might call a paying game, nor nice for the temper but for that I don't blame him, for if once those commercials do begin talking they'll talk for ever.

'Now I'm coming to this afternoon.'

I thought it was about time,—though for the life of me, I did not dare to hint as much.

'Well, it might have been three, or it might have been half past, anyhow it was thereabouts, when up there comes two men and a woman, which one of the men was that young man what's a friend of yours. "Oh," I says to myself, "here's something new in callers, I wonder what it is they're wanting." That young man what was a friend of yours, he starts hammering, and hammering, as the custom was with every one who came, and, as usual, no more notice was taken of him than nothing,—though I knew that all the time the Arab party was indoors.'

At this point I felt that at all hazards I must interpose a question.

'You are sure he was indoors?'

She took it better than I feared she might.

'Of course I'm sure,—hadn't I seen him come in at seven, and he never hadn't gone out since, for I don't believe that I'd taken my eyes off the place not for two minutes together, and I'd never had a sight of him. If he wasn't indoors, where was he then?'

For the moment, so far as I was concerned, the query was unanswerable. She triumphantly continued:

'Instead of doing what most did, when they'd had enough of hammering, and going away, these three they went round to the back, and I'm blessed if they mustn't have got through the kitchen window, woman and all, for all of a sudden the blind in the front room was pulled not up, but down—dragged down it was, and there was that young man what's a friend of yours standing with it in his hand.

""Well," I says to myself, "if that ain't cool I should like to know what is. If, when you ain't let in, you can let yourself in, and that without so much as saying by your leave, or with your leave, things is coming to a pretty pass. Wherever can that Arab party be, and whatever can he be thinking of, to let

them go on like that because that he's the sort to allow a liberty to be took with him, and say nothing, I don't believe."

'Every moment I expects to hear a noise and see a row begin, but, so far as I could make out, all was quiet and there wasn't nothing of the kind. So I says to myself, "There's more in this than meets the eye, and them three parties must have right upon their side, or they wouldn't be doing what they are doing in the way they are, there'd be a shindy."

'Presently, in about five minutes, the front door opens, and a young man—not the one what's your friend, but the other—comes sailing out, and through the gate, and down the road, as stiff and upright as a grenadier,—I never see anyone walk more upright, and few as fast. At his heels comes the young man what is your friend, and it seems to me that he couldn't make out what this other was a-doing of. I says to myself, "There's been a quarrel between them two, and him as has gone has hooked it." This young man what is your friend he stood at the gate, all of a fidget, staring after the other with all his eyes, as if he couldn't think what to make of him, and the young woman, she stood on the doorstep, staring after him too.

'As the young man what had hooked it turned the corner, and was out of sight, all at once your friend he seemed to make up his mind, and he started off running as hard as he could pelt,—and the young woman was left alone. I expected, every minute, to see him come back with the other young man, and the young woman, by the way she hung about the gate, she seemed to expect it too. But no, nothing of the kind. So when, as I expect, she'd had enough of waiting, she went into the house again, and I see her pass the front room window. After a while, back she comes to the gate, and stands looking and looking, but nothing was to be seen of either of them young men. When she'd been at the gate, I daresay five minutes, back she goes into the house,—and I never saw nothing of her again.'

'You never saw anything of her again?—Are you sure she went back into the house?'

'As sure as I am that I see you.'

'I suppose that you didn't keep a constant watch upon the premises?'

'But that's just what I did do. I felt something queer was going on, and I made up my mind to see it through. And when I make up my mind to a thing like that I'm not easy to turn aside. I never moved off the chair at my bedroom window, and I never took my eyes off the house, not till you come knocking at my front door.'

'But, since the young lady is certainly not in the house at present, she must have eluded your observation, and, in some manner, have left it without your seeing her.'

'I don't believe she did, I don't see how she could have done,—there's something queer about that house, since that Arab party's been inside it. But though I didn't see her, I did see someone else.'

'Who was that?'

'A young man.'

'A young man?'

'Yes, a young man, and that's what puzzled me, and what's been puzzling me ever since, for see him go in I never did do.'

'Can you describe him?'

'Not as to the face, for he wore a dirty cloth cap pulled down right over it, and he walked so quickly that I never had a proper look. But I should know him anywhere if I saw him, if only because of his clothes and his walk.'

'What was there peculiar about his clothes and his walk?'

'Why, his clothes were that old, and torn, and dirty, that a ragman wouldn't have given a thank you for them,—and as for fit,—there wasn't none, they hung upon him like a scarecrow—he was a regular figure of fun; I should think the boys would call after him if they saw him in the street. As for his walk, he walked off just like the first young man had done, he strutted along with his shoulders back, and his head in the air, and that stiff and straight that my kitchen poker would have looked crooked beside of him.'

'Did nothing happen to attract your attention between the young lady's going back into the house and the coming out of this young man?'

Miss Coleman cogitated.

'Now you mention it there did,—though I should have forgotten all about it if you hadn't asked me,—that comes of your not letting me tell the tale in my own way. About twenty minutes after the young woman had gone in someone put up the blind in the front room, which that young man had dragged right down, I couldn't see who it was for the blind was between us, and it was about ten minutes after that that young man came marching out.'

'And then what followed?'

'Why, in about another ten minutes that Arab party himself comes scooting through the door.'

'The Arab party?'

'Yes, the Arab party! The sight of him took me clean aback. Where he'd been, and what he'd been doing with himself while them there people played hi-spy-hi about his premises I'd have given a shilling out of my pocket to have known, but there he was, as large as life, and carrying a bundle.'

'A bundle?'

'A bundle, on his head, like a muffin-man carries his tray. It was a great thing, you never would have thought he could have carried it, and it was easy to see that it was as much as he could manage; it bent him nearly double, and he went crawling along like a snail,—it took him quite a time to get to the end of the road.'

Mr Lessingham leaped up from his seat, crying, 'Marjorie was in that bundle!'

'I doubt it,' I said.

He moved about the room distractedly, wringing his hands.

'She was! she must have been! God help us all!'

'I repeat that I doubt it. If you will be advised by me you will wait awhile before you arrive at any such conclusion.'

All at once there was a tapping at the window pane. Atherton was staring at us from without.

He shouted through the glass, 'Come out of that, you fossils!—I've news for you!'

CHAPTER XLI

THE CONSTABLE,—HIS CLUE,—AND THE CAB

Miss Coleman, getting up in a fluster, went hurrying to the door.

'I won't have that young man in my house. I won't have him! Don't let him dare to put his nose across my doorstep.'

I endeavoured to appease her perturbation.

'I promise you that he shall not come in, Miss Coleman. My friend here, and I, will go and speak to him outside.'

She held the front door open just wide enough to enable Lessingham and me to slip through, then she shut it after us with a bang. She evidently had a strong objection to any intrusion on Sydney's part.

Standing just without the gate he saluted us with a characteristic vigour which was scarcely flattering to our late hostess. Behind him was a constable.

'I hope you two have been mewed in with that old pussy long enough. While you've been tittle-tattling I've been doing,—listen to what this bobby's got to say.'

The constable, his thumbs thrust inside his belt, wore an indulgent smile upon his countenance. He seemed to find Sydney amusing. He spoke in a deep bass voice,—as if it issued from his boots.

'I don't know that I've got anything to say.'

It was plain that Sydney thought otherwise.

'You wait till I've given this pretty pair of gossips a lead, officer, then I'll trot you out.' He turned to us.

'After I'd poked my nose into every dashed hole in that infernal den, and been rewarded with nothing but a pain in the back for my trouble, I stood cooling my heels on the doorstep, wondering if I should fight the cabman, or get him to fight me, just to pass the time away,—for he says he can box, and he looks it,—when who should come strolling along but this magnificent example of the metropolitan constabulary.' He waved his hand towards the policeman, whose grin grew wider. 'I looked at him, and he looked at me, and then when we'd had enough of admiring each other's fine features and striking proportions, he said to me, "Has he gone?" I said, "Who?—Baxter?—or Bob Brown?" He said, "No, the Arab." I said, "What do you know about any Arab?" He said, "Well, I saw him in the Broadway about three-quarters of an hour ago, and then, seeing you here, and the house all open, I wondered if he had gone for good." With that I almost jumped out of my skin, though you can bet your life I never showed it. I said, "How do you know it was he?" He said, "It was him right enough, there's no doubt about that. If you've seen him once, you're not likely to forget him." "Where was he going?" "He was talking to a cabman,—four-wheeler. He'd got a great bundle on his head,—wanted to take it inside with him. Cabman didn't seem to see it." That was enough for me,—I picked this most deserving officer up in my arms, and carried him across the road to you two fellows like a flash of lightning.'

Since the policeman was six feet three or four, and more than sufficiently broad in proportion, his scarcely seemed the kind of figure to be picked up in anybody's arms and carried like a 'flash of lightning,' which,—as his smile grew more indulgent, he himself appeared to think.

Still, even allowing for Atherton's exaggeration, the news which he had brought was sufficiently important. I questioned the constable upon my own account.

'There is my card, officer, probably, before the day is over, a charge of a very serious character will be preferred against the person who has been

residing in the house over the way. In the meantime it is of the utmost importance that a watch should be kept upon his movements. I suppose you have no sort of doubt that the person you saw in the Broadway was the one in question?'

'Not a morsel. I know him as well as I do my own brother,—we all do upon this beat. He's known amongst us as the Arab. I've had my eye on him ever since he came to the place. A queer fish he is. I always have said that he's up to some game or other. I never came across one like him for flying about in all sorts of weather, at all hours of the night, always tearing along as if for his life. As I was telling this gentleman I saw him in the Broadway,—well, now it's about an hour since, perhaps a little more. I was coming on duty when I saw a crowd in front of the District Railway Station,—and there was the Arab, having a sort of argument with the cabman. He had a great bundle on his head, five or six feet long, perhaps longer. He wanted to take this great bundle with him into the cab, and the cabman, he didn't see it.'

'You didn't wait to see him drive off.'

'No,—I hadn't time. I was due at the station,—I was cutting it pretty fine as it was.'

'You didn't speak to him,—or to the cabman?'

'No, it wasn't any business of mine you understand. The whole thing just caught my eye as I was passing.'

'And you didn't take the cabman's number?'

'No, well, as far as that goes it wasn't needful. I know the cabman, his name and all about him, his stable's in Bradmore.'

I whipped out my note-book.

'Give me his address.'

'I don't know what his Christian name is, Tom, I believe, but I'm not sure. Anyhow his surname's Ellis and his address is Church Mews, St John's Road, Bradmore,—I don't know his number, but any one will tell you which is his place, if you ask for Four-Wheel Ellis,—that's the name he's known by among his pals because of his driving a four-wheeler.'

'Thank you, officer. I am obliged to you.' Two half-crowns changed hands. 'If you will keep an eye on the house and advise me at the address which you will find on my card, of any thing which takes place there during the next few days, you will do me a service.'

We had clambered back into the hansom, the driver was just about to start, when the constable was struck by a sudden thought.

'One moment, sir,—blessed if I wasn't going to forget the most important bit of all. I did hear him tell Ellis where to drive him to,—he kept saying it over and over again, in that queer lingo of his. "Waterloo Railway Station, Waterloo Railway Station." "All right," said Ellis, "I'll drive you to Waterloo Railway Station right enough, only I'm not going to have that bundle of yours inside my cab. There isn't room for it, so you put it on the roof." "To Waterloo Railway Station," said the Arab, "I take my bundle with me to Waterloo Railway Station,—I take it with me." "Who says you don't take it with you?" said Ellis. "You can take it, and twenty more besides, for all I care, only you don't take it inside my cab,—put it on the roof." "I take it with me to Waterloo Railway Station," said the Arab, and there they were, wrangling and jangling, and neither seeming to be able to make out what the other was after, and the people all laughing.'

'Waterloo Railway Station,—you are sure that was what he said?'

'I'll take my oath to it, because I said to myself, when I heard it, "I wonder what you'll have to pay for that little lot, for the District Railway Station's outside the four-mile radius." As we drove off I was inclined to ask myself, a little bitterly—and perhaps unjustly—if it were not characteristic of the average London policeman to almost forget the most important part of his information,—at any rate to leave it to the last and only to bring it to the front on having his palm crossed with silver.

As the hansom bowled along we three had what occasionally approached a warm discussion.

'Marjorie was in that bundle,' began Lessingham, in the most lugubrious of tones, and with the most woe-begone of faces.

'I doubt it,' I observed.

'She was,—I feel it,—I know it. She was either dead and mutilated, or gagged and drugged and helpless. All that remains is vengeance.'

'I repeat that I doubt it.'

Atherton struck in.

'I am bound to say, with the best will in the world to think otherwise, that I agree with Lessingham.'

'You are wrong.'

'It's all very well for you to talk in that cock-sure way, but it's easier for you to say I'm wrong than to prove it. If I am wrong, and if Lessingham's wrong, how do you explain his extraordinary insistence on taking it inside the cab with him, which the bobby describes? If there wasn't something horrible, awful in that bundle of his, of which he feared the discovery, why was he so reluctant to have it placed upon the roof?'

'There probably was something in it which he was particularly anxious should not be discovered, but I doubt if it was anything of the kind which you suggest.'

'Here is Marjorie in a house alone—nothing has been seen of her since,—her clothing, her hair, is found hidden away under the floor. This scoundrel sallies forth with a huge bundle on his head,—the bobby speaks of it being five or six feet long, or longer,—a bundle which he regards with so much solicitude that he insists on never allowing it to go, for a single instant, out of his sight and reach. What is in the thing? don't all the facts most unfortunately point in one direction?'

Mr Lessingham covered his face with his hands, and groaned.

'I fear that Mr Atherton is right.'

'I differ from you both.'

Sydney at once became heated.

'Then perhaps you can tell us what was in the bundle?'

'I fancy I could make a guess at the contents.'

'Oh you could, could you, then, perhaps, for our sakes, you'll make it,—and not play the oracular owl!—Lessingham and I are interested in this business, after all.'

'It contained the bearer's personal property: that, and nothing more. Stay! before you jeer at me, suffer me to finish. If I am not mistaken as to the identity of the person whom the constable describes as the Arab, I apprehend that the contents of that bundle were of much more importance to him than if they had consisted of Miss Lindon, either dead or living. More. I am inclined to suspect that if the bundle was placed on the roof of the cab, and if the driver did meddle with it, and did find out the contents, and understand them, he would have been driven, out of hand, stark staring mad.'

Sydney was silent, as if he reflected. I imagine he perceived there was something in what I said.

'But what has become of Miss Lindon?'

'I fancy that Miss Lindon, at this moment, is—somewhere; I don't, just now, know exactly where, but I hope very shortly to be able to give you a clearer notion,—attired in a rotten, dirty pair of boots; a filthy, tattered pair of trousers; a ragged, unwashed apology for a shirt; a greasy, ancient, shapeless coat; and a frowsy peaked cloth cap.'

They stared at me, opened-eyed. Atherton was the first to speak.

'What on earth do you mean?'

'I mean that it seems to me that the facts point in the direction of my conclusions rather than yours—and that very strongly too. Miss Coleman asserts that she saw Miss London return into the house; that within a few minutes the blind was replaced at the front window; and that shortly after a young man, attired in the costume I have described, came walking out of the front door. I believe that young man was Miss Marjorie Lindon.'

Lessingham and Atherton both broke out into interrogations, with Sydney, as usual, loudest.

'But—man alive! what on earth should make her do a thing like that? Marjorie, the most retiring, modest girl on all God's earth, walk about in broad daylight, in such a costume, and for no reason at all! my dear Champnell, you are suggesting that she first of all went mad.'

'She was in a state of trance.'

'Good God!—Champnell!'

'Well?'

'Then you think that—juggling villain did get hold of her?'

'Undoubtedly. Here is my view of the case, mind it is only a hypothesis and you must take it for what it is worth. It seems to me quite clear that the Arab, as we will call the person for the sake of identification, was somewhere about the premises when you thought he wasn't.'

'But—where? We looked upstairs, and downstairs, and everywhere—where could he have been?'

'That, as at present advised, I am not prepared to say, but I think you may take it for granted that he was there. He hypnotised the man Holt, and sent him away, intending you to go after him, and so being rid of you both—'

'The deuce he did, Champnell! You write me down an ass!'

'As soon as the coast was clear he discovered himself to Miss Lindon, who, I expect, was disagreeably surprised, and hypnotised her.'

'The hound!'

'The devil!'

The first exclamation was Lessingham's, the second Sydney's.

'He then constrained her to strip herself to the skin—'

'The wretch!'

'The fiend!'

'He cut off her hair; he hid it and her clothes under the floor where we found them—where I think it probable that he had already some ancient masculine garments concealed—'

'By Jove! I shouldn't be surprised if they were Holt's. I remember the man saying that that nice joker stripped him of his duds,—and certainly when I saw him,—and when Marjorie found him!—he had absolutely nothing on but a queer sort of cloak. Can it be possible that that humorous professor of hankey-pankey—may all the maledictions of the accursed alight upon his head!—can have sent Marjorie Lindon, the daintiest damsel in the land!—into the streets of London rigged out in Holt's old togs!'

'As to that, I am not able to give an authoritative opinion, but, if I understand you aright, it at least is possible. Anyhow I am disposed to think that he sent Miss Lindon after the man Holt, taking it for granted that he had eluded you.—'

'That's it. Write me down an ass again!'

'That he did elude you, you have yourself admitted.'

'That's because I stopped talking with that mutton-headed bobby,—I'd have followed the man to the ends of the earth if it hadn't been for that.'

'Precisely; the reason is immaterial, it is the fact with which we are immediately concerned. He did elude you. And I think you will find that Miss Lindon and Mr Holt are together at this moment.'

'In men's clothing?'

'Both in men's clothing, or, rather, Miss Lindon is in a man's rags.'

'Great Potiphar! To think of Marjorie like that!'

'And where they are, the Arab is not very far off either.'

Lessingham caught me by the arm.

'And what diabolical mischief do you imagine that he proposes to do to her?'

I shirked the question.

'Whatever it is, it is our business to prevent his doing it.'

'And where do you think they have been taken?'

'That it will be our immediate business to endeavour to discover,—and here, at any rate, we are at Waterloo.'

CHAPTER XLII

THE QUARRY DOUBLES

I turned towards the booking-office on the main departure platform. As I went, the chief platform inspector, George Bellingham, with whom I had some acquaintance, came out of his office. I stopped him.

'Mr Bellingham, will you be so good as to step with me to the booking-office, and instruct the clerk in charge to answer one or two questions which I wish to put to him. I will explain to you afterwards what is their exact import, but you know me sufficiently to be able to believe me when I say that they refer to a matter in which every moment is of the first importance.'

He turned and accompanied us into the interior of the booking-case.

'To which of the clerks, Mr Champnell, do you wish to put your questions?'

'To the one who issues third-class tickets to Southampton.'

Bellingham beckoned to a man who was counting a heap of money, and apparently seeking to make it tally with the entries in a huge ledger which lay open before him,—he was a short, slightly-built young fellow, with a pleasant face and smiling eyes.

'Mr Stone, this gentleman wishes to ask you one or two questions.'

'I am at his service.'

I put my questions.

'I want to know, Mr Stone, if, in the course of the day, you have issued any tickets to a person dressed in Arab costume?'

His reply was prompt.

'I have—by the last train, the 7.25,—three singles.'

Three singles! Then my instinct had told me rightly.

'Can you describe the person?'

Mr Stone's eyes twinkled.

'I don't know that I can, except in a general way,—he was uncommonly old and uncommonly ugly, and he had a pair of the most extraordinary eyes I ever saw,—they gave me a sort of all-overish feeling when I saw them glaring at me through the pigeon hole. But I can tell you one thing about him, he had a great bundle on his head, which he steadied with one hand, and as it bulged out in all directions its presence didn't make him popular with other people who wanted tickets too.'

Undoubtedly this was our man.

'You are sure he asked for three tickets?'

'Certain. He said three tickets to Southampton; laid down the exact fare,—nineteen and six—and held up three fingers—like that. Three nasty looking fingers they were, with nails as long as talons.'

'You didn't see who were his companions?'

'I didn't,—I didn't try to look. I gave him his tickets and off he went,—with the people grumbling at him because that bundle of his kept getting in their way.'

Bellingham touched me on the arm.

'I can tell you about the Arab of whom Mr Stone speaks. My attention was called to him by his insisting on taking his bundle with him into the

carriage,—it was an enormous thing, he could hardly squeeze it through the door; it occupied the entire seat. But as there weren't as many passengers as usual, and he wouldn't or couldn't be made to understand that his precious bundle would be safe in the luggage van along with the rest of the luggage, and as he wasn't the sort of person you could argue with to any advantage, I had him put into an empty compartment, bundle and all.'

'Was he alone then?'

'I thought so at the time, he said nothing about having more than one ticket, or any companions, but just before the train started two other men—English men—got into his compartment; and as I came down the platform, the ticket inspector at the barrier informed me that these two men were with him, because he held tickets for the three, which, as he was a foreigner, and they seemed English, struck the inspector as odd.'

'Could you describe the two men?'

'I couldn't, not particularly, but the man who had charge of the barrier might. I was at the other end of the train when they got in. All I noticed was that one seemed to be a commonplace looking individual and that the other was dressed like a tramp, all rags and tatters, a disreputable looking object he appeared to be.'

'That,' I said to myself, 'was Miss Marjorie Lindon, the lovely daughter of a famous house; the wife-elect of a coming statesman.'

To Bellingham I remarked aloud:

'I want you to strain a point, Mr Bellingham, and to do me a service which I assure you you shall never have any cause to regret. I want you to wire instructions down the line to detain this Arab and his companions and to keep them in custody until the receipt of further instructions. They are not wanted by the police as yet, but they will be as soon as I am able to give certain information to the authorities at Scotland Yard,—and wanted very badly. But, as you will perceive for yourself, until I am able to give that information every moment is important.—Where's the Station Superintendent?'

'He's gone. At present I'm in charge.'

'Then will you do this for me? I repeat that you shall never have any reason to regret it.'

'I will if you'll accept all responsibility.'

'I'll do that with the greatest pleasure.'

Bellingham looked at his watch.

'It's about twenty minutes to nine. The train's scheduled for Basingstoke at 9.6. If we wire to Basingstoke at once they ought to be ready for them when they come.'

'Good!'

The wire was sent.

We were shown into Bellingham's office to await results. Lessingham paced agitatedly to and fro; he seemed to have reached the limits of his self-control, and to be in a condition in which movement of some sort was an absolute necessity. The mercurial Sydney, on the contrary, leaned back in a chair, his legs stretched out in front of him, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, and stared at Lessingham, as if he found relief to his feelings in watching his companion's restlessness. I, for my part, drew up as full a precis of the case as I deemed advisable, and as time permitted, which I despatched by one of the company's police to Scotland Yard.

Then I turned to my associates.

'Now, gentlemen, it's past dinner time. We may have a journey in front of us. If you take my advice you'll have something to eat.'

Lessingham shook his head.

'I want nothing.'

'Nor I,' echoed Sydney.

I started up.

'You must pardon my saying nonsense, but surely you of all men, Mr Lessingham, should be aware that you will not improve the situation by rendering yourself incapable of seeing it through. Come and dine.'

I haled them off with me, willy nilly, to the refreshment room, I dined,—after a fashion; Mr Lessingham swallowed with difficulty, a plate of soup; Sydney nibbled at a plate of the most unpromising looking 'chicken and ham,'—he proved, indeed, more intractable than Lessingham, and was not to be persuaded to tackle anything easier of digestion.

I was just about to take cheese after chop when Bellingham came hastening in, in his hand an open telegram.

'The birds have flown,' he cried.

'Flown!—How?'

In reply he gave me the telegram. I glanced at it. It ran:

'Persons described not in the train. Guard says they got out at Vauxhall. Have wired Vauxhall to advise you.'

'That's a level-headed chap,' said Bellingham. 'The man who sent that telegram. His wiring to Vauxhall should save us a lot of time,—we ought to hear from there directly. Hollo! what's this? I shouldn't be surprised if this is it.'

As he spoke a porter entered,—he handed an envelope to Bellingham. We all three kept our eyes fixed on the inspector's face as he opened it. When he perceived the contents he gave an exclamation of surprise.

'This Arab of yours, and his two friends, seem rather a curious lot, Mr Champnell.'

He passed the paper on to me. It took the form of a report. Lessingham and Sydney, regardless of forms and ceremonies, leaned over my shoulder as I read it.

'Passengers by 7.30 Southampton, on arrival of train, complained of noises coming from a compartment in coach 8964. Stated that there had been shrieks and yells ever since the train left Waterloo, as if someone was being murdered. An Arab and two Englishmen got out of the compartment in question, apparently the party referred to in wire just to hand from Basingstoke. All three declared that there was nothing the matter. That they had been shouting for fun. Arab gave up three third singles for Southampton, saying, in reply to questions, that they had changed their minds, and did not want to go any farther. As there were no signs of a struggle or of violence, nor, apparently, any definite cause for detention, they were allowed to pass. They took a four-wheeler, No. 09435. The Arab and one man went inside, and the other man on the box. They asked to be driven to Commercial Road, Limehouse. The cab has since returned. Driver says he put the three men down, at their request, in Commercial Road, at the corner of Sutcliffe Street, near the East India Docks. They walked up Sutcliffe Street, the Englishmen in front, and the Arab behind, took the first turning to the right, and after that he saw nothing of them. The driver further states that all the way the Englishman inside, who was so ragged and dirty that he was reluctant to carry him, kept up a sort of wailing noise which so attracted his attention that he twice got off his box to see what was the matter, and each time he said it was nothing. The cabman is of opinion that both the Englishmen were of weak intellect. We were of the same impression here. They said nothing, except at the seeming instigation of the Arab, but when spoken to stared and gaped like lunatics.

'It may be mentioned that the Arab had with him an enormous bundle, which he persisted, in spite of all remonstrances, on taking with him inside the cab.'

As soon as I had mastered the contents of the report, and perceived what I believed to be—unknown to the writer himself—its hideous inner meaning, I turned to Bellingham.

'With your permission, Mr Bellingham, I will keep this communication,—it will be safe in my hands, you will be able to get a copy, and it may be necessary that I should have the original to show to the police. If any inquiries are made for me from Scotland Yard, tell them that I have gone to

the Commercial Road, and that I will report my movements from Limehouse Police Station.'

In another minute we were once more traversing the streets of London,—three in a hansom cab.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE MURDER AT MRS 'ENDERSON'S

It is something of a drive from Waterloo to Limehouse,—it seems longer when all your nerves are tingling with anxiety to reach your journey's end; and the cab I had hit upon proved to be not the fastest I might have chosen. For some time after our start, we were silent. Each was occupied with his own thoughts.

Then Lessingham, who was sitting at my side, said to me,

'Mr Champnell, you have that report.'

'I have.'

'Will you let me see it once more?'

I gave it to him. He read it once, twice,—and I fancy yet again. I purposely avoided looking at him as he did so. Yet all the while I was conscious of his pallid cheeks, the twitched muscles of his mouth, the feverish glitter of his eyes,—this Leader of Men, whose predominate characteristic in the House of Commons was immobility, was rapidly approximating to the condition of a hysterical woman. The mental strain which he had been recently undergoing was proving too much for his physical strength. This disappearance of the woman he loved bade fair to be the final straw. I felt convinced that unless something was done quickly to relieve the strain upon his mind he was nearer to a state of complete mental and moral collapse than he himself imagined. Had he been under my orders I should have commanded him to at once return home, and not to think; but conscious that, as things were, such a direction would be simply futile, I decided to do

something else instead. Feeling that suspense was for him the worst possible form of suffering I resolved to explain, so far as I was able, precisely what it was I feared, and how I proposed to prevent it.

Presently there came the question for which I had been waiting, in a harsh, broken voice which no one who had heard him speak on a public platform, or in the House of Commons, would have recognised as his.

'Mr Champnell,—who do you think this person is of whom the report from Vauxhall Station speaks as being all in rags and tatters?'

He knew perfectly well,—but I understood the mental attitude which induced him to prefer that the information should seem to come from me.

'I hope that it will prove to be Miss Lindon.'

'Hope!' He gave a sort of gasp.

'Yes, hope,—because if it is I think it possible, nay probable, that within a few hours you will have her again enfolded in your arms.'

'Pray God that it may be so! pray God!—pray the good God!'

I did not dare to look round for, from the tremor which was in his tone, I was persuaded that in the speaker's eyes were tears. Atherton continued silent. He was leaning half out of the cab, staring straight ahead, as if he saw in front a young girl's face, from which he could not remove his glance, and which beckoned him on.

After a while Lessingham spoke again, as if half to himself and half to me.

'This mention of the shrieks on the railway, and of the wailing noise in the cab,—what must this wretch have done to her? How my darling must have suffered!'

That was a theme on which I myself scarcely ventured to allow my thoughts to rest. The notion of a gently-nurtured girl being at the mercy of that fiend incarnate, possessed—as I believed that so-called Arab to be possessed—of all the paraphernalia of horror and of dread, was one which caused me

tangible shrinkings of the body. Whence had come those shrieks and yells, of which the writer of the report spoke, which had caused the Arab's fellow-passengers to think that murder was being done? What unimaginable agony had caused them? what speechless torture? And the 'wailing noise,' which had induced the prosaic, indurated London cabman to get twice off his box to see what was the matter, what anguish had been provocative of that? The helpless girl who had already endured so much, endured, perhaps, that to which death would have been preferred!—shut up in that rattling, jolting box on wheels, alone with that diabolical Asiatic, with the enormous bundle, which was but the lurking place of nameless terrors,—what might she not, while being borne through the heart of civilised London, have been made to suffer? What had she not been made to suffer to have kept up that continued 'wailing noise'?

It was not a theme on which it was wise to permit one's thoughts to linger,—and particularly was it clear that it was one from which Lessingham's thoughts should have been kept as far as possible away.

'Come, Mr Lessingham, neither you nor I will do himself any good by permitting his reflections to flow in a morbid channel. Let us talk of something else. By the way, weren't you due to speak in the House to-night?'

'Due!—Yes, I was due,—but what does it matter?'

'But have you acquainted no one with the cause of your non-attendance?'

'Acquaint!—whom should I acquaint?'

'My good sir! Listen to me, Mr Lessingham. Let me entreat you very earnestly, to follow my advice. Call another cab,—or take this! and go at once to the House. It is not too late. Play the man, deliver the speech you have undertaken to deliver, perform your political duties. By coming with me you will be a hindrance rather than a help, and you may do your reputation an injury from which it never may recover. Do as I counsel you, and I will undertake to do my very utmost to let you have good news by the time your speech is finished.'

He turned on me with a bitterness for which I was unprepared.

'If I were to go down to the House, and try to speak in the state in which I am now, they would laugh at me, I should be ruined.'

'Do you not run an equally great risk of being ruined by staying away?'

He gripped me by the arm.

'Mr Champnell, do you know that I am on the verge of madness? Do you know that as I am sitting here by your side I am living in a dual world? I am going on and on to catch that—that fiend, and I am back again in that Egyptian den, upon that couch of rugs, with the Woman of the Songs beside me, and Marjorie is being torn and tortured, and burnt before my eyes! God help me! Her shrieks are ringing in my ears!'

He did not speak loudly, but his voice was none the less impressive on that account. I endeavoured my hardest to be stern.

'I confess that you disappoint me, Mr Lessingham. I have always understood that you were a man of unusual strength; you appear instead, to be a man of extraordinary weakness; with an imagination so ill-governed that its ebullitions remind me of nothing so much as feminine hysterics, Your wild language is not warranted by circumstances. I repeat that I think it quite possible that by to-morrow morning she will be returned to you.'

'Yes,—but how? as the Marjorie I have known, as I saw her last,—or how?'

That was the question which I had already asked myself, in what condition would she be when we had succeeded in snatching her from her captor's grip? It was a question to which I had refused to supply an answer. To him I lied by implication.

'Let us hope that, with the exception of being a trifle scared, she will be as sound and hale and hearty as even in her life.'

'Do you yourself believe that she'll be like that,—untouched, unchanged, unstained?'

Then I lied right out,—it seemed to me necessary to calm his growing excitement.

'I do.'

'You don't!'

'Mr Lessingham!'

'Do you think that I can't see your face and read in it the same thoughts which trouble me? As a man of honour do you care to deny that when Marjorie Lindon is restored to me,—if she ever is!—you fear she will be but the mere soiled husk of the Marjorie whom I knew and loved?'

'Even supposing that there may be a modicum of truth in what you say,—which I am far from being disposed to admit—what good purpose do you propose to serve by talking in such a strain?'

'None,—no good purpose,—unless it be the desire of looking the truth in the face. For, Mr Champnell, you must not seek to play with me the hypocrite, nor try to hide things from me as if I were a child. If my life is ruined—it is ruined,—let me know it, and look the knowledge in the face. That, to me, is to play the man.'

I was silent.

The wild tale he had told me of that Cairene inferno, oddly enough—yet why oddly, for the world is all coincidence!—had thrown a flood of light on certain events which had happened some three years previously and which ever since had remained shrouded in mystery. The conduct of the business afterwards came into my hands,—and briefly, what had occurred was this:

Three persons,—two sisters and their brother, who was younger than themselves, members of a decent English family, were going on a trip round the world. They were young, adventurous, and—not to put too fine a point on it—foolhardy. The evening after their arrival in Cairo, by way of what is called 'a lark,' in spite of the protestations of people who were better

informed than themselves, they insisted on going, alone, for a ramble through the native quarter.

They went,—but they never returned. Or, rather the two girls never returned. After an interval the young man was found again,—what was left of him. A fuss was made when there were no signs of their re-appearance, but as there were no relations, nor even friends of theirs, but only casual acquaintances on board the ship by which they had travelled, perhaps not so great a fuss as might have been was made. Anyhow, nothing was discovered. Their widowed mother, alone in England, wondering how it was that beyond the receipt of a brief wire, acquainting her with their arrival at Cairo, she had heard nothing further of their wanderings, placed herself in communication with the diplomatic people over there,—to learn that, to all appearances, her three children had vanished from off the face of the earth.

Then a fuss was made,—with a vengeance. So far as one can judge the whole town and neighbourhood was turned pretty well upside down. But nothing came of it,—so far as any results were concerned, the authorities might just as well have left the mystery of their vanishment alone. It continued where it was in spite of them.

However, some three months afterwards a youth was brought to the British Embassy by a party of friendly Arabs who asserted that they had found him naked and nearly dying in some remote spot in the Wady Haifa desert. It was the brother of the two lost girls. He was as nearly dying as he very well could be without being actually dead when they brought him to the Embassy,—and in a state of indescribable mutilation. He seemed to rally for a time under careful treatment, but he never again uttered a coherent word. It was only from his delirious ravings that any idea was formed of what had really occurred.

Shorthand notes were taken of some of the utterances of his delirium. Afterwards they were submitted to me. I remembered the substance of them quite well, and when Mr Lessingham began to tell me of his own hideous experiences they came back to me more clearly still. Had I laid those notes before him I have little doubt but that he would have immediately perceived that seventeen years after the adventure which had left such an indelible

scar upon his own life, this youth—he was little more than a boy—had seen the things which he had seen, and suffered the nameless agonies and degradations which he had suffered. The young man was perpetually raving about some indescribable den of horror which was own brother to Lessingham's temple and about some female monster, whom he regarded with such fear and horror that every allusion he made to her was followed by a convulsive paroxysm which taxed all the ingenuity of his medical attendants to bring him out of. He frequently called upon his sisters by name, speaking of them in a manner which inevitably suggested that he had been an unwilling and helpless witness of hideous tortures which they had undergone; and then he would rise in bed, screaming, 'They're burning them! they're burning them! Devils! devils!' And at those times it required all the strength of those who were in attendance to restrain his maddened frenzy.

The youth died in one of these fits of great preternatural excitement, without, as I have previously written, having given utterance to one single coherent word, and by some of those who were best able to judge it was held to have been a mercy that he did die without having been restored to consciousness. And, presently, tales began to be whispered, about some idolatrous sect, which was stated to have its headquarters somewhere in the interior of the country—some located it in this neighbourhood, and some in that—which was stated to still practise, and to always have practised, in unbroken historical continuity, the debased, unclean, mystic, and bloody rites, of a form of idolatry which had had its birth in a period of the world's story which was so remote, that to all intents and purposes it might be described as pre-historic.

While the ferment was still at its height, a man came to the British Embassy who said that he was a member of a tribe which had its habitat on the banks of the White Nile. He asserted that he was in association with this very idolatrous sect,—though he denied that he was one of the actual sectaries. He did admit, however, that he had assisted more than once at their orgies, and declared that it was their constant practice to offer young women as sacrifices—preferably white Christian women, with a special preference, if they could get them, to young English women. He vowed that he himself had seen with his own eyes, English girls burnt alive. The description which

he gave of what preceded and followed these foul murders appalled those who listened. He finally wound up by offering, on payment of a stipulated sum of money, to guide a troop of soldiers to this den of demons, so that they should arrive there at a moment when it was filled with worshippers, who were preparing to participate in an orgie which was to take place during the next few days.

His offer was conditionally accepted. He was confined in an apartment with one man on guard inside and another on guard outside the room. That night the sentinel without was startled by hearing a great noise and frightful screams issuing from the chamber in which the native was interned. He summoned assistance. The door was opened. The soldier on guard within was stark, staring mad,—he died within a few months, a gibbering maniac to the end. The native was dead. The window, which was a very small one, was securely fastened inside and strongly barred without. There was nothing to show by what means entry had been gained. Yet it was the general opinion of those who saw the corpse that the man had been destroyed by some wild beast. A photograph was taken of the body after death, a copy of which is still in my possession. In it are distinctly shown lacerations about the neck and the lower portion of the abdomen, as if they had been produced by the claws of some huge and ferocious animal. The skull is splintered in half-a-dozen places, and the face is torn to rags.

That was more than three years ago. The whole business has remained as great a mystery as ever. But my attention has once or twice been caught by trifling incidents, which have caused me to more than suspect that the wild tale told by that murdered native had in it at least the elements of truth; and which have even led me to wonder if the trade in kidnapping was not being carried on to this very hour, and if women of my own flesh and blood were not still being offered up on that infernal altar. And now, here was Paul Lessingham, a man of world-wide reputation, of great intellect, of undoubted honour, who had come to me with a wholly unconscious verification of all my worst suspicions!

That the creature spoken of as an Arab,—and who was probably no more an Arab than I was, and whose name was certainly not Mohamed el Kheir!—was an emissary from that den of demons, I had no doubt. What was the

exact purport of the creature's presence in England was another question, Possibly part of the intention was the destruction of Paul Lessingham, body, soul and spirit; possibly another part was the procurement of fresh victims for that long-drawn-out holocaust. That this latter object explained the disappearance of Miss Lindon I felt persuaded. That she was designed by the personification of evil who was her captor, to suffer all the horrors at which the stories pointed, and then to be burned alive, amidst the triumphant yells of the attendant demons, I was certain. That the wretch, aware that the pursuit was in full cry, was tearing, twisting, doubling, and would stick at nothing which would facilitate the smuggling of the victim out of England, was clear.

My interest in the quest was already far other than a merely professional one. The blood in my veins tingled at the thought of such a woman as Miss Lindon being in the power of such a monster. I may assuredly claim that throughout the whole business I was urged forward by no thought of fee or of reward. To have had a share in rescuing that unfortunate girl, and in the destruction of her noxious persecutor, would have been reward enough for me.

One is not always, even in strictly professional matters, influenced by strictly professional instincts.

The cab slowed. A voice descended through the trap door.

'This is Commercial Road, sir,—what part of it do you want?'

'Drive me to Limehouse Police Station.'

We were driven there. I made my way to the usual inspector behind the usual pigeon-hole.

'My name is Champnell. Have you received any communication from Scotland Yard to-night having reference to a matter in which I am interested?'

'Do you mean about the Arab? We received a telephonic message about half an hour ago.'

'Since communicating with Scotland Yard this has come to hand from the authorities at Vauxhall Station. Can you tell me if anything has been seen of the person in question by the men of your division?'

I handed the Inspector the 'report.' His reply was laconic.

'I will inquire.'

He passed through a door into an inner room and the 'report' went with him.

'Beg pardon, sir, but was that a Harab you was a-talking about to the Hinspector?'

The speaker was a gentleman unmistakably of the gutter-snipe class. He was seated on a form. Close at hand hovered a policeman whose special duty it seemed to be to keep an eye upon his movements.

'Why do you ask?'

'I beg your pardon, sir, but I saw a Harab myself about a hour ago,—leastways he looked like as if he was a Harab.'

'What sort of a looking person was he?'

'I can't 'ardly tell you that, sir, because I didn't never have a proper look at him,—but I know he had a bloomin' great bundle on 'is 'ead. ... It was like this, 'ere. I was comin' round the corner, as he was passin', I never see 'im till I was right atop of 'im, so that I haccidentally run agin 'im,—my heye! didn't 'e give me a downer! I was down on the back of my 'ead in the middle of the road before I knew where I was and 'e was at the other end of the street. If 'e 'adn't knocked me more'n 'arf silly I'd been after 'im, sharp,—I tell you! and hasked 'im what 'e thought 'e was a-doin' of, but afore my senses was back agin 'e was out o' sight,—clean!'

'You are sure he had a bundle on his head?'

'I noticed it most particular.'

'How long ago do you say this was? and where?'

'About a hour ago,—perhaps more, perhaps less.'

'Was he alone?'

'It seemed to me as if a cove was a follerin' 'im, leastways there was a bloke as was a-keepin' close at 'is 'eels,—though I don't know what 'is little game was, I'm sure. Ask the pleesman—he knows, he knows everything the pleesman do.'

I turned to the 'pleesman.'

'Who is this man?'

The 'pleesman' put his hands behind his back, and threw out his chest. His manner was distinctly affable.

'Well,—he's being detained upon suspicion. He's given us an address at which to make inquiries, and inquiries are being made. I shouldn't pay too much attention to what he says if I were you. I don't suppose he'd be particular about a lie or two.'

This frank expression of opinion re-aroused the indignation of the gentleman on the form.

'There you hare! at it again! That's just like you peelers,—you're all the same! What do you know about me?—Nuffink! This gen'leman ain't got no call to believe me, not as I knows on,—it's all the same to me if 'e do or don't, but it's trewth what I'm sayin', all the same.'

At this point the Inspector re-appeared at the pigeon-hole. He cut short the flow of eloquence.

'Now then, not so much noise outside there!' He addressed me. 'None of our men have seen anything of the person you're inquiring for, so far as we're aware. But, if you like, I will place a man at your disposal, and he will go round with you, and you will be able to make your own inquiries.'

A capless, wildly excited young ragamuffin came dashing in at the street door. He gasped out, as clearly as he could for the speed which he had

made:

'There's been murder done, Mr Pleesman,—a Harab's killed a bloke.'

'Mr Pleesman' gripped him by the shoulder.

'What's that?'

The youngster put up his arm, and ducked his head, instinctively, as if to ward off a blow.

'Leave me alone! I don't want none of your 'andling!—I ain't done nuffink to you! I tell you 'e 'as!'

The Inspector spoke through the pigeon-hole.

'He has what, my lad? What do you say has happened?'

'There's been murder done—it's right enough!—there 'as!—up at Mrs 'Enderson's, in Paradise Place,—a Harab's been and killed a bloke!'

CHAPTER XLIV

THE MAN WHO WAS MURDERED

The Inspector spoke to me.

'If what the boy says is correct it sounds as if the person whom you are seeking may have had a finger in the pie.'

I was of the same opinion, as, apparently, were Lessingham and Sidney. Atherton collared the youth by the shoulder which Mr Pleesman had left disengaged.

'What sort of looking bloke is it who's been murdered?'

'I dunno! I 'aven't seen 'im! Mrs 'Enderson, she says to me! "'Gustus Barley," she says, "a bloke's been murdered. That there Harab what I chucked out 'alf a hour ago been and murdered 'im, and left 'im behind up in my back room. You run as 'ard as you can tear and tell them there dratted please what's so fond of shovin' their dirty noses into respectable people's 'ouses." So I comes and tells yer. That's all I knows about it.'

We went four in the hansom which had been waiting in the street to Mrs Henderson's in Paradise Place,—the Inspector and we three. 'Mr Pleesman' and 'Gustus Barley' followed on foot. The Inspector was explanatory.

'Mrs Henderson keeps a sort of lodging-house,—a "Sailors' Home" she calls it, but no one could call it sweet. It doesn't bear the best of characters, and if you asked me what I thought of it, I should say in plain English that it was a disorderly house.'

Paradise Place proved to be within three or four hundred yards of the Station House. So far as could be seen in the dark it consisted of a row of houses of considerable dimensions,—and also of considerable antiquity. They opened on to two or three stone steps which led directly into the street. At one of the doors stood an old lady with a shawl drawn over her head. This was Mrs Henderson. She greeted us with garrulous volubility.

'So you 'ave come, 'ave you? I thought you never was a-comin' that I did.' She recognised the Inspector. 'It's you, Mr Phillips, is it?' Perceiving us, she drew a little back 'Who's them 'ere parties? They ain't coppers?'

Mr Phillips dismissed her inquiry, curtly.

'Never you mind who they are. What's this about someone being murdered.'

'Ssh!' The old lady glanced round. 'Don't you speak so loud, Mr Phillips. No one don't know nothing about it as yet. The parties what's in my 'ouse is most respectable,—most! and they couldn't abide the notion of there being police about the place.'

'We quite believe that, Mrs Henderson.'

The Inspector's tone was grim.

Mrs Henderson led the way up a staircase which would have been distinctly the better for repairs. It was necessary to pick one's way as one went, and as the light was defective stumbles were not infrequent.

Our guide paused outside a door on the topmost landing. From some mysterious recess in her apparel she produced a key.

'It's in 'ere. I locked the door so that nothing mightn't be disturbed. I knows 'ow particular you pleesmen is.'

She turned the key. We all went in—we, this time, in front, and she behind.

A candle was guttering on a broken and dilapidated single washhand stand. A small iron bedstead stood by its side, the clothes on which were all tumbled and tossed. There was a rush-seated chair with a hole in the seat,—

and that, with the exception of one or two chipped pieces of stoneware, and a small round mirror which was hung on a nail against the wall, seemed to be all that the room contained. I could see nothing in the shape of a murdered man. Nor, it appeared, could the Inspector either.

'What's the meaning of this, Mrs Henderson? I don't see anything here.'

'It's be'ind the bed, Mr Phillips. I left 'im just where I found 'im, I wouldn't 'ave touched 'im not for nothing, nor yet 'ave let nobody else 'ave touched 'im neither, because, as I say, I know 'ow particular you pleesmen is.'

We all four went hastily forward. Atherton and I went to the head of the bed, Lessingham and the Inspector, leaning right across the bed, peeped over the side. There, on the floor in the space which was between the bed and the wall, lay the murdered man.

At sight of him an exclamation burst from Sydney's lips.

'It's Holt!'

'Thank God!' cried Lessingham. 'It isn't Marjorie!'

The relief in his tone was unmistakable. That the one was gone was plainly nothing to him in comparison with the fact that the other was left.

Thrusting the bed more into the centre of the room I knelt down beside the man on the floor. A more deplorable spectacle than he presented I have seldom witnessed. He was decently clad in a grey tweed suit, white hat, collar and necktie, and it was perhaps that fact which made his extreme attenuation the more conspicuous. I doubt if there was an ounce of flesh on the whole of his body. His cheeks and the sockets of his eyes were hollow. The skin was drawn tightly over his cheek bones,—the bones themselves were staring through. Even his nose was wasted, so that nothing but a ridge of cartilage remained. I put my arm beneath his shoulder and raised him from the floor; no resistance was offered by the body's gravity,—he was as light as a little child.

'I doubt,' I said, 'if this man has been murdered. It looks to me like a case of starvation, or exhaustion,—possibly a combination of both.'

'What's that on his neck?' asked the Inspector,—he was kneeling at my side.

He referred to two abrasions of the skin,—one on either side of the man's neck.

'They look to me like scratches. They seem pretty deep, but I don't think they're sufficient in themselves to cause death.'

'They might be, joined to an already weakened constitution. Is there anything in his pockets?—let's lift him on to the bed.'

We lifted him on to the bed,—a featherweight he was to lift. While the Inspector was examining his pockets—to find them empty—a tall man with a big black beard came bustling in. He proved to be Dr Glossop, the local police surgeon, who had been sent for before our quitting the Station House.

His first pronouncement, made as soon as he commenced his examination, was, under the circumstances, sufficiently startling.

'I don't believe the man's dead. Why didn't you send for me directly you found him?'

The question was put to Mrs Henderson.

'Well, Dr Glossop, I wouldn't touch 'im myself, and I wouldn't 'ave 'im touched by no one else, because, as I've said afore, I know 'ow particular them pleesmen is.'

'Then in that case, if he does die you'll have had a hand in murdering him,—that's all'

The lady sniggered. 'Of course Dr Glossop, we all knows that you'll always 'ave your joke.'

'You'll find it a joke if you have to hang, as you ought to, you—' The doctor said what he did say to himself, under his breath. I doubt if it was flattering

to Mrs Henderson. 'Have you got any brandy in the house?'

'We've got everythink in the 'ouse for them as likes to pay for it,—everythink.' Then, suddenly remembering that the police were present, and that hers were not exactly licensed premises, 'Leastways we can send out for it for them parties as gives us the money, being, as is well known, always willing to oblige.'

'Then send for some,—to the tap downstairs, if that's the nearest! If this man dies before you've brought it I'll have you locked up as sure as you're a living woman.'

The arrival of the brandy was not long delayed,—but the man on the bed had regained consciousness before it came. Opening his eyes he looked up at the doctor bending over him.

'Hollo, my man! that's more like the time of day! How are you feeling?'

The patient stared hazily up at the doctor, as if his sense of perception was not yet completely restored,—as if this big bearded man was something altogether strange. Atherton bent down beside the doctor.

'I'm glad to see you looking better, Mr Holt. You know me don't you? I've been running about after you all day long.'

'You are—you are—' The man's eyes closed, as if the effort at recollection exhausted him. He kept them closed as he continued to speak.

'I know who you are. You are—the gentleman.'

'Yes, that's it, I'm the gentleman,—name of Atherton.—Miss Lindon's friend. And I daresay you're feeling pretty well done up, and in want of something to eat and drink,—here's some brandy for you.'

The doctor had some in a tumbler. He raised the patient's head, allowing it to trickle down his throat. The man swallowed it mechanically, motionless, as if unconscious what it was that he was doing. His cheeks flushed, the passing glow of colour caused their condition of extraordinary, and, indeed,

extravagant attentuation, to be more prominent than ever. The doctor laid him back upon the bed, feeling his pulse with one hand, while he stood and regarded him in silence.

Then, turning to the Inspector, he said to him in an undertone;

'If you want him to make a statement he'll have to make it now, he's going fast. You won't be able to get much out of him,—he's too far gone, and I shouldn't bustle him, but get what you can.'

The Inspector came to the front, a notebook in his hand.

'I understand from this gentleman—' signifying Atherton—'that your name's Robert Holt. I'm an Inspector of police, and I want you to tell me what has brought you into this condition. Has anyone been assaulting you?'

Holt, opening his eyes, glanced up at the speaker mistily, as if he could not see him clearly,—still less understand what it was that he was saying. Sydney, stooping over him, endeavoured to explain.

'The Inspector wants to know how you got here, has anyone been doing anything to you? Has anyone been hurting you?'

The man's eyelids were partially closed. Then they opened wider and wider. His mouth opened too. On his skeleton features there came a look of panic fear. He was evidently struggling to speak. At last words came.

'The beetle!' He stopped. Then, after an effort, spoke again. 'The beetle!'

'What's he mean?' asked the Inspector.

'I think I understand,' Sydney answered; then turning again to the man in the bed. 'Yes, I hear what you say,—the beetle. Well, has the beetle done anything to you?'

'It took me by the throat!'

'Is that the meaning of the marks upon your neck?'

'The beetle killed me.'

The lids closed. The man relapsed into a state of lethargy. The Inspector was puzzled;—and said so.

'What's he mean about a beetle?'

Atherton replied.

'I think I understand what he means,—and my friends do too. We'll explain afterwards. In the meantime I think I'd better get as much out of him as I can,—while there's time.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, his hand upon the patient's pulse, 'while there's time. There isn't much—only seconds.'

Sydney endeavoured to rouse the man from his stupor.

'You've been with Miss Lindon all the afternoon and evening, haven't you, Mr Holt?'

Atherton had reached a chord in the man's consciousness. His lips moved, —in painful articulation.

'Yes—all the afternoon—and evening—God help me!'

'I hope God will help you my poor fellow; you've been in need of His help if ever man was. Miss Lindon is disguised in your old clothes, isn't she?'

'Yes,—in my old clothes. My God!'

'And where is Miss Lindon now?'

The man had been speaking with his eyes closed. Now he opened them, wide; there came into them the former staring horror. He became possessed by uncontrollable agitation,—half raising himself in bed. Words came from his quivering lips as if they were only drawn from him by the force of his anguish.

'The beetle's going to kill Miss Lindon.'

A momentary paroxysm seemed to shake the very foundations of his being. His whole frame quivered. He fell back on to the bed,—ominously. The doctor examined him in silence—while we too were still.

'This time he's gone for good, there'll be no conjuring him back again.'

I felt a sudden pressure on my arm, and found that Lessingham was clutching me with probably unconscious violence. The muscles of his face were twitching. He trembled. I turned to the doctor.

'Doctor, if there is any of that brandy left will you let me have it for my friend?'

Lessingham disposed of the remainder of the 'shillings worth.' I rather fancy it saved us from a scene.

The Inspector was speaking to the woman of the house.

'Now, Mrs Henderson, perhaps you'll tell us what all this means. Who is this man, and how did he come in here, and who came in with him, and what do you know about it altogether? If you've got anything to say, say it, only you'd better be careful, because it's my duty to warn you that anything you do say may be used against you.'

CHAPTER XLV

ALL THAT MRS 'ENDERSON KNEW

Mrs Henderson put her hands under her apron and smirked.

'Well, Mr Phillips, it do sound strange to 'ear you talkin' to me like that. Anybody'd think I'd done something as I didn't ought to 'a' done to 'ear you going on. As for what's 'appened, I'll tell you all I know with the greatest willingness on earth. And as for bein' careful, there ain't no call for you to tell me to be that, for that I always am, as by now you ought to know.'

'Yes,—I do know. Is that all you have to say?'

'Rilly, Mr Phillips, what a man you are for catching people up, you rilly are. O' course that ain't all I've got to say,—ain't I just a-comin' to it?'

'Then come.'

'If you presses me so you'll muddle of me up, and then if I do 'appen to make a horror, you'll say I'm a liar, when goodness knows there ain't no more truthful woman not in Limehouse.'

Words plainly trembled on the Inspector's lips,—which he refrained from uttering. Mrs Henderson cast her eyes upwards, as if she sought for inspiration from the filthy ceiling.

'So far as I can swear it might 'ave been a hour ago, or it might 'ave been a hour and a quarter, or it might 'ave been a hour and twenty minutes—'

'We're not particular as to the seconds.'

'When I 'ears a knockin' at my front door, and when I comes to open it, there was a Harab party, with a great bundle on 'is 'ead, bigger nor 'isself, and two other parties along with him. This Harab party says, in that queer foreign way them Harab parties 'as of talkin', "A room for the night, a room." Now I don't much care for foreigners, and never did, especially them Harabs, which their 'abits ain't my own,—so I as much 'ints the same. But this 'ere Harab party, he didn't seem to quite foller of my meaning, for all he done was to say as he said afore, "A room for the night, a room." And he shoves a couple of 'arf crowns into my 'and. Now it's always been a motter o' mine, that money is money, and one man's money is as good as another man's. So, not wishing to be disagreeable—which other people would have taken 'em if I 'adn't, I shows 'em up 'ere. I'd been downstairs it might 'ave been 'arf a hour, when I 'ears a shindy a-coming from this room —'

'What sort of a shindy?'

'Yelling and shrieking—oh my gracious, it was enough to set your blood all curdled,—for ear-piercingness I never did 'ear nothing like it. We do 'ave troublesome parties in 'ere, like they do elsewhere, but I never did 'ear nothing like that before. I stood it for about a minute, but it kep' on, and kep' on, and every moment I expected as the other parties as was in the 'ouse would be complainin', so up I comes and I thumps at the door, and it seemed that thump I might for all the notice that was took of me.'

'Did the noise keep on?'

'Keep on! I should think it did keep on! Lord love you! shriek after shriek, I expected to see the roof took off.'

'Were there any other noises? For instance, were there any sounds of struggling, or of blows?'

'There weren't no sounds except of the party hollering.'

'One party only?'

'One party only. As I says afore, shriek after shriek,—when you put your ear to the panel there was a noise like some other party blubbering, but that weren't nothing, as for the hollering you wouldn't have thought that nothing what you might call 'umin could 'ave kep' up such a screechin'. I thumps and thumps and at last when I did think that I should 'ave to 'ave the door broke down, the Harab says to me from inside, "Go away! I pay for the room! go away!" I did think that pretty good, I tell you that. So I says, "Pay for the room or not pay for the room, you didn't pay to make that shindy!" And what's more I says, "If I 'ear it again," I says, "out you goes! And if you don't go quiet I'll 'ave somebody in as'll pretty quickly make you!"'

'Then was there silence?'

'So to speak there was,—only there was this sound as if some party was a-blubbering, and another sound as if a party was a-panting for his breath.'

'Then what happened?'

'Seeing that, so to speak, all was quiet, down I went again. And in another quarter of a hour, or it might 'ave been twenty minutes, I went to the front door to get a mouthful of hair. And Mrs Barker, what lives over the road, at No. 24, she comes to me and says, "That there Arab party of yours didn't stop long." I looks at 'er, "I don't quite foller you," I says,—which I didn't. "I saw him come in," she says, "and then, a few minutes back, I see 'im go again, with a great bundle on 'is 'ead he couldn't 'ardly stagger under!" "Oh," I says, "that's news to me, I didn't know 'e'd gone, nor see him neither ——" which I didn't. So, up I comes again, and, sure enough, the door was open, and it seems to me that the room was empty, till I come upon this pore young man what was lying be'ind the bed,'

There was a growl from the doctor.

'If you'd had any sense, and sent for me at once, he might have been alive at this moment.'

"Ow was I to know that, Dr Glossop? I couldn't tell. My finding 'im there murdered was quite enough for me. So I runs downstairs, and I nips 'old of 'Gustus Barley, what was leaning against the wall, and I says to him,

"Gustus Barley, run to the station as fast as you can and tell 'em that a man's been murdered,—that Harab's been and killed a bloke." And that's all I know about it, and I couldn't tell you no more, Mr Phillips, not if you was to keep on asking me questions not for hours and hours'

'Then you think it was this man'—with a motion towards the bed—'who was shrieking?'

'To tell you the truth, Mr Phillips, about that I don't 'ardly know what to think. If you 'ad asked me I should 'ave said it was a woman. I ought to know a woman's holler when I 'ear it, if any one does, I've 'eard enough of 'em in my time, goodness knows. And I should 'ave said that only a woman could 'ave hollered like that and only 'er when she was raving mad. But there weren't no woman with him. There was only this man what's murdered, and the other man,—and as for the other man I will say this, that 'e 'adn't got twopennyworth of clothes to cover 'im. But, Mr Phillips, howsomever that may be, that's the last Harab I'll 'ave under my roof, no matter what they pays, and you may mark my words I'll 'ave no more.'

Mrs Henderson, once more glancing upward, as if she imagined herself to have made some declaration of a religious nature, shook her head with much solemnity.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE SUDDEN STOPPING

As we were leaving the house a constable gave the Inspector a note. Having read it he passed it to me. It was from the local office.

'Message received that an Arab with a big bundle on his head has been noticed loitering about the neighbourhood of St Pancras Station. He seemed to be accompanied by a young man who had the appearance of a tramp. Young man seemed ill. They appeared to be waiting for a train, probably to the North. Shall I advise detention?'

I scribbled on the flyleaf of the note.

'Have them detained. If they have gone by train have a special in readiness.'

In a minute we were again in the cab. I endeavoured to persuade Lessingham and Atherton to allow me to conduct the pursuit alone,—in vain. I had no fear of Atherton's succumbing, but I was afraid for Lessingham. What was more almost than the expectation of his collapse was the fact that his looks and manner, his whole bearing, so eloquent of the agony and agitation of his mind, was beginning to tell upon my nerves. A catastrophe of some sort I foresaw. Of the curtain's fall upon one tragedy we had just been witnesses. That there was worse—much worse, to follow I did not doubt. Optimistic anticipations were out of the question,—that the creature we were chasing would relinquish the prey uninjured, no one, after what we had seen and heard, could by any possibility suppose. Should a necessity suddenly arise for prompt and immediate action, that Lessingham would prove a hindrance rather than a help I felt persuaded.

But since moments were precious, and Lessingham was not to be persuaded to allow the matter to proceed without him, all that remained was to make the best of his presence.

The great arch of St Pancras was in darkness. An occasional light seemed to make the darkness still more visible. The station seemed deserted. I thought, at first, that there was not a soul about the place, that our errand was in vain, that the only thing for us to do was to drive to the police station and to pursue our inquiries there. But as we turned towards the booking-office, our footsteps ringing out clearly through the silence and the night, a door opened, a light shone out from the room within, and a voice inquired:

'Who's that?'

'My name's Champnell. Has a message been received from me from the Limehouse Police Station?'

'Step this way.'

We stepped that way,—into a snug enough office, of which one of the railway inspectors was apparently in charge. He was a big man, with a fair beard. He looked me up and down, as if doubtfully. Lessingham he recognised at once. He took off his cap to him.

'Mr Lessingham, I believe?'

'I am Mr Lessingham. Have you any news for me?'

I fancy, by his looks,—that the official was struck by the pallor of the speaker's face,—and by his tremulous voice.

'I am instructed to give certain information to a Mr Augustus Champnell.'

'I am Mr Champnell. What's your information?'

'With reference to the Arab about whom you have been making inquiries. A foreigner, dressed like an Arab, with a great bundle on his head, took two single thirds for Hull by the midnight express.'

'Was he alone?'

'It is believed that he was accompanied by a young man of very disreputable appearance. They were not together at the booking-office, but they had been seen together previously. A minute or so after the Arab had entered the train this young man got into the same compartment—they were in the front waggon.'

'Why were they not detained?'

'We had no authority to detain them, nor any reason, until your message was received a few minutes ago we at this station were not aware that inquiries were being made for them.'

'You say he booked to Hull,—does the train run through to Hull?'

'No—it doesn't go to Hull at all. Part of it's the Liverpool and Manchester Express, and part of it's for Carlisle. It divides at Derby. The man you're looking for will change either at Sheffield or at Cudworth Junction and go on to Hull by the first train in the morning. There's a local service.'

I looked at my watch.

'You say the train left at midnight. It's now nearly five-and-twenty past. Where's it now?'

'Nearing St Albans, it's due there 12.35.'

'Would there be time for a wire to reach St Albans?'

'Hardly,—and anyhow there'll only be enough railway officials about the place to receive and despatch the train. They'll be fully occupied with their ordinary duties. There won't be time to get the police there.'

'You could wire to St Albans to inquire if they were still in the train?'

'That could be done,—certainly. I'll have it done at once if you like.'

'Then where's the next stoppage?'

'Well, they're at Luton at 12.51. But that's another case of St Albans. You see there won't be much more than twenty minutes by the time you've got your wire off, and I don't expect there'll be many people awake at Luton. At these country places sometimes there's a policeman hanging about the station to see the express go through, but, on the other hand, very often there isn't, and if there isn't, probably at this time of night it'll take a good bit of time to get the police on the premises. I tell you what I should advise.'

'What's that?'

'The train is due at Bedford at 1.29—send your wire there. There ought to be plenty of people about at Bedford, and anyhow there'll be time to get the police to the station.'

'Very good. I instructed them to tell you to have a special ready,—have you got one?'

'There's an engine with steam up in the shed,—we'll have all ready for you in less than ten minutes. And I tell you what,—you'll have about fifty minutes before the train is due at Bedford. It's a fifty mile run. With luck you ought to get there pretty nearly as soon as the express does.—Shall I tell them to get ready?'

'At once.'

While he issued directions through a telephone to what, I presume, was the engine shed, I drew up a couple of telegrams. Having completed his orders he turned to me.

'They're coming out of the siding now—they'll be ready in less than ten minutes. I'll see that the line's kept clear. Have you got those wires?'

'Here is one,—this is for Bedford.'

It ran:

'Arrest the Arab who is in train due at 1.29. When leaving St Pancras he was in a third-class compartment in front waggon. He has a large bundle, which detain. He took two third singles for Hull. Also detain his companion, who is dressed like a tramp. This is a young lady whom the Arab has disguised and kidnapped while in a condition of hypnotic trance. Let her have medical assistance and be taken to a hotel. All expenses will be paid on the arrival of the undersigned who is following by special train. As the Arab will probably be very violent a sufficient force of police should be in waiting.

'AUGUSTUS CHAMPNELL.'

'And this is the other. It is probably too late to be of any use at St Albans,—but send it there, and also to Luton.' 'Is Arab with companion in train which left St Pancras at 13.0? If so, do not let them get out till train reaches Bedford, where instructions are being wired for arrest.'

The Inspector rapidly scanned them both.

'They ought to do your business, I should think. Come along with me—I'll have them sent at once, and we'll see if your train's ready.'

The train was not ready,—nor was it ready within the prescribed ten minutes. There was some hitch, I fancy, about a saloon. Finally we had to be content with an ordinary old-fashioned first-class carriage. The delay, however, was not altogether time lost. Just as the engine with its solitary coach was approaching the platform someone came running up with an envelope in his hand.

'Telegram from St Albans.'

I tore it open. It was brief and to the point.

'Arab with companion was in train when it left here. Am wiring Luton.'

'That's all right. Now unless something wholly unforeseen takes place, we ought to have them.'

That unforeseen!

I went forward with the Inspector and the guard of our train to exchange a few final words with the driver. The Inspector explained what instructions he had given.

'I've told the driver not to spare his coal but to take you into Bedford within five minutes after the arrival of the express. He says he thinks that he can do it.'

The driver leaned over his engine, rubbing his hands with the usual oily rag. He was a short, wiry man with grey hair and a grizzled moustache, with about him that bearing of semi-humorous, frank-faced resolution which one notes about engine-drivers as a class.

'We ought to do it, the gradients are against us, but it's a clear night and there's no wind. The only thing that will stop us will be if there's any shunting on the road, or any luggage trains; of course, if we are blocked, we are blocked, but the Inspector says he'll clear the way for us.'

'Yes,' said the Inspector, 'I'll clear the way. I've wired down the road already.'

Atherton broke in.

'Driver, if you get us into Bedford within five minutes of the arrival of the mail there'll be a five-pound note to divide between your mate and you.'

The driver grinned.

'We'll get you there in time, sir, if we have to go clear through the shunters. It isn't often we get a chance of a five-pound note for a run to Bedford, and we'll do our best to earn it.'

The fireman waved his hand in the rear.

'That's right, sir!' he cried. 'We'll have to trouble you for that five-pound note.'

So soon as we were clear of the station it began to seem probable that, as the fireman put it, Atherton would be 'troubled.' Journeying in a train which consists of a single carriage attached to an engine which is flying at topmost speed is a very different business from being an occupant of an ordinary train which is travelling at ordinary express rates. I had discovered that for myself before. That night it was impressed on me more than ever. A tyro—or even a nervous 'season'—might have been excused for expecting at every moment we were going to be derailed. It was hard to believe that the carriage had any springs,—it rocked and swung, and jogged and jolted. Of smooth travelling had we none. Talking was out of the question;—and for that, I, personally, was grateful. Quite apart from the difficulty we experienced in keeping our seats—and when every moment our position was being altered and we were jerked backwards and forwards up and down, this way and that, that was a business which required care,—the noise was deafening. It was as though we were being pursued by a legion of shrieking, bellowing, raging demons.

'George!' shrieked Atherton, 'he does mean to earn that fiver. I hope I'll be alive to pay it him!'

He was only at the other end of the carriage, but though I could see by the distortion of his visage that he was shouting at the top of his voice,—and he has a voice,—I only caught here and there a word or two of what he was saying. I had to make sense of the whole.

Lessingham's contortions were a study. Few of that large multitude of persons who are acquainted with him only by means of the portraits which have appeared in the illustrated papers, would then have recognised the rising statesman. Yet I believe that few things could have better fallen in with his mood than that wild travelling. He might have been almost shaken to pieces,—but the very severity of the shaking served to divert his thoughts from the one dread topic which threatened to absorb them to the exclusion of all else beside. Then there was the tonic influence of the element of risk. The pick-me-up effect of a spice of peril. Actual danger there quite probably was none; but there very really seemed to be. And one thing was absolutely certain, that if we did come to smash while going at that speed we should come to as everlasting smash as the heart of man could by any possibility desire. It is probable that the knowledge that this was so warmed the blood in Lessingham's veins. At any rate as—to use what in this case, was simply a form of speech—I sat and watched him, it seemed to me that he was getting a firmer hold of the strength which had all but escaped him, and that with every jog and jolt he was becoming more and more of a man.

On and on we went dashing, clashing, smashing, roaring, rumbling. Atherton, who had been endeavouring to peer through the window, strained his lungs again in the effort to make himself audible.

'Where the devil are we?'

Looking at my watch I screamed back at him.

'It's nearly one, so I suppose we're somewhere in the neighbourhood of Luton.—Hollo! What's the matter?'

That something was the matter seemed certain. There was a shrill whistle from the engine. In a second we were conscious—almost too conscious—of the application of the Westinghouse brake. Of all the jolting that was ever jolted! the mere reverberation of the carriage threatened to resolve our bodies into their component parts. Feeling what we felt then helped us to realise the retardatory force which that vacuum brake must be exerting,—it did not seem at all surprising that the train should have been brought to an almost instant stand-still.

Simultaneously all three of us were on our feet. I let down my window and Atherton let down his,—he shouting out,

'I should think that Inspector's wire hasn't had it's proper effect, looks as if we're blocked—or else we've stopped at Luton. It can't be Bedford.'

It wasn't Bedford—so much seemed clear. Though at first from my window I could make out nothing. I was feeling more than a trifle dazed,—there was a singing in my ears,—the sudden darkness was impenetrable. Then I became conscious that the guard was opening the door of his compartment. He stood on the step for a moment, seeming to hesitate. Then, with a lamp in his hand, he descended on to the line.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

'Don't know, sir. Seems as if there was something on the road. What's up there?'

This was to the man on the engine. The fireman replied:

'Someone in front there's waving a red light like mad,—lucky I caught sight of him, we should have been clean on top of him in another moment. Looks as if there was something wrong. Here he comes.'

As my eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness I became aware that someone was making what haste he could along the six-foot way, swinging a red light as he came. Our guard advanced to meet him, shouting as he went:

'What's the matter! Who's that?'

A voice replied,

'My God! Is that George Hewett. I thought you were coming right on top of us!'

Our guard again.

'What! Jim Branson! What the devil are you doing here, what's wrong? I thought you were on the twelve out, we're chasing you.'

'Are you? Then you've caught us. Thank God for it!—We're a wreck.'

I had already opened the carriage door. With that we all three clambered out on to the line.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE CONTENTS OF THE THIRD-CLASS CARRIAGE

I moved to the stranger who was holding the lamp. He was in official uniform.

'Are you the guard of the 12.0 out from St Pancras?'

'I am.'

'Where's your train? What's happened?'

'As for where it is, there it is, right in front of you, what's left of it. As to what's happened, why, we're wrecked.'

'What do you mean by you're wrecked?'

'Some heavy loaded trucks broke loose from a goods in front and came running down the hill on top of us.'

'How long ago was it?'

'Not ten minutes. I was just starting off down the road to the signal box, it's a good two miles away, when I saw you coming. My God! I thought there was going to be another smash.'

'Much damage done?'

'Seems to me as if we're all smashed up. As far as I can make out they're matchboxed up in front. I feel as if I was all broken up inside of me. I've

been in the service going on for thirty years, and this is the first accident I've been in.'

It was too dark to see the man's face, but judging from his tone he was either crying or very near to it.

Our guard turned and shouted back to our engine,

'You'd better go back to the box and let 'em know!'

'All right!' came echoing back.

The special immediately commenced retreating, whistling continually as it went. All the country side must have heard the engine shrieking, and all who did hear must have understood that on the line something was seriously wrong.

The smashed train was all in darkness, the force of the collision had put out all the carriage lamps. Here was a flickering candle, there the glimmer of a match, these were all the lights which shone upon the scene. People were piling up debris by the side of the line, for the purpose of making a fire,—more for illumination than for warmth.

Many of the passengers had succeeded in freeing themselves, and were moving hither and thither about the line. But the majority appeared to be still imprisoned. The carriage doors were jammed. Without the necessary tools it was impossible to open them. Every step we took our ears were saluted by piteous cries. Men, women, children, appealed to us for help.

'Open the door, sir!' 'In the name of God, sir, open the door!'

Over and over again, in all sorts of tones, with all degrees of violence, the supplication was repeated.

The guards vainly endeavoured to appease the, in many cases, half-frenzied creatures.

'All right, sir! If you'll only wait a minute or two, madam! We can't get the doors open without tools, a special train's just started off to get them. If

you'll only have patience there'll be plenty of help for everyone of you directly. You'll be quite safe in there, if you'll only keep still.'

But that was just what they found it most difficult to do—keep still!

In the front of the train all was chaos. The trucks which had done the mischief—there were afterwards shown to be six of them, together with two guards' vans—appeared to have been laden with bags of Portland cement. The bags had burst, and everything was covered with what seemed gritty dust. The air was full of the stuff, it got into our eyes, half blinding us. The engine of the express had turned a complete somersault. It vomited forth smoke, and steam, and flames,—every moment it seemed as if the woodwork of the carriages immediately behind and beneath would catch fire.

The front coaches were, as the guard had put it, 'match-boxed.' They were nothing but a heap of debris,—telescoped into one another in a state of apparently inextricable confusion. It was broad daylight before access was gained to what had once been the interiors. The condition of the first third-class compartment revealed an extraordinary state of things.

Scattered all over it were pieces of what looked like partially burnt rags, and fragments of silk and linen. I have those fragments now. Experts have assured me that they are actually neither of silk nor linen! but of some material—animal rather than vegetable—with which they are wholly unacquainted. On the cushions and woodwork—especially on the woodwork of the floor—were huge blotches,—stains of some sort. When first noticed they were damp, and gave out a most unpleasant smell. One of the pieces of woodwork is yet in my possession,—with the stain still on it. Experts have pronounced upon it too,—with the result that opinions are divided. Some maintain that the stain was produced by human blood, which had been subjected to a great heat, and, so to speak, parboiled. Others declare that it is the blood of some wild animal,—possibly of some creature of the cat species. Yet others affirm that it is not blood at all, but merely paint. While a fourth describes it as—I quote the written opinion which lies in front of me—'caused apparently by a deposit of some sort of viscid matter, probably the excretion of some variety of lizard.'

In a corner of the carriage was the body of what seemed a young man costumed like a tramp. It was Marjorie Lindon.

So far as a most careful search revealed, that was all the compartment contained.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

It is several years since I bore my part in the events which I have rapidly sketched,—or I should not have felt justified in giving them publicity. Exactly how many years, for reasons which should be sufficiently obvious, I must decline to say.

Marjorie Lindon still lives. The spark of life which was left in her, when she was extricated from among the debris of the wrecked express, was fanned again into flame. Her restoration was, however, not merely an affair of weeks or months, it was a matter of years. I believe that, even after her physical powers were completely restored—in itself a tedious task—she was for something like three years under medical supervision as a lunatic. But all that skill and money could do was done, and in course of time—the great healer—the results were entirely satisfactory.

Her father is dead,—and has left her in possession of the family estates. She is married to the individual who, in these pages, has been known as Paul Lessingham. Were his real name divulged she would be recognised as the popular and universally revered wife of one of the greatest statesmen the age has seen.

Nothing has been said to her about the fateful day on which she was—consciously or unconsciously—paraded through London in the tattered masculine habiliments of a vagabond. She herself has never once alluded to it. With the return of reason the affair seems to have passed from her memory as wholly as if it had never been, which, although she may not know it, is not the least cause she has for thankfulness. Therefore what

actually transpired will never, in all human probability, be certainly known and particularly what precisely occurred in the railway carriage during that dreadful moment of sudden passing from life unto death. What became of the creature who all but did her to death; who he was—if it was a 'he,' which is extremely doubtful; whence he came; whither he went; what was the purport of his presence here,—to this hour these things are puzzles.

Paul Lessingham has not since been troubled by his old tormentor. He has ceased to be a haunted man. None the less he continues to have what seems to be a constitutional disrelish for the subject of beetles, nor can he himself be induced to speak of them. Should they be mentioned in a general conversation, should he be unable to immediately bring about a change of theme, he will, if possible, get up and leave the room. More, on this point he and his wife are one.

The fact may not be generally known, but it is so. Also I have reason to believe that there still are moments in which he harks back, with something like physical shrinking, to that awful nightmare of the past, and in which he prays God, that as it is distant from him now so may it be kept far off from him for ever.

Before closing, one matter may be casually mentioned. The tale has never been told, but I have unimpeachable authority for its authenticity.

During the recent expeditionary advance towards Dongola, a body of native troops which was encamped at a remote spot in the desert was aroused one night by what seemed to be the sound of a loud explosion. The next morning, at a distance of about a couple of miles from the camp, a huge hole was discovered in the ground,—as if blasting operations, on an enormous scale, had recently been carried on. In the hole itself, and round about it, were found fragments of what seemed bodies; credible witnesses have assured me that they were bodies neither of men nor women, but of creatures of some monstrous growth. I prefer to believe, since no scientific examination of the remains took place, that these witnesses ignorantly, though innocently, erred.

One thing is sure. Numerous pieces, both of stone and of metal, were seen, which went far to suggest that some curious subterranean building had been

blown up by the force of the explosion. Especially were there portions of moulded metal which seemed to belong to what must have been an immense bronze statue. There were picked up also, more than a dozen replicas in bronze of the whilom sacred scarabaeus.

That the den of demons described by Paul Lessingham, had, that night, at last come to an end, and that these things which lay scattered, here and there, on that treeless plain, were the evidences of its final destruction, is not a hypothesis which I should care to advance with any degree of certainty. But, putting this and that together, the facts seem to point that way,—and it is a consummation devoutly to be desired.

By-the-bye, Sydney Atherton has married Miss Dora Grayling. Her wealth has made him one of the richest men in England. She began, the story goes, by loving him immensely; I can answer for the fact that he has ended by loving her as much. Their devotion to each other contradicts the pessimistic nonsense which supposes that every marriage must be of necessity a failure. He continues his career of an inventor. His investigations into the subject of aerial flight, which have brought the flying machine within the range of practical politics, are on everybody's tongue.

The best man at Atherton's wedding was Percy Woodville, now the Earl of Barnes. Within six months afterwards he married one of Mrs Atherton's bridesmaids.

It was never certainly shown how Robert Holt came to his end. At the inquest the coroner's jury was content to return a verdict of 'Died of exhaustion.' He lies buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, under a handsome tombstone, the cost of which, had he had it in his pockets, might have indefinitely prolonged his days.

It should be mentioned that that portion of this strange history which purports to be The Surprising Narration of Robert Holt was compiled from the statements which Holt made to Atherton, and to Miss Lindon, as she then was, when, a mud-stained, shattered derelict he lay at the lady's father's house.

Miss Linden's contribution towards the elucidation of the mystery was written with her own hand. After her physical strength had come back to her, and, while mentally, she still hovered between the darkness and the light, her one relaxation was writing. Although she would never speak of what she had written, it was found that her theme was always the same. She confided to pen and paper what she would not speak of with her lips. She told, and re-told, and re-told again, the story of her love, and of her tribulation so far as it is contained in the present volume. Her MSS. invariably began and ended at the same point. They have all of them been destroyed, with one exception. That exception is herein placed before the reader.

On the subject of the Mystery of the Beetle I do not propose to pronounce a confident opinion. Atherton and I have talked it over many and many a time, and at the end we have got no 'farrarder.' So far as I am personally concerned, experience has taught me that there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy, and I am quite prepared to believe that the so-called Beetle, which others saw, but I never, was—or is, for it cannot be certainly shown that the thing is not still existing—a creature born neither of God nor man.

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THE STRANGE CASE
OF DR. JEKYLL AND
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By Robert Louis Stevenson

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THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE ***

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The Strange Case Of Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde

by Robert Louis Stevenson

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STORY OF THE DOOR

Mr. Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary and yet somehow lovable. At friendly meetings, and when the wine was to his taste, something eminently human beaconed from his eye; something indeed which never found its way into his talk, but which spoke not only in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face, but more often and loudly in the acts of his life. He was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years. But he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove. "I incline to Cain's heresy," he used to say quaintly: "I let my brother go to the devil in his own way." In this character, it was frequently his fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of downgoing men. And to such as these, so long as they came about his chambers, he never marked a shade of change in his demeanour.

No doubt the feat was easy to Mr. Utterson; for he was undemonstrative at the best, and even his friendship seemed to be founded in a similar catholicity of good-nature. It is the mark of a modest man to accept his friendly circle ready-made from the hands of opportunity; and that was the lawyer's way. His friends were those of his own blood or those whom he had known the longest; his affections, like ivy, were the growth of time, they implied no aptness in the object. Hence, no doubt the bond that united him to Mr. Richard Enfield, his distant kinsman, the well-known man about town. It was a nut to crack for many, what these two could see in each other, or what subject they could find in common. It was reported by those who encountered them in their Sunday walks, that they said nothing, looked singularly dull and would hail with obvious relief the appearance of a friend. For all that, the two men put the greatest store by these excursions, counted them the chief jewel of each week, and not only set aside occasions

of pleasure, but even resisted the calls of business, that they might enjoy them uninterrupted.

It chanced on one of these rambles that their way led them down a by-street in a busy quarter of London. The street was small and what is called quiet, but it drove a thriving trade on the weekdays. The inhabitants were all doing well, it seemed and all emulously hoping to do better still, and laying out the surplus of their grains in coquetry; so that the shop fronts stood along that thoroughfare with an air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen. Even on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood, like a fire in a forest; and with its freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger.

Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two storeys high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence. The door, which was equipped with neither bell nor knocker, was blistered and distained. Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings; and for close on a generation, no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages.

Mr. Enfield and the lawyer were on the other side of the by-street; but when they came abreast of the entry, the former lifted up his cane and pointed.

“Did you ever remark that door?” he asked; and when his companion had replied in the affirmative, “It is connected in my mind,” added he, “with a very odd story.”

“Indeed?” said Mr. Utterson, with a slight change of voice, “and what was that?”

“Well, it was this way,” returned Mr. Enfield: “I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o’clock of a black winter morning, and my way lay through a part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps. Street after street and all the folks asleep—

street after street, all lighted up as if for a procession and all as empty as a church—till at last I got into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut. I gave a few halloa, took to my heels, collared my gentleman, and brought him back to where there was already quite a group about the screaming child. He was perfectly cool and made no resistance, but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me like running. The people who had turned out were the girl's own family; and pretty soon, the doctor, for whom she had been sent put in his appearance. Well, the child was not much the worse, more frightened, according to the sawbones; and there you might have supposed would be an end to it. But there was one curious circumstance. I had taken a loathing to my gentleman at first sight. So had the child's family, which was only natural. But the doctor's case was what struck me. He was the usual cut and dry apothecary, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent and about as emotional as a bagpipe. Well, sir, he was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that sawbones turn sick and white with the desire to kill him. I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine; and killing being out of the question, we did the next best. We told the man we could and would make such a scandal out of this as should make his name stink from one end of London to the other. If he had any friends or any credit, we undertook that he should lose them. And all the time, as we were pitching it in red hot, we were keeping the women off him as best we could for they were as wild as harpies. I never saw a circle of such hateful faces; and there was the man in the middle, with a kind of black sneering coolness—frightened too, I could see that—but carrying it off, sir, really like Satan. 'If you choose to make capital out of this accident,' said he, 'I am naturally helpless. No gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene,' says he. 'Name your figure.' Well, we screwed him up to a hundred pounds for the child's family; he would have clearly liked to stick out; but there was something about the lot of us that meant mischief, and at

last he struck. The next thing was to get the money; and where do you think he carried us but to that place with the door?—whipped out a key, went in, and presently came back with the matter of ten pounds in gold and a cheque for the balance on Coutts's, drawn payable to bearer and signed with a name that I can't mention, though it's one of the points of my story, but it was a name at least very well known and often printed. The figure was stiff; but the signature was good for more than that if it was only genuine. I took the liberty of pointing out to my gentleman that the whole business looked apocryphal, and that a man does not, in real life, walk into a cellar door at four in the morning and come out with another man's cheque for close upon a hundred pounds. But he was quite easy and sneering. 'Set your mind at rest,' says he, 'I will stay with you till the banks open and cash the cheque myself.' So we all set off, the doctor, and the child's father, and our friend and myself, and passed the rest of the night in my chambers; and next day, when we had breakfasted, went in a body to the bank. I gave in the cheque myself, and said I had every reason to believe it was a forgery. Not a bit of it. The cheque was genuine."

"Tut-tut!" said Mr. Utterson.

"I see you feel as I do," said Mr. Enfield. "Yes, it's a bad story. For my man was a fellow that nobody could have to do with, a really damnable man; and the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of the proprieties, celebrated too, and (what makes it worse) one of your fellows who do what they call good. Blackmail, I suppose; an honest man paying through the nose for some of the capers of his youth. Black Mail House is what I call the place with the door, in consequence. Though even that, you know, is far from explaining all," he added, and with the words fell into a vein of musing.

From this he was recalled by Mr. Utterson asking rather suddenly: "And you don't know if the drawer of the cheque lives there?"

"A likely place, isn't it?" returned Mr. Enfield. "But I happen to have noticed his address; he lives in some square or other."

"And you never asked about the—place with the door?" said Mr. Utterson.

"No, sir; I had a delicacy," was the reply. "I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. You start a question, and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top

of a hill; and away the stone goes, starting others; and presently some bland old bird (the last you would have thought of) is knocked on the head in his own back garden and the family have to change their name. No sir, I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask.”

“A very good rule, too,” said the lawyer.

“But I have studied the place for myself,” continued Mr. Enfield. “It seems scarcely a house. There is no other door, and nobody goes in or out of that one but, once in a great while, the gentleman of my adventure. There are three windows looking on the court on the first floor; none below; the windows are always shut but they’re clean. And then there is a chimney which is generally smoking; so somebody must live there. And yet it’s not so sure; for the buildings are so packed together about the court, that it’s hard to say where one ends and another begins.”

The pair walked on again for a while in silence; and then “Enfield,” said Mr. Utterson, “that’s a good rule of yours.”

“Yes, I think it is,” returned Enfield.

“But for all that,” continued the lawyer, “there’s one point I want to ask. I want to ask the name of that man who walked over the child.”

“Well,” said Mr. Enfield, “I can’t see what harm it would do. It was a man of the name of Hyde.”

“Hm,” said Mr. Utterson. “What sort of a man is he to see?”

“He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something down-right detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point. He’s an extraordinary looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. No, sir; I can make no hand of it; I can’t describe him. And it’s not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment.”

Mr. Utterson again walked some way in silence and obviously under a weight of consideration. “You are sure he used a key?” he inquired at last.

“My dear sir...” began Enfield, surprised out of himself.

“Yes, I know,” said Utterson; “I know it must seem strange. The fact is, if I do not ask you the name of the other party, it is because I know it already.

You see, Richard, your tale has gone home. If you have been inexact in any point you had better correct it.”

“I think you might have warned me,” returned the other with a touch of sullenness. “But I have been pedantically exact, as you call it. The fellow had a key; and what’s more, he has it still. I saw him use it not a week ago.”

Mr. Utterson sighed deeply but said never a word; and the young man presently resumed. “Here is another lesson to say nothing,” said he. “I am ashamed of my long tongue. Let us make a bargain never to refer to this again.”

“With all my heart,” said the lawyer. “I shake hands on that, Richard.”

SEARCH FOR MR. HYDE

That evening Mr. Utterson came home to his bachelor house in sombre spirits and sat down to dinner without relish. It was his custom of a Sunday, when this meal was over, to sit close by the fire, a volume of some dry divinity on his reading desk, until the clock of the neighbouring church rang out the hour of twelve, when he would go soberly and gratefully to bed. On this night however, as soon as the cloth was taken away, he took up a candle and went into his business room. There he opened his safe, took from the most private part of it a document endorsed on the envelope as Dr. Jekyll's Will and sat down with a clouded brow to study its contents. The will was holograph, for Mr. Utterson though he took charge of it now that it was made, had refused to lend the least assistance in the making of it; it provided not only that, in case of the decease of Henry Jekyll, M.D., D.C.L., L.L.D., F.R.S., etc., all his possessions were to pass into the hands of his "friend and benefactor Edward Hyde," but that in case of Dr. Jekyll's "disappearance or unexplained absence for any period exceeding three calendar months," the said Edward Hyde should step into the said Henry Jekyll's shoes without further delay and free from any burthen or obligation beyond the payment of a few small sums to the members of the doctor's household. This document had long been the lawyer's eyesore. It offended him both as a lawyer and as a lover of the sane and customary sides of life, to whom the fanciful was the immodest. And hitherto it was his ignorance of Mr. Hyde that had swelled his indignation; now, by a sudden turn, it was his knowledge. It was already bad enough when the name was but a name of which he could learn no more. It was worse when it began to be clothed upon with detestable attributes; and out of the shifting, insubstantial mists that had so long baffled his eye, there leaped up the sudden, definite presentment of a fiend.

"I thought it was madness," he said, as he replaced the obnoxious paper in the safe, "and now I begin to fear it is disgrace."

With that he blew out his candle, put on a greatcoat, and set forth in the direction of Cavendish Square, that citadel of medicine, where his friend,

the great Dr. Lanyon, had his house and received his crowding patients. "If anyone knows, it will be Lanyon," he had thought.

The solemn butler knew and welcomed him; he was subjected to no stage of delay, but ushered direct from the door to the dining-room where Dr. Lanyon sat alone over his wine. This was a hearty, healthy, dapper, red-faced gentleman, with a shock of hair prematurely white, and a boisterous and decided manner. At sight of Mr. Utterson, he sprang up from his chair and welcomed him with both hands. The geniality, as was the way of the man, was somewhat theatrical to the eye; but it reposed on genuine feeling. For these two were old friends, old mates both at school and college, both thorough respectors of themselves and of each other, and what does not always follow, men who thoroughly enjoyed each other's company.

After a little rambling talk, the lawyer led up to the subject which so disagreeably preoccupied his mind.

"I suppose, Lanyon," said he, "you and I must be the two oldest friends that Henry Jekyll has?"

"I wish the friends were younger," chuckled Dr. Lanyon. "But I suppose we are. And what of that? I see little of him now."

"Indeed?" said Utterson. "I thought you had a bond of common interest."

"We had," was the reply. "But it is more than ten years since Henry Jekyll became too fanciful for me. He began to go wrong, wrong in mind; and though of course I continue to take an interest in him for old sake's sake, as they say, I see and I have seen devilish little of the man. Such unscientific balderdash," added the doctor, flushing suddenly purple, "would have estranged Damon and Pythias."

This little spirit of temper was somewhat of a relief to Mr. Utterson. "They have only differed on some point of science," he thought; and being a man of no scientific passions (except in the matter of conveyancing), he even added: "It is nothing worse than that!" He gave his friend a few seconds to recover his composure, and then approached the question he had come to put. "Did you ever come across a *protégé* of his—one Hyde?" he asked.

"Hyde?" repeated Lanyon. "No. Never heard of him. Since my time."

That was the amount of information that the lawyer carried back with him to the great, dark bed on which he tossed to and fro, until the small

hours of the morning began to grow large. It was a night of little ease to his toiling mind, toiling in mere darkness and besieged by questions.

Six o'clock struck on the bells of the church that was so conveniently near to Mr. Utterson's dwelling, and still he was digging at the problem. Hitherto it had touched him on the intellectual side alone; but now his imagination also was engaged, or rather enslaved; and as he lay and tossed in the gross darkness of the night and the curtained room, Mr. Enfield's tale went by before his mind in a scroll of lighted pictures. He would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city; then of the figure of a man walking swiftly; then of a child running from the doctor's; and then these met, and that human Juggernaut trod the child down and passed on regardless of her screams. Or else he would see a room in a rich house, where his friend lay asleep, dreaming and smiling at his dreams; and then the door of that room would be opened, the curtains of the bed plucked apart, the sleeper recalled, and lo! there would stand by his side a figure to whom power was given, and even at that dead hour, he must rise and do its bidding. The figure in these two phases haunted the lawyer all night; and if at any time he dozed over, it was but to see it glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly and still the more swiftly, even to dizziness, through wider labyrinths of lamplighted city, and at every street corner crush a child and leave her screaming. And still the figure had no face by which he might know it; even in his dreams, it had no face, or one that baffled him and melted before his eyes; and thus it was that there sprang up and grew apace in the lawyer's mind a singularly strong, almost an inordinate, curiosity to behold the features of the real Mr. Hyde. If he could but once set eyes on him, he thought the mystery would lighten and perhaps roll altogether away, as was the habit of mysterious things when well examined. He might see a reason for his friend's strange preference or bondage (call it which you please) and even for the startling clause of the will. At least it would be a face worth seeing: the face of a man who was without bowels of mercy: a face which had but to show itself to raise up, in the mind of the unimpressionable Enfield, a spirit of enduring hatred.

From that time forward, Mr. Utterson began to haunt the door in the by-street of shops. In the morning before office hours, at noon when business was plenty and time scarce, at night under the face of the fogged city moon, by all lights and at all hours of solitude or concourse, the lawyer was to be found on his chosen post.

“If he be Mr. Hyde,” he had thought, “I shall be Mr. Seek.”

And at last his patience was rewarded. It was a fine dry night; frost in the air; the streets as clean as a ballroom floor; the lamps, unshaken by any wind, drawing a regular pattern of light and shadow. By ten o’clock, when the shops were closed, the by-street was very solitary and, in spite of the low growl of London from all round, very silent. Small sounds carried far; domestic sounds out of the houses were clearly audible on either side of the roadway; and the rumour of the approach of any passenger preceded him by a long time. Mr. Utterson had been some minutes at his post, when he was aware of an odd light footstep drawing near. In the course of his nightly patrols, he had long grown accustomed to the quaint effect with which the footfalls of a single person, while he is still a great way off, suddenly spring out distinct from the vast hum and clatter of the city. Yet his attention had never before been so sharply and decisively arrested; and it was with a strong, superstitious prevision of success that he withdrew into the entry of the court.

The steps drew swiftly nearer, and swelled out suddenly louder as they turned the end of the street. The lawyer, looking forth from the entry, could soon see what manner of man he had to deal with. He was small and very plainly dressed and the look of him, even at that distance, went somehow strongly against the watcher’s inclination. But he made straight for the door, crossing the roadway to save time; and as he came, he drew a key from his pocket like one approaching home.

Mr. Utterson stepped out and touched him on the shoulder as he passed. “Mr. Hyde, I think?”

Mr. Hyde shrank back with a hissing intake of the breath. But his fear was only momentary; and though he did not look the lawyer in the face, he answered coolly enough: “That is my name. What do you want?”

“I see you are going in,” returned the lawyer. “I am an old friend of Dr. Jekyll’s—Mr. Utterson of Gaunt Street—you must have heard of my name; and meeting you so conveniently, I thought you might admit me.”

“You will not find Dr. Jekyll; he is from home,” replied Mr. Hyde, blowing in the key. And then suddenly, but still without looking up, “How did you know me?” he asked.

“On your side,” said Mr. Utterson “will you do me a favour?”

“With pleasure,” replied the other. “What shall it be?”

“Will you let me see your face?” asked the lawyer.

Mr. Hyde appeared to hesitate, and then, as if upon some sudden reflection, fronted about with an air of defiance; and the pair stared at each other pretty fixedly for a few seconds. “Now I shall know you again,” said Mr. Utterson. “It may be useful.”

“Yes,” returned Mr. Hyde, “It is as well we have met; and *à propos*, you should have my address.” And he gave a number of a street in Soho.

“Good God!” thought Mr. Utterson, “can he, too, have been thinking of the will?” But he kept his feelings to himself and only grunted in acknowledgment of the address.

“And now,” said the other, “how did you know me?”

“By description,” was the reply.

“Whose description?”

“We have common friends,” said Mr. Utterson.

“Common friends,” echoed Mr. Hyde, a little hoarsely. “Who are they?”

“Jekyll, for instance,” said the lawyer.

“He never told you,” cried Mr. Hyde, with a flush of anger. “I did not think you would have lied.”

“Come,” said Mr. Utterson, “that is not fitting language.”

The other snarled aloud into a savage laugh; and the next moment, with extraordinary quickness, he had unlocked the door and disappeared into the house.

The lawyer stood awhile when Mr. Hyde had left him, the picture of disquietude. Then he began slowly to mount the street, pausing every step or two and putting his hand to his brow like a man in mental perplexity. The problem he was thus debating as he walked, was one of a class that is rarely solved. Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him. “There must be something else,”

said the perplexed gentleman. "There *is* something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? or can it be the old story of Dr. Fell? or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend."

Round the corner from the by-street, there was a square of ancient, handsome houses, now for the most part decayed from their high estate and let in flats and chambers to all sorts and conditions of men; map-engravers, architects, shady lawyers and the agents of obscure enterprises. One house, however, second from the corner, was still occupied entire; and at the door of this, which wore a great air of wealth and comfort, though it was now plunged in darkness except for the fanlight, Mr. Utterson stopped and knocked. A well-dressed, elderly servant opened the door.

"Is Dr. Jekyll at home, Poole?" asked the lawyer.

"I will see, Mr. Utterson," said Poole, admitting the visitor, as he spoke, into a large, low-roofed, comfortable hall paved with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright, open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak. "Will you wait here by the fire, sir? or shall I give you a light in the dining-room?"

"Here, thank you," said the lawyer, and he drew near and leaned on the tall fender. This hall, in which he was now left alone, was a pet fancy of his friend the doctor's; and Utterson himself was wont to speak of it as the pleasantest room in London. But tonight there was a shudder in his blood; the face of Hyde sat heavy on his memory; he felt (what was rare with him) a nausea and distaste of life; and in the gloom of his spirits, he seemed to read a menace in the flickering of the firelight on the polished cabinets and the uneasy starting of the shadow on the roof. He was ashamed of his relief, when Poole presently returned to announce that Dr. Jekyll was gone out.

"I saw Mr. Hyde go in by the old dissecting room, Poole," he said. "Is that right, when Dr. Jekyll is from home?"

"Quite right, Mr. Utterson, sir," replied the servant. "Mr. Hyde has a key."

"Your master seems to repose a great deal of trust in that young man, Poole," resumed the other musingly.

“Yes, sir, he does indeed,” said Poole. “We have all orders to obey him.”

“I do not think I ever met Mr. Hyde?” asked Utterson.

“O, dear no, sir. He never *dines* here,” replied the butler. “Indeed we see very little of him on this side of the house; he mostly comes and goes by the laboratory.”

“Well, good-night, Poole.”

“Good-night, Mr. Utterson.”

And the lawyer set out homeward with a very heavy heart. “Poor Harry Jekyll,” he thought, “my mind misgives me he is in deep waters! He was wild when he was young; a long while ago to be sure; but in the law of God, there is no statute of limitations. Ay, it must be that; the ghost of some old sin, the cancer of some concealed disgrace: punishment coming, *pede claudo*, years after memory has forgotten and self-love condoned the fault.” And the lawyer, scared by the thought, brooded awhile on his own past, groping in all the corners of memory, least by chance some Jack-in-the-Box of an old iniquity should leap to light there. His past was fairly blameless; few men could read the rolls of their life with less apprehension; yet he was humbled to the dust by the many ill things he had done, and raised up again into a sober and fearful gratitude by the many he had come so near to doing yet avoided. And then by a return on his former subject, he conceived a spark of hope. “This Master Hyde, if he were studied,” thought he, “must have secrets of his own; black secrets, by the look of him; secrets compared to which poor Jekyll’s worst would be like sunshine. Things cannot continue as they are. It turns me cold to think of this creature stealing like a thief to Harry’s bedside; poor Harry, what a wakening! And the danger of it; for if this Hyde suspects the existence of the will, he may grow impatient to inherit. Ay, I must put my shoulders to the wheel—if Jekyll will but let me,” he added, “if Jekyll will only let me.” For once more he saw before his mind’s eye, as clear as transparency, the strange clauses of the will.

DR. JEKYLL WAS QUITE AT EASE

A fortnight later, by excellent good fortune, the doctor gave one of his pleasant dinners to some five or six old cronies, all intelligent, reputable men and all judges of good wine; and Mr. Utterson so contrived that he remained behind after the others had departed. This was no new arrangement, but a thing that had befallen many scores of times. Where Utterson was liked, he was liked well. Hosts loved to detain the dry lawyer, when the light-hearted and loose-tongued had already their foot on the threshold; they liked to sit a while in his unobtrusive company, practising for solitude, sobering their minds in the man's rich silence after the expense and strain of gaiety. To this rule, Dr. Jekyll was no exception; and as he now sat on the opposite side of the fire—a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a stylish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness—you could see by his looks that he cherished for Mr. Utterson a sincere and warm affection.

“I have been wanting to speak to you, Jekyll,” began the latter. “You know that will of yours?”

A close observer might have gathered that the topic was distasteful; but the doctor carried it off gaily. “My poor Utterson,” said he, “you are unfortunate in such a client. I never saw a man so distressed as you were by my will; unless it were that hide-bound pedant, Lanyon, at what he called my scientific heresies. O, I know he's a good fellow—you needn't frown—an excellent fellow, and I always mean to see more of him; but a hide-bound pedant for all that; an ignorant, blatant pedant. I was never more disappointed in any man than Lanyon.”

“You know I never approved of it,” pursued Utterson, ruthlessly disregarding the fresh topic.

“My will? Yes, certainly, I know that,” said the doctor, a trifle sharply. “You have told me so.”

“Well, I tell you so again,” continued the lawyer. “I have been learning something of young Hyde.”

The large handsome face of Dr. Jekyll grew pale to the very lips, and there came a blackness about his eyes. "I do not care to hear more," said he. "This is a matter I thought we had agreed to drop."

"What I heard was abominable," said Utterson.

"It can make no change. You do not understand my position," returned the doctor, with a certain incoherency of manner. "I am painfully situated, Utterson; my position is a very strange—a very strange one. It is one of those affairs that cannot be mended by talking."

"Jekyll," said Utterson, "you know me: I am a man to be trusted. Make a clean breast of this in confidence; and I make no doubt I can get you out of it."

"My good Utterson," said the doctor, "this is very good of you, this is downright good of you, and I cannot find words to thank you in. I believe you fully; I would trust you before any man alive, ay, before myself, if I could make the choice; but indeed it isn't what you fancy; it is not as bad as that; and just to put your good heart at rest, I will tell you one thing: the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde. I give you my hand upon that; and I thank you again and again; and I will just add one little word, Utterson, that I'm sure you'll take in good part: this is a private matter, and I beg of you to let it sleep."

Utterson reflected a little, looking in the fire.

"I have no doubt you are perfectly right," he said at last, getting to his feet.

"Well, but since we have touched upon this business, and for the last time I hope," continued the doctor, "there is one point I should like you to understand. I have really a very great interest in poor Hyde. I know you have seen him; he told me so; and I fear he was rude. But I do sincerely take a great, a very great interest in that young man; and if I am taken away, Utterson, I wish you to promise me that you will bear with him and get his rights for him. I think you would, if you knew all; and it would be a weight off my mind if you would promise."

"I can't pretend that I shall ever like him," said the lawyer.

"I don't ask that," pleaded Jekyll, laying his hand upon the other's arm; "I only ask for justice; I only ask you to help him for my sake, when I am no longer here."

Utterson heaved an irrepressible sigh. “Well,” said he, “I promise.”

THE CAREW MURDER CASE

Nearly a year later, in the month of October, 18—, London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity and rendered all the more notable by the high position of the victim. The details were few and startling. A maid servant living alone in a house not far from the river, had gone upstairs to bed about eleven. Although a fog rolled over the city in the small hours, the early part of the night was cloudless, and the lane, which the maid's window overlooked, was brilliantly lit by the full moon. It seems she was romantically given, for she sat down upon her box, which stood immediately under the window, and fell into a dream of musing. Never (she used to say, with streaming tears, when she narrated that experience), never had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world. And as she so sat she became aware of an aged beautiful gentleman with white hair, drawing near along the lane; and advancing to meet him, another and very small gentleman, to whom at first she paid less attention. When they had come within speech (which was just under the maid's eyes) the older man bowed and accosted the other with a very pretty manner of politeness. It did not seem as if the subject of his address were of great importance; indeed, from his pointing, it sometimes appeared as if he were only inquiring his way; but the moon shone on his face as he spoke, and the girl was pleased to watch it, it seemed to breathe such an innocent and old-world kindness of disposition, yet with something high too, as of a well-founded self-content. Presently her eye wandered to the other, and she was surprised to recognise in him a certain Mr. Hyde, who had once visited her master and for whom she had conceived a dislike. He had in his hand a heavy cane, with which he was trifling; but he answered never a word, and seemed to listen with an ill-contained impatience. And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were

audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted.

It was two o'clock when she came to herself and called for the police. The murderer was gone long ago; but there lay his victim in the middle of the lane, incredibly mangled. The stick with which the deed had been done, although it was of some rare and very tough and heavy wood, had broken in the middle under the stress of this insensate cruelty; and one splintered half had rolled in the neighbouring gutter—the other, without doubt, had been carried away by the murderer. A purse and gold watch were found upon the victim: but no cards or papers, except a sealed and stamped envelope, which he had been probably carrying to the post, and which bore the name and address of Mr. Utterson.

This was brought to the lawyer the next morning, before he was out of bed; and he had no sooner seen it and been told the circumstances, than he shot out a solemn lip. "I shall say nothing till I have seen the body," said he; "this may be very serious. Have the kindness to wait while I dress." And with the same grave countenance he hurried through his breakfast and drove to the police station, whither the body had been carried. As soon as he came into the cell, he nodded.

"Yes," said he, "I recognise him. I am sorry to say that this is Sir Danvers Carew."

"Good God, sir," exclaimed the officer, "is it possible?" And the next moment his eye lighted up with professional ambition. "This will make a deal of noise," he said. "And perhaps you can help us to the man." And he briefly narrated what the maid had seen, and showed the broken stick.

Mr. Utterson had already quailed at the name of Hyde; but when the stick was laid before him, he could doubt no longer; broken and battered as it was, he recognised it for one that he had himself presented many years before to Henry Jekyll.

"Is this Mr. Hyde a person of small stature?" he inquired.

"Particularly small and particularly wicked-looking, is what the maid calls him," said the officer.

Mr. Utterson reflected; and then, raising his head, "If you will come with me in my cab," he said, "I think I can take you to his house."

It was by this time about nine in the morning, and the first fog of the season. A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven, but the wind was continually charging and routing these embattled vapours; so that as the cab crawled from street to street, Mr. Utterson beheld a marvelous number of degrees and hues of twilight; for here it would be dark like the back-end of evening; and there would be a glow of a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration; and here, for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up, and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wreaths. The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer's eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare. The thoughts of his mind, besides, were of the gloomiest dye; and when he glanced at the companion of his drive, he was conscious of some touch of that terror of the law and the law's officers, which may at times assail the most honest.

As the cab drew up before the address indicated, the fog lifted a little and showed him a dingy street, a gin palace, a low French eating house, a shop for the retail of penny numbers and twopenny salads, many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of many different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to have a morning glass; and the next moment the fog settled down again upon that part, as brown as umber, and cut him off from his blackguardly surroundings. This was the home of Henry Jekyll's favourite; of a man who was heir to a quarter of a million sterling.

An ivory-faced and silvery-haired old woman opened the door. She had an evil face, smoothed by hypocrisy: but her manners were excellent. Yes, she said, this was Mr. Hyde's, but he was not at home; he had been in that night very late, but he had gone away again in less than an hour; there was nothing strange in that; his habits were very irregular, and he was often absent; for instance, it was nearly two months since she had seen him till yesterday.

"Very well, then, we wish to see his rooms," said the lawyer; and when the woman began to declare it was impossible, "I had better tell you who this person is," he added. "This is Inspector Newcomen of Scotland Yard."

A flash of odious joy appeared upon the woman's face. "Ah!" said she, "he is in trouble! What has he done?"

Mr. Utterson and the inspector exchanged glances. “He don’t seem a very popular character,” observed the latter. “And now, my good woman, just let me and this gentleman have a look about us.”

In the whole extent of the house, which but for the old woman remained otherwise empty, Mr. Hyde had only used a couple of rooms; but these were furnished with luxury and good taste. A closet was filled with wine; the plate was of silver, the napery elegant; a good picture hung upon the walls, a gift (as Utterson supposed) from Henry Jekyll, who was much of a connoisseur; and the carpets were of many plies and agreeable in colour. At this moment, however, the rooms bore every mark of having been recently and hurriedly ransacked; clothes lay about the floor, with their pockets inside out; lock-fast drawers stood open; and on the hearth there lay a pile of grey ashes, as though many papers had been burned. From these embers the inspector disinterred the butt end of a green cheque book, which had resisted the action of the fire; the other half of the stick was found behind the door; and as this clinched his suspicions, the officer declared himself delighted. A visit to the bank, where several thousand pounds were found to be lying to the murderer’s credit, completed his gratification.

“You may depend upon it, sir,” he told Mr. Utterson: “I have him in my hand. He must have lost his head, or he never would have left the stick or, above all, burned the cheque book. Why, money’s life to the man. We have nothing to do but wait for him at the bank, and get out the handbills.”

This last, however, was not so easy of accomplishment; for Mr. Hyde had numbered few familiars—even the master of the servant maid had only seen him twice; his family could nowhere be traced; he had never been photographed; and the few who could describe him differed widely, as common observers will. Only on one point were they agreed; and that was the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity with which the fugitive impressed his beholders.

INCIDENT OF THE LETTER

It was late in the afternoon, when Mr. Utterson found his way to Dr. Jekyll's door, where he was at once admitted by Poole, and carried down by the kitchen offices and across a yard which had once been a garden, to the building which was indifferently known as the laboratory or dissecting rooms. The doctor had bought the house from the heirs of a celebrated surgeon; and his own tastes being rather chemical than anatomical, had changed the destination of the block at the bottom of the garden. It was the first time that the lawyer had been received in that part of his friend's quarters; and he eyed the dingy, windowless structure with curiosity, and gazed round with a distasteful sense of strangeness as he crossed the theatre, once crowded with eager students and now lying gaunt and silent, the tables laden with chemical apparatus, the floor strewn with crates and littered with packing straw, and the light falling dimly through the foggy cupola. At the further end, a flight of stairs mounted to a door covered with red baize; and through this, Mr. Utterson was at last received into the doctor's cabinet. It was a large room fitted round with glass presses, furnished, among other things, with a cheval-glass and a business table, and looking out upon the court by three dusty windows barred with iron. The fire burned in the grate; a lamp was set lighted on the chimney shelf, for even in the houses the fog began to lie thickly; and there, close up to the warmth, sat Dr. Jekyll, looking deathly sick. He did not rise to meet his visitor, but held out a cold hand and bade him welcome in a changed voice.

“And now,” said Mr. Utterson, as soon as Poole had left them, “you have heard the news?”

The doctor shuddered. “They were crying it in the square,” he said. “I heard them in my dining-room.”

“One word,” said the lawyer. “Carew was my client, but so are you, and I want to know what I am doing. You have not been mad enough to hide this fellow?”

“Utterson, I swear to God,” cried the doctor, “I swear to God I will never set eyes on him again. I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in

this world. It is all at an end. And indeed he does not want my help; you do not know him as I do; he is safe, he is quite safe; mark my words, he will never more be heard of.”

The lawyer listened gloomily; he did not like his friend’s feverish manner. “You seem pretty sure of him,” said he; “and for your sake, I hope you may be right. If it came to a trial, your name might appear.”

“I am quite sure of him,” replied Jekyll; “I have grounds for certainty that I cannot share with any one. But there is one thing on which you may advise me. I have—I have received a letter; and I am at a loss whether I should show it to the police. I should like to leave it in your hands, Utterson; you would judge wisely, I am sure; I have so great a trust in you.”

“You fear, I suppose, that it might lead to his detection?” asked the lawyer.

“No,” said the other. “I cannot say that I care what becomes of Hyde; I am quite done with him. I was thinking of my own character, which this hateful business has rather exposed.”

Utterson ruminated awhile; he was surprised at his friend’s selfishness, and yet relieved by it. “Well,” said he, at last, “let me see the letter.”

The letter was written in an odd, upright hand and signed “Edward Hyde”: and it signified, briefly enough, that the writer’s benefactor, Dr. Jekyll, whom he had long so unworthily repaid for a thousand generousities, need labour under no alarm for his safety, as he had means of escape on which he placed a sure dependence. The lawyer liked this letter well enough; it put a better colour on the intimacy than he had looked for; and he blamed himself for some of his past suspicions.

“Have you the envelope?” he asked.

“I burned it,” replied Jekyll, “before I thought what I was about. But it bore no postmark. The note was handed in.”

“Shall I keep this and sleep upon it?” asked Utterson.

“I wish you to judge for me entirely,” was the reply. “I have lost confidence in myself.”

“Well, I shall consider,” returned the lawyer. “And now one word more: it was Hyde who dictated the terms in your will about that disappearance?”

The doctor seemed seized with a qualm of faintness; he shut his mouth tight and nodded.

“I knew it,” said Utterson. “He meant to murder you. You had a fine escape.”

“I have had what is far more to the purpose,” returned the doctor solemnly: “I have had a lesson—O God, Utterson, what a lesson I have had!” And he covered his face for a moment with his hands.

On his way out, the lawyer stopped and had a word or two with Poole. “By the bye,” said he, “there was a letter handed in to-day: what was the messenger like?” But Poole was positive nothing had come except by post; “and only circulars by that,” he added.

This news sent off the visitor with his fears renewed. Plainly the letter had come by the laboratory door; possibly, indeed, it had been written in the cabinet; and if that were so, it must be differently judged, and handled with the more caution. The newsboys, as he went, were crying themselves hoarse along the footways: “Special edition. Shocking murder of an M.P.” That was the funeral oration of one friend and client; and he could not help a certain apprehension lest the good name of another should be sucked down in the eddy of the scandal. It was, at least, a ticklish decision that he had to make; and self-reliant as he was by habit, he began to cherish a longing for advice. It was not to be had directly; but perhaps, he thought, it might be fished for.

Presently after, he sat on one side of his own hearth, with Mr. Guest, his head clerk, upon the other, and midway between, at a nicely calculated distance from the fire, a bottle of a particular old wine that had long dwelt unsunned in the foundations of his house. The fog still slept on the wing above the drowned city, where the lamps glimmered like carbuncles; and through the muffle and smother of these fallen clouds, the procession of the town’s life was still rolling in through the great arteries with a sound as of a mighty wind. But the room was gay with firelight. In the bottle the acids were long ago resolved; the imperial dye had softened with time, as the colour grows richer in stained windows; and the glow of hot autumn afternoons on hillside vineyards, was ready to be set free and to disperse the fogs of London. Insensibly the lawyer melted. There was no man from whom he kept fewer secrets than Mr. Guest; and he was not always sure that he kept as many as he meant. Guest had often been on business to the

doctor's; he knew Poole; he could scarce have failed to hear of Mr. Hyde's familiarity about the house; he might draw conclusions: was it not as well, then, that he should see a letter which put that mystery to right? and above all since Guest, being a great student and critic of handwriting, would consider the step natural and obliging? The clerk, besides, was a man of counsel; he could scarce read so strange a document without dropping a remark; and by that remark Mr. Utterson might shape his future course.

"This is a sad business about Sir Danvers," he said.

"Yes, sir, indeed. It has elicited a great deal of public feeling," returned Guest. "The man, of course, was mad."

"I should like to hear your views on that," replied Utterson. "I have a document here in his handwriting; it is between ourselves, for I scarce know what to do about it; it is an ugly business at the best. But there it is; quite in your way: a murderer's autograph."

Guest's eyes brightened, and he sat down at once and studied it with passion. "No sir," he said: "not mad; but it is an odd hand."

"And by all accounts a very odd writer," added the lawyer.

Just then the servant entered with a note.

"Is that from Dr. Jekyll, sir?" inquired the clerk. "I thought I knew the writing. Anything private, Mr. Utterson?"

"Only an invitation to dinner. Why? Do you want to see it?"

"One moment. I thank you, sir;" and the clerk laid the two sheets of paper alongside and sedulously compared their contents. "Thank you, sir," he said at last, returning both; "it's a very interesting autograph."

There was a pause, during which Mr. Utterson struggled with himself. "Why did you compare them, Guest?" he inquired suddenly.

"Well, sir," returned the clerk, "there's a rather singular resemblance; the two hands are in many points identical: only differently sloped."

"Rather quaint," said Utterson.

"It is, as you say, rather quaint," returned Guest.

"I wouldn't speak of this note, you know," said the master.

"No, sir," said the clerk. "I understand."

But no sooner was Mr. Utterson alone that night, than he locked the note into his safe, where it reposed from that time forward. "What!" he thought.

“Henry Jekyll forge for a murderer!” And his blood ran cold in his veins.

INCIDENT OF DR. LANYON

Time ran on; thousands of pounds were offered in reward, for the death of Sir Danvers was resented as a public injury; but Mr. Hyde had disappeared out of the ken of the police as though he had never existed. Much of his past was unearthed, indeed, and all disreputable: tales came out of the man's cruelty, at once so callous and violent; of his vile life, of his strange associates, of the hatred that seemed to have surrounded his career; but of his present whereabouts, not a whisper. From the time he had left the house in Soho on the morning of the murder, he was simply blotted out; and gradually, as time drew on, Mr. Utterson began to recover from the hotness of his alarm, and to grow more at quiet with himself. The death of Sir Danvers was, to his way of thinking, more than paid for by the disappearance of Mr. Hyde. Now that that evil influence had been withdrawn, a new life began for Dr. Jekyll. He came out of his seclusion, renewed relations with his friends, became once more their familiar guest and entertainer; and whilst he had always been known for charities, he was now no less distinguished for religion. He was busy, he was much in the open air, he did good; his face seemed to open and brighten, as if with an inward consciousness of service; and for more than two months, the doctor was at peace.

On the 8th of January Utterson had dined at the doctor's with a small party; Lanyon had been there; and the face of the host had looked from one to the other as in the old days when the trio were inseparable friends. On the 12th, and again on the 14th, the door was shut against the lawyer. "The doctor was confined to the house," Poole said, "and saw no one." On the 15th, he tried again, and was again refused; and having now been used for the last two months to see his friend almost daily, he found this return of solitude to weigh upon his spirits. The fifth night he had in Guest to dine with him; and the sixth he betook himself to Dr. Lanyon's.

There at least he was not denied admittance; but when he came in, he was shocked at the change which had taken place in the doctor's appearance. He had his death-warrant written legibly upon his face. The rosy man had

grown pale; his flesh had fallen away; he was visibly balder and older; and yet it was not so much these tokens of a swift physical decay that arrested the lawyer's notice, as a look in the eye and quality of manner that seemed to testify to some deep-seated terror of the mind. It was unlikely that the doctor should fear death; and yet that was what Utterson was tempted to suspect. "Yes," he thought; "he is a doctor, he must know his own state and that his days are counted; and the knowledge is more than he can bear." And yet when Utterson remarked on his ill looks, it was with an air of great firmness that Lanyon declared himself a doomed man.

"I have had a shock," he said, "and I shall never recover. It is a question of weeks. Well, life has been pleasant; I liked it; yes, sir, I used to like it. I sometimes think if we knew all, we should be more glad to get away."

"Jekyll is ill, too," observed Utterson. "Have you seen him?"

But Lanyon's face changed, and he held up a trembling hand. "I wish to see or hear no more of Dr. Jekyll," he said in a loud, unsteady voice. "I am quite done with that person; and I beg that you will spare me any allusion to one whom I regard as dead."

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Utterson; and then after a considerable pause, "Can't I do anything?" he inquired. "We are three very old friends, Lanyon; we shall not live to make others."

"Nothing can be done," returned Lanyon; "ask himself."

"He will not see me," said the lawyer.

"I am not surprised at that," was the reply. "Some day, Utterson, after I am dead, you may perhaps come to learn the right and wrong of this. I cannot tell you. And in the meantime, if you can sit and talk with me of other things, for God's sake, stay and do so; but if you cannot keep clear of this accursed topic, then in God's name, go, for I cannot bear it."

As soon as he got home, Utterson sat down and wrote to Jekyll, complaining of his exclusion from the house, and asking the cause of this unhappy break with Lanyon; and the next day brought him a long answer, often very pathetically worded, and sometimes darkly mysterious in drift. The quarrel with Lanyon was incurable. "I do not blame our old friend," Jekyll wrote, "but I share his view that we must never meet. I mean from henceforth to lead a life of extreme seclusion; you must not be surprised, nor must you doubt my friendship, if my door is often shut even to you.

You must suffer me to go my own dark way. I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also. I could not think that this earth contained a place for sufferings and terrors so unmanly; and you can do but one thing, Utterson, to lighten this destiny, and that is to respect my silence.” Utterson was amazed; the dark influence of Hyde had been withdrawn, the doctor had returned to his old tasks and amities; a week ago, the prospect had smiled with every promise of a cheerful and an honoured age; and now in a moment, friendship, and peace of mind, and the whole tenor of his life were wrecked. So great and unprepared a change pointed to madness; but in view of Lanyon’s manner and words, there must lie for it some deeper ground.

A week afterwards Dr. Lanyon took to his bed, and in something less than a fortnight he was dead. The night after the funeral, at which he had been sadly affected, Utterson locked the door of his business room, and sitting there by the light of a melancholy candle, drew out and set before him an envelope addressed by the hand and sealed with the seal of his dead friend. “PRIVATE: for the hands of G. J. Utterson ALONE, and in case of his predecease *to be destroyed unread*,” so it was emphatically superscribed; and the lawyer dreaded to behold the contents. “I have buried one friend to-day,” he thought: “what if this should cost me another?” And then he condemned the fear as a disloyalty, and broke the seal. Within there was another enclosure, likewise sealed, and marked upon the cover as “not to be opened till the death or disappearance of Dr. Henry Jekyll.” Utterson could not trust his eyes. Yes, it was disappearance; here again, as in the mad will which he had long ago restored to its author, here again were the idea of a disappearance and the name of Henry Jekyll bracketted. But in the will, that idea had sprung from the sinister suggestion of the man Hyde; it was set there with a purpose all too plain and horrible. Written by the hand of Lanyon, what should it mean? A great curiosity came on the trustee, to disregard the prohibition and dive at once to the bottom of these mysteries; but professional honour and faith to his dead friend were stringent obligations; and the packet slept in the inmost corner of his private safe.

It is one thing to mortify curiosity, another to conquer it; and it may be doubted if, from that day forth, Utterson desired the society of his surviving friend with the same eagerness. He thought of him kindly; but his thoughts were disquieted and fearful. He went to call indeed; but he was perhaps

relieved to be denied admittance; perhaps, in his heart, he preferred to speak with Poole upon the doorstep and surrounded by the air and sounds of the open city, rather than to be admitted into that house of voluntary bondage, and to sit and speak with its inscrutable recluse. Poole had, indeed, no very pleasant news to communicate. The doctor, it appeared, now more than ever confined himself to the cabinet over the laboratory, where he would sometimes even sleep; he was out of spirits, he had grown very silent, he did not read; it seemed as if he had something on his mind. Utterson became so used to the unvarying character of these reports, that he fell off little by little in the frequency of his visits.

INCIDENT AT THE WINDOW

It chanced on Sunday, when Mr. Utterson was on his usual walk with Mr. Enfield, that their way lay once again through the by-street; and that when they came in front of the door, both stopped to gaze on it.

“Well,” said Enfield, “that story’s at an end at least. We shall never see more of Mr. Hyde.”

“I hope not,” said Utterson. “Did I ever tell you that I once saw him, and shared your feeling of repulsion?”

“It was impossible to do the one without the other,” returned Enfield. “And by the way, what an ass you must have thought me, not to know that this was a back way to Dr. Jekyll’s! It was partly your own fault that I found it out, even when I did.”

“So you found it out, did you?” said Utterson. “But if that be so, we may step into the court and take a look at the windows. To tell you the truth, I am uneasy about poor Jekyll; and even outside, I feel as if the presence of a friend might do him good.”

The court was very cool and a little damp, and full of premature twilight, although the sky, high up overhead, was still bright with sunset. The middle one of the three windows was half-way open; and sitting close beside it, taking the air with an infinite sadness of mien, like some disconsolate prisoner, Utterson saw Dr. Jekyll.

“What! Jekyll!” he cried. “I trust you are better.”

“I am very low, Utterson,” replied the doctor drearily, “very low. It will not last long, thank God.”

“You stay too much indoors,” said the lawyer. “You should be out, whipping up the circulation like Mr. Enfield and me. (This is my cousin—Mr. Enfield—Dr. Jekyll.) Come now; get your hat and take a quick turn with us.”

“You are very good,” sighed the other. “I should like to very much; but no, no, no, it is quite impossible; I dare not. But indeed, Utterson, I am very

glad to see you; this is really a great pleasure; I would ask you and Mr. Enfield up, but the place is really not fit.”

“Why, then,” said the lawyer, good-naturedly, “the best thing we can do is to stay down here and speak with you from where we are.”

“That is just what I was about to venture to propose,” returned the doctor with a smile. But the words were hardly uttered, before the smile was struck out of his face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze the very blood of the two gentlemen below. They saw it but for a glimpse for the window was instantly thrust down; but that glimpse had been sufficient, and they turned and left the court without a word. In silence, too, they traversed the by-street; and it was not until they had come into a neighbouring thoroughfare, where even upon a Sunday there were still some stirrings of life, that Mr. Utterson at last turned and looked at his companion. They were both pale; and there was an answering horror in their eyes.

“God forgive us, God forgive us,” said Mr. Utterson.

But Mr. Enfield only nodded his head very seriously, and walked on once more in silence.

THE LAST NIGHT

Mr. Utterson was sitting by his fireside one evening after dinner, when he was surprised to receive a visit from Poole.

“Bless me, Poole, what brings you here?” he cried; and then taking a second look at him, “What ails you?” he added; “is the doctor ill?”

“Mr. Utterson,” said the man, “there is something wrong.”

“Take a seat, and here is a glass of wine for you,” said the lawyer. “Now, take your time, and tell me plainly what you want.”

“You know the doctor’s ways, sir,” replied Poole, “and how he shuts himself up. Well, he’s shut up again in the cabinet; and I don’t like it, sir—I wish I may die if I like it. Mr. Utterson, sir, I’m afraid.”

“Now, my good man,” said the lawyer, “be explicit. What are you afraid of?”

“I’ve been afraid for about a week,” returned Poole, doggedly disregarding the question, “and I can bear it no more.”

The man’s appearance amply bore out his words; his manner was altered for the worse; and except for the moment when he had first announced his terror, he had not once looked the lawyer in the face. Even now, he sat with the glass of wine untasted on his knee, and his eyes directed to a corner of the floor. “I can bear it no more,” he repeated.

“Come,” said the lawyer, “I see you have some good reason, Poole; I see there is something seriously amiss. Try to tell me what it is.”

“I think there’s been foul play,” said Poole, hoarsely.

“Foul play!” cried the lawyer, a good deal frightened and rather inclined to be irritated in consequence. “What foul play! What does the man mean?”

“I daren’t say, sir,” was the answer; “but will you come along with me and see for yourself?”

Mr. Utterson’s only answer was to rise and get his hat and greatcoat; but he observed with wonder the greatness of the relief that appeared upon the

butler's face, and perhaps with no less, that the wine was still untasted when he set it down to follow.

It was a wild, cold, seasonable night of March, with a pale moon, lying on her back as though the wind had tilted her, and flying wrack of the most diaphanous and lawny texture. The wind made talking difficult, and flecked the blood into the face. It seemed to have swept the streets unusually bare of passengers, besides; for Mr. Utterson thought he had never seen that part of London so deserted. He could have wished it otherwise; never in his life had he been conscious of so sharp a wish to see and touch his fellow-creatures; for struggle as he might, there was borne in upon his mind a crushing anticipation of calamity. The square, when they got there, was full of wind and dust, and the thin trees in the garden were lashing themselves along the railing. Poole, who had kept all the way a pace or two ahead, now pulled up in the middle of the pavement, and in spite of the biting weather, took off his hat and mopped his brow with a red pocket-handkerchief. But for all the hurry of his coming, these were not the dews of exertion that he wiped away, but the moisture of some strangling anguish; for his face was white and his voice, when he spoke, harsh and broken.

"Well, sir," he said, "here we are, and God grant there be nothing wrong."

"Amen, Poole," said the lawyer.

Thereupon the servant knocked in a very guarded manner; the door was opened on the chain; and a voice asked from within, "Is that you, Poole?"

"It's all right," said Poole. "Open the door."

The hall, when they entered it, was brightly lighted up; the fire was built high; and about the hearth the whole of the servants, men and women, stood huddled together like a flock of sheep. At the sight of Mr. Utterson, the housemaid broke into hysterical whimpering; and the cook, crying out "Bless God! it's Mr. Utterson," ran forward as if to take him in her arms.

"What, what? Are you all here?" said the lawyer peevishly. "Very irregular, very unseemly; your master would be far from pleased."

"They're all afraid," said Poole.

Blank silence followed, no one protesting; only the maid lifted her voice and now wept loudly.

"Hold your tongue!" Poole said to her, with a ferocity of accent that testified to his own jangled nerves; and indeed, when the girl had so

suddenly raised the note of her lamentation, they had all started and turned towards the inner door with faces of dreadful expectation. "And now," continued the butler, addressing the knife-boy, "reach me a candle, and we'll get this through hands at once." And then he begged Mr. Utterson to follow him, and led the way to the back garden.

"Now, sir," said he, "you come as gently as you can. I want you to hear, and I don't want you to be heard. And see here, sir, if by any chance he was to ask you in, don't go."

Mr. Utterson's nerves, at this unlooked-for termination, gave a jerk that nearly threw him from his balance; but he recollected his courage and followed the butler into the laboratory building through the surgical theatre, with its lumber of crates and bottles, to the foot of the stair. Here Poole motioned him to stand on one side and listen; while he himself, setting down the candle and making a great and obvious call on his resolution, mounted the steps and knocked with a somewhat uncertain hand on the red baize of the cabinet door.

"Mr. Utterson, sir, asking to see you," he called; and even as he did so, once more violently signed to the lawyer to give ear.

A voice answered from within: "Tell him I cannot see anyone," it said complainingly.

"Thank you, sir," said Poole, with a note of something like triumph in his voice; and taking up his candle, he led Mr. Utterson back across the yard and into the great kitchen, where the fire was out and the beetles were leaping on the floor.

"Sir," he said, looking Mr. Utterson in the eyes, "Was that my master's voice?"

"It seems much changed," replied the lawyer, very pale, but giving look for look.

"Changed? Well, yes, I think so," said the butler. "Have I been twenty years in this man's house, to be deceived about his voice? No, sir; master's made away with; he was made away with eight days ago, when we heard him cry out upon the name of God; and *who's* in there instead of him, and *why* it stays there, is a thing that cries to Heaven, Mr. Utterson!"

"This is a very strange tale, Poole; this is rather a wild tale my man," said Mr. Utterson, biting his finger. "Suppose it were as you suppose, supposing

Dr. Jekyll to have been—well, murdered, what could induce the murderer to stay? That won't hold water; it doesn't commend itself to reason."

"Well, Mr. Utterson, you are a hard man to satisfy, but I'll do it yet," said Poole. "All this last week (you must know) him, or it, whatever it is that lives in that cabinet, has been crying night and day for some sort of medicine and cannot get it to his mind. It was sometimes his way—the master's, that is—to write his orders on a sheet of paper and throw it on the stair. We've had nothing else this week back; nothing but papers, and a closed door, and the very meals left there to be smuggled in when nobody was looking. Well, sir, every day, ay, and twice and thrice in the same day, there have been orders and complaints, and I have been sent flying to all the wholesale chemists in town. Every time I brought the stuff back, there would be another paper telling me to return it, because it was not pure, and another order to a different firm. This drug is wanted bitter bad, sir, whatever for."

"Have you any of these papers?" asked Mr. Utterson.

Poole felt in his pocket and handed out a crumpled note, which the lawyer, bending nearer to the candle, carefully examined. Its contents ran thus: "Dr. Jekyll presents his compliments to Messrs. Maw. He assures them that their last sample is impure and quite useless for his present purpose. In the year 18—, Dr. J. purchased a somewhat large quantity from Messrs. M. He now begs them to search with most sedulous care, and should any of the same quality be left, forward it to him at once. Expense is no consideration. The importance of this to Dr. J. can hardly be exaggerated." So far the letter had run composedly enough, but here with a sudden splutter of the pen, the writer's emotion had broken loose. "For God's sake," he added, "find me some of the old."

"This is a strange note," said Mr. Utterson; and then sharply, "How do you come to have it open?"

"The man at Maw's was main angry, sir, and he threw it back to me like so much dirt," returned Poole.

"This is unquestionably the doctor's hand, do you know?" resumed the lawyer.

"I thought it looked like it," said the servant rather sulkily; and then, with another voice, "But what matters hand of write?" he said. "I've seen him!"

“Seen him?” repeated Mr. Utterson. “Well?”

“That’s it!” said Poole. “It was this way. I came suddenly into the theatre from the garden. It seems he had slipped out to look for this drug or whatever it is; for the cabinet door was open, and there he was at the far end of the room digging among the crates. He looked up when I came in, gave a kind of cry, and whipped upstairs into the cabinet. It was but for one minute that I saw him, but the hair stood upon my head like quills. Sir, if that was my master, why had he a mask upon his face? If it was my master, why did he cry out like a rat, and run from me? I have served him long enough. And then...” The man paused and passed his hand over his face.

“These are all very strange circumstances,” said Mr. Utterson, “but I think I begin to see daylight. Your master, Poole, is plainly seized with one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer; hence, for aught I know, the alteration of his voice; hence the mask and the avoidance of his friends; hence his eagerness to find this drug, by means of which the poor soul retains some hope of ultimate recovery—God grant that he be not deceived! There is my explanation; it is sad enough, Poole, ay, and appalling to consider; but it is plain and natural, hangs well together, and delivers us from all exorbitant alarms.”

“Sir,” said the butler, turning to a sort of mottled pallor, “that thing was not my master, and there’s the truth. My master”—here he looked round him and began to whisper—“is a tall, fine build of a man, and this was more of a dwarf.” Utterson attempted to protest. “O, sir,” cried Poole, “do you think I do not know my master after twenty years? Do you think I do not know where his head comes to in the cabinet door, where I saw him every morning of my life? No, sir, that thing in the mask was never Dr. Jekyll—God knows what it was, but it was never Dr. Jekyll; and it is the belief of my heart that there was murder done.”

“Poole,” replied the lawyer, “if you say that, it will become my duty to make certain. Much as I desire to spare your master’s feelings, much as I am puzzled by this note which seems to prove him to be still alive, I shall consider it my duty to break in that door.”

“Ah, Mr. Utterson, that’s talking!” cried the butler.

“And now comes the second question,” resumed Utterson: “Who is going to do it?”

“Why, you and me, sir,” was the undaunted reply.

“That’s very well said,” returned the lawyer; “and whatever comes of it, I shall make it my business to see you are no loser.”

“There is an axe in the theatre,” continued Poole; “and you might take the kitchen poker for yourself.”

The lawyer took that rude but weighty instrument into his hand, and balanced it. “Do you know, Poole,” he said, looking up, “that you and I are about to place ourselves in a position of some peril?”

“You may say so, sir, indeed,” returned the butler.

“It is well, then that we should be frank,” said the other. “We both think more than we have said; let us make a clean breast. This masked figure that you saw, did you recognise it?”

“Well, sir, it went so quick, and the creature was so doubled up, that I could hardly swear to that,” was the answer. “But if you mean, was it Mr. Hyde?—why, yes, I think it was! You see, it was much of the same bigness; and it had the same quick, light way with it; and then who else could have got in by the laboratory door? You have not forgot, sir, that at the time of the murder he had still the key with him? But that’s not all. I don’t know, Mr. Utterson, if you ever met this Mr. Hyde?”

“Yes,” said the lawyer, “I once spoke with him.”

“Then you must know as well as the rest of us that there was something queer about that gentleman—something that gave a man a turn—I don’t know rightly how to say it, sir, beyond this: that you felt in your marrow kind of cold and thin.”

“I own I felt something of what you describe,” said Mr. Utterson.

“Quite so, sir,” returned Poole. “Well, when that masked thing like a monkey jumped from among the chemicals and whipped into the cabinet, it went down my spine like ice. O, I know it’s not evidence, Mr. Utterson; I’m book-learned enough for that; but a man has his feelings, and I give you my bible-word it was Mr. Hyde!”

“Ay, ay,” said the lawyer. “My fears incline to the same point. Evil, I fear, founded—evil was sure to come—of that connection. Ay truly, I believe you; I believe poor Harry is killed; and I believe his murderer (for what purpose, God alone can tell) is still lurking in his victim’s room. Well, let our name be vengeance. Call Bradshaw.”

The footman came at the summons, very white and nervous.

“Pull yourself together, Bradshaw,” said the lawyer. “This suspense, I know, is telling upon all of you; but it is now our intention to make an end of it. Poole, here, and I are going to force our way into the cabinet. If all is well, my shoulders are broad enough to bear the blame. Meanwhile, lest anything should really be amiss, or any malefactor seek to escape by the back, you and the boy must go round the corner with a pair of good sticks and take your post at the laboratory door. We give you ten minutes to get to your stations.”

As Bradshaw left, the lawyer looked at his watch. “And now, Poole, let us get to ours,” he said; and taking the poker under his arm, led the way into the yard. The scud had banked over the moon, and it was now quite dark. The wind, which only broke in puffs and draughts into that deep well of building, tossed the light of the candle to and fro about their steps, until they came into the shelter of the theatre, where they sat down silently to wait. London hummed solemnly all around; but nearer at hand, the stillness was only broken by the sounds of a footfall moving to and fro along the cabinet floor.

“So it will walk all day, sir,” whispered Poole; “ay, and the better part of the night. Only when a new sample comes from the chemist, there’s a bit of a break. Ah, it’s an ill conscience that’s such an enemy to rest! Ah, sir, there’s blood foully shed in every step of it! But hark again, a little closer—put your heart in your ears, Mr. Utterson, and tell me, is that the doctor’s foot?”

The steps fell lightly and oddly, with a certain swing, for all they went so slowly; it was different indeed from the heavy creaking tread of Henry Jekyll. Utterson sighed. “Is there never anything else?” he asked.

Poole nodded. “Once,” he said. “Once I heard it weeping!”

“Weeping? how that?” said the lawyer, conscious of a sudden chill of horror.

“Weeping like a woman or a lost soul,” said the butler. “I came away with that upon my heart, that I could have wept too.”

But now the ten minutes drew to an end. Poole disinterred the axe from under a stack of packing straw; the candle was set upon the nearest table to light them to the attack; and they drew near with bated breath to where that patient foot was still going up and down, up and down, in the quiet of the night.

“Jekyll,” cried Utterson, with a loud voice, “I demand to see you.” He paused a moment, but there came no reply. “I give you fair warning, our suspicions are aroused, and I must and shall see you,” he resumed; “if not by fair means, then by foul—if not of your consent, then by brute force!”

“Utterson,” said the voice, “for God’s sake, have mercy!”

“Ah, that’s not Jekyll’s voice—it’s Hyde’s!” cried Utterson. “Down with the door, Poole!”

Poole swung the axe over his shoulder; the blow shook the building, and the red baize door leaped against the lock and hinges. A dismal screech, as of mere animal terror, rang from the cabinet. Up went the axe again, and again the panels crashed and the frame bounded; four times the blow fell; but the wood was tough and the fittings were of excellent workmanship; and it was not until the fifth, that the lock burst and the wreck of the door fell inwards on the carpet.

The besiegers, appalled by their own riot and the stillness that had succeeded, stood back a little and peered in. There lay the cabinet before their eyes in the quiet lamplight, a good fire glowing and chattering on the hearth, the kettle singing its thin strain, a drawer or two open, papers neatly set forth on the business table, and nearer the fire, the things laid out for tea; the quietest room, you would have said, and, but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace that night in London.

Right in the middle there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching. They drew near on tiptoe, turned it on its back and beheld the face of Edward Hyde. He was dressed in clothes far too large for him, clothes of the doctor’s bigness; the cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone; and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew that he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer.

“We have come too late,” he said sternly, “whether to save or punish. Hyde is gone to his account; and it only remains for us to find the body of your master.”

The far greater proportion of the building was occupied by the theatre, which filled almost the whole ground storey and was lighted from above, and by the cabinet, which formed an upper storey at one end and looked upon the court. A corridor joined the theatre to the door on the by-street; and with this the cabinet communicated separately by a second flight of

stairs. There were besides a few dark closets and a spacious cellar. All these they now thoroughly examined. Each closet needed but a glance, for all were empty, and all, by the dust that fell from their doors, had stood long unopened. The cellar, indeed, was filled with crazy lumber, mostly dating from the times of the surgeon who was Jekyll's predecessor; but even as they opened the door they were advertised of the uselessness of further search, by the fall of a perfect mat of cobweb which had for years sealed up the entrance. Nowhere was there any trace of Henry Jekyll, dead or alive.

Poole stamped on the flags of the corridor. "He must be buried here," he said, hearkening to the sound.

"Or he may have fled," said Utterson, and he turned to examine the door in the by-street. It was locked; and lying near by on the flags, they found the key, already stained with rust.

"This does not look like use," observed the lawyer.

"Use!" echoed Poole. "Do you not see, sir, it is broken? much as if a man had stamped on it."

"Ay," continued Utterson, "and the fractures, too, are rusty." The two men looked at each other with a scare. "This is beyond me, Poole," said the lawyer. "Let us go back to the cabinet."

They mounted the stair in silence, and still with an occasional awestruck glance at the dead body, proceeded more thoroughly to examine the contents of the cabinet. At one table, there were traces of chemical work, various measured heaps of some white salt being laid on glass saucers, as though for an experiment in which the unhappy man had been prevented.

"That is the same drug that I was always bringing him," said Poole; and even as he spoke, the kettle with a startling noise boiled over.

This brought them to the fireside, where the easy-chair was drawn cosily up, and the tea things stood ready to the sitter's elbow, the very sugar in the cup. There were several books on a shelf; one lay beside the tea things open, and Utterson was amazed to find it a copy of a pious work, for which Jekyll had several times expressed a great esteem, annotated, in his own hand with startling blasphemies.

Next, in the course of their review of the chamber, the searchers came to the cheval-glass, into whose depths they looked with an involuntary horror. But it was so turned as to show them nothing but the rosy glow playing on

the roof, the fire sparkling in a hundred repetitions along the glazed front of the presses, and their own pale and fearful countenances stooping to look in.

“This glass has seen some strange things, sir,” whispered Poole.

“And surely none stranger than itself,” echoed the lawyer in the same tones. “For what did Jekyll”—he caught himself up at the word with a start, and then conquering the weakness—“what could Jekyll want with it?” he said.

“You may say that!” said Poole.

Next they turned to the business table. On the desk, among the neat array of papers, a large envelope was uppermost, and bore, in the doctor’s hand, the name of Mr. Utterson. The lawyer unsealed it, and several enclosures fell to the floor. The first was a will, drawn in the same eccentric terms as the one which he had returned six months before, to serve as a testament in case of death and as a deed of gift in case of disappearance; but in place of the name of Edward Hyde, the lawyer, with indescribable amazement read the name of Gabriel John Utterson. He looked at Poole, and then back at the paper, and last of all at the dead malefactor stretched upon the carpet.

“My head goes round,” he said. “He has been all these days in possession; he had no cause to like me; he must have raged to see himself displaced; and he has not destroyed this document.”

He caught up the next paper; it was a brief note in the doctor’s hand and dated at the top. “O Poole!” the lawyer cried, “he was alive and here this day. He cannot have been disposed of in so short a space; he must be still alive, he must have fled! And then, why fled? and how? and in that case, can we venture to declare this suicide? O, we must be careful. I foresee that we may yet involve your master in some dire catastrophe.”

“Why don’t you read it, sir?” asked Poole.

“Because I fear,” replied the lawyer solemnly. “God grant I have no cause for it!” And with that he brought the paper to his eyes and read as follows:

“My dear Utterson,—When this shall fall into your hands, I shall have disappeared, under what circumstances I have not the penetration to foresee, but my instinct and all the circumstances of my nameless situation

tell me that the end is sure and must be early. Go then, and first read the narrative which Lanyon warned me he was to place in your hands; and if you care to hear more, turn to the confession of

“Your unworthy and unhappy friend,

“HENRY JEKYLL.”

“There was a third enclosure?” asked Utterson.

“Here, sir,” said Poole, and gave into his hands a considerable packet sealed in several places.

The lawyer put it in his pocket. “I would say nothing of this paper. If your master has fled or is dead, we may at least save his credit. It is now ten; I must go home and read these documents in quiet; but I shall be back before midnight, when we shall send for the police.”

They went out, locking the door of the theatre behind them; and Utterson, once more leaving the servants gathered about the fire in the hall, trudged back to his office to read the two narratives in which this mystery was now to be explained.

DR. LANYON'S NARRATIVE

On the ninth of January, now four days ago, I received by the evening delivery a registered envelope, addressed in the hand of my colleague and old school companion, Henry Jekyll. I was a good deal surprised by this; for we were by no means in the habit of correspondence; I had seen the man, dined with him, indeed, the night before; and I could imagine nothing in our intercourse that should justify formality of registration. The contents increased my wonder; for this is how the letter ran:

“10th December, 18—.

“Dear Lanyon,—You are one of my oldest friends; and although we may have differed at times on scientific questions, I cannot remember, at least on my side, any break in our affection. There was never a day when, if you had said to me, ‘Jekyll, my life, my honour, my reason, depend upon you,’ I would not have sacrificed my left hand to help you. Lanyon, my life, my honour, my reason, are all at your mercy; if you fail me to-night, I am lost. You might suppose, after this preface, that I am going to ask you for something dishonourable to grant. Judge for yourself.

“I want you to postpone all other engagements for to-night—ay, even if you were summoned to the bedside of an emperor; to take a cab, unless your carriage should be actually at the door; and with this letter in your hand for consultation, to drive straight to my house. Poole, my butler, has his orders; you will find him waiting your arrival with a locksmith. The door of my cabinet is then to be forced; and you are to go in alone; to open the glazed press (letter E) on the left hand, breaking the lock if it be shut; and to draw out, *with all its contents as they stand*, the fourth drawer from the top or (which is the same thing) the third from the bottom. In my extreme distress of mind, I have a morbid fear of misdirecting you; but even if I am in error, you may know the right drawer by its contents: some powders, a phial and a paper book. This drawer I beg of you to carry back with you to Cavendish Square exactly as it stands.

“That is the first part of the service: now for the second. You should be back, if you set out at once on the receipt of this, long before midnight; but I will leave you that amount of margin, not only in the fear of one of those obstacles that can neither be prevented nor foreseen, but because an hour when your servants are in bed is to be preferred for what will then remain to do. At midnight, then, I have to ask you to be alone in your consulting room, to admit with your own hand into the house a man who will present himself in my name, and to place in his hands the drawer that you will have brought with you from my cabinet. Then you will have played your part and earned my gratitude completely. Five minutes afterwards, if you insist upon an explanation, you will have understood that these arrangements are of capital importance; and that by the neglect of one of them, fantastic as they must appear, you might have charged your conscience with my death or the shipwreck of my reason.

“Confident as I am that you will not trifle with this appeal, my heart sinks and my hand trembles at the bare thought of such a possibility. Think of me at this hour, in a strange place, labouring under a blackness of distress that no fancy can exaggerate, and yet well aware that, if you will but punctually serve me, my troubles will roll away like a story that is told. Serve me, my dear Lanyon and save

“Your friend,

“H.J.

“P.S.—I had already sealed this up when a fresh terror struck upon my soul. It is possible that the post-office may fail me, and this letter not come into your hands until to-morrow morning. In that case, dear Lanyon, do my errand when it shall be most convenient for you in the course of the day; and once more expect my messenger at midnight. It may then already be too late; and if that night passes without event, you will know that you have seen the last of Henry Jekyll.”

Upon the reading of this letter, I made sure my colleague was insane; but till that was proved beyond the possibility of doubt, I felt bound to do as he requested. The less I understood of this farrago, the less I was in a position to judge of its importance; and an appeal so worded could not be set aside

without a grave responsibility. I rose accordingly from table, got into a hansom, and drove straight to Jekyll's house. The butler was awaiting my arrival; he had received by the same post as mine a registered letter of instruction, and had sent at once for a locksmith and a carpenter. The tradesmen came while we were yet speaking; and we moved in a body to old Dr. Denman's surgical theatre, from which (as you are doubtless aware) Jekyll's private cabinet is most conveniently entered. The door was very strong, the lock excellent; the carpenter avowed he would have great trouble and have to do much damage, if force were to be used; and the locksmith was near despair. But this last was a handy fellow, and after two hour's work, the door stood open. The press marked E was unlocked; and I took out the drawer, had it filled up with straw and tied in a sheet, and returned with it to Cavendish Square.

Here I proceeded to examine its contents. The powders were neatly enough made up, but not with the nicety of the dispensing chemist; so that it was plain they were of Jekyll's private manufacture; and when I opened one of the wrappers I found what seemed to me a simple crystalline salt of a white colour. The phial, to which I next turned my attention, might have been about half full of a blood-red liquor, which was highly pungent to the sense of smell and seemed to me to contain phosphorus and some volatile ether. At the other ingredients I could make no guess. The book was an ordinary version book and contained little but a series of dates. These covered a period of many years, but I observed that the entries ceased nearly a year ago and quite abruptly. Here and there a brief remark was appended to a date, usually no more than a single word: "double" occurring perhaps six times in a total of several hundred entries; and once very early in the list and followed by several marks of exclamation, "total failure!!!" All this, though it whetted my curiosity, told me little that was definite. Here were a phial of some salt, and the record of a series of experiments that had led (like too many of Jekyll's investigations) to no end of practical usefulness. How could the presence of these articles in my house affect either the honour, the sanity, or the life of my flighty colleague? If his messenger could go to one place, why could he not go to another? And even granting some impediment, why was this gentleman to be received by me in secret? The more I reflected the more convinced I grew that I was dealing with a case of cerebral disease; and though I dismissed my servants to bed, I

loaded an old revolver, that I might be found in some posture of self-defence.

Twelve o'clock had scarce rung out over London, ere the knocker sounded very gently on the door. I went myself at the summons, and found a small man crouching against the pillars of the portico.

“Are you come from Dr. Jekyll?” I asked.

He told me “yes” by a constrained gesture; and when I had bidden him enter, he did not obey me without a searching backward glance into the darkness of the square. There was a policeman not far off, advancing with his bull’s eye open; and at the sight, I thought my visitor started and made greater haste.

These particulars struck me, I confess, disagreeably; and as I followed him into the bright light of the consulting room, I kept my hand ready on my weapon. Here, at last, I had a chance of clearly seeing him. I had never set eyes on him before, so much was certain. He was small, as I have said; I was struck besides with the shocking expression of his face, with his remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution, and—last but not least—with the odd, subjective disturbance caused by his neighbourhood. This bore some resemblance to incipient rigour, and was accompanied by a marked sinking of the pulse. At the time, I set it down to some idiosyncratic, personal distaste, and merely wondered at the acuteness of the symptoms; but I have since had reason to believe the cause to lie much deeper in the nature of man, and to turn on some nobler hinge than the principle of hatred.

This person (who had thus, from the first moment of his entrance, struck in me what I can only describe as a disgustful curiosity) was dressed in a fashion that would have made an ordinary person laughable; his clothes, that is to say, although they were of rich and sober fabric, were enormously too large for him in every measurement—the trousers hanging on his legs and rolled up to keep them from the ground, the waist of the coat below his haunches, and the collar sprawling wide upon his shoulders. Strange to relate, this ludicrous accoutrement was far from moving me to laughter. Rather, as there was something abnormal and misbegotten in the very essence of the creature that now faced me—something seizing, surprising and revolting—this fresh disparity seemed but to fit in with and to reinforce

it; so that to my interest in the man's nature and character, there was added a curiosity as to his origin, his life, his fortune and status in the world.

These observations, though they have taken so great a space to be set down in, were yet the work of a few seconds. My visitor was, indeed, on fire with sombre excitement.

"Have you got it?" he cried. "Have you got it?" And so lively was his impatience that he even laid his hand upon my arm and sought to shake me.

I put him back, conscious at his touch of a certain icy pang along my blood. "Come, sir," said I. "You forget that I have not yet the pleasure of your acquaintance. Be seated, if you please." And I showed him an example, and sat down myself in my customary seat and with as fair an imitation of my ordinary manner to a patient, as the lateness of the hour, the nature of my preoccupations, and the horror I had of my visitor, would suffer me to muster.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Lanyon," he replied civilly enough. "What you say is very well founded; and my impatience has shown its heels to my politeness. I come here at the instance of your colleague, Dr. Henry Jekyll, on a piece of business of some moment; and I understood..." He paused and put his hand to his throat, and I could see, in spite of his collected manner, that he was wrestling against the approaches of the hysteria—"I understood, a drawer..."

But here I took pity on my visitor's suspense, and some perhaps on my own growing curiosity.

"There it is, sir," said I, pointing to the drawer, where it lay on the floor behind a table and still covered with the sheet.

He sprang to it, and then paused, and laid his hand upon his heart; I could hear his teeth grate with the convulsive action of his jaws; and his face was so ghastly to see that I grew alarmed both for his life and reason.

"Compose yourself," said I.

He turned a dreadful smile to me, and as if with the decision of despair, plucked away the sheet. At sight of the contents, he uttered one loud sob of such immense relief that I sat petrified. And the next moment, in a voice that was already fairly well under control, "Have you a graduated glass?" he asked.

I rose from my place with something of an effort and gave him what he asked.

He thanked me with a smiling nod, measured out a few minims of the red tincture and added one of the powders. The mixture, which was at first of a reddish hue, began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour, to effervesce audibly, and to throw off small fumes of vapour. Suddenly and at the same moment, the ebullition ceased and the compound changed to a dark purple, which faded again more slowly to a watery green. My visitor, who had watched these metamorphoses with a keen eye, smiled, set down the glass upon the table, and then turned and looked upon me with an air of scrutiny.

“And now,” said he, “to settle what remains. Will you be wise? will you be guided? will you suffer me to take this glass in my hand and to go forth from your house without further parley? or has the greed of curiosity too much command of you? Think before you answer, for it shall be done as you decide. As you decide, you shall be left as you were before, and neither richer nor wiser, unless the sense of service rendered to a man in mortal distress may be counted as a kind of riches of the soul. Or, if you shall so prefer to choose, a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you, here, in this room, upon the instant; and your sight shall be blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan.”

“Sir,” said I, affecting a coolness that I was far from truly possessing, “you speak enigmas, and you will perhaps not wonder that I hear you with no very strong impression of belief. But I have gone too far in the way of inexplicable services to pause before I see the end.”

“It is well,” replied my visitor. “Lanyon, you remember your vows: what follows is under the seal of our profession. And now, you who have so long been bound to the most narrow and material views, you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine, you who have derided your superiors—behold!”

He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp. A cry followed; he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth; and as I looked there came, I thought, a change—he seemed to swell—his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter—and the next moment, I had sprung to

my feet and leaped back against the wall, my arms raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror.

“O God!” I screamed, and “O God!” again and again; for there before my eyes—pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death—there stood Henry Jekyll!

What he told me in the next hour, I cannot bring my mind to set on paper. I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it; and yet now when that sight has faded from my eyes, I ask myself if I believe it, and I cannot answer. My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night; and I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous. As for the moral turpitude that man unveiled to me, even with tears of penitence, I cannot, even in memory, dwell on it without a start of horror. I will say but one thing, Utterson, and that (if you can bring your mind to credit it) will be more than enough. The creature who crept into my house that night was, on Jekyll’s own confession, known by the name of Hyde and hunted for in every corner of the land as the murderer of Carew.

HASTIE LANYON.

HENRY JEKYLL'S FULL STATEMENT OF THE CASE

I was born in the year 18— to a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellowmen, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future. And indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life. Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me, I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame. It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I was, and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature. In this case, I was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately on that hard law of life, which lies at the root of religion and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress. Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering. And it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, which led wholly towards the mystic and the transcendental, reacted and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among my members. With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have

been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens. I, for my part, from the nature of my life, advanced infallibly in one direction and in one direction only. It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both; and from an early date, even before the course of my scientific discoveries had begun to suggest the most naked possibility of such a miracle, I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved daydream, on the thought of the separation of these elements. If each, I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together—that in the agonised womb of consciousness, these polar twins should be continuously struggling. How, then were they dissociated?

I was so far in my reflections when, as I have said, a side light began to shine upon the subject from the laboratory table. I began to perceive more deeply than it has ever yet been stated, the trembling immateriality, the mistlike transience, of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired. Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion. For two good reasons, I will not enter deeply into this scientific branch of my confession. First, because I have been made to learn that the doom and burthen of our life is bound for ever on man's shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure. Second, because, as my narrative will make, alas! too evident, my discoveries were incomplete. Enough then, that I not only recognised my natural body from the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a

second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression, and bore the stamp of lower elements in my soul.

I hesitated long before I put this theory to the test of practice. I knew well that I risked death; for any drug that so potently controlled and shook the very fortress of identity, might, by the least scruple of an overdose or at the least inopportunity in the moment of exhibition, utterly blot out that immaterial tabernacle which I looked to it to change. But the temptation of a discovery so singular and profound at last overcame the suggestions of alarm. I had long since prepared my tincture; I purchased at once, from a firm of wholesale chemists, a large quantity of a particular salt which I knew, from my experiments, to be the last ingredient required; and late one accursed night, I compounded the elements, watched them boil and smoke together in the glass, and when the ebullition had subsided, with a strong glow of courage, drank off the potion.

The most racking pangs succeeded: a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death. Then these agonies began swiftly to subside, and I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a millrace in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul. I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine. I stretched out my hands, exulting in the freshness of these sensations; and in the act, I was suddenly aware that I had lost in stature.

There was no mirror, at that date, in my room; that which stands beside me as I write, was brought there later on and for the very purpose of these transformations. The night however, was far gone into the morning—the morning, black as it was, was nearly ripe for the conception of the day—the inmates of my house were locked in the most rigorous hours of slumber; and I determined, flushed as I was with hope and triumph, to venture in my new shape as far as to my bedroom. I crossed the yard, wherein the

constellations looked down upon me, I could have thought, with wonder, the first creature of that sort that their unsleeping vigilance had yet disclosed to them; I stole through the corridors, a stranger in my own house; and coming to my room, I saw for the first time the appearance of Edward Hyde.

I must here speak by theory alone, saying not that which I know, but that which I suppose to be most probable. The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed. Again, in the course of my life, which had been, after all, nine tenths a life of effort, virtue and control, it had been much less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. In my eyes it bore a livelier image of the spirit, it seemed more express and single, than the imperfect and divided countenance I had been hitherto accustomed to call mine. And in so far I was doubtless right. I have observed that when I wore the semblance of Edward Hyde, none could come near to me at first without a visible misgiving of the flesh. This, as I take it, was because all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil.

I lingered but a moment at the mirror: the second and conclusive experiment had yet to be attempted; it yet remained to be seen if I had lost my identity beyond redemption and must flee before daylight from a house that was no longer mine; and hurrying back to my cabinet, I once more prepared and drank the cup, once more suffered the pangs of dissolution, and came to myself once more with the character, the stature and the face of Henry Jekyll.

That night I had come to the fatal cross-roads. Had I approached my discovery in a more noble spirit, had I risked the experiment while under the empire of generous or pious aspirations, all must have been otherwise,

and from these agonies of death and birth, I had come forth an angel instead of a fiend. The drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine; it but shook the doors of the prisonhouse of my disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth. At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion; and the thing that was projected was Edward Hyde. Hence, although I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil, and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair. The movement was thus wholly toward the worse.

Even at that time, I had not conquered my aversions to the dryness of a life of study. I would still be merrily disposed at times; and as my pleasures were (to say the least) undignified, and I was not only well known and highly considered, but growing towards the elderly man, this incoherency of my life was daily growing more unwelcome. It was on this side that my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery. I had but to drink the cup, to doff at once the body of the noted professor, and to assume, like a thick cloak, that of Edward Hyde. I smiled at the notion; it seemed to me at the time to be humourous; and I made my preparations with the most studious care. I took and furnished that house in Soho, to which Hyde was tracked by the police; and engaged as a housekeeper a creature whom I knew well to be silent and unscrupulous. On the other side, I announced to my servants that a Mr. Hyde (whom I described) was to have full liberty and power about my house in the square; and to parry mishaps, I even called and made myself a familiar object, in my second character. I next drew up that will to which you so much objected; so that if anything befell me in the person of Dr. Jekyll, I could enter on that of Edward Hyde without pecuniary loss. And thus fortified, as I supposed, on every side, I began to profit by the strange immunities of my position.

Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it—I did not even exist! Let me but escape into my laboratory door, give me but a second or

two to mix and swallow the draught that I had always standing ready; and whatever he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror; and there in his stead, quietly at home, trimming the midnight lamp in his study, a man who could afford to laugh at suspicion, would be Henry Jekyll.

The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde, they soon began to turn toward the monstrous. When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity. This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where it was possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered.

Into the details of the infamy at which I thus connived (for even now I can scarce grant that I committed it) I have no design of entering; I mean but to point out the warnings and the successive steps with which my chastisement approached. I met with one accident which, as it brought on no consequence, I shall no more than mention. An act of cruelty to a child aroused against me the anger of a passer-by, whom I recognised the other day in the person of your kinsman; the doctor and the child's family joined him; there were moments when I feared for my life; and at last, in order to pacify their too just resentment, Edward Hyde had to bring them to the door, and pay them in a cheque drawn in the name of Henry Jekyll. But this danger was easily eliminated from the future, by opening an account at another bank in the name of Edward Hyde himself; and when, by sloping my own hand backward, I had supplied my double with a signature, I thought I sat beyond the reach of fate.

Some two months before the murder of Sir Danvers, I had been out for one of my adventures, had returned at a late hour, and woke the next day in

bed with somewhat odd sensations. It was in vain I looked about me; in vain I saw the decent furniture and tall proportions of my room in the square; in vain that I recognised the pattern of the bed curtains and the design of the mahogany frame; something still kept insisting that I was not where I was, that I had not wakened where I seemed to be, but in the little room in Soho where I was accustomed to sleep in the body of Edward Hyde. I smiled to myself, and in my psychological way, began lazily to inquire into the elements of this illusion, occasionally, even as I did so, dropping back into a comfortable morning doze. I was still so engaged when, in one of my more wakeful moments, my eyes fell upon my hand. Now the hand of Henry Jekyll (as you have often remarked) was professional in shape and size; it was large, firm, white and comely. But the hand which I now saw, clearly enough, in the yellow light of a mid-London morning, lying half shut on the bedclothes, was lean, corded, knuckly, of a dusky pallor and thickly shaded with a swart growth of hair. It was the hand of Edward Hyde.

I must have stared upon it for near half a minute, sunk as I was in the mere stupidity of wonder, before terror woke up in my breast as sudden and startling as the crash of cymbals; and bounding from my bed I rushed to the mirror. At the sight that met my eyes, my blood was changed into something exquisitely thin and icy. Yes, I had gone to bed Henry Jekyll, I had awakened Edward Hyde. How was this to be explained? I asked myself; and then, with another bound of terror—how was it to be remedied? It was well on in the morning; the servants were up; all my drugs were in the cabinet—a long journey down two pairs of stairs, through the back passage, across the open court and through the anatomical theatre, from where I was then standing horror-struck. It might indeed be possible to cover my face; but of what use was that, when I was unable to conceal the alteration in my stature? And then with an overpowering sweetness of relief, it came back upon my mind that the servants were already used to the coming and going of my second self. I had soon dressed, as well as I was able, in clothes of my own size: had soon passed through the house, where Bradshaw stared and drew back at seeing Mr. Hyde at such an hour and in such a strange array; and ten minutes later, Dr. Jekyll had returned to his own shape and was sitting down, with a darkened brow, to make a feint of breakfasting.

Small indeed was my appetite. This inexplicable incident, this reversal of my previous experience, seemed, like the Babylonian finger on the wall, to be spelling out the letters of my judgment; and I began to reflect more seriously than ever before on the issues and possibilities of my double existence. That part of me which I had the power of projecting, had lately been much exercised and nourished; it had seemed to me of late as though the body of Edward Hyde had grown in stature, as though (when I wore that form) I were conscious of a more generous tide of blood; and I began to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forfeited, and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine. The power of the drug had not been always equally displayed. Once, very early in my career, it had totally failed me; since then I had been obliged on more than one occasion to double, and once, with infinite risk of death, to treble the amount; and these rare uncertainties had cast hitherto the sole shadow on my contentment. Now, however, and in the light of that morning's accident, I was led to remark that whereas, in the beginning, the difficulty had been to throw off the body of Jekyll, it had of late gradually but decidedly transferred itself to the other side. All things therefore seemed to point to this; that I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse.

Between these two, I now felt I had to choose. My two natures had memory in common, but all other faculties were most unequally shared between them. Jekyll (who was composite) now with the most sensitive apprehensions, now with a greedy gusto, projected and shared in the pleasures and adventures of Hyde; but Hyde was indifferent to Jekyll, or but remembered him as the mountain bandit remembers the cavern in which he conceals himself from pursuit. Jekyll had more than a father's interest; Hyde had more than a son's indifference. To cast in my lot with Jekyll, was to die to those appetites which I had long secretly indulged and had of late begun to pamper. To cast it in with Hyde, was to die to a thousand interests and aspirations, and to become, at a blow and forever, despised and friendless. The bargain might appear unequal; but there was still another consideration in the scales; for while Jekyll would suffer smartingly in the fires of abstinence, Hyde would be not even conscious of all that he had lost. Strange as my circumstances were, the terms of this debate are as old and commonplace as man; much the same inducements and alarms cast the

die for any tempted and trembling sinner; and it fell out with me, as it falls with so vast a majority of my fellows, that I chose the better part and was found wanting in the strength to keep to it.

Yes, I preferred the elderly and discontented doctor, surrounded by friends and cherishing honest hopes; and bade a resolute farewell to the liberty, the comparative youth, the light step, leaping impulses and secret pleasures, that I had enjoyed in the disguise of Hyde. I made this choice perhaps with some unconscious reservation, for I neither gave up the house in Soho, nor destroyed the clothes of Edward Hyde, which still lay ready in my cabinet. For two months, however, I was true to my determination; for two months, I led a life of such severity as I had never before attained to, and enjoyed the compensations of an approving conscience. But time began at last to obliterate the freshness of my alarm; the praises of conscience began to grow into a thing of course; I began to be tortured with throes and longings, as of Hyde struggling after freedom; and at last, in an hour of moral weakness, I once again compounded and swallowed the transforming draught.

I do not suppose that, when a drunkard reasons with himself upon his vice, he is once out of five hundred times affected by the dangers that he runs through his brutish, physical insensibility; neither had I, long as I had considered my position, made enough allowance for the complete moral insensibility and insensate readiness to evil, which were the leading characters of Edward Hyde. Yet it was by these that I was punished. My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring. I was conscious, even when I took the draught, of a more unbridled, a more furious propensity to ill. It must have been this, I suppose, that stirred in my soul that tempest of impatience with which I listened to the civilities of my unhappy victim; I declare, at least, before God, no man morally sane could have been guilty of that crime upon so pitiful a provocation; and that I struck in no more reasonable spirit than that in which a sick child may break a plaything. But I had voluntarily stripped myself of all those balancing instincts by which even the worst of us continues to walk with some degree of steadiness among temptations; and in my case, to be tempted, however slightly, was to fall.

Instantly the spirit of hell awoke in me and raged. With a transport of glee, I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow; and it

was not till weariness had begun to succeed, that I was suddenly, in the top fit of my delirium, struck through the heart by a cold thrill of terror. A mist dispersed; I saw my life to be forfeit; and fled from the scene of these excesses, at once glorying and trembling, my lust of evil gratified and stimulated, my love of life screwed to the topmost peg. I ran to the house in Soho, and (to make assurance doubly sure) destroyed my papers; thence I set out through the lamplit streets, in the same divided ecstasy of mind, gloating on my crime, light-headedly devising others in the future, and yet still hastening and still hearkening in my wake for the steps of the avenger. Hyde had a song upon his lips as he compounded the draught, and as he drank it, pledged the dead man. The pangs of transformation had not done tearing him, before Henry Jekyll, with streaming tears of gratitude and remorse, had fallen upon his knees and lifted his clasped hands to God. The veil of self-indulgence was rent from head to foot. I saw my life as a whole: I followed it up from the days of childhood, when I had walked with my father's hand, and through the self-denying toils of my professional life, to arrive again and again, with the same sense of unreality, at the damned horrors of the evening. I could have screamed aloud; I sought with tears and prayers to smother down the crowd of hideous images and sounds with which my memory swarmed against me; and still, between the petitions, the ugly face of my iniquity stared into my soul. As the acuteness of this remorse began to die away, it was succeeded by a sense of joy. The problem of my conduct was solved. Hyde was thenceforth impossible; whether I would or not, I was now confined to the better part of my existence; and O, how I rejoiced to think of it! with what willing humility I embraced anew the restrictions of natural life! with what sincere renunciation I locked the door by which I had so often gone and come, and ground the key under my heel!

The next day, came the news that the murder had been overlooked, that the guilt of Hyde was patent to the world, and that the victim was a man high in public estimation. It was not only a crime, it had been a tragic folly. I think I was glad to know it; I think I was glad to have my better impulses thus buttressed and guarded by the terrors of the scaffold. Jekyll was now my city of refuge; let but Hyde peep out an instant, and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him.

I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past; and I can say with honesty that my resolve was fruitful of some good. You know yourself how

earnestly, in the last months of the last year, I laboured to relieve suffering; you know that much was done for others, and that the days passed quietly, almost happily for myself. Nor can I truly say that I wearied of this beneficent and innocent life; I think instead that I daily enjoyed it more completely; but I was still cursed with my duality of purpose; and as the first edge of my penitence wore off, the lower side of me, so long indulged, so recently chained down, began to growl for licence. Not that I dreamed of resuscitating Hyde; the bare idea of that would startle me to frenzy: no, it was in my own person that I was once more tempted to trifle with my conscience; and it was as an ordinary secret sinner that I at last fell before the assaults of temptation.

There comes an end to all things; the most capacious measure is filled at last; and this brief condescension to my evil finally destroyed the balance of my soul. And yet I was not alarmed; the fall seemed natural, like a return to the old days before I had made my discovery. It was a fine, clear, January day, wet under foot where the frost had melted, but cloudless overhead; and the Regent's Park was full of winter chirrupings and sweet with spring odours. I sat in the sun on a bench; the animal within me licking the chops of memory; the spiritual side a little drowsed, promising subsequent penitence, but not yet moved to begin. After all, I reflected, I was like my neighbours; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active good-will with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. And at the very moment of that vainglorious thought, a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering. These passed away, and left me faint; and then as in its turn faintness subsided, I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy. I was once more Edward Hyde. A moment before I had been safe of all men's respect, wealthy, beloved—the cloth laying for me in the dining-room at home; and now I was the common quarry of mankind, hunted, houseless, a known murderer, thrall to the gallows.

My reason wavered, but it did not fail me utterly. I have more than once observed that in my second character, my faculties seemed sharpened to a point and my spirits more tensely elastic; thus it came about that, where Jekyll perhaps might have succumbed, Hyde rose to the importance of the moment. My drugs were in one of the presses of my cabinet; how was I to

reach them? That was the problem that (crushing my temples in my hands) I set myself to solve. The laboratory door I had closed. If I sought to enter by the house, my own servants would consign me to the gallows. I saw I must employ another hand, and thought of Lanyon. How was he to be reached? how persuaded? Supposing that I escaped capture in the streets, how was I to make my way into his presence? and how should I, an unknown and displeasing visitor, prevail on the famous physician to rifle the study of his colleague, Dr. Jekyll? Then I remembered that of my original character, one part remained to me: I could write my own hand; and once I had conceived that kindling spark, the way that I must follow became lighted up from end to end.

Thereupon, I arranged my clothes as best I could, and summoning a passing hansom, drove to an hotel in Portland Street, the name of which I chanced to remember. At my appearance (which was indeed comical enough, however tragic a fate these garments covered) the driver could not conceal his mirth. I gnashed my teeth upon him with a gust of devilish fury; and the smile withered from his face—happily for him—yet more happily for myself, for in another instant I had certainly dragged him from his perch. At the inn, as I entered, I looked about me with so black a countenance as made the attendants tremble; not a look did they exchange in my presence; but obsequiously took my orders, led me to a private room, and brought me wherewithal to write. Hyde in danger of his life was a creature new to me; shaken with inordinate anger, strung to the pitch of murder, lusting to inflict pain. Yet the creature was astute; mastered his fury with a great effort of the will; composed his two important letters, one to Lanyon and one to Poole; and that he might receive actual evidence of their being posted, sent them out with directions that they should be registered. Thenceforward, he sat all day over the fire in the private room, gnawing his nails; there he dined, sitting alone with his fears, the waiter visibly quailing before his eye; and thence, when the night was fully come, he set forth in the corner of a closed cab, and was driven to and fro about the streets of the city. He, I say—I cannot say, I. That child of Hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred. And when at last, thinking the driver had begun to grow suspicious, he discharged the cab and ventured on foot, attired in his misfitting clothes, an object marked out for observation, into the midst of the nocturnal passengers, these two base passions raged within him like a tempest. He walked fast, hunted by his fears, chattering to

himself, skulking through the less frequented thoroughfares, counting the minutes that still divided him from midnight. Once a woman spoke to him, offering, I think, a box of lights. He smote her in the face, and she fled.

When I came to myself at Lanyon's, the horror of my old friend perhaps affected me somewhat: I do not know; it was at least but a drop in the sea to the abhorrence with which I looked back upon these hours. A change had come over me. It was no longer the fear of the gallows, it was the horror of being Hyde that racked me. I received Lanyon's condemnation partly in a dream; it was partly in a dream that I came home to my own house and got into bed. I slept after the prostration of the day, with a stringent and profound slumber which not even the nightmares that wrung me could avail to break. I awoke in the morning shaken, weakened, but refreshed. I still hated and feared the thought of the brute that slept within me, and I had not of course forgotten the appalling dangers of the day before; but I was once more at home, in my own house and close to my drugs; and gratitude for my escape shone so strong in my soul that it almost rivalled the brightness of hope.

I was stepping leisurely across the court after breakfast, drinking the chill of the air with pleasure, when I was seized again with those indescribable sensations that heralded the change; and I had but the time to gain the shelter of my cabinet, before I was once again raging and freezing with the passions of Hyde. It took on this occasion a double dose to recall me to myself; and alas! six hours after, as I sat looking sadly in the fire, the pangs returned, and the drug had to be re-administered. In short, from that day forth it seemed only by a great effort as of gymnastics, and only under the immediate stimulation of the drug, that I was able to wear the countenance of Jekyll. At all hours of the day and night, I would be taken with the premonitory shudder; above all, if I slept, or even dozed for a moment in my chair, it was always as Hyde that I awakened. Under the strain of this continually impending doom and by the sleeplessness to which I now condemned myself, ay, even beyond what I had thought possible to man, I became, in my own person, a creature eaten up and emptied by fever, languidly weak both in body and mind, and solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self. But when I slept, or when the virtue of the medicine wore off, I would leap almost without transition (for the pangs of transformation grew daily less marked) into the possession of a fancy brimming with images of terror, a soul boiling with causeless hatreds, and a body that seemed not strong enough to contain the raging energies of life. The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickliness of Jekyll. And certainly the hate that now divided them was equal on each side. With

Jekyll, it was a thing of vital instinct. He had now seen the full deformity of that creature that shared with him some of the phenomena of consciousness, and was co-heir with him to death: and beyond these links of community, which in themselves made the most poignant part of his distress, he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. And this again, that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him, and deposed him out of life. The hatred of Hyde for Jekyll was of a different order. His terror of the gallows drove him continually to commit temporary suicide, and return to his subordinate station of a part instead of a person; but he loathed the necessity, he loathed the despondency into which Jekyll was now fallen, and he resented the dislike with which he was himself regarded. Hence the ape-like tricks that he would play me, scrawling in my own hand blasphemies on the pages of my books, burning the letters and destroying the portrait of my father; and indeed, had it not been for his fear of death, he would long ago have ruined himself in order to involve me in the ruin. But his love of life is wonderful; I go further: I, who sicken and freeze at the mere thought of him, when I recall the abjection and passion of this attachment, and when I know how he fears my power to cut him off by suicide, I find it in my heart to pity him.

It is useless, and the time awfully fails me, to prolong this description; no one has ever suffered such torments, let that suffice; and yet even to these, habit brought—no, not alleviation—but a certain callousness of soul, a certain acquiescence of despair; and my punishment might have gone on for years, but for the last calamity which has now fallen, and which has finally severed me from my own face and nature. My provision of the salt, which had never been renewed since the date of the first experiment, began to run low. I sent out for a fresh supply and mixed the draught; the ebullition followed, and the first change of colour, not the second; I drank it and it was without efficiency. You will learn from Poole how I have had London ransacked; it was in vain; and I am now persuaded that my first supply was

impure, and that it was that unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught.

About a week has passed, and I am now finishing this statement under the influence of the last of the old powders. This, then, is the last time, short of a miracle, that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face (now how sadly altered!) in the glass. Nor must I delay too long to bring my writing to an end; for if my narrative has hitherto escaped destruction, it has been by a combination of great prudence and great good luck. Should the throes of change take me in the act of writing it, Hyde will tear it in pieces; but if some time shall have elapsed after I have laid it by, his wonderful selfishness and circumscription to the moment will probably save it once again from the action of his ape-like spite. And indeed the doom that is closing on us both has already changed and crushed him. Half an hour from now, when I shall again and forever reindue that hated personality, I know how I shall sit shuddering and weeping in my chair, or continue, with the most strained and fearstruck ecstasy of listening, to pace up and down this room (my last earthly refuge) and give ear to every sound of menace. Will Hyde die upon the scaffold? or will he find courage to release himself at the last moment? God knows; I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end.

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The Picture of Dorian Gray

Oscar Wilde

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THE PICTURE
OF
DORIAN GRAY
BY

OSCAR WILDE

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL,
HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LTD.

PARIS
ON SALE AT YE OLD PARIS BOOKE SHOPPE
11 RUE DE CHÂTEAUDUN

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Pirated and Mutilated Editions of "Dorian
Gray" at the end of this present volume.*

**CHAPTER: I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII,
XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX,**

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE PREFACE

THE artist is the creator of beautiful things.

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.

The highest, as the lowest, form of criticism
is a mode of autobiography.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in
beautiful things are the cultivated. For
these there is hope.

They are the elect to whom beautiful things
mean only Beauty.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral
book. Books are well written, or
badly written. That is all.

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism
is the rage of Caliban not seeing
his own face in a glass.

The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter
of the artist, but the morality of art consists

in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.

No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type.

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital.

When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

All art is quite useless.

OSCAR WILDE.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

CHAPTER I

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddlebags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.

In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward, whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement, and gave rise to so many strange conjectures.

As the painter looked at the gracious and comely form he had so skilfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake.

"It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done," said Lord Henry, languidly. "You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor.

The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place."

"I don't think I shall send it anywhere," he answered, tossing his head back in that odd way that used to make his friends laugh at him at Oxford. "No: I won't send it anywhere."

Lord Henry elevated his eyebrows, and looked at him in amazement through the thin blue wreaths of smoke that curled up in such fanciful whorls from his heavy opium-tainted cigarette. "Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one, you seem to want to throw it away. It is silly of you, for there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men quite jealous, if old men are ever capable of any emotion."

"I know you will laugh at me," he replied, "but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it."

Lord Henry stretched himself out on the divan and laughed.

"Yes, I knew you would; but it is quite true, all the same."

"Too much of yourself in it! Upon my word, Basil, I didn't know you were so vain; and I really can't see any resemblance between you, with your rugged strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus, and you—well, of course you have an intellectual expression, and all that. But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face. The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid. Look at the successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous

they are! Except, of course, in the Church. But then in the Church they don't think. A bishop keeps on saying at the age of eighty what he was told to say when he was a boy of eighteen, and as a natural consequence he always looks absolutely delightful. Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. I feel quite sure of that. He is some brainless, beautiful creature, who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look at, and always here in summer when we want something to chill our intelligence. Don't flatter yourself, Basil: you are not in the least like him."

"You don't understand me, Harry," answered the artist. "Of course I am not like him. I know that perfectly well. Indeed, I should be sorry to look like him. You shrug your shoulders? I am telling you the truth. There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction, the sort of fatality that seems to dog through history the faltering steps of kings. It is better not to be different from one's fellows. The ugly and the stupid have the best of it in this world. They can sit at their ease and gape at the play. If they know nothing of victory, they are at least spared the knowledge of defeat. They live as we all should live, undisturbed, indifferent, and without disquiet. They neither bring ruin upon others, nor ever receive it from alien hands. Your rank and wealth, Harry; my brains, such as they are—my art, whatever it may be worth; Dorian Gray's good looks—we shall all suffer for what the gods have given us, suffer terribly."

"Dorian Gray? Is that his name?" asked Lord Henry, walking across the studio towards Basil Hallward.

"Yes, that is his name. I didn't intend to tell it to you."

"But why not?"

"Oh, I can't explain. When I like people immensely I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvellous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it. When I leave town now I never tell my people where I am

going. If I did, I would lose all my pleasure. It is a silly habit, I daresay, but somehow it seems to bring a great deal of romance into one's life. I suppose you think me awfully foolish about it?"

"Not at all," answered Lord Henry, "not at all, my dear Basil. You seem to forget that I am married, and the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties. I never know where my wife is, and my wife never knows what I am doing. When we meet—we do meet occasionally, when we dine out together, or go down to the Duke's—we tell each other the most absurd stories with the most serious faces. My wife is very good at it—much better, in fact, than I am. She never gets confused over her dates, and I always do. But when she does find me out, she makes no row at all. I sometimes wish she would; but she merely laughs at me."

"I hate the way you talk about your married life, Harry," said Basil Hallward, strolling towards the door that led into the garden. "I believe that you are really a very good husband, but that you are thoroughly ashamed of your own virtues. You are an extraordinary fellow. You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose."

"Being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know," cried Lord Henry, laughing; and the two young men went out into the garden together, and ensconced themselves on a long bamboo seat that stood in the shade of a tall laurel bush. The sunlight slipped over the polished leaves. In the grass, white daisies were tremulous.

After a pause, Lord Henry pulled out his watch. "I am afraid I must be going, Basil," he murmured, "and before I go, I insist on your answering a question I put to you some time ago."

"What is that?" said the painter, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

"You know quite well."

"I do not, Harry."

"Well, I will tell you what it is. I want you to explain to me why you won't exhibit Dorian Gray's picture. I want the real reason."

"I told you the real reason."

"No, you did not. You said it was because there was too much of yourself in it. Now, that is childish."

"Harry," said Basil Hallward, looking him straight in the face, "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul."

Lord Henry laughed. "And what is that?" he asked.

"I will tell you," said Hallward; but an expression of perplexity came over his face.

"I am all expectation, Basil," continued his companion, glancing at him.

"Oh, there is really very little to tell, Harry," answered the painter; "and I am afraid you will hardly understand it. Perhaps you will hardly believe it."

Lord Henry smiled, and, leaning down, plucked a pink-petalled daisy from the grass, and examined it. "I am quite sure I shall understand it," he replied, gazing intently at the little golden white-feathered disk, "and as for believing things, I can believe anything, provided that it is quite incredible."

The wind shook some blossoms from the trees, and the heavy lilac-blossoms, with their clustering stars, moved to and fro in the languid air. A grasshopper began to chirrup by the wall, and like a blue thread a long thin dragon-fly floated past on its brown gauze wings. Lord Henry felt as if he could hear Basil Hallward's heart beating, and wondered what was coming.

"The story is simply this," said the painter after some time. "Two months ago I went to a crush at Lady Brandon's. You know we poor artists have to show ourselves in society from time to time, just to remind the public that we are not savages. With an evening coat and a white tie, as you told me once, anybody, even a stockbroker, can gain a reputation for being civilised. Well, after I had been in the room about ten minutes, talking to huge over-dressed dowagers and tedious Academicians, I suddenly became conscious that someone was looking at me. I turned halfway round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. I did not want any external influence in my life. You know yourself, Harry, how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray. Then—— but I don't know how to explain it to you. Something seemed to tell me that I was on the verge of a terrible crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for me exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows. I grew afraid, and turned to quit the room. It was not conscience that made me do so; it was a sort of cowardice. I take no credit to myself for trying to escape."

"Conscience and cowardice are really the same things, Basil. Conscience is the trade-name of the firm. That is all."

"I don't believe that, Harry, and I don't believe you do either. However, whatever was my motive—and it may have been pride, for I used to be very proud—I certainly struggled to the door. There, of course, I stumbled against Lady Brandon. 'You are not going to run away so soon, Mr. Hallward?' she screamed out. You know her curiously shrill voice?"

"Yes; she is a peacock in everything but beauty," said Lord Henry, pulling the daisy to bits with his long, nervous fingers.

"I could not get rid of her. She brought me up to Royalties, and people with Stars and Garters, and elderly ladies with gigantic tiaras and parrot noses. She spoke of me as her dearest friend. I had only met her once

before, but she took it into her head to lionise me. I believe some picture of mine had made a great success at the time, at least had been chattered about in the penny newspapers, which is the nineteenth-century standard of immortality. Suddenly I found myself face to face with the young man whose personality had so strangely stirred me. We were quite close, almost touching. Our eyes met again. It was reckless of me, but I asked Lady Brandon to introduce me to him. Perhaps it was not so reckless, after all. It was simply inevitable. We would have spoken to each other without any introduction. I am sure of that. Dorian told me so afterwards. He, too, felt that we were destined to know each other."

"And how did Lady Brandon describe this wonderful young man?" asked his companion. "I know she goes in for giving a rapid *précis* of all her guests. I remember her bringing me up to a truculent and red-faced old gentleman covered all over with orders and ribbons, and hissing into my ear, in a tragic whisper which must have been perfectly audible to everybody in the room, the most astounding details. I simply fled. I like to find out people for myself. But Lady Brandon treats her guests exactly as an auctioneer treats his goods. She either explains them entirely away, or tells one everything about them except what one wants to know."

"Poor Lady Brandon! You are hard on her, Harry!" said Hallward, listlessly.

"My dear fellow, she tried to found a *salon*, and only succeeded in opening a restaurant. How could I admire her? But tell me, what did she say about Mr. Dorian Gray?"

"Oh, something like, 'Charming boy—poor dear mother and I absolutely inseparable. Quite forget what he does—afraid he—doesn't do anything—oh, yes, plays the piano—or is it the violin, dear Mr. Gray?' Neither of us could help laughing, and we became friends at once."

"Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one," said the young lord, plucking another daisy.

Hallward shook his head. "You don't understand what friendship is, Harry," he murmured—"or what enmity is, for that matter. You like

everyone; that is to say, you are indifferent to everyone."

"How horribly unjust of you!" cried Lord Henry, tilting his hat back, and looking up at the little clouds that, like ravelled skeins of glossy white silk, were drifting across the hollowed turquoise of the summer sky. "Yes; horribly unjust of you. I make a great difference between people. I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects. A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies. I have not got one who is a fool. They are all men of some intellectual power, and consequently they all appreciate me. Is that very vain of me? I think it is rather vain."

"I should think it was, Harry. But according to your category I must be merely an acquaintance."

"My dear old Basil, you are much more than an acquaintance."

"And much less than a friend. A sort of brother, I suppose?"

"Oh, brothers! I don't care for brothers. My elder brother won't die, and my younger brothers seem never to do anything else."

"Harry!" exclaimed Hallward, frowning.

"My dear fellow, I am not quite serious. But I can't help detesting my relations. I suppose it comes from the fact that none of us can stand other people having the same faults as ourselves. I quite sympathise with the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders. The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property, and that if anyone of us makes an ass of himself he is poaching on their preserves. When poor Southwark got into the Divorce Court, their indignation was quite magnificent. And yet I don't suppose that ten per cent. of the proletariat live correctly."

"I don't agree with a single word that you have said, and, what is more, Harry, I feel sure you don't either."

Lord Henry stroked his pointed brown beard, and tapped the toe of his patent-leather boot with a tasselled ebony cane. "How English you are,

Basil! That is the second time you have made that observation. If one puts forward an idea to a true Englishman—always a rash thing to do—he never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong. The only thing he considers of any importance is whether one believes it oneself. Now, the value of an idea has nothing whatsoever to do with the sincerity of the man who expresses it. Indeed, the probabilities are that the more insincere the man is, the more purely intellectual will the idea be, as in that case it will not be coloured by either his wants, his desires, or his prejudices. However, I don't propose to discuss politics, sociology, or metaphysics with you. I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world. Tell me more about Mr. Dorian Gray. How often do you see him?"

"Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me."

"How extraordinary! I thought you would never care for anything but your art."

"He is all my art to me now," said the painter, gravely. "I sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinoüs was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me. It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch from him. Of course I have done all that. But he is much more to me than a model or a sitter. I won't tell you that I am dissatisfied with what I have done of him, or that his beauty is such that Art cannot express it. There is nothing that Art cannot express, and I know that the work I have done, since I met Dorian Gray, is good work, is the best work of my life. But in some curious way—I wonder will you understand me?—his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me, before. 'A dream of form in days of thought:'—who is it who says that? I forget; but it is what Dorian Gray has been to me. The merely visible presence of this lad—for

he seems to me little more than a lad, though he is really over twenty—his merely visible presence—ah! I wonder can you realise all that that means? Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void. Harry! if you only knew what Dorian Gray is to me! You remember that landscape of mine, for which Agnew offered me such a huge price, but which I would not part with? It is one of the best things I have ever done. And why is it so? Because, while I was painting it, Dorian Gray sat beside me. Some subtle influence passed from him to me, and for the first time in my life I saw in the plain woodland the wonder I had always looked for, and always missed."

"Basil, this is extraordinary! I must see Dorian Gray."

Hallward got up from the seat, and walked up and down the garden. After some time he came back. "Harry," he said, "Dorian Gray is to me simply a motive in art. You might see nothing in him. I see everything in him. He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there. He is a suggestion, as I have said, of a new manner. I find him in the curves of certain lines, in the loveliness and subtleties of certain colours. That is all."

"Then why won't you exhibit his portrait?" asked Lord Henry.

"Because, without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to him. He knows nothing about it. He shall never know anything about it. But the world might guess it; and I will not bare my soul to their shallow prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope. There is too much of myself in the thing, Harry—too much of myself!"

"Poets are not so scrupulous as you are. They know how useful passion is for publication. Nowadays a broken heart will run to many editions."

"I hate them for it," cried Hallward. "An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an age

when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty. Some day I will show the world what it is; and for that reason the world shall never see my portrait of Dorian Gray."

"I think you are wrong, Basil, but I won't argue with you. It is only the intellectually lost who ever argue. Tell me, is Dorian Gray very fond of you?"

The painter considered for a few moments. "He likes me," he answered, after a pause; "I know he likes me. Of course I flatter him dreadfully. I find a strange pleasure in saying things to him that I know I shall be sorry for having said. As a rule, he is charming to me, and we sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things. Now and then, however, he is horribly thoughtless, and seems to take a real delight in giving me pain. Then I feel, Harry, that I have given away my whole soul to someone who treats it as if it were a flower to put in his coat, a bit of decoration to charm his vanity, an ornament for a summer's day."

"Days in summer, Basil, are apt to linger," murmured Lord Henry. "Perhaps you will tire sooner than he will. It is a sad thing to think of, but there is no doubt that Genius lasts longer than Beauty. That accounts for the fact that we all take such pains to over-educate ourselves. In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts, in the silly hope of keeping our place. The thoroughly well-informed man—that is the modern ideal. And the mind of the thoroughly well-informed man is a dreadful thing. It is like a bric-à-brac shop, all monsters and dust, with everything priced above its proper value. I think you will tire first, all the same. Some day you will look at your friend, and he will seem to you to be a little out of drawing, or you won't like his tone of colour, or something. You will bitterly reproach him in your own heart, and seriously think that he has behaved very badly to you. The next time he calls, you will be perfectly cold and indifferent. It will be a great pity, for it will alter you. What you have told me is quite a romance, a romance of art one might call it, and the worst of having a romance of any kind is that it leaves one so unromantic."

"Harry, don't talk like that. As long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me. You can't feel what I feel. You change too often."

"Ah, my dear Basil, that is exactly why I can feel it. Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love: it is the faithless who know love's tragedies." And Lord Henry struck a light on a dainty silver case, and began to smoke a cigarette with a self-conscious and satisfied air, as if he had summed up the world in a phrase. There was a rustle of chirruping sparrows in the green lacquer leaves of the ivy, and the blue cloud-shadows chased themselves across the grass like swallows. How pleasant it was in the garden! And how delightful other people's emotions were!—much more delightful than their ideas, it seemed to him. One's own soul, and the passions of one's friends—those were the fascinating things in life. He pictured to himself with silent amusement the tedious luncheon that he had missed by staying so long with Basil Hallward. Had he gone to his aunt's he would have been sure to have met Lord Goodbody there, and the whole conversation would have been about the feeding of the poor, and the necessity for model lodging-houses. Each class would have preached the importance of those virtues, for whose exercise there was no necessity in their own lives. The rich would have spoken on the value of thrift, and the idle grown eloquent over the dignity of labour. It was charming to have escaped all that! As he thought of his aunt, an idea seemed to strike him. He turned to Hallward, and said, "My dear fellow, I have just remembered."

"Remembered what, Harry?"

"Where I heard the name of Dorian Gray."

"Where was it?" asked Hallward, with a slight frown.

"Don't look so angry, Basil. It was at my aunt, Lady Agatha's. She told me she had discovered a wonderful young man, who was going to help her in the East End, and that his name was Dorian Gray. I am bound to state that she never told me he was good-looking. Women have no appreciation of good looks; at least, good women have not. She said that he was very earnest, and had a beautiful nature. I at once pictured to myself a creature

with spectacles and lank hair, horribly freckled, and tramping about on huge feet. I wish I had known it was your friend."

"I am very glad you didn't, Harry."

"Why?"

"I don't want you to meet him."

"You don't want me to meet him?"

"No."

"Mr. Dorian Gray is in the studio, sir," said the butler, coming into the garden.

"You must introduce me now," cried Lord Henry, laughing.

The painter turned to his servant, who stood blinking in the sunlight. "Ask Mr. Gray to wait, Parker: I shall be in in a few moments." The man bowed, and went up the walk.

Then he looked at Lord Henry. "Dorian Gray is my dearest friend," he said. "He has a simple and a beautiful nature. Your aunt was quite right in what she said of him. Don't spoil him. Don't try to influence him. Your influence would be bad. The world is wide, and has many marvellous people in it. Don't take away from me the one person who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses; my life as an artist depends on him. Mind, Harry, I trust you." He spoke very slowly, and the words seemed wrung out of him almost against his will.

"What nonsense you talk!" said Lord Henry, smiling, and, taking Hallward by the arm, he almost led him into the house.

CHAPTER II

As they entered they saw Dorian Gray. He was seated at the piano, with his back to them, turning over the pages of a volume of Schumann's "Forest Scenes." "You must lend me these, Basil," he cried. "I want to learn them. They are perfectly charming."

"That entirely depends on how you sit to-day, Dorian."

"Oh, I am tired of sitting, and I don't want a life-sized portrait of myself," answered the lad, swinging round on the music-stool, in a wilful, petulant manner. When he caught sight of Lord Henry, a faint blush coloured his cheeks for a moment, and he started up. "I beg your pardon, Basil, but I didn't know you had anyone with you."

"This is Lord Henry Wotton, Dorian, an old Oxford friend of mine. I have just been telling him what a capital sitter you were, and now you have spoiled everything."

"You have not spoiled my pleasure in meeting you, Mr. Gray," said Lord Henry, stepping forward and extending his hand. "My aunt has often spoken to me about you. You are one of her favourites, and, I am afraid, one of her victims also."

"I am in Lady Agatha's black books at present," answered Dorian, with a funny look of penitence. "I promised to go to a club in Whitechapel with her last Tuesday, and I really forgot all about it. We were to have played a duet together—three duets, I believe. I don't know what she will say to me. I am far too frightened to call."

"Oh, I will make your peace with my aunt. She is quite devoted to you. And I don't think it really matters about your not being there. The audience probably thought it was a duet. When Aunt Agatha sits down to the piano she makes quite enough noise for two people."

"That is very horrid to her, and not very nice to me," answered Dorian, laughing.

Lord Henry looked at him. Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the

candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world. No wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him.

"You are too charming to go in for philanthropy, Mr. Gray—far too charming." And Lord Henry flung himself down on the divan, and opened his cigarette-case.

The painter had been busy mixing his colours and getting his brushes ready. He was looking worried, and when he heard Lord Henry's last remark he glanced at him, hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Harry, I want to finish this picture to-day. Would you think it awfully rude of me if I asked you to go away?"

Lord Henry smiled, and looked at Dorian Gray. "Am I to go, Mr. Gray?" he asked.

"Oh, please don't, Lord Henry. I see that Basil is in one of his sulky moods; and I can't bear him when he sulks. Besides, I want you to tell me why I should not go in for philanthropy."

"I don't know that I shall tell you that, Mr. Gray. It is so tedious a subject that one would have to talk seriously about it. But I certainly shall not run away, now that you have asked me to stop. You don't really mind, Basil, do you? You have often told me that you liked your sitters to have someone to chat to."

Hallward bit his lip. "If Dorian wishes it, of course you must stay. Dorian's whims are laws to everybody, except himself."

Lord Henry took up his hat and gloves. "You are very pressing, Basil, but I am afraid I must go. I have promised to meet a man at the Orleans. Good-bye, Mr. Gray. Come and see me some afternoon in Curzon Street. I am nearly always at home at five o'clock. Write to me when you are coming. I should be sorry to miss you."

"Basil," cried Dorian Gray, "if Lord Henry Wotton goes I shall go too. You never open your lips while you are painting, and it is horribly dull

standing on a platform and trying to look pleasant. Ask him to stay. I insist upon it."

"Stay, Harry, to oblige Dorian, and to oblige me," said Hallward, gazing intently at his picture. "It is quite true, I never talk when I am working, and never listen either, and it must be dreadfully tedious for my unfortunate sitters. I beg you to stay."

"But what about my man at the Orleans?"

The painter laughed. "I don't think there will be any difficulty about that. Sit down again, Harry. And now, Dorian, get up on the platform, and don't move about too much, or pay any attention to what Lord Henry says. He has a very bad influence over all his friends, with the single exception of myself."

Dorian Gray stepped up on the dais, with the air of a young Greek martyr, and made a little *moue* of discontent to Lord Henry, to whom he had rather taken a fancy. He was so unlike Basil. They made a delightful contrast. And he had such a beautiful voice. After a few moments he said to him, "Have you really a very bad influence, Lord Henry? As bad as Basil says?"

"There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view."

"Why?"

"Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realise one's nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self. Of course they are charitable. They feed the hungry, and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked. Courage has gone out of our race. Perhaps we never really had it.

The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion—these are the two things that govern us. And yet _____"

"Just turn your head a little more to the right, Dorian, like a good boy," said the painter, deep in his work, and conscious only that a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before.

"And yet," continued Lord Henry, in his low, musical voice, and with that graceful wave of the hand that was always so characteristic of him, and that he had even in his Eton days, "I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream—I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediævalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal—to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also. You, Mr. Gray, you yourself, with your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame——"

"Stop!" faltered Dorian Gray, "stop! you bewilder me. I don't know what to say. There is some answer to you, but I cannot find it. Don't speak. Let me think. Or, rather, let me try not to think."

For nearly ten minutes he stood there, motionless, with parted lips, and eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil's friend had said to him—words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in them—had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.

Music had stirred him like that. Music had troubled him many times. But music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?

Yes; there had been things in his boyhood that he had not understood. He understood them now. Life suddenly became fiery-coloured to him. It seemed to him that he had been walking in fire. Why had he not known it?

With his subtle smile, Lord Henry watched him. He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing. He felt intensely interested. He was amazed at the sudden impression that his words had produced, and, remembering a book that he had read when he was sixteen, a book which had revealed to him much that he had not known before, he wondered whether Dorian Gray was passing through a similar experience. He had merely shot an arrow into the air. Had it hit the mark? How fascinating the lad was!

Hallward painted away with that marvellous bold touch of his, that had the true refinement and perfect delicacy that in art, at any rate, comes only from strength. He was unconscious of the silence.

"Basil, I am tired of standing," cried Dorian Gray, suddenly. "I must go out and sit in the garden. The air is stifling here."

"My dear fellow, I am so sorry. When I am painting, I can't think of anything else. But you never sat better. You were perfectly still. And I have

caught the effect I wanted—the half-parted lips, and the bright look in the eyes. I don't know what Harry has been saying to you, but he has certainly made you have the most wonderful expression. I suppose he has been paying you compliments. You mustn't believe a word that he says."

"He has certainly not been paying me compliments. Perhaps that is the reason that I don't believe anything he has told me."

"You know you believe it all," said Lord Henry, looking at him with his dreamy, languorous eyes. "I will go out to the garden with you. It is horribly hot in the studio. Basil, let us have something iced to drink, something with strawberries in it."

"Certainly, Harry. Just touch the bell, and when Parker comes I will tell him what you want. I have got to work up this background, so I will join you later on. Don't keep Dorian too long. I have never been in better form for painting than I am to-day. This is going to be my masterpiece. It is my masterpiece as it stands."

Lord Henry went out to the garden, and found Dorian Gray burying his face in the great cool lilac-blossoms, feverishly drinking in their perfume as if it had been wine. He came close to him, and put his hand upon his shoulder. "You are quite right to do that," he murmured. "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul."

The lad started and drew back. He was bareheaded, and the leaves had tossed his rebellious curls and tangled all their gilded threads. There was a look of fear in his eyes, such as people have when they are suddenly awakened. His finely-chiselled nostrils quivered, and some hidden nerve shook the scarlet of his lips and left them trembling.

"Yes," continued Lord Henry, "that is one of the great secrets of life—to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul. You are a wonderful creation. You know more than you think you know, just as you know less than you want to know."

Dorian Gray frowned and turned his head away. He could not help liking the tall, graceful young man who was standing by him. His romantic olive-

coloured face and worn expression interested him. There was something in his low, languid voice that was absolutely fascinating. His cool, white, flower-like hands, even, had a curious charm. They moved, as he spoke, like music, and seemed to have a language of their own. But he felt afraid of him, and ashamed of being afraid. Why had it been left for a stranger to reveal him to himself? He had known Basil Hallward for months, but the friendship between them had never altered him. Suddenly there had come someone across his life who seemed to have disclosed to him life's mystery. And, yet, what was there to be afraid of? He was not a schoolboy or a girl. It was absurd to be frightened.

"Let us go and sit in the shade," said Lord Henry. "Parker has brought out the drinks, and if you stay any longer in this glare you will be quite spoiled, and Basil will never paint you again. You really must not allow yourself to become sunburnt. It would be unbecoming."

"What can it matter?" cried Dorian Gray, laughing, as he sat down on the seat at the end of the garden.

"It should matter everything to you, Mr. Gray."

"Why?"

"Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having."

"I don't feel that, Lord Henry."

"No, you don't feel it now. Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when thought has seared your forehead with its lines, and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it, you will feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it always be so?... You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray. Don't frown. You have. And Beauty is a form of Genius—is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the world, like sunlight, or spring-time, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon. It cannot be questioned. It has its divine right of sovereignty. It makes princes of those who have it. You smile? Ah! when you have lost it

you won't smile.... People say sometimes that Beauty is only superficial. That may be so. But at least it is not so superficial as Thought is. To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.... Yes, Mr. Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that the memory of your past will make more bitter than defeats. Every month as it wanes brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become sallow, and hollow-cheeked, and dull-eyed. You will suffer horribly.... Ah! realise your youth while you have it. Don't squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are the sickly aims, the false ideals, of our age. Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing.... A new Hedonism—that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season.... The moment I met you I saw that you were quite unconscious of what you really are, of what you really might be. There was so much in you that charmed me that I felt I must tell you something about yourself. I thought how tragic it would be if you were wasted. For there is such a little time that your youth will last—such a little time. The common hill-flowers wither, but they blossom again. The laburnum will be as yellow next June as it is now. In a month there will be purple stars on the clematis, and year after year the green night of its leaves will hold its purple stars. But we never get back our youth. The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty, becomes sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!"

Dorian Gray listened, open-eyed and wondering. The spray of lilac fell from his hand upon the gravel. A furry bee came and buzzed round it for a moment. Then it began to scramble all over the oval stellated globe of the tiny blossoms. He watched it with that strange interest in trivial things that we try to develop when things of high import make us afraid, or when we are stirred by some new emotion for which we cannot find expression, or when some thought that terrifies us lays sudden siege to the brain and calls on us to yield. After a time the bee flew away. He saw it creeping into the stained trumpet of a Tyrian convolvulus. The flower seemed to quiver, and then swayed gently to and fro.

Suddenly the painter appeared at the door of the studio, and made staccato signs for them to come in. They turned to each other, and smiled.

"I am waiting," he cried. "Do come in. The light is quite perfect, and you can bring your drinks."

They rose up, and sauntered down the walk together. Two green-and-white butterflies fluttered past them, and in the pear-tree at the corner of the garden a thrush began to sing.

"You are glad you have met me, Mr. Gray," said Lord Henry, looking at him.

"Yes, I am glad now. I wonder shall I always be glad?"

"Always! That is a dreadful word. It makes me shudder when I hear it. Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to make it last for ever. It is a meaningless word, too. The only difference between a caprice and a life-long passion is that the caprice lasts a little longer."

As they entered the studio, Dorian Gray put his hand upon Lord Henry's arm. "In that case, let our friendship be a caprice," he murmured, flushing at his own boldness, then stepped up on the platform and resumed his pose.

Lord Henry flung himself into a large wicker arm-chair and watched him. The sweep and dash of the brush on the canvas made the only sound

that broke the stillness, except when, now and then, Hallward stepped back to look at his work from a distance. In the slanting beams that streamed through the open doorway the dust danced and was golden. The heavy scent of the roses seemed to brood over everything.

After about a quarter of an hour Hallward stopped painting, looked for a long time at Dorian Gray, and then for a long time at the picture, biting the end of one of his huge brushes, and frowning. "It is quite finished," he cried at last, and stooping down he wrote his name in long vermilion letters on the left-hand corner of the canvas.

Lord Henry came over and examined the picture. It was certainly a wonderful work of art, and a wonderful likeness as well.

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you most warmly," he said. "It is the finest portrait of modern times. Mr. Gray, come over and look at yourself."

The lad started, as if awakened from some dream. "Is it really finished?" he murmured, stepping down from the platform.

"Quite finished," said the painter. "And you have sat splendidly to-day. I am awfully obliged to you."

"That is entirely due to me," broke in Lord Henry. "Isn't it, Mr. Gray?"

Dorian made no answer, but passed listlessly in front of his picture, and turned towards it. When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognised himself for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. Basil Hallward's compliments had seemed to him to be merely the charming exaggerations of friendship. He had listened to them, laughed at them, forgotten them. They had not influenced his nature. Then had come Lord Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred him at the time, and now, as he stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him.

Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his lips, and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth.

As he thought of it, a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a knife, and made each delicate fibre of his nature quiver. His eyes deepened into amethyst, and across them came a mist of tears. He felt as if a hand of ice had been laid upon his heart.

"Don't you like it?" cried Hallward at last, stung a little by the lad's silence, not understanding what it meant.

"Of course he likes it," said Lord Henry. "Who wouldn't like it? It is one of the greatest things in modern art. I will give you anything you like to ask for it. I must have it."

"It is not my property, Harry."

"Whose property is it?"

"Dorian's, of course," answered the painter.

"He is a very lucky fellow."

"How sad it is!" murmured Dorian Gray, with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June.... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!"

"You would hardly care for such an arrangement, Basil," cried Lord Henry, laughing. "It would be rather hard lines on your work."

"I should object very strongly, Harry," said Hallward.

Dorian Gray turned and looked at him. "I believe you would, Basil. You like your art better than your friends. I am no more to you than a green bronze figure. Hardly as much, I daresay."

The painter stared in amazement. It was so unlike Dorian to speak like that. What had happened? He seemed quite angry. His face was flushed and his cheeks burning.

"Yes," he continued, "I am less to you than your ivory Hermes or your silver Faun. You will like them always. How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know, now, that when one loses one's good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself."

Hallward turned pale, and caught his hand. "Dorian! Dorian!" he cried, "don't talk like that. I have never had such a friend as you, and I shall never have such another. You are not jealous of material things, are you?—you who are finer than any of them!"

"I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now! Why did you paint it? It will mock me some day—mock me horribly!" The hot tears welled into his eyes; he tore his hand away, and, flinging himself on the divan, he buried his face in the cushions, as though he was praying.

"This is your doing, Harry," said the painter, bitterly.

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "It is the real Dorian Gray—that is all."

"It is not."

"If it is not, what have I to do with it?"

"You should have gone away when I asked you," he muttered.

"I stayed when you asked me," was Lord Henry's answer.

"Harry, I can't quarrel with my two best friends at once, but between you both you have made me hate the finest piece of work I have ever done, and I will destroy it. What is it but canvas and colour? I will not let it come across our three lives and mar them."

Dorian Gray lifted his golden head from the pillow, and with pallid face and tear-stained eyes looked at him, as he walked over to the deal painting-table that was set beneath the high curtained window. What was he doing there? His fingers were straying about among the litter of tin tubes and dry brushes, seeking for something. Yes, it was for the long palette-knife, with its thin blade of lithe steel. He had found it at last. He was going to rip up the canvas.

With a stifled sob the lad leaped from the couch, and, rushing over to Hallward, tore the knife out of his hand, and flung it to the end of the studio. "Don't, Basil, don't!" he cried. "It would be murder!"

"I am glad you appreciate my work at last, Dorian," said the painter, coldly, when he had recovered from his surprise. "I never thought you would."

"Appreciate it? I am in love with it, Basil. It is part of myself. I feel that."

"Well, as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished, and framed, and sent home. Then you can do what you like with yourself." And he walked across the room and rang the bell for tea. "You will have tea, of course, Dorian? And so will you, Harry? Or do you object to such simple pleasures?"

"I adore simple pleasures," said Lord Henry. "They are the last refuge of the complex. But I don't like scenes, except on the stage. What absurd fellows you are, both of you! I wonder who it was defined man as a rational animal. It was the most premature definition ever given. Man is many things, but he is not rational. I am glad he is not, after all: though I

wish you chaps would not squabble over the picture. You had much better let me have it, Basil. This silly boy doesn't really want it, and I really do."

"If you let anyone have it but me, Basil, I shall never forgive you!" cried Dorian Gray; "and I don't allow people to call me a silly boy."

"You know the picture is yours, Dorian. I gave it to you before it existed."

"And you know you have been a little silly, Mr. Gray, and that you don't really object to being reminded that you are extremely young."

"I should have objected very strongly this morning, Lord Henry."

"Ah! this morning! You have lived since then."

There came a knock at the door, and the butler entered with a laden tea-tray and set it down upon a small Japanese table. There was a rattle of cups and saucers and the hissing of a fluted Georgian urn. Two globe-shaped china dishes were brought in by a page. Dorian Gray went over and poured out the tea. The two men sauntered languidly to the table, and examined what was under the covers.

"Let us go to the theatre to-night," said Lord Henry. "There is sure to be something on, somewhere. I have promised to dine at White's, but it is only with an old friend, so I can send him a wire to say that I am ill, or that I am prevented from coming in consequence of a subsequent engagement. I think that would be a rather nice excuse: it would have all the surprise of candour."

"It is such a bore putting on one's dress-clothes," muttered Hallward. "And, when one has them on, they are so horrid."

"Yes," answered Lord Henry, dreamily, "the costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life."

"You really must not say things like that before Dorian, Harry."

"Before which Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one in the picture?"

"Before either."

"I should like to come to the theatre with you, Lord Henry," said the lad.

"Then you shall come; and you will come too, Basil, won't you?"

"I can't really. I would sooner not. I have a lot of work to do."

"Well, then, you and I will go alone, Mr. Gray."

"I should like that awfully."

The painter bit his lip and walked over, cup in hand, to the picture. "I shall stay with the real Dorian," he said, sadly.

"Is it the real Dorian?" cried the original of the portrait, strolling across to him. "Am I really like that?"

"Yes; you are just like that."

"How wonderful, Basil!"

"At least you are like it in appearance. But it will never alter," sighed Hallward. "That is something."

"What a fuss people make about fidelity!" exclaimed Lord Henry. "Why, even in love it is purely a question for physiology. It has nothing to do with our own will. Young men want to be faithful, and are not; old men want to be faithless, and cannot: that is all one can say."

"Don't go to the theatre to-night, Dorian," said Hallward. "Stop and dine with me."

"I can't, Basil."

"Why?"

"Because I have promised Lord Henry Wotton to go with him."

"He won't like you the better for keeping your promises. He always breaks his own. I beg you not to go."

Dorian Gray laughed and shook his head.

"I entreat you."

The lad hesitated, and looked over at Lord Henry, who was watching them from the tea-table with an amused smile.

"I must go, Basil," he answered.

"Very well," said Hallward; and he went over and laid down his cup on the tray. "It is rather late, and, as you have to dress, you had better lose no time. Good-bye, Harry. Good-bye, Dorian. Come and see me soon. Come to-morrow."

"Certainly."

"You won't forget?"

"No, of course not," cried Dorian.

"And... Harry!"

"Yes, Basil?"

"Remember what I asked you, when we were in the garden this morning."

"I have forgotten it."

"I trust you."

"I wish I could trust myself," said Lord Henry, laughing. "Come, Mr. Gray, my hansom is outside, and I can drop you at your own place. Good-bye, Basil. It has been a most interesting afternoon."

As the door closed behind them, the painter flung himself down on a sofa, and a look of pain came into his face.

CHAPTER III

At half-past twelve next day Lord Henry Wotton strolled from Curzon Street over to the Albany to call on his uncle, Lord Fermor, a genial if somewhat rough-mannered old bachelor, whom the outside world called selfish because it derived no particular benefit from him, but who was considered generous by Society as he fed the people who amused him. His father had been our ambassador at Madrid when Isabella was young, and Prim unthought of, but had retired from the Diplomatic Service in a capricious moment of annoyance at not being offered the Embassy at Paris, a post to which he considered that he was fully entitled by reason of his birth, his indolence, the good English of his despatches, and his inordinate passion for pleasure. The son, who had been his father's secretary, had resigned along with his chief, somewhat foolishly as was thought at the time, and on succeeding some months later to the title, had set himself to the serious study of the great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing. He had two large town houses, but preferred to live in chambers, as it was less trouble, and took most of his meals at his club. He paid some attention to the management of his collieries in the Midland counties, excusing himself for this taint of industry on the ground that the one advantage of having coal was that it enabled a gentleman to afford the decency of burning wood on his own hearth. In politics he was a Tory, except when the Tories were in office, during which period he roundly abused them for being a pack of Radicals. He was a hero to his valet, who bullied him, and a terror to most of his relations, whom he bullied in turn. Only England could have produced him, and he always said that the country was going to the dogs. His principles were out of date, but there was a good deal to be said for his prejudices.

When Lord Henry entered the room, he found his uncle sitting in a rough shooting coat, smoking a cheroot, and grumbling over *The Times*. "Well, Harry," said the old gentleman, "what brings you out so early? I thought you dandies never got up till two, and were not visible till five."

"Pure family affection, I assure you, Uncle George. I want to get something out of you."

"Money, I suppose," said Lord Fermor, making a wry face. "Well, sit down and tell me all about it. Young people, nowadays, imagine that money is everything."

"Yes," murmured Lord Henry, settling his buttonhole in his coat; "and when they grow older they know it. But I don't want money. It is only people who pay their bills who want that, Uncle George, and I never pay mine. Credit is the capital of a younger son, and one lives charmingly upon it. Besides, I always deal with Dartmoor's tradesmen, and consequently they never bother me. What I want is information; not useful information, of course; useless information."

"Well, I can tell you anything that is in an English Blue-book, Harry, although those fellows nowadays write a lot of nonsense. When I was in the Diplomatic, things were much better. But I hear they let them in now by examination. What can you expect? Examinations, sir, are pure humbug from beginning to end. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him."

"Mr. Dorian Gray does not belong to Blue-books, Uncle George," said Lord Henry, languidly.

"Mr. Dorian Gray? Who is he?" asked Lord Fermor, knitting his bushy white eyebrows.

"That is what I have come to learn, Uncle George. Or rather, I know who he is. He is the last Lord Kelso's grandson. His mother was a Devereux; Lady Margaret Devereux. I want you to tell me about his mother. What was she like? Whom did she marry? You have known nearly everybody in your time, so you might have known her. I am very much interested in Mr. Gray at present. I have only just met him."

"Kelso's grandson!" echoed the old gentleman.—"Kelso's grandson!... Of course.... I knew his mother intimately. I believe I was at her christening. She was an extraordinarily beautiful girl, Margaret Devereux; and made all the men frantic by running away with a penniless young fellow; a mere nobody, sir, a subaltern in a foot regiment, or something of that kind. Certainly. I remember the whole thing as if it happened yesterday. The

poor chap was killed in a duel at Spa, a few months after the marriage. There was an ugly story about it. They said Kelso got some rascally adventurer, some Belgian brute, to insult his son-in-law in public; paid him, sir, to do it, paid him; and that the fellow spitted his man as if he had been a pigeon. The thing was hushed up, but, egad, Kelso ate his chop alone at the club for some time afterwards. He brought his daughter back with him, I was told, and she never spoke to him again. Oh, yes; it was a bad business. The girl died too; died within a year. So she left a son, did she? I had forgotten that. What sort of boy is he? If he is like his mother he must be a good-looking chap."

"He is very good-looking," assented Lord Henry.

"I hope he will fall into proper hands," continued the old man. "He should have a pot of money waiting for him if Kelso did the right thing by him. His mother had money too. All the Selby property came to her, through her grandfather. Her grandfather hated Kelso, thought him a mean dog. He was, too. Came to Madrid once when I was there. Egad, I was ashamed of him. The Queen used to ask me about the English noble who was always quarrelling with the cabmen about their fares. They made quite a story of it. I didn't dare to show my face at Court for a month. I hope he treated his grandson better than he did the jarvies."

"I don't know," answered Lord Henry. "I fancy that the boy will be well off. He is not of age yet. He has Selby, I know. He told me so. And... his mother was very beautiful?"

"Margaret Devereux was one of the loveliest creatures I ever saw, Harry. What on earth induced her to behave as she did, I never could understand. She could have married anybody she chose. Carlington was mad after her. She was romantic, though. All the women of that family were. The men were a poor lot, but, egad! the women were wonderful. Carlington went on his knees to her. Told me so himself. She laughed at him, and there wasn't a girl in London at the time who wasn't after him. And by the way, Harry, talking about silly marriages, what is this humbug your father tells me about Dartmoor wanting to marry an American? Ain't English girls good enough for him?"

"It is rather fashionable to marry Americans just now, Uncle George."

"I'll back English women against the world, Harry," said Lord Fermor, striking the table with his fist.

"The betting is on the Americans."

"They don't last, I am told," muttered his uncle.

"A long engagement exhausts them, but they are capital at a steeplechase. They take things flying. I don't think Dartmoor has a chance."

"Who are her people?" grumbled the old gentleman. "Has she got any?"

Lord Henry shook his head. "American girls are as clever at concealing their parents as English women are at concealing their past," he said, rising to go.

"They are pork-packers, I suppose?"

"I hope so, Uncle George, for Dartmoor's sake. I am told that pork-packing is the most lucrative profession in America, after politics."

"Is she pretty?"

"She behaves as if she was beautiful. Most American women do. It is the secret of their charm."

"Why can't these American women stay in their own country? They are always telling us that it is the Paradise for women."

"It is. That is the reason why, like Eve, they are so excessively anxious to get out of it," said Lord Henry. "Good-bye, Uncle George. I shall be late for lunch, if I stop any longer. Thanks for giving me the information I wanted. I always like to know everything about my new friends, and nothing about my old ones."

"Where are you lunching, Harry?"

"At Aunt Agatha's. I have asked myself and Mr. Gray. He is her latest *protégé*."

"Humph! tell your Aunt Agatha, Harry, not to bother me any more with her charity appeals. I am sick of them. Why, the good woman thinks that I have nothing to do but to write cheques for her silly fads."

"All right, Uncle George, I'll tell her, but it won't have any effect. Philanthropic people lose all sense of humanity. It is their distinguishing characteristic."

The old gentleman growled approvingly, and rang the bell for his servant. Lord Henry passed up the low arcade into Burlington Street, and turned his steps in the direction of Berkeley Square.

So that was the story of Dorian Gray's parentage. Crudely as it had been told to him, it had yet stirred him by its suggestion of a strange, almost modern romance. A beautiful woman risking everything for a mad passion. A few wild weeks of happiness cut short by a hideous, treacherous crime. Months of voiceless agony, and then a child born in pain. The mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man. Yes; it was an interesting background. It posed the lad, made him more perfect as it were. Behind every exquisite thing

that existed, there was something tragic. Worlds had to be in travail, that the meanest flower might blow.... And how charming he had been at dinner the night before, as, with startled eyes and lips parted in frightened pleasure, he had sat opposite to him at the club, the red candleshades staining to a richer rose the wakening wonder of his face. Talking to him was like playing upon an exquisite violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow.... There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it. To project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or a strange perfume; there was a real joy in that—perhaps the most satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an age grossly carnal in its pleasures, and grossly common in its aims.... He was a marvellous type, too, this lad, whom by so curious a chance he had met in Basil's studio; or could be fashioned into a marvellous type, at any rate. Grace was his, and the white purity of boyhood, and beauty such as old Greek marbles kept for us. There was nothing that one could not do with him. He could be made a Titan or a toy. What a pity it was that such beauty was destined to fade!... And Basil? From a psychological point of view, how interesting he was! The new manner in art, the fresh mode of looking at life, suggested so strangely by the merely visible presence of one who was unconscious of it all; the silent spirit that dwelt in dim woodland, and walked unseen in open field, suddenly showing herself, Dryad-like and not afraid, because in his soul who sought for her there had been wakened that wonderful vision to which alone are wonderful things revealed; the mere shapes and patterns of things becoming, as it were, refined, and gaining a kind of symbolical value, as though they were themselves patterns of some other and more perfect form whose shadow they made real: how strange it all was! He remembered something like it in history. Was it not Plato, that artist in thought, who had first analysed it? Was it not Buonarrotti who had carved it in the coloured marbles of a sonnet-sequence? But in our own century it was strange.... Yes; he would try to be to Dorian Gray what, without knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned the wonderful portrait. He would seek to dominate him—had already, indeed, half done

so. He would make that wonderful spirit his own. There was something fascinating in this son of Love and Death.

Suddenly he stopped, and glanced up at the houses. He found that he had passed his aunt's some distance, and, smiling to himself, turned back. When he entered the somewhat sombre hall the butler told him that they had gone in to lunch. He gave one of the footmen his hat and stick, and passed into the dining-room.

"Late as usual, Harry," cried his aunt, shaking her head at him.

He invented a facile excuse, and having taken the vacant seat next to her, looked round to see who was there. Dorian bowed to him shyly from the end of the table, a flush of pleasure stealing into his cheek. Opposite was the Duchess of Harley; a lady of admirable good-nature and good temper, much liked by everyone who knew her, and of those ample architectural proportions that in women who are not Duchesses are described by contemporary historians as stoutness. Next to her sat, on her right, Sir Thomas Burdon, a Radical member of Parliament, who followed his leader in public life, and in private life followed the best cooks, dining with the Tories, and thinking with the Liberals, in accordance with a wise and well-known rule. The post on her left was occupied by Mr. Erskine of Treadley, an old gentleman of considerable charm and culture, who had fallen, however, into bad habits of silence, having, as he explained once to Lady Agatha, said everything that he had to say before he was thirty. His own neighbour was Mrs. Vandeleur, one of his aunt's oldest friends, a perfect saint amongst women, but so dreadfully dowdy that she reminded one of a badly bound hymn-book. Fortunately for him she had on the other side Lord Faudel, a most intelligent middle-aged mediocrity, as bald as a Ministerial statement in the House of Commons, with whom she was conversing in that intensely earnest manner which is the one unpardonable error, as he remarked once himself, that all really good people fall into, and from which none of them ever quite escape.

"We are talking about poor Dartmoor, Lord Henry," cried the Duchess, nodding pleasantly to him across the table. "Do you think he will really marry this fascinating young person?"

"I believe she has made up her mind to propose to him, Duchess."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Lady Agatha. "Really, someone should interfere."

"I am told, on excellent authority, that her father keeps an American dry-goods store," said Sir Thomas Burdon, looking supercilious.

"My uncle has already suggested pork-packing, Sir Thomas."

"Dry-goods! What are American dry-goods?" asked the Duchess, raising her large hands in wonder, and accentuating the verb.

"American novels," answered Lord Henry, helping himself to some quail.

The Duchess looked puzzled.

"Don't mind him, my dear," whispered Lady Agatha. "He never means anything that he says."

"When America was discovered," said the Radical member, and he began to give some wearisome facts. Like all people who try to exhaust a subject, he exhausted his listeners. The Duchess sighed, and exercised her privilege of interruption. "I wish to goodness it never had been discovered at all!" she exclaimed. "Really, our girls have no chance nowadays. It is most unfair."

"Perhaps, after all, America never has been discovered," said Mr. Erskine. "I myself would say that it had merely been detected."

"Oh! but I have seen specimens of the inhabitants," answered the Duchess, vaguely. "I must confess that most of them are extremely pretty. And they dress well, too. They get all their dresses in Paris. I wish I could afford to do the same."

"They say that when good Americans die they go to Paris," chuckled Sir Thomas, who had a large wardrobe of Humour's cast-off clothes.

"Really! And where do bad Americans go to when they die?" inquired the Duchess.

"They go to America," murmured Lord Henry.

Sir Thomas frowned. "I am afraid that your nephew is prejudiced against that great country," he said to Lady Agatha. "I have travelled all over it, in cars provided by the directors, who, in such matters, are extremely civil. I assure you that it is an education to visit it."

"But must we really see Chicago in order to be educated?" asked Mr. Erskine, plaintively. "I don't feel up to the journey."

Sir Thomas waved his hand. "Mr. Erskine of Treadley has the world on his shelves. We practical men like to see things, not to read about them. The Americans are an extremely interesting people. They are absolutely reasonable. I think that is their distinguishing characteristic. Yes, Mr. Erskine, an absolutely reasonable people. I assure you there is no nonsense about the Americans."

"How dreadful!" cried Lord Henry. "I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable. There is something unfair about its use. It is hitting below the intellect."

"I do not understand you," said Sir Thomas, growing rather red.

"I do, Lord Henry," murmured Mr. Erskine, with a smile.

"Paradoxes are all very well in their way...." rejoined the Baronet.

"Was that a paradox?" asked Mr. Erskine. "I did not think so. Perhaps it was. Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test Reality we must see it on the tight-rope. When the Verities become acrobats we can judge them."

"Dear me!" said Lady Agatha, "how you men argue! I am sure I never can make out what you are talking about. Oh! Harry, I am quite vexed with you. Why do you try to persuade our nice Mr. Dorian Gray to give up the East End? I assure you he would be quite invaluable. They would love his playing."

"I want him to play to me," cried Lord Henry, smiling, and he looked down the table and caught a bright answering glance.

"But they are so unhappy in Whitechapel," continued Lady Agatha.

"I can sympathise with everything, except suffering," said Lord Henry, shrugging his shoulders. "I cannot sympathise with that. It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in the modern sympathy with pain. One should sympathise with the colour, the beauty, the joy of life. The less said about life's sores the better."

"Still, the East End is a very important problem," remarked Sir Thomas, with a grave shake of the head.

"Quite so," answered the young lord. "It is the problem of slavery, and we try to solve it by amusing the slaves."

The politician looked at him keenly. "What change do you propose, then?" he asked.

Lord Henry laughed. "I don't desire to change anything in England except the weather," he answered. "I am quite content with philosophic contemplation. But, as the nineteenth century has gone bankrupt through an over-expenditure of sympathy, I would suggest that we should appeal to Science to put us straight. The advantage of the emotions is that they lead us astray, and the advantage of Science is that it is not emotional."

"But we have such grave responsibilities," ventured Mrs. Vandeleur, timidly.

"Terribly grave," echoed Lady Agatha.

Lord Henry looked over at Mr. Erskine. "Humanity takes itself too seriously. It is the world's original sin. If the caveman had known how to laugh, History would have been different."

"You are really very comforting," warbled the Duchess. "I have always felt rather guilty when I came to see your dear aunt, for I take no interest

at all in the East End. For the future I shall be able to look her in the face without a blush."

"A blush is very becoming, Duchess," remarked Lord Henry.

"Only when one is young," she answered. "When an old woman like myself blushes, it is a very bad sign. Ah! Lord Henry, I wish you would tell me how to become young again."

He thought for a moment. "Can you remember any great error that you committed in your early days, Duchess?" he asked, looking at her across the table.

"A great many, I fear," she cried.

"Then commit them over again," he said, gravely. "To get back one's youth, one has merely to repeat one's follies."

"A delightful theory!" she exclaimed. "I must put it into practice."

"A dangerous theory!" came from Sir Thomas's tight lips. Lady Agatha shook her head, but could not help being amused. Mr. Erskine listened.

"Yes," he continued, "that is one of the great secrets of life. Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes."

A laugh ran round the table.

He played with the idea, and grew wilful; tossed it into the air and transformed it; let it escape and recaptured it; made it iridescent with fancy, and winged it with paradox. The praise of folly, as he went on, soared into a philosophy, and Philosophy herself became young, and catching the mad music of Pleasure, wearing, one might fancy, her wine-stained robe and wreath of ivy, danced like a Bacchante over the hills of life, and mocked the slow Silenus for being sober. Facts fled before her like frightened forest things. Her white feet trod the huge press at which wise Omar sits, till the seething grape-juice rose round her bare limbs in waves of purple bubbles, or crawled in red foam over the vat's black,

dripping, sloping sides. It was an extraordinary improvisation. He felt that the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him, and the consciousness that amongst his audience there was one whose temperament he wished to fascinate, seemed to give his wit keenness, and to lend colour to his imagination. He was brilliant, fantastic, irresponsible. He charmed his listeners out of themselves, and they followed his pipe laughing. Dorian Gray never took his gaze off him, but sat like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips, and wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes.

At last, liveried in the costume of the age, Reality entered the room in the shape of a servant to tell the Duchess that her carriage was waiting. She wrung her hands in mock despair. "How annoying!" she cried. "I must go. I have to call for my husband at the club, to take him to some absurd meeting at Willis's Rooms, where he is going to be in the chair. If I am late, he is sure to be furious, and I couldn't have a scene in this bonnet. It is far too fragile. A harsh word would ruin it. No, I must go, dear Agatha. Good-bye, Lord Henry, you are quite delightful, and dreadfully demoralising. I am sure I don't know what to say about your views. You must come and dine with us some night. Tuesday? Are you disengaged Tuesday?"

"For you I would throw over anybody, Duchess," said Lord Henry, with a bow.

"Ah! that is very nice, and very wrong of you," she cried; "so mind you come;" and she swept out of the room, followed by Lady Agatha and the other ladies.

When Lord Henry had sat down again, Mr. Erskine moved round, and taking a chair close to him, placed his hand upon his arm.

"You talk books away," he said; "why don't you write one?"

"I am too fond of reading books to care to write them, Mr. Erskine. I should like to write a novel certainly; a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet, and as unreal. But there is no literary public in England for

anything except newspapers, primers, and encyclopædias. Of all people in the world the English have the least sense of the beauty of literature."

"I fear you are right," answered Mr. Erskine. "I myself used to have literary ambitions, but I gave them up long ago. And now, my dear young friend, if you will allow me to call you so, may I ask if you really meant all that you said to us at lunch?"

"I quite forget what I said," smiled Lord Henry. "Was it all very bad?"

"Very bad indeed. In fact I consider you extremely dangerous, and if anything happens to our good Duchess we shall all look on you as being primarily responsible. But I should like to talk to you about life. The generation into which I was born was tedious. Some day, when you are tired of London, come down to Treadley, and expound to me your philosophy of pleasure over some admirable Burgundy I am fortunate enough to possess."

"I shall be charmed. A visit to Treadley would be a great privilege. It has a perfect host, and a perfect library."

"You will complete it," answered the old gentleman, with a courteous bow. "And now I must bid good-bye to your excellent aunt. I am due at the Athenæum. It is the hour when we sleep there."

"All of you, Mr. Erskine?"

"Forty of us, in forty arm-chairs. We are practising for an English Academy of Letters."

Lord Henry laughed, and rose. "I am going to the Park," he cried.

As he was passing out of the door Dorian Gray touched him on the arm. "Let me come with you," he murmured.

"But I thought you had promised Basil Hallward to go and see him," answered Lord Henry.

"I would sooner come with you; yes, I feel I must come with you. Do let me. And you will promise to talk to me all the time? No one talks so

wonderfully as you do."

"Ah! I have talked quite enough for to-day," said Lord Henry, smiling. "All I want now is to look at life. You may come and look at it with me, if you care to."

CHAPTER IV

One afternoon, a month later, Dorian Gray was reclining in a luxurious arm-chair, in the little library of Lord Henry's house in Mayfair. It was, in its way, a very charming room, with its high-panelled wainscoting of olive-stained oak, its cream-coloured frieze and ceiling of raised plaster-work, and its brickdust felt carpet strewn with silk long-fringed Persian rugs. On a tiny satinwood table stood a statuette by Clodion, and beside it lay a copy of "*Les Cent Nouvelles*," bound for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve, and powdered with the gilt daisies that Queen had selected for her device. Some large blue china jars and parrot-tulips were ranged on the mantel-shelf, and through the small leaded panels of the window streamed the apricot-coloured light of a summer day in London.

Lord Henry had not yet come in. He was always late on principle, his principle being that punctuality is the thief of time. So the lad was looking rather sulky, as with listless fingers he turned over the pages of an elaborately-illustrated edition of "*Manon Lescaut*" that he had found in one of the bookcases. The formal monotonous ticking of the Louis Quatorze clock annoyed him. Once or twice he thought of going away.

At last he heard a step outside, and the door opened. "How late you are, Harry!" he murmured.

"I am afraid it is not Harry, Mr. Gray," answered a shrill voice.

He glanced quickly round, and rose to his feet. "I beg your pardon. I thought——"

"You thought it was my husband. It is only his wife. You must let me introduce myself. I know you quite well by your photographs. I think my husband has got seventeen of them."

"Not seventeen, Lady Henry?"

"Well, eighteen, then. And I saw you with him the other night at the Opera." She laughed nervously as she spoke, and watched him with her vague forget-me-not eyes. She was a curious woman, whose dresses always looked as if they had been designed in a rage and put on in a tempest. She was usually in love with somebody, and, as her passion was never returned, she had kept all her illusions. She tried to look picturesque, but only succeeded in being untidy. Her name was Victoria, and she had a perfect mania for going to church.

"That was at 'Lohengrin,' Lady Henry, I think?"

"Yes; it was at dear 'Lohengrin.' I like Wagner's music better than anybody's. It is so loud that one can talk the whole time without other people hearing what one says. That is a great advantage: don't you think so, Mr. Gray?"

The same nervous staccato laugh broke from her thin lips, and her fingers began to play with a long tortoise-shell paper-knife.

Dorian smiled, and shook his head: "I am afraid I don't think so, Lady Henry. I never talk during music, at least, during good music. If one hears bad music, it is one's duty to drown it in conversation."

"Ah! that is one of Harry's views, isn't it, Mr. Gray? I always hear Harry's views from his friends. It is the only way I get to know of them. But you must not think I don't like good music. I adore it, but I am afraid of it. It makes me too romantic. I have simply worshipped pianists—two at a time, sometimes, Harry tells me. I don't know what it is about them. Perhaps it is that they are foreigners. They all are, ain't they? Even those that are born in England become foreigners after a time, don't they? It is so clever of them, and such a compliment to art. Makes it quite cosmopolitan, doesn't it? You have never been to any of my parties, have you, Mr. Gray?"

You must come. I can't afford orchids, but I spare no expense in foreigners. They make one's rooms look so picturesque. But here is Harry!—Harry, I came in to look for you, to ask you something—I forget what it was—and I found Mr. Gray here. We have had such a pleasant chat about music. We have quite the same ideas. No; I think our ideas are quite different. But he has been most pleasant. I am so glad I've seen him."

"I am charmed, my love, quite charmed," said Lord Henry, elevating his dark crescent-shaped eyebrows and looking at them both with an amused smile. "So sorry I am late, Dorian. I went to look after a piece of old brocade in Wardour Street, and had to bargain for hours for it. Nowadays people know the price of everything, and the value of nothing."

"I am afraid I must be going," exclaimed Lady Henry, breaking an awkward silence with her silly sudden laugh. "I have promised to drive with the Duchess. Good-bye, Mr. Gray. Good-bye, Harry. You are dining out, I suppose? So am I. Perhaps I shall see you at Lady Thornbury's."

"I daresay, my dear," said Lord Henry, shutting the door behind her, as, looking like a bird of paradise that had been out all night in the rain, she flitted out of the room, leaving a faint odour of frangipanni. Then he lit a cigarette, and flung himself down on the sofa.

"Never marry a woman with straw-coloured hair, Dorian," he said, after a few puffs.

"Why, Harry?"

"Because they are so sentimental."

"But I like sentimental people."

"Never marry at all, Dorian. Men marry because they are tired; women, because they are curious; both are disappointed."

"I don't think I am likely to marry, Henry. I am too much in love. That is one of your aphorisms. I am putting it into practice, as I do everything that you say."

"Who are you in love with?" asked Lord Henry, after a pause.

"With an actress," said Dorian Gray, blushing.

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "That is a rather commonplace *début*."

"You would not say so if you saw her, Harry."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Sibyl Vane."

"Never heard of her."

"No one has. People will some day, however. She is a genius."

"My dear boy, no woman is a genius. Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly. Women represent the triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals."

"Harry, how can you?"

"My dear Dorian, it is quite true. I am analysing women at the present, so I ought to know. The subject is not so abstruse as I thought it was. I find that, ultimately, there are only two kinds of women, the plain and the coloured. The plain women are very useful. If you want to gain a reputation for respectability, you have merely to take them down to supper. The other women are very charming. They commit one mistake, however. They paint in order to try and look young. Our grandmothers painted in order to try and talk brilliantly. *Rouge* and *esprit* used to go together. That is all over now. As long as a woman can look ten years younger than her own daughter, she is perfectly satisfied. As for conversation, there are only five women in London worth talking to, and two of these can't be admitted into decent society. However, tell me about your genius. How long have you known her?"

"Ah! Harry, your views terrify me."

"Never mind that. How long have you known her?"

"About three weeks."

"And where did you come across her?"

"I will tell you, Harry; but you mustn't be unsympathetic about it. After all, it never would have happened if I had not met you. You filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life. For days after I met you, something seemed to throb in my veins. As I lounged in the Park, or strolled down Piccadilly, I used to look at every one who passed me, and wonder, with a mad curiosity, what sort of lives they led. Some of them fascinated me. Others filled me with terror. There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations.... Well, one evening about seven o'clock, I determined to go out in search of some adventure. I felt that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins, as you once phrased it, must have something in store for me. I fancied a thousand things. The mere danger gave me a sense of delight. I remembered what you had said to me on that wonderful evening when we first dined together, about the search for beauty being the real secret of life. I don't know what I expected, but I went out and wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares. About half-past eight I passed by an absurd little theatre, with great flaring gas-jets and gaudy play-bills. A hideous Jew, in the most amazing waistcoat I ever beheld in my life, was standing at the entrance, smoking a vile cigar. He had greasy ringlets, and an enormous diamond blazed in the centre of a soiled shirt. 'Have a box, my Lord?' he said, when he saw me, and he took off his hat with an air of gorgeous servility. There was something about him, Harry, that amused me. He was such a monster. You will laugh at me, I know, but I really went in and paid a whole guinea for the stage-box. To the present day I can't make out why I did so; and yet if I hadn't—my dear Harry, if I hadn't, I should have missed the greatest romance of my life. I see you are laughing. It is horrid of you!"

"I am not laughing, Dorian; at least I am not laughing at you. But you should not say the greatest romance of your life. You should say the first

romance of your life. You will always be loved, and you will always be in love with love. A *grande passion* is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes of a country. Don't be afraid. There are exquisite things in store for you. This is merely the beginning."

"Do you think my nature so shallow?" cried Dorian Gray, angrily.

"No; I think your nature so deep."

"How do you mean?"

"My dear boy, the people who love only once in their lives are really the shallow people. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I call either the lethargy of custom or their lack of imagination. Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of the intellect—simply a confession of failures. Faithfulness! I must analyse it some day. The passion for property is in it. There are many things that we would throw away if we were not afraid that others might pick them up. But I don't want to interrupt you. Go on with your story."

"Well, I found myself seated in a horrid little private box, with a vulgar drop-scene staring me in the face. I looked out from behind the curtain, and surveyed the house. It was a tawdry affair, all Cupids and cornucopias, like a third-rate wedding cake. The gallery and pit were fairly full, but the two rows of dingy stalls were quite empty, and there was hardly a person in what I suppose they called the dress-circle. Women went about with oranges and ginger-beer, and there was a terrible consumption of nuts going on."

"It must have been just like the palmy days of the British Drama."

"Just like, I should fancy, and very depressing. I began to wonder what on earth I should do, when I caught sight of the play-bill. What do you think the play was, Harry?"

"I should think 'The Idiot Boy, or Dumb but Innocent.' Our fathers used to like that sort of piece, I believe. The longer I live, Dorian, the more

keenly I feel that whatever was good enough for our fathers is not good enough for us. In art, as in politics, *les grands-pères ont toujours tort.*"

"This play was good enough for us, Harry. It was 'Romeo and Juliet.' I must admit that I was rather annoyed at the idea of seeing Shakespeare done in such a wretched hole of a place. Still, I felt interested, in a sort of way. At any rate, I determined to wait for the first act. There was a dreadful orchestra, presided over by a young Hebrew who sat at a cracked piano, that nearly drove me away, but at last the drop-scene was drawn up, and the play began. Romeo was a stout elderly gentleman, with corked eyebrows, a husky tragedy voice, and a figure like a beer-barrel. Mercutio was almost as bad. He was played by the low-comedian, who had introduced gags of his own and was on most friendly terms with the pit. They were both as grotesque as the scenery, and that looked as if it had come out of a country-booth. But Juliet! Harry, imagine a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, with a little flower-like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose. She was the loveliest thing I had ever seen in my life. You said to me once that pathos left you unmoved, but that beauty, mere beauty, could fill your eyes with tears. I tell you, Harry, I could hardly see this girl for the mist of tears that came across me. And her voice—I never heard such a voice. It was very low at first, with deep mellow notes, that seemed to fall singly upon one's ear. Then it became a little louder, and sounded like a flute or a distant hautbois. In the garden-scene it had all the tremulous ecstasy that one hears just before dawn when nightingales are singing. There were moments, later on, when it had the wild passion of violins. You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of Sibyl Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don't know which to follow. Why should I not love her? Harry, I do love her. She is everything to me in life. Night after night I go to see her play. One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap. She has been mad, and has come into the presence of a

guilty king, and given him rue to wear, and bitter herbs to taste of. She has been innocent, and the black hands of jealousy have crushed her reed-like throat. I have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century. No glamour ever transfigures them. One knows their minds as easily as one knows their bonnets. One can always find them. There is no mystery in any of them. They ride in the Park in the morning, and chatter at tea-parties in the afternoon. They have their stereotyped smile, and their fashionable manner. They are quite obvious. But an actress! How different an actress is! Harry! why didn't you tell me that the only thing worth loving is an actress?"

"Because I have loved so many of them, Dorian."

"Oh, yes, horrid people with dyed hair and painted faces."

"Don't run down dyed hair and painted faces. There is an extraordinary charm in them, sometimes," said Lord Henry.

"I wish now I had not told you about Sibyl Vane."

"You could not have helped telling me, Dorian. All through your life you will tell me everything you do."

"Yes, Harry, I believe that is true. I cannot help telling you things. You have a curious influence over me. If I ever did a crime, I would come and confess it to you. You would understand me."

"People like you—the wilful sunbeams of life—don't commit crimes, Dorian. But I am much obliged for the compliment, all the same. And now tell me—reach me the matches, like a good boy: thanks:—what are your actual relations with Sibyl Vane?"

Dorian Gray leaped to his feet, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes. "Harry! Sibyl Vane is sacred!"

"It is only the sacred things that are worth touching, Dorian," said Lord Henry, with a strange touch of pathos in his voice. "But why should you be annoyed? I suppose she will belong to you some day. When one is in love,

one always begins by deceiving one's self, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. You know her, at any rate, I suppose?"

"Of course I know her. On the first night I was at the theatre, the horrid old Jew came round to the box after the performance was over, and offered to take me behind the scenes and introduce me to her. I was furious with him, and told him that Juliet had been dead for hundreds of years, and that her body was lying in a marble tomb in Verona. I think, from his blank look of amazement, that he was under the impression that I had taken too much champagne, or something."

"I am not surprised."

"Then he asked me if I wrote for any of the newspapers. I told him I never even read them. He seemed terribly disappointed at that, and confided to me that all the dramatic critics were in a conspiracy against him, and that they were every one of them to be bought."

"I should not wonder if he was quite right there. But, on the other hand, judging from their appearance, most of them cannot be at all expensive."

"Well, he seemed to think they were beyond his means," laughed Dorian. "By this time, however, the lights were being put out in the theatre, and I had to go. He wanted me to try some cigars that he strongly recommended. I declined. The next night, of course, I arrived at the place again. When he saw me he made me a low bow, and assured me that I was a munificent patron of art. He was a most offensive brute, though he had an extraordinary passion for Shakespeare. He told me once, with an air of pride, that his five bankruptcies were entirely due to 'The Bard,' as he insisted on calling him. He seemed to think it a distinction."

"It was a distinction, my dear Dorian—a great distinction. Most people become bankrupt through having invested too heavily in the prose of life. To have ruined one's self over poetry is an honour. But when did you first speak to Miss Sibyl Vane?"

"The third night. She had been playing Rosalind. I could not help going round. I had thrown her some flowers, and she had looked at me; at least I fancied that she had. The old Jew was persistent. He seemed determined to take me behind, so I consented. It was curious my not wanting to know her, wasn't it?"

"No; I don't think so."

"My dear Harry, why?"

"I will tell you some other time. Now I want to know about the girl."

"Sibyl? Oh, she was so shy, and so gentle. There is something of a child about her. Her eyes opened wide in exquisite wonder when I told her what I thought of her performance, and she seemed quite unconscious of her power. I think we were both rather nervous. The old Jew stood grinning at the doorway of the dusty greenroom, making elaborate speeches about us both, while we stood looking at each other like children. He would insist on calling me 'My Lord,' so I had to assure Sibyl that I was not anything of the kind. She said quite simply to me, 'You look more like a prince. I must call you Prince Charming.'"

"Upon my word, Dorian, Miss Sibyl knows how to pay compliments."

"You don't understand her, Harry. She regarded me merely as a person in a play. She knows nothing of life. She lives with her mother, a faded tired woman who played Lady Capulet in a sort of magenta dressing-wrapper on the first night, and looks as if she had seen better days."

"I know that look. It depresses me," murmured Lord Henry, examining his rings.

"The Jew wanted to tell me her history, but I said it did not interest me."

"You were quite right. There is always something infinitely mean about other people's tragedies."

"Sibyl is the only thing I care about. What is it to me where she came from? From her little head to her little feet, she is absolutely and entirely

divine. Every night of my life I go to see her act, and every night she is more marvellous."

"That is the reason, I suppose, that you never dine with me now. I thought you must have some curious romance on hand. You have; but it is not quite what I expected."

"My dear Harry, we either lunch or sup together every day, and I have been to the Opera with you several times," said Dorian, opening his blue eyes in wonder.

"You always come dreadfully late."

"Well, I can't help going to see Sibyl play," he cried, "even if it is only for a single act. I get hungry for her presence; and when I think of the wonderful soul that is hidden away in that little ivory body, I am filled with awe."

"You can dine with me to-night, Dorian, can't you?"

He shook his head. "To-night she is Imogen," he answered, "and to-morrow night she will be Juliet."

"When is she Sibyl Vane?"

"Never."

"I congratulate you."

"How horrid you are! She is all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual. You laugh, but I tell you she has genius. I love her, and I must make her love me. You, who know all the secrets of life, tell me how to charm Sibyl Vane to love me! I want to make Romeo jealous. I want the dead lovers of the world to hear our laughter, and grow sad. I want a breath of our passion to stir their dust into consciousness, to wake their ashes into pain. My God, Harry, how I worship her!" He was walking up and down the room as he spoke. Hectic spots of red burned on his cheeks. He was terribly excited.

Lord Henry watched him with a subtle sense of pleasure. How different he was now from the shy, frightened boy he had met in Basil Hallward's studio! His nature had developed like a flower, had borne blossoms of scarlet flame. Out of its secret hiding-place had crept his Soul, and Desire had come to meet it on the way.

"And what do you propose to do?" said Lord Henry, at last.

"I want you and Basil to come with me some night and see her act. I have not the slightest fear of the result. You are certain to acknowledge her genius. Then we must get her out of the Jew's hands. She is bound to him for three years—at least for two years and eight months—from the present time. I shall have to pay him something, of course. When all that is settled, I shall take a West End theatre and bring her out properly. She will make the world as mad as she has made me."

"That would be impossible, my dear boy?"

"Yes, she will. She has not merely art, consummate art-instinct, in her, but she has personality also; and you have often told me that it is personalities, not principles, that move the age."

"Well, what night shall we go?"

"Let me see. To-day is Tuesday. Let us fix to-morrow. She plays Juliet to-morrow."

"All right. The Bristol at eight o'clock; and I will get Basil."

"Not eight, Harry, please. Half-past six. We must be there before the curtain rises. You must see her in the first act, where she meets Romeo."

"Half-past six! What an hour! It will be like having a meat-tea, or reading an English novel. It must be seven. No gentleman dines before seven. Shall you see Basil between this and then? Or shall I write to him?"

"Dear Basil! I have not laid eyes on him for a week. It is rather horrid of me, as he has sent me my portrait in the most wonderful frame, specially designed by himself, and, though I am a little jealous of the picture for

being a whole month younger than I am, I must admit that I delight in it. Perhaps you had better write to him. I don't want to see him alone. He says things that annoy me. He gives me good advice."

Lord Henry smiled. "People are very fond of giving away what they need most themselves. It is what I call the depth of generosity."

"Oh, Basil is the best of fellows, but he seems to me to be just a bit of a Philistine. Since I have known you, Harry, I have discovered that."

"Basil, my dear boy, puts everything that is charming in him into his work. The consequence is that he has nothing left for life but his prejudices, his principles, and his common-sense. The only artists I have ever known, who are personally delightful, are bad artists. Good artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are. A great poet, a really great poet, is the most unpoetical of all creatures. But inferior poets are absolutely fascinating. The worse their rhymes are, the more picturesque they look. The mere fact of having published a book of second-rate sonnets makes a man quite irresistible. He lives the poetry that he cannot write. The others write the poetry that they dare not realise."

"I wonder is that really so, Harry?" said Dorian Gray, putting some perfume on his handkerchief out of a large gold-topped bottle that stood on the table. "It must be, if you say it. And now I am off. Imogen is waiting for me. Don't forget about to-morrow. Good-bye."

As he left the room, Lord Henry's heavy eyelids drooped, and he began to think. Certainly few people had ever interested him so much as Dorian Gray, and yet the lad's mad adoration of some one else caused him not the slightest pang of annoyance or jealousy. He was pleased by it. It made him a more interesting study. He had been always enthralled by the methods of natural science, but the ordinary subject-matter of that science had seemed to him trivial and of no import. And so he had begun by vivisecting himself, as he had ended by vivisecting others. Human life—that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating. Compared to it there was nothing else of any value. It was true that as one watched life in its curious

crucible of pain and pleasure, one could not wear over one's face a mask of glass, nor keep the sulphurous fumes from troubling the brain, and making the imagination turbid with monstrous fancies and misshapen dreams. There were poisons so subtle that to know their properties one had to sicken of them. There were maladies so strange that one had to pass through them if one sought to understand their nature. And, yet, what a great reward one received! How wonderful the whole world became to one! To note the curious hard logic of passion, and the emotional coloured life of the intellect—to observe where they met, and where they separated, at what point they were in unison, and at what point they were at discord—there was a delight in that! What matter what the cost was? One could never pay too high a price for any sensation.

He was conscious—and the thought brought a gleam of pleasure into his brown agate eyes—that it was through certain words of his, musical words said with musical utterance, that Dorian Gray's soul had turned to this white girl and bowed in worship before her. To a large extent the lad was his own creation. He had made him premature. That was something. Ordinary people waited till life disclosed to them its secrets, but to the few, to the elect, the mysteries of life were revealed before the veil was drawn away. Sometimes this was the effect of art, and chiefly of the art of literature, which dealt immediately with the passions and the intellect. But now and then a complex personality took the place and assumed the office of art; was indeed, in its way, a real work of art, Life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or sculpture, or painting.

Yes, the lad was premature. He was gathering his harvest while it was yet spring. The pulse and passion of youth were in him, but he was becoming self-conscious. It was delightful to watch him. With his beautiful face, and his beautiful soul, he was a thing to wonder at. It was no matter how it all ended, or was destined to end. He was like one of those gracious figures in a pageant or a play, whose joys seem to be remote from one, but whose sorrows stir one's sense of beauty, and whose wounds are like red roses.

Soul and body, body and soul—how mysterious they were! There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where

the fleshly impulse ceased, or the physical impulse began? How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists! And yet how difficult to decide between the claims of the various schools! Was the soul a shadow seated in the house of sin? Or was the body really in the soul, as Giordano Bruno thought? The separation of spirit from matter was a mystery, and the union of spirit with matter was a mystery also.

He began to wonder whether we could ever make psychology so absolute a science that each little spring of life would be revealed to us. As it was, we always misunderstood ourselves, and rarely understood others. Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to their mistakes. Moralists had, as a rule, regarded it as a mode of warning, had claimed for it a certain ethical efficacy in the formation of character, had praised it as something that taught us what to follow and showed us what to avoid. But there was no motive power in experience. It was as little of an active cause as conscience itself. All that it really demonstrated was that our future would be the same as our past, and that the sin we had done once, and with loathing, we would do many times, and with joy.

It was clear to him that the experimental method was the only method by which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions; and certainly Dorian Gray was a subject made to his hand, and seemed to promise rich and fruitful results. His sudden mad love for Sibyl Vane was a psychological phenomenon of no small interest. There was no doubt that curiosity had much to do with it, curiosity and the desire for new experiences; yet it was not a simple but rather a very complex passion. What there was in it of the purely sensuous instinct of boyhood had been transformed by the workings of the imagination, changed into something that seemed to the lad himself to be remote from sense, and was for that very reason all the more dangerous. It was the passions about whose origin we deceived ourselves that tyrannised most strongly over us. Our weakest motives were those of whose nature we were conscious. It often happened that when we thought we were experimenting on others we were really experimenting on ourselves.

While Lord Henry sat dreaming on these things, a knock came to the door, and his valet entered, and reminded him it was time to dress for

dinner. He got up and looked out into the street. The sunset had smitten into scarlet gold the upper windows of the houses opposite. The panes glowed like plates of heated metal. The sky above was like a faded rose. He thought of his friend's young fiery-coloured life, and wondered how it was all going to end.

When he arrived home, about half-past twelve o'clock, he saw a telegram lying on the hall table. He opened it, and found it was from Dorian Gray. It was to tell him that he was engaged to be married to Sibyl Vane.

CHAPTER V

"Mother, mother, I am so happy!" whispered the girl, burying her face in the lap of the faded, tired-looking woman who, with back turned to the shrill intrusive light, was sitting in the one arm-chair that their dingy sitting-room contained. "I am so happy!" she repeated, "and you must be happy too!"

Mrs. Vane winced, and put her thin bismuth-whitened hands on her daughter's head. "Happy!" she echoed, "I am only happy, Sibyl, when I see you act. You must not think of anything but your acting. Mr. Isaacs has been very good to us, and we owe him money."

The girl looked up and pouted. "Money, mother?" she cried, "what does money matter? Love is more than money."

"Mr. Isaacs has advanced us fifty pounds to pay off our debts, and to get a proper outfit for James. You must not forget that, Sibyl. Fifty pounds is a very large sum. Mr. Isaacs has been most considerate."

"He is not a gentleman, mother, and I hate the way he talks to me," said the girl, rising to her feet, and going over to the window.

"I don't know how we could manage without him," answered the elder woman, querulously.

Sibyl Vane tossed her head and laughed. "We don't want him any more, mother. Prince Charming rules life for us now." Then she paused. A rose shook in her blood, and shadowed her cheeks. Quick breath parted the petals of her lips. They trembled. Some southern wind of passion swept over her, and stirred the dainty folds of her dress. "I love him," she said, simply.

"Foolish child! foolish child!" was the parrot-phrase flung in answer. The waving of crooked, false-jewelled fingers gave grotesqueness to the words.

The girl laughed again. The joy of a caged bird was in her voice. Her eyes caught the melody, and echoed it in radiance; then closed for a moment, as though to hide their secret. When they opened, the mist of a dream had passed across them.

Thin-lipped wisdom spoke at her from the worn chair, hinted at prudence, quoted from that book of cowardice whose author apes the name of common sense. She did not listen. She was free in her prison of passion. Her prince, Prince Charming, was with her. She had called on Memory to remake him. She had sent her soul to search for him, and it had brought him back. His kiss burned again upon her mouth. Her eyelids were warm with his breath.

Then Wisdom altered its method and spoke of espial and discovery. This young man might be rich. If so, marriage should be thought of. Against the shell of her ear broke the waves of worldly cunning. The arrows of craft shot by her. She saw the thin lips moving, and smiled.

Suddenly she felt the need to speak. The wordy silence troubled her. "Mother, mother," she cried, "why does he love me so much? I know why I love him. I love him because he is like what Love himself should be. But what does he see in me? I am not worthy of him. And yet—why, I cannot tell—though I feel so much beneath him, I don't feel humble. I feel proud, terribly proud. Mother, did you love my father as I love Prince Charming?"

The elder woman grew pale beneath the coarse powder that daubed her cheeks, and her dry lips twitched with a spasm of pain. Sibyl rushed to her,

flung her arms round her neck, and kissed her. "Forgive me, mother. I know it pains you to talk about our father. But it only pains you because you loved him so much. Don't look so sad. I am as happy to-day as you were twenty years ago. Ah! let me be happy for ever!"

"My child, you are far too young to think of falling in love. Besides, what do you know of this young man? You don't even know his name. The whole thing is most inconvenient, and really, when James is going away to Australia, and I have so much to think of, I must say that you should have shown more consideration. However, as I said before, if he is rich...."

"Ah! Mother, mother, let me be happy!"

Mrs. Vane glanced at her, and with one of those false theatrical gestures that so often become a mode of second nature to a stage-player, clasped her in her arms. At this moment the door opened, and a young lad with rough brown hair came into the room. He was thick-set of figure, and his hands and feet were large, and somewhat clumsy in movement. He was not so finely bred as his sister. One would hardly have guessed the close relationship that existed between them. Mrs. Vane fixed her eyes on him, and intensified the smile. She mentally elevated her son to the dignity of an audience. She felt sure that the *tableau* was interesting.

"You might keep some of your kisses for me, Sibyl, I think," said the lad, with a good-natured grumble.

"Ah! but you don't like being kissed, Jim," she cried. "You are a dreadful old bear." And she ran across the room and hugged him.

James Vane looked into his sister's face with tenderness. "I want you to come out with me for a walk, Sibyl. I don't suppose I shall ever see this horrid London again. I am sure I don't want to."

"My son, don't say such dreadful things," murmured Mrs. Vane, taking up a tawdry theatrical dress, with a sigh, and beginning to patch it. She felt a little disappointed that he had not joined the group. It would have increased the theatrical picturesqueness of the situation.

"Why not, mother? I mean it."

"You pain me, my son. I trust you will return from Australia in a position of affluence. I believe there is no society of any kind in the Colonies, nothing that I would call society; so when you have made your fortune you must come back and assert yourself in London."

"Society!" muttered the lad. "I don't want to know anything about that. I should like to make some money to take you and Sibyl off the stage. I hate it."

"Oh, Jim!" said Sibyl, laughing, "how unkind of you! But are you really going for a walk with me? That will be nice! I was afraid you were going to say good-bye to some of your friends—to Tom Hardy, who gave you that hideous pipe, or Ned Langton, who makes fun of you for smoking it. It is very sweet of you to let me have your last afternoon. Where shall we go? Let us go to the Park."

"I am too shabby," he answered, frowning. "Only swell people go to the Park."

"Nonsense, Jim," she whispered, stroking the sleeve of his coat.

He hesitated for a moment. "Very well," he said at last, "but don't be too long dressing." She danced out of the door. One could hear her singing as she ran upstairs. Her little feet pattered overhead.

He walked up and down the room two or three times. Then he turned to the still figure in the chair. "Mother, are my things ready?" he asked.

"Quite ready, James," she answered, keeping her eyes on her work. For some months past she had felt ill at ease when she was alone with this rough, stern son of hers. Her shallow secret nature was troubled when their eyes met. She used to wonder if he suspected anything. The silence, for he made no other observation, became intolerable to her. She began to complain. Women defend themselves by attacking, just as they attack by sudden and strange surrenders. "I hope you will be contented, James, with your sea-faring life," she said. "You must remember that it is your own choice. You might have entered a solicitor's office. Solicitors are a very respectable class, and in the country often dine with the best families."

"I hate offices, and I hate clerks," he replied. "But you are quite right. I have chosen my own life. All I say is, watch over Sibyl. Don't let her come to any harm. Mother, you must watch over her."

"James, you really talk very strangely. Of course I watch over Sibyl."

"I hear a gentleman comes every night to the theatre, and goes behind to talk to her. Is that right? What about that?"

"You are speaking about things you don't understand, James. In the profession we are accustomed to receive a great deal of most gratifying attention. I myself used to receive many bouquets at one time. That was when acting was really understood. As for Sibyl, I do not know at present whether her attachment is serious or not. But there is no doubt that the young man in question is a perfect gentleman. He is always most polite to me. Besides, he has the appearance of being rich, and the flowers he sends are lovely."

"You don't know his name, though," said the lad, harshly.

"No," answered his mother, with a placid expression in her face. "He has not yet revealed his real name. I think it is quite romantic of him. He is probably a member of the aristocracy."

James Vane bit his lip. "Watch over Sibyl, mother," he cried, "watch over her."

"My son, you distress me very much. Sibyl is always under my special care. Of course, if this gentleman is wealthy, there is no reason why she should not contract an alliance with him. I trust he is one of the aristocracy. He has all the appearance of it, I must say. It might be a most brilliant marriage for Sibyl. They would make a charming couple. His good looks are really quite remarkable; everybody notices them."

The lad muttered something to himself, and drummed on the window-pane with his coarse fingers. He had just turned round to say something, when the door opened, and Sibyl ran in.

"How serious you both are!" she cried. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I suppose one must be serious sometimes. Good-bye, mother; I will have my dinner at five o'clock. Everything is packed, except my shirts, so you need not trouble."

"Good-bye, my son," she answered, with a bow of strained stateliness.

She was extremely annoyed at the tone he had adopted with her, and there was something in his look that had made her feel afraid.

"Kiss me, mother," said the girl. Her flower-like lips touched the withered cheek, and warmed its frost.

"My child! my child!" cried Mrs. Vane, looking up to the ceiling in search of an imaginary gallery.

"Come, Sibyl," said her brother, impatiently. He hated his mother's affectations.

They went out into the flickering wind-blown sunlight, and strolled down the dreary Euston Road. The passers-by glanced in wonder at the sullen, heavy youth, who, in coarse, ill-fitting clothes, was in the company of such a graceful, refined-looking girl. He was like a common gardener walking with a rose.

Jim frowned from time to time when he caught the inquisitive glance of some stranger. He had that dislike of being stared at which comes on geniuses late in life, and never leaves the commonplace. Sibyl, however, was quite unconscious of the effect she was producing. Her love was trembling in laughter on her lips. She was thinking of Prince Charming, and, that she might think of him all the more, she did not talk of him but prattled on about the ship in which Jim was going to sail, about the gold he was certain to find, about the wonderful heiress whose life he was to save from the wicked, red-shirted bushrangers. For he was not to remain a sailor, or a super-cargo, or whatever he was going to be. Oh, no! A sailor's existence was dreadful. Fancy being cooped up in a horrid ship, with the hoarse, hump-backed waves trying to get in, and a black wind blowing the masts down, and tearing the sails into long screaming ribands! He was to leave the vessel at Melbourne, bid a polite good-bye to the captain, and go

off at once to the gold-fields. Before a week was over he was to come across a large nugget of pure gold, the largest nugget that had ever been discovered, and bring it down to the coast in a waggon guarded by six mounted policemen. The bushrangers were to attack them three times, and be defeated with immense slaughter. Or, no. He was not to go to the gold-fields at all. They were horrid places, where men got intoxicated, and shot each other in bar-rooms, and used bad language. He was to be a nice sheep-farmer, and one evening, as he was riding home, he was to see the beautiful heiress being carried off by a robber on a black horse, and give chase, and rescue her. Of course she would fall in love with him, and he with her, and they would get married, and come home, and live in an immense house in London. Yes, there were delightful things in store for him. But he must be very good, and not lose his temper, or spend his money foolishly. She was only a year older than he was, but she knew so much more of life. He must be sure, also, to write to her by every mail, and to say his prayers each night before he went to sleep. God was very good, and would watch over him. She would pray for him, too, and in a few years he would come back quite rich and happy.

The lad listened sulkily to her, and made no answer. He was heart-sick at leaving home.

Yet it was not this alone that made him gloomy and morose. Inexperienced though he was, he had still a strong sense of the danger of Sibyl's position. This young dandy who was making love to her could mean her no good. He was a gentleman, and he hated him for that, hated him through some curious race-instinct for which he could not account, and which for that reason was all the more dominant within him. He was conscious also of the shallowness and vanity of his mother's nature, and in that saw infinite peril for Sibyl and Sibyl's happiness. Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them; sometimes they forgive them.

His mother! He had something on his mind to ask of her, something that he had brooded on for many months of silence. A chance phrase that he had heard at the theatre, a whispered sneer that had reached his ears one night as he waited at the stage-door, had set loose a train of horrible

thoughts. He remembered it as if it had been the lash of a hunting-crop across his face. His brows knit together into a wedge-like furrow, and with a twitch of pain he bit his under-lip.

"You are not listening to a word I am saying, Jim," cried Sibyl, "and I am making the most delightful plans for your future. Do say something."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Oh! that you will be a good boy, and not forget us," she answered, smiling at him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You are more likely to forget me, than I am to forget you, Sibyl."

She flushed. "What do you mean, Jim?" she asked.

"You have a new friend, I hear. Who is he? Why have you not told me about him? He means you no good."

"Stop, Jim!" she exclaimed. "You must not say anything against him. I love him."

"Why, you don't even know his name," answered the lad. "Who is he? I have a right to know."

"He is called Prince Charming. Don't you like the name? Oh! you silly boy! you should never forget it. If you only saw him, you would think him the most wonderful person in the world. Some day you will meet him: when you come back from Australia. You will like him so much. Everybody likes him, and I... love him. I wish you could come to the theatre to-night. He is going to be there, and I am to play Juliet. Oh! how I shall play it! Fancy, Jim, to be in love and play Juliet! To have him sitting there! To play for his delight! I am afraid I may frighten the company, frighten or enthrall them. To be in love is to surpass one's self. Poor dreadful Mr. Isaacs will be shouting 'genius' to his loafers at the bar. He has preached me as a dogma; to-night he will announce me as a revelation. I feel it. And it is all his, his only, Prince Charming, my wonderful lover, my god of graces. But I am poor beside him. Poor? What does that matter?"

When poverty creeps in at the door, love flies in through the window. Our proverbs want re-writing. They were made in winter, and it is summer now; spring-time for me, I think, a very dance of blossoms in blue skies."

"He is a gentleman," said the lad, sullenly.

"A Prince!" she cried, musically. "What more do you want?"

"He wants to enslave you."

"I shudder at the thought of being free."

"I want you to beware of him."

"To see him is to worship him, to know him is to trust him."

"Sibyl, you are mad about him."

She laughed, and took his arm. "You dear old Jim, you talk as if you were a hundred. Some day you will be in love yourself. Then you will know what it is. Don't look so sulky. Surely you should be glad to think that, though you are going away, you leave me happier than I have ever been before. Life has been hard for us both, terribly hard and difficult. But it will be different now. You are going to a new world, and I have found one. Here are two chairs; let us sit down and see the smart people go by."

They took their seats amidst a crowd of watchers. The tulip-beds across the road flamed like throbbing rings of fire. A white dust, tremulous cloud of orris-root it seemed, hung in the panting air. The brightly-coloured parasols danced and dipped like monstrous butterflies.

She made her brother talk of himself, his hopes, his prospects. He spoke slowly and with effort. They passed words to each other as players at a game pass counters. Sibyl felt oppressed. She could not communicate her joy. A faint smile curving that sullen mouth was all the echo she could win. After some time she became silent. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of golden hair and laughing lips, and in an open carriage with two ladies Dorian Gray drove past.

She started to her feet. "There he is!" she cried.

"Who?" said Jim Vane.

"Prince Charming," she answered, looking after the victoria.

He jumped up, and seized her roughly by the arm. "Show him to me. Which is he? Point him out. I must see him!" he exclaimed; but at that moment the Duke of Berwick's four-in-hand came between, and when it had left the space clear, the carriage had swept out of the Park.

"He is gone," murmured Sibyl, sadly. "I wish you had seen him."

"I wish I had, for as sure as there is a God in heaven, if he ever does you any wrong I shall kill him."

She looked at him in horror. He repeated his words. They cut the air like a dagger. The people round began to gape. A lady standing close to her tittered.

"Come away, Jim; come away," she whispered. He followed her doggedly, as she passed through the crowd. He felt glad at what he had said.

When they reached the Achilles Statue she turned round. There was pity in her eyes that became laughter on her lips. She shook her head at him. "You are foolish, Jim, utterly foolish; a bad-tempered boy, that is all. How can you say such horrible things? You don't know what you are talking about. You are simply jealous and unkind. Ah! I wish you would fall in love. Love makes people good, and what you said was wicked."

"I am sixteen," he answered, "and I know what I am about. Mother is no help to you. She doesn't understand how to look after you. I wish now that I was not going to Australia at all. I have a great mind to chuck the whole thing up. I would, if my articles hadn't been signed."

"Oh, don't be so serious, Jim. You are like one of the heroes of those silly melodramas mother used to be so fond of acting in. I am not going to quarrel with you. I have seen him, and oh! to see him is perfect happiness. We won't quarrel. I know you would never harm anyone I love, would you?"

"Not as long as you love him, I suppose," was the sullen answer.

"I shall love him for ever!" she cried.

"And he?"

"For ever, too!"

"He had better."

She shrank from him. Then she laughed and put her hand on his arm. He was merely a boy.

At the Marble Arch they hailed an omnibus, which left them close to their shabby home in the Euston Road. It was after five o'clock, and Sibyl had to lie down for a couple of hours before acting. Jim insisted that she should do so. He said that he would sooner part with her when their mother was not present. She would be sure to make a scene, and he detested scenes of every kind.

In Sibyl's own room they parted. There was jealousy in the lad's heart, and a fierce, murderous hatred of the stranger who, as it seemed to him, had come between them. Yet, when her arms were flung round his neck, and her fingers strayed through his hair, he softened, and kissed her with real affection. There were tears in his eyes as he went downstairs.

His mother was waiting for him below. She grumbled at his unpunctuality, as he entered. He made no answer, but sat down to his meagre meal. The flies buzzed round the table, and crawled over the stained cloth. Through the rumble of omnibuses, and the clatter of street-cabs, he could hear the droning voice devouring each minute that was left to him.

After some time, he thrust away his plate, and put his head in his hands. He felt that he had a right to know. It should have been told to him before, if it was as he suspected. Leaden with fear, his mother watched him. Words dropped mechanically from her lips. A tattered lace handkerchief twitched in her fingers. When the clock struck six, he got up, and went to the door. Then he turned back, and looked at her. Their eyes met. In hers he saw a wild appeal for mercy. It enraged him.

"Mother, I have something to ask you," he said. Her eyes wandered vaguely about the room. She made no answer. "Tell me the truth. I have a right to know. Were you married to my father?"

She heaved a deep sigh. It was a sigh of relief. The terrible moment, the moment that night and day, for weeks and months, she had dreaded, had come at last, and yet she felt no terror. Indeed in some measure it was a disappointment to her. The vulgar directness of the question called for a direct answer. The situation had not been gradually led up to. It was crude. It reminded her of a bad rehearsal.

"No," she answered, wondering at the harsh simplicity of life.

"My father was a scoundrel then?" cried the lad, clenching his fists.

She shook her head. "I knew he was not free. We loved each other very much. If he had lived, he would have made provision for us. Don't speak against him, my son. He was your father, and a gentleman. Indeed he was highly connected."

An oath broke from his lips. "I don't care for myself," he exclaimed, "but don't let Sibyl.... It is a gentleman, isn't it, who is in love with her, or says he is? Highly connected, too, I suppose."

For a moment a hideous sense of humiliation came over the woman. Her head drooped. She wiped her eyes with shaking hands. "Sibyl has a mother," she murmured; "I had none."

The lad was touched. He went towards her, and stooping down he kissed her. "I am sorry if I have pained you by asking about my father," he said, "but I could not help it. I must go now. Good-bye. Don't forget that you will only have one child now to look after, and believe me that if this man wrongs my sister, I will find out who he is, track him down, and kill him like a dog. I swear it."

The exaggerated folly of the threat, the passionate gesture that accompanied it, the mad melodramatic words, made life seem more vivid to her. She was familiar with the atmosphere. She breathed more freely, and for the first time for many months she really admired her son. She would have liked to have continued the scene on the same emotional scale, but he cut her short. Trunks had to be carried down, and mufflers looked for. The lodging-house drudge bustled in and out. There was the bargaining with the cabman. The moment was lost in vulgar details. It was with a renewed feeling of disappointment that she waved the tattered lace handkerchief from the window, as her son drove away. She was conscious that a great opportunity had been wasted. She consoled herself by telling Sibyl how desolate she felt her life would be, now that she had only one child to look after. She remembered the phrase. It had pleased her. Of the threat she said nothing. It was vividly and dramatically expressed. She felt that they would all laugh at it some day.

CHAPTER VI

"I suppose you have heard the news, Basil?" said Lord Henry that evening, as Hallward was shown into a little private room at the Bristol where dinner had been laid for three.

"No, Harry," answered the artist, giving his hat and coat to the bowing waiter. "What is it? Nothing about politics, I hope? They don't interest me. There is hardly a single person in the House of Commons worth painting; though many of them would be the better for a little white-washing."

"Dorian Gray is engaged to be married," said Lord Henry, watching him as he spoke.

Hallward started, and then frowned. "Dorian engaged to be married!" he cried. "Impossible!"

"It is perfectly true."

"To whom?"

"To some little actress or other."

"I can't believe it. Dorian is far too sensible."

"Dorian is far too wise not to do foolish things now and then, my dear Basil."

"Marriage is hardly a thing that one can do now and then, Harry."

"Except in America," rejoined Lord Henry, languidly. "But I didn't say he was married. I said he was engaged to be married. There is a great difference. I have a distinct remembrance of being married, but I have no recollection at all of being engaged. I am inclined to think that I never was engaged."

"But think of Dorian's birth, and position, and wealth. It would be absurd for him to marry so much beneath him."

"If you want to make him marry this girl tell him that, Basil. He is sure to do it, then. Whenever a man does a thoroughly stupid thing, it is always from the noblest motives."

"I hope the girl is good, Harry. I don't want to see Dorian tied to some vile creature, who might degrade his nature and ruin his intellect."

"Oh, she is better than good—she is beautiful," murmured Lord Henry, sipping a glass of vermouth and orange-bitters. "Dorian says she is beautiful; and he is not often wrong about things of that kind. Your portrait of him has quickened his appreciation of the personal appearance of other people. It has had that excellent effect, amongst others. We are to see her to-night, if that boy doesn't forget his appointment."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite serious, Basil. I should be miserable if I thought I should ever be more serious than I am at the present moment."

"But do you approve of it, Harry?" asked the painter, walking up and down the room, and biting his lip. "You can't approve of it, possibly. It is some silly infatuation."

"I never approve, or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd attitude to take towards life. We are not sent into the world to air our moral prejudices. I never take any notice of what common people say, and I never interfere with what charming people do. If a personality fascinates me, whatever mode of expression that personality selects is absolutely delightful to me. Dorian Gray falls in love with a beautiful girl who acts Juliet, and proposes to marry her. Why not? If he wedded Messalina he would be none the less interesting. You know I am not a champion of marriage. The real drawback to marriage is that it makes one unselfish. And unselfish people are colourless. They lack individuality. Still, there are certain temperaments that marriage makes more complex. They retain their egotism, and add to it many other egos. They are forced to have more than one life. They become more highly organised, and to be highly organised is, I should fancy, the object of man's existence. Besides, every experience is of value, and, whatever one may say against marriage, it is certainly an experience. I hope that Dorian Gray will make this girl his wife, passionately adore her for six months, and then suddenly become fascinated by someone else. He would be a wonderful study."

"You don't mean a single word of all that, Harry; you know you don't. If Dorian Gray's life were spoiled, no one would be sorrier than yourself. You

are much better than you pretend to be."

Lord Henry laughed. "The reason we all like to think so well of others is that we are all afraid for ourselves. The basis of optimism is sheer terror. We think that we are generous because we credit our neighbour with the possession of those virtues that are likely to be a benefit to us. We praise the banker that we may overdraw our account, and find good qualities in the highwayman in the hope that he may spare our pockets. I mean everything that I have said. I have the greatest contempt for optimism. As for a spoiled life, no life is spoiled but one whose growth is arrested. If you want to mar a nature, you have merely to reform it. As for marriage, of course that would be silly, but there are other and more interesting bonds between men and women. I will certainly encourage them. They have the charm of being fashionable. But here is Dorian himself. He will tell you more than I can."

"My dear Harry, my dear Basil, you must both congratulate me!" said the lad, throwing off his evening cape with its satin-lined wings and shaking each of his friends by the hand in turn. "I have never been so happy. Of course it is sudden; all really delightful things are. And yet it seems to me to be the one thing I have been looking for all my life." He was flushed with excitement and pleasure, and looked extraordinarily handsome.

"I hope you will always be very happy, Dorian," said Hallward, "but I don't quite forgive you for not having let me know of your engagement. You let Harry know."

"And I don't forgive you for being late for dinner," broke in Lord Henry, putting his hand on the lad's shoulder, and smiling as he spoke. "Come, let us sit down and try what the new *chef* here is like, and then you will tell us how it all came about."

"There is really not much to tell," cried Dorian, as they took their seats at the small round table. "What happened was simply this. After I left you yesterday evening, Harry, I dressed, had some dinner at that little Italian restaurant in Rupert Street you introduced me to, and went down at eight o'clock to the theatre. Sibyl was playing *Rosalind*. Of course the scenery

was dreadful, and the Orlando absurd. But Sibyl! You should have seen her! When she came on in her boy's clothes she was perfectly wonderful. She wore a moss-coloured velvet jerkin with cinnamon sleeves, slim brown cross-gartered hose, a dainty little green cap with a hawk's feather caught in a jewel, and a hooded cloak lined with dull red. She had never seemed to me more exquisite. She had all the delicate grace of that Tanagra figurine that you have in your studio, Basil. Her hair clustered round her face like dark leaves round a pale rose. As for her acting—well, you shall see her to-night. She is simply a born artist. I sat in the dingy box absolutely enthralled. I forgot that I was in London and in the nineteenth century. I was away with my love in a forest that no man had ever seen. After the performance was over I went behind, and spoke to her. As we were sitting together, suddenly there came into her eyes a look that I had never seen there before. My lips moved towards hers. We kissed each other. I can't describe to you what I felt at that moment. It seemed to me that all my life had been narrowed to one perfect point of rose-coloured joy. She trembled all over, and shook like a white narcissus. Then she flung herself on her knees and kissed my hands. I feel that I should not tell you all this, but I can't help it. Of course our engagement is a dead secret. She has not even told her own mother. I don't know what my guardians will say. Lord Radley is sure to be furious. I don't care. I shall be of age in less than a year, and then I can do what I like. I have been right, Basil, haven't I, to take my love out of poetry, and to find my wife in Shakespeare's plays? Lips that Shakespeare taught to speak have whispered their secret in my ear. I have had the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth."

"Yes, Dorian, I suppose you were right," said Hallward, slowly.

"Have you seen her to-day?" asked Lord Henry.

Dorian Gray shook his head. "I left her in the forest of Arden, I shall find her in an orchard in Verona."

Lord Henry sipped his champagne in a meditative manner. "At what particular point did you mention the word marriage, Dorian? And what did she say in answer? Perhaps you forgot all about it."

"My dear Harry, I did not treat it as a business transaction, and I did not make any formal proposal. I told her that I loved her, and she said she was not worthy to be my wife. Not worthy! Why, the whole world is nothing to me compared with her."

"Women are wonderfully practical," murmured Lord Henry—"much more practical than we are. In situations of that kind we often forget to say anything about marriage, and they always remind us."

Hallward laid his hand upon his arm. "Don't, Harry. You have annoyed Dorian. He is not like other men. He would never bring misery upon anyone. His nature is too fine for that."

Lord Henry looked across the table. "Dorian is never annoyed with me," he answered. "I asked the question for the best reason possible, for the only reason, indeed, that excuses one for asking any question—simple curiosity. I have a theory that it is always the women who propose to us, and not we who propose to the women. Except, of course, in middle-class life. But then the middle classes are not modern."

Dorian Gray laughed, and tossed his head. "You are quite incorrigible, Harry; but I don't mind. It is impossible to be angry with you. When you see Sibyl Vane you will feel that the man who could wrong her would be a beast, a beast without a heart. I cannot understand how anyone can wish to shame the thing he loves. I love Sibyl Vane. I want to place her on a pedestal of gold, and to see the world worship the woman who is mine. What is marriage? An irrevocable vow. You mock at it for that. Ah! don't mock. It is an irrevocable vow that I want to take. Her trust makes me faithful, her belief makes me good. When I am with her, I regret all that you have taught me. I become different from what you have known me to be. I am changed, and the mere touch of Sibyl Vane's hand makes me forget you and all your wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful theories."

"And those are...?" asked Lord Henry, helping himself to some salad.

"Oh, your theories about life, your theories about love, your theories about pleasure. All your theories, in fact, Harry."

"Pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about," he answered, in his slow, melodious voice. "But I am afraid I cannot claim my theory as my own. It belongs to Nature, not to me. Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When we are happy we are always good, but when we are good we are not always happy."

"Ah! but what do you mean by good?" cried Basil Hallward.

"Yes," echoed Dorian, leaning back in his chair, and looking at Lord Henry over the heavy clusters of purple-lipped irises that stood in the centre of the table, "what do you mean by good, Harry?"

"To be good is to be in harmony with one's self," he replied, touching the thin stem of his glass with his pale, fine-pointed fingers. "Discord is to be forced to be in harmony with others. One's own life—that is the important thing. As for the lives of one's neighbours, if one wishes to be a prig or a Puritan, one can flaunt one's moral views about them, but they are not one's concern. Besides, Individualism has really the higher aim. Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one's age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form of the grossest immorality."

"But, surely, if one lives merely for one's self, Harry, one pays a terrible price for doing so?" suggested the painter.

"Yes, we are overcharged for everything nowadays. I should fancy that the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich."

"One has to pay in other ways but money."

"What sort of ways, Basil?"

"Oh! I should fancy in remorse, in suffering, in... well, in the consciousness of degradation."

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, mediæval art is charming, but mediæval emotions are out of date. One can use them in fiction, of course. But then the only things that one can use in fiction are

the things that one has ceased to use in fact. Believe me, no civilised man ever regrets a pleasure, and no uncivilised man ever knows what a pleasure is."

"I know what pleasure is," cried Dorian Gray. "It is to adore someone."

"That is certainly better than being adored," he answered, toying with some fruits. "Being adored is a nuisance. Women treat us just as Humanity treats its gods. They worship us, and are always bothering us to do something for them."

"I should have said that whatever they ask for they had first given to us," murmured the lad, gravely. "They create Love in our natures. They have a right to demand it back."

"That is quite true, Dorian," cried Hallward.

"Nothing is ever quite true," said Lord Henry.

"This is," interrupted Dorian. "You must admit, Harry, that women give to men the very gold of their lives."

"Possibly," he sighed, "but they invariably want it back in such very small change. That is the worry. Women, as some witty Frenchman once put it, inspire us with the desire to do masterpieces, and always prevent us from carrying them out."

"Harry, you are dreadful! I don't know why I like you so much."

"You will always like me, Dorian," he replied. "Will you have some coffee, you fellows?—Waiter, bring coffee, and *fine-champagne*, and some cigarettes. No: don't mind the cigarettes; I have some. Basil, I can't allow you to smoke cigars. You must have a cigarette. A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want? Yes, Dorian, you will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you have never had the courage to commit."

"What nonsense you talk, Harry!" cried the lad, taking a light from a fire-breathing silver dragon that the waiter had placed on the table. "Let us go

down to the theatre. When Sibyl comes on the stage you will have a new ideal of life. She will represent something to you that you have never known."

"I have known everything," said Lord Henry, with a tired look in his eyes, "but I am always ready for a new emotion. I am afraid, however, that, for me at any rate, there is no such thing. Still, your wonderful girl may thrill me. I love acting. It is so much more real than life. Let us go. Dorian, you will come with me. I am so sorry, Basil, but there is only room for two in the brougham. You must follow us in a hansom."

They got up and put on their coats, sipping their coffee standing. The painter was silent and preoccupied. There was a gloom over him. He could not bear this marriage, and yet it seemed to him to be better than many other things that might have happened. After a few minutes, they all passed downstairs. He drove off by himself, as had been arranged, and watched the flashing lights of the little brougham in front of him. A strange sense of loss came over him. He felt that Dorian Gray would never again be to him all that he had been in the past. Life had come between them.... His eyes darkened, and the crowded, flaring streets became blurred to his eyes. When the cab drew up at the theatre, it seemed to him that he had grown years older.

CHAPTER VII

For some reason or other, the house was crowded that night, and the fat Jew manager who met them at the door was beaming from ear to ear with an oily, tremulous smile. He escorted them to their box with a sort of pompous humility, waving his fat jewelled hands, and talking at the top of his voice. Dorian Gray loathed him more than ever. He felt as if he had come to look for Miranda and had been met by Caliban. Lord Henry, upon the other hand, rather liked him. At least he declared he did, and insisted on shaking him by the hand, and assuring him that he was proud to meet a

man who had discovered a real genius and gone bankrupt over a poet. Hallward amused himself with watching the faces in the pit. The heat was terribly oppressive, and the huge sunlight flamed like a monstrous dahlia with petals of yellow fire. The youths in the gallery had taken off their coats and waistcoats and hung them over the side. They talked to each other across the theatre, and shared their oranges with the tawdry girls who sat beside them. Some women were laughing in the pit. Their voices were horribly shrill and discordant. The sound of the popping of corks came from the bar.

"What a place to find one's divinity in!" said Lord Henry.

"Yes!" answered Dorian Gray. "It was here I found her, and she is divine beyond all living things. When she acts you will forget everything. These common, rough people, with their coarse faces and brutal gestures, become quite different when she is on the stage. They sit silently and watch her. They weep and laugh as she wills them to do. She makes them as responsive as a violin. She spiritualises them, and one feels that they are of the same flesh and blood as one's self."

"The same flesh and blood as one's self! Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed Lord Henry, who was scanning the occupants of the gallery through his opera-glass.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Dorian," said the painter. "I understand what you mean, and I believe in this girl. Anyone you love must be marvellous, and any girl that has the effect you describe must be fine and noble. To spiritualise one's age—that is something worth doing. If this girl can give a soul to those who have lived without one, if she can create the sense of beauty in people whose lives have been sordid and ugly, if she can strip them of their selfishness and lend them tears for sorrows that are not their own, she is worthy of all your adoration, worthy of the adoration of the world. This marriage is quite right. I did not think so at first, but I admit it now. The gods made Sibyl Vane for you. Without her you would have been incomplete."

"Thanks, Basil," answered Dorian Gray, pressing his hand. "I knew that you would understand me. Harry is so cynical, he terrifies me. But here is the orchestra. It is quite dreadful, but it only lasts for about five minutes. Then the curtain rises, and you will see the girl to whom I am going to give all my life, to whom I have given everything that is good in me."

A quarter of an hour afterwards, amidst an extraordinary turmoil of applause, Sibyl Vane stepped on to the stage. Yes, she was certainly lovely to look at—one of the loveliest creatures, Lord Henry thought, that he had ever seen. There was something of the fawn in her shy grace and startled eyes. A faint blush, like the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, came to her cheeks as she glanced at the crowded, enthusiastic house. She stepped back a few paces, and her lips seemed to tremble. Basil Hallward leaped to his feet and began to applaud. Motionless, and as one in a dream, sat Dorian Gray, gazing at her. Lord Henry peered through his glasses, murmuring, "Charming! charming!"

The scene was the hall of Capulet's house, and Romeo in his pilgrim's dress had entered with Mercutio and his other friends. The band, such as it was, struck up a few bars of music, and the dance began. Through the crowd of ungainly, shabbily-dressed actors, Sibyl Vane moved like a creature from a finer world. Her body swayed, while she danced, as a plant sways in the water. The curves of her throat were the curves of a white lily. Her hands seemed to be made of cool ivory.

Yet she was curiously listless. She showed no sign of joy when her eyes rested on Romeo. The few words she had to speak—

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss—

with the brief dialogue that follows, were spoken in a thoroughly artificial manner. The voice was exquisite, but from the point of view of tone it was absolutely false. It was wrong in colour. It took away all the life from the verse. It made the passion unreal.

Dorian Gray grew pale as he watched her. He was puzzled and anxious. Neither of his friends dared to say anything to him. She seemed to them to be absolutely incompetent. They were horribly disappointed.

Yet they felt that the true test of any Juliet is the balcony scene of the second act. They waited for that. If she failed there, there was nothing in her.

She looked charming as she came out in the moonlight. That could not be denied. But the staginess of her acting was unbearable, and grew worse as she went on. Her gestures became absurdly artificial. She over-emphasised everything that she had to say. The beautiful passage—

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night—

was declaimed with the painful precision of a schoolgirl who has been taught to recite by some second-rate professor of elocution. When she leaned over the balcony and came to those wonderful lines—

Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say, "It lightens." Sweet, good-night!
This bud of love by summer's ripening breath
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet—

she spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her. It was not nervousness. Indeed, so far from being nervous, she was absolutely self-contained. It was simply bad art. She was a complete failure.

Even the common, uneducated audience of the pit and gallery lost their interest in the play. They got restless, and began to talk loudly and to whistle. The Jew manager, who was standing at the back of the dress-circle, stamped and swore with rage. The only person unmoved was the girl herself.

When the second act was over there came a storm of hisses, and Lord Henry got up from his chair and put on his coat. "She is quite beautiful, Dorian," he said, "but she can't act. Let us go."

"I am going to see the play through," answered the lad, in a hard, bitter voice. "I am awfully sorry that I have made you waste an evening, Harry. I apologise to you both."

"My dear Dorian, I should think Miss Vane was ill," interrupted Hallward. "We will come some other night."

"I wish she were ill," he rejoined. "But she seems to me to be simply callous and cold. She has entirely altered. Last night she was a great artist. This evening she is merely a commonplace, mediocre actress."

"Don't talk like that about anyone you love, Dorian. Love is a more wonderful thing than Art."

"They are both simply forms of imitation," remarked Lord Henry. "But do let us go. Dorian, you must not stay here any longer. It is not good for one's morals to see bad acting. Besides, I don't suppose you will want your wife to act. So what does it matter if she plays Juliet like a wooden doll? She is very lovely, and if she knows as little about life as she does about acting, she will be a delightful experience. There are only two kinds of people who are really fascinating—people who know absolutely everything, and people who know absolutely nothing. Good heavens, my dear boy, don't look so tragic! The secret of remaining young is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming. Come to the club with Basil and myself. We will smoke cigarettes and drink to the beauty of Sibyl Vane. She is beautiful. What more can you want?"

"Go away, Harry," cried the lad. "I want to be alone. Basil, you must go. Ah! can't you see that my heart is breaking?" The hot tears came to his eyes. His lips trembled, and, rushing to the back of the box, he leaned up against the wall, hiding his face in his hands.

"Let us go, Basil," said Lord Henry, with a strange tenderness in his voice; and the two young men passed out together.

A few moments afterwards the footlights flared up, and the curtain rose on the third act. Dorian Gray went back to his seat. He looked pale, and proud, and indifferent. The play dragged on, and seemed interminable. Half of the audience went out, tramping in heavy boots, and laughing. The whole thing was a *fiasco*. The last act was played to almost empty benches. The curtain went down on a titter, and some groans.

As soon as it was over, Dorian Gray rushed behind the scenes into the greenroom. The girl was standing there alone, with a look of triumph on her face. Her eyes were lit with an exquisite fire. There was a radiance about her. Her parted lips were smiling over some secret of their own.

When he entered, she looked at him, and an expression of infinite joy came over her. "How badly I acted to-night, Dorian!" she cried.

"Horribly!" he answered, gazing at her in amazement—"horribly! It was dreadful. Are you ill? You have no idea what it was. You have no idea what I suffered."

The girl smiled. "Dorian," she answered, lingering over his name with long-drawn music in her voice, as though it were sweeter than honey to the red petals of her mouth—"Dorian, you should have understood. But you understand now, don't you?"

"Understand what?" he asked, angrily.

"Why I was so bad to-night. Why I shall always be bad. Why I shall never act well again."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You are ill, I suppose. When you are ill you shouldn't act. You make yourself ridiculous. My friends were bored. I was bored."

She seemed not to listen to him. She was transfigured with joy. An ecstasy of happiness dominated her.

"Dorian, Dorian," she cried, "before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night, and Portia the other. The joy of

Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine also. I believed in everything. The common people who acted with me seemed to me to be godlike. The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came—oh, my beautiful love!—and you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is. To-night, for the first time in my life, I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played. To-night, for the first time, I became conscious that the Romeo was hideous, and old, and painted, that the moonlight in the orchard was false, that the scenery was vulgar, and that the words I had to speak were unreal, were not my words, were not what I wanted to say. You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection. You had made me understand what love really is. My love! my love! Prince Charming! Prince of life! I have grown sick of shadows. You are more to me than all art can ever be. What have I to do with the puppets of a play? When I came on to-night, I could not understand how it was that everything had gone from me. I thought that I was going to be wonderful. I found that I could do nothing. Suddenly it dawned on my soul what it all meant. The knowledge was exquisite to me. I heard them hissing, and I smiled. What could they know of love such as ours? Take me away, Dorian—take me away with you, where we can be quite alone. I hate the stage. I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot mimic one that burns me like fire. Oh, Dorian, Dorian, you understand now what it signifies? Even if I could do it, it would be profanation for me to play at being in love. You have made me see that."

He flung himself down on the sofa, and turned away his face. "You have killed my love," he muttered.

She looked at him in wonder, and laughed. He made no answer. She came across to him, and with her little fingers stroked his hair. She knelt down and pressed his hands to her lips. He drew them away, and a shudder ran through him.

Then he leaped up, and went to the door. "Yes," he cried, "you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were

marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realised the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away. You are shallow and stupid. My God! how mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again. I will never think of you. I will never mention your name. You don't know what you were to me, once. Why, once.... Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I wish I had never laid eyes upon you! You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art you are nothing. I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshipped you, and you would have borne my name. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face."

The girl grew white, and trembled. She clenched her hands together, and her voice seemed to catch in her throat. "You are not serious, Dorian?" she murmured. "You are acting."

"Acting! I leave that to you. You do it so well," he answered bitterly.

She rose from her knees, and, with a piteous expression of pain in her face, came across the room to him. She put her hand upon his arm, and looked into his eyes. He thrust her back. "Don't touch me!" he cried.

A low moan broke from her, and she flung herself at his feet, and lay there like a trampled flower. "Dorian, Dorian, don't leave me!" she whispered. "I am so sorry I didn't act well. I was thinking of you all the time. But I will try—indeed, I will try. It came so suddenly across me, my love for you. I think I should never have known it if you had not kissed me—if we had not kissed each other. Kiss me again, my love. Don't go away from me. I couldn't bear it. Oh! don't go away from me. My brother.... No; never mind. He didn't mean it. He was in jest.... But you, oh! can't you forgive me for to-night? I will work so hard, and try to improve. Don't be cruel to me because I love you better than anything in the world. After all, it is only once that I have not pleased you. But you are quite right, Dorian. I should have shown myself more of an artist. It was foolish of me; and yet I couldn't help it. Oh, don't leave me, don't leave me." A fit of passionate sobbing choked her. She crouched on the floor like a wounded thing, and

Dorian Gray, with his beautiful eyes, looked down at her, and his chiselled lips curled in exquisite disdain. There is always something ridiculous about the emotions of people whom one has ceased to love. Sibyl Vane seemed to him to be absurdly melodramatic. Her tears and sobs annoyed him.

"I am going," he said at last, in his calm, clear voice. "I don't wish to be unkind, but I can't see you again. You have disappointed me."

She wept silently, and made no answer, but crept nearer. Her little hands stretched blindly out, and appeared to be seeking for him. He turned on his heel, and left the room. In a few moments he was out of the theatre.

Where he went to he hardly knew. He remembered wandering through dimly-lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts.

As the dawn was just breaking he found himself close to Covent Garden. The darkness lifted, and, flushed with faint fires, the sky hollowed itself into a perfect pearl. Huge carts filled with nodding lilies rumbled slowly down the polished empty street. The air was heavy with the perfume of the flowers, and their beauty seemed to bring him an anodyne for his pain. He followed into the market, and watched the men unloading their waggons. A white-smocked carter offered him some cherries. He thanked him, and wondered why he refused to accept any money for them, and began to eat them listlessly. They had been plucked at midnight, and the coldness of the moon had entered into them. A long line of boys carrying crates of striped tulips, and of yellow and red roses, defiled in front of him, threading their way through the huge jade-green piles of vegetables. Under the portico, with its grey sun-bleached pillars, loitered a troop of draggled bareheaded girls, waiting for the auction to be over. Others crowded round the swinging doors of the coffee-house in the Piazza. The heavy cart-horses slipped and stamped upon the rough stones, shaking their bells and

trappings. Some of the drivers were lying asleep on a pile of sacks. Iris-necked, and pink-footed, the pigeons ran about picking up seeds.

After a little while, he hailed a hansom, and drove home. For a few moments he loitered upon the doorstep, looking round at the silent Square with its blank, close-shuttered windows, and its staring blinds. The sky was pure opal now, and the roofs of the houses glistened like silver against it. From some chimney opposite a thin wreath of smoke was rising. It curled, a violet riband, through the nacre-coloured air.

In the huge gilt Venetian lantern, spoil of some Doge's barge, that hung from the ceiling of the great oak-panelled hall of entrance, lights were still burning from three flickering jets: thin blue petals of flame they seemed, rimmed with white fire. He turned them out, and, having thrown his hat and cape on the table, passed through the library towards the door of his bedroom, a large octagonal chamber on the ground floor that, in his new-born feeling for luxury, he had just had decorated for himself, and hung with some curious Renaissance tapestries that had been discovered stored in a disused attic at Selby Royal. As he was turning the handle of the door, his eye fell upon the portrait Basil Hallward had painted of him. He started back as if in surprise. Then he went on into his own room, looking somewhat puzzled. After he had taken the buttonhole out of his coat, he seemed to hesitate. Finally he came back, went over to the picture, and examined it. In the dim arrested light that struggled through the cream-coloured silk blinds, the face appeared to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth. It was certainly strange.

He turned round, and, walking to the window, drew up the blind. The bright dawn flooded the room, and swept the fantastic shadows into dusky corners, where they lay shuddering. But the strange expression that he had noticed in the face of the portrait seemed to linger there, to be more intensified even. The quivering, ardent sunlight showed him the lines of cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing.

He winced, and, taking up from the table an oval glass framed in ivory Cupids, one of Lord Henry's many presents to him, glanced hurriedly into its polished depths. No line like that warped his red lips. What did it mean?

He rubbed his eyes, and came close to the picture, and examined it again. There were no signs of any change when he looked into the actual painting, and yet there was no doubt that the whole expression had altered. It was not a mere fancy of his own. The thing was horribly apparent.

He threw himself into a chair, and began to think. Suddenly there flashed across his mind what he had said in Basil Hallward's studio the day the picture had been finished. Yes, he remembered it perfectly. He had uttered a mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the portrait grow old; that his own beauty might be untarnished, and the face on the canvas bear the burden of his passions and his sins; that the painted image might be seared with the lines of suffering and thought, and that he might keep all the delicate bloom and loveliness of his then just conscious boyhood. Surely his wish had not been fulfilled? Such things were impossible. It seemed monstrous even to think of them. And, yet, there was the picture before him, with the touch of cruelty in the mouth.

Cruelty! Had he been cruel? It was the girl's fault, not his. He had dreamed of her as a great artist, had given his love to her because he had thought her great. Then she had disappointed him. She had been shallow and unworthy. And, yet, a feeling of infinite regret came over him, as he thought of her lying at his feet sobbing like a little child. He remembered with what callousness he had watched her. Why had he been made like that? Why had such a soul been given to him? But he had suffered also. During the three terrible hours that the play had lasted, he had lived centuries of pain, æon upon æon of torture. His life was well worth hers. She had marred him for a moment, if he had wounded her for an age. Besides, women were better suited to bear sorrow than men. They lived on their emotions. They only thought of their emotions. When they took lovers, it was merely to have someone with whom they could have scenes. Lord Henry had told him that, and Lord Henry knew what women were. Why should he trouble about Sibyl Vane? She was nothing to him now.

But the picture? What was he to say of that? It held the secret of his life, and told his story. It had taught him to love his own beauty. Would it teach him to loathe his own soul? Would he ever look at it again?

No; it was merely an illusion wrought on the troubled senses. The horrible night that he had passed had left phantoms behind it. Suddenly there had fallen upon his brain that tiny scarlet speck that makes men mad. The picture had not changed. It was folly to think so.

Yet it was watching him, with its beautiful marred face and its cruel smile. Its bright hair gleamed in the early sunlight. Its blue eyes met his own. A sense of infinite pity, not for himself, but for the painted image of himself, came over him. It had altered already, and would alter more. Its gold would wither into grey. Its red and white roses would die. For every sin that he committed, a stain would fleck and wreck its fairness. But he would not sin. The picture, changed or unchanged, would be to him the visible emblem of conscience. He would resist temptation. He would not see Lord Henry any more—would not, at any rate, listen to those subtle poisonous theories that in Basil Hallward's garden had first stirred within him the passion for impossible things. He would go back to Sibyl Vane, make her amends, marry her, try to love her again. Yes, it was his duty to do so. She must have suffered more than he had. Poor child! He had been selfish and cruel to her. The fascination that she had exercised over him would return. They would be happy together. His life with her would be beautiful and pure.

He got up from his chair, and drew a large screen right in front of the portrait, shuddering as he glanced at it. "How horrible!" he murmured to himself, and he walked across to the window and opened it. When he stepped out on to the grass, he drew a deep breath. The fresh morning air seemed to drive away all his sombre passions. He thought only of Sibyl. A faint echo of his love came back to him. He repeated her name over and over again. The birds that were singing in the dew-drenched garden seemed to be telling the flowers about her.

CHAPTER VIII

It was long past noon when he awoke. His valet had crept several times on tiptoe into the room to see if he was stirring, and had wondered what made his young master sleep so late. Finally his bell sounded, and Victor came softly in with a cup of tea, and a pile of letters, on a small tray of old Sèvres china, and drew back the olive-satin curtains, with their shimmering blue lining, that hung in front of the three tall windows.

"Monsieur has well slept this morning," he said, smiling.

"What o'clock is it, Victor?" asked Dorian Gray, drowsily.

"One hour and a quarter, Monsieur."

How late it was! He sat up, and, having sipped some tea, turned over his letters. One of them was from Lord Henry, and had been brought by hand that morning. He hesitated for a moment, and then put it aside. The others he opened listlessly. They contained the usual collection of cards, invitations to dinner, tickets for private views, programmes of charity concerts, and the like, that are showered on fashionable young men every morning during the season. There was a rather heavy bill, for a chased silver Louis-Quinze toilet-set, that he had not yet had the courage to send on to his guardians, who were extremely old-fashioned people and did not realise that we live in an age when unnecessary things are our only necessities; and there were several very courteously worded communications from Jermyn Street money-lenders offering to advance any sum of money at a moment's notice and at the most reasonable rates of interest.

After about ten minutes he got up, and, throwing on an elaborate dressing-gown of silk-embroidered cashmere wool, passed into the onyx-paved bathroom. The cool water refreshed him after his long sleep. He seemed to have forgotten all that he had gone through. A dim sense of having taken part in some strange tragedy came to him once or twice, but there was the unreality of a dream about it.

As soon as he was dressed, he went into the library and sat down to a light French breakfast, that had been laid out for him on a small round table close to the open window. It was an exquisite day. The warm air seemed laden with spices. A bee flew in, and buzzed round the blue-dragon bowl that, filled with sulphur-yellow roses, stood before him. He felt perfectly happy.

Suddenly his eye fell on the screen that he had placed in front of the portrait, and he started.

"Too cold for Monsieur?" asked his valet, putting an omelette on the table. "I shut the window?"

Dorian shook his head. "I am not cold," he murmured.

Was it all true? Had the portrait really changed? Or had it been simply his own imagination that had made him see a look of evil where there had been a look of joy? Surely a painted canvas could not alter? The thing was absurd. It would serve as a tale to tell Basil some day. It would make him smile.

And, yet, how vivid was his recollection of the whole thing! First in the dim twilight, and then in the bright dawn, he had seen the touch of cruelty round the warped lips. He almost dreaded his valet leaving the room. He knew that when he was alone he would have to examine the portrait. He was afraid of certainty. When the coffee and cigarettes had been brought and the man turned to go, he felt a wild desire to tell him to remain. As the door was closing behind him he called him back. The man stood waiting for his orders. Dorian looked at him for a moment. "I am not at home to anyone, Victor," he said, with a sigh. The man bowed and retired.

Then he rose from the table, lit a cigarette, and flung himself down on a luxuriously-cushioned couch that stood facing the screen. The screen was an old one, of gilt Spanish leather, stamped and wrought with a rather florid Louis-Quatorze pattern. He scanned it curiously, wondering if ever before it had concealed the secret of a man's life.

Should he move it aside, after all? Why not let it stay there? What was the use of knowing? If the thing was true, it was terrible. If it was not true, why trouble about it? But what if, by some fate or deadlier chance, eyes other than his spied behind, and saw the horrible change? What should he do if Basil Hallward came and asked to look at his own picture? Basil would be sure to do that. No; the thing had to be examined, and at once. Anything would be better than this dreadful state of doubt.

He got up, and locked both doors. At least he would be alone when he looked upon the mask of his shame. Then he drew the screen aside, and saw himself face to face. It was perfectly true. The portrait had altered.

As he often remembered afterwards, and always with no small wonder, he found himself at first gazing at the portrait with a feeling of almost scientific interest. That such a change should have taken place was incredible to him. And yet it was a fact. Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms, that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas, and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what that soul thought, they realized?—that what it dreamed, they made true? Or was there some other, more terrible reason? He shuddered, and felt afraid, and, going back to the couch, lay there, gazing at the picture in sickened horror.

One thing, however, he felt that it had done for him. It had made him conscious how unjust, how cruel, he had been to Sibyl Vane. It was not too late to make reparation for that. She could still be his wife. His unreal and selfish love would yield to some higher influence, would be transformed into some nobler passion, and the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him would be a guide to him through life, would be to him what holiness is to some, and conscience to others, and the fear of God to us all. There were opiates for remorse, drugs that could lull the moral sense to sleep. But here was a visible symbol of the degradation of sin. Here was an ever-present sign of the ruin men brought upon their souls.

Three o'clock struck, and four, and the half-hour rang its double chime, but Dorian Gray did not stir. He was trying to gather up the scarlet threads of life, and to weave them into a pattern; to find his way through the

sanguine labyrinth of passion through which he was wandering. He did not know what to do, or what to think. Finally, he went over to the table, and wrote a passionate letter to the girl he had loved, imploring her forgiveness, and accusing himself of madness. He covered page after page with wild words of sorrow, and wilder words of pain. There is a luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we feel that no one else has a right to blame us. It is the confession, not the priest, that gives us absolution. When Dorian had finished the letter, he felt that he had been forgiven.

Suddenly there came a knock to the door, and he heard Lord Henry's voice outside. "My dear boy, I must see you. Let me in at once. I can't bear your shutting yourself up like this."

He made no answer at first, but remained quite still. The knocking still continued, and grew louder. Yes, it was better to let Lord Henry in, and to explain to him the new life he was going to lead, to quarrel with him if it became necessary to quarrel, to part if parting was inevitable. He jumped up, drew the screen hastily across the picture, and unlocked the door.

"I am so sorry for it all, Dorian," said Lord Henry, as he entered. "But you must not think too much about it."

"Do you mean about Sibyl Vane?" asked the lad.

"Yes, of course," answered Lord Henry, sinking into a chair, and slowly pulling off his yellow gloves. "It is dreadful, from one point of view, but it was not your fault. Tell me, did you go behind and see her, after the play was over?"

"Yes."

"I felt sure you had. Did you make a scene with her?"

"I was brutal, Harry—perfectly brutal. But it is all right now. I am not sorry for anything that has happened. It has taught me to know myself better."

"Ah, Dorian, I am so glad you take it in that way! I was afraid I would find you plunged in remorse, and tearing that nice curly hair of yours."

"I have got through all that," said Dorian, shaking his head, and smiling. "I am perfectly happy now. I know what conscience is, to begin with. It is not what you told me it was. It is the divinest thing in us. Don't sneer at it, Harry, any more—at least not before me. I want to be good. I can't bear the idea of my soul being hideous."

"A very charming artistic basis for ethics, Dorian! I congratulate you on it. But how are you going to begin?"

"By marrying Sibyl Vane."

"Marrying Sibyl Vane!" cried Lord Henry, standing up, and looking at him in perplexed amazement. "But, my dear Dorian——"

"Yes, Harry, I know what you are going to say. Something dreadful about marriage. Don't say it. Don't ever say things of that kind to me again. Two days ago I asked Sibyl to marry me. I am not going to break my word to her. She is to be my wife!"

"Your wife! Dorian!... Didn't you get my letter? I wrote to you this morning, and sent the note down, by my own man."

"Your letter? Oh, yes, I remember. I have not read it yet, Harry. I was afraid there might be something in it that I wouldn't like. You cut life to pieces with your epigrams."

"You know nothing then?"

"What do you mean?"

Lord Henry walked across the room, and, sitting down by Dorian Gray, took both his hands in his own, and held them tightly. "Dorian," he said, "my letter—don't be frightened—was to tell you that Sibyl Vane is dead."

A cry of pain broke from the lad's lips, and he leaped to his feet, tearing his hands away from Lord Henry's grasp. "Dead! Sibyl dead! It is not true! It is a horrible lie! How dare you say it?"

"It is quite true, Dorian," said Lord Henry, gravely. "It is in all the morning papers. I wrote down to you to ask you not to see anyone till I came. There will have to be an inquest, of course, and you must not be mixed up in it. Things like that make a man fashionable in Paris. But in London people are so prejudiced. Here, one should never make one's *début* with a scandal. One should reserve that to give an interest to one's old age. I suppose they don't know your name at the theatre? If they don't, it is all right. Did anyone see you going round to her room? That is an important point."

Dorian did not answer for a few moments. He was dazed with horror. Finally he stammered in a stifled voice, "Harry, did you say an inquest? What did you mean by that? Did Sibyl——? Oh, Harry, I can't bear it! But be quick. Tell me everything at once."

"I have no doubt it was not an accident, Dorian, though it must be put in that way to the public. It seems that as she was leaving the theatre with her mother, about half-past twelve or so, she said she had forgotten something upstairs. They waited some time for her, but she did not come down again. They ultimately found her lying dead on the floor of her dressing-room. She had swallowed something by mistake, some dreadful thing they use at theatres. I don't know what it was, but it had either prussic acid or white lead in it. I should fancy it was prussic acid, as she seems to have died instantaneously."

"Harry, Harry, it is terrible!" cried the lad.

"Yes; it is very tragic, of course, but you must not get yourself mixed up in it. I see by *The Standard* that she was seventeen. I should have thought she was almost younger than that. She looked such a child, and seemed to know so little about acting. Dorian, you mustn't let this thing get on your nerves. You must come and dine with me, and afterwards we will look in at the Opera. It is a Patti night, and everybody will be there. You can come to my sister's box. She has got some smart women with her."

"So I have murdered Sibyl Vane," said Dorian Gray, half to himself—"murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife. Yet

the roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden. And to-night I am to dine with you, and then go on to the Opera, and sup somewhere, I suppose, afterwards. How extraordinarily dramatic life is! If I had read all this in a book, Harry, I think I would have wept over it. Somehow, now that it has happened actually, and to me, it seems far too wonderful for tears. Here is the first passionate love-letter I have ever written in my life. Strange, that my first passionate love-letter should have been addressed to a dead girl. Can they feel, I wonder, those white silent people we call the dead? Sibyl! Can she feel, or know, or listen? Oh, Harry, how I loved her once! It seems years ago to me now. She was everything to me. Then came that dreadful night—was it really only last night?—when she played so badly, and my heart almost broke. She explained it all to me. It was terribly pathetic. But I was not moved a bit. I thought her shallow. Suddenly something happened that made me afraid. I can't tell you what it was, but it was terrible. I said I would go back to her. I felt I had done wrong. And now she is dead. My God! my God! Harry, what shall I do? You don't know the danger I am in, and there is nothing to keep me straight. She would have done that for me. She had no right to kill herself. It was selfish of her."

"My dear Dorian," answered Lord Henry, taking a cigarette from his case, and producing a gold-latten matchbox, "the only way a woman can ever reform a man is by boring him so completely that he loses all possible interest in life. If you had married this girl you would have been wretched. Of course you would have treated her kindly. One can always be kind to people about whom one cares nothing. But she would have soon found out that you were absolutely indifferent to her. And when a woman finds that out about her husband, she either becomes dreadfully dowdy, or wears very smart bonnets that some other woman's husband has to pay for. I say nothing about the social mistake, which would have been abject, which, of course, I would not have allowed, but I assure you that in any case the whole thing would have been an absolute failure."

"I suppose it would," muttered the lad, walking up and down the room, and looking horribly pale. "But I thought it was my duty. It is not my fault that this terrible tragedy has prevented my doing what was right. I

remember your saying once that there is a fatality about good resolutions—that they are always made too late. Mine certainly were."

"Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific laws. Their origin is pure vanity. Their result is absolutely *nil*. They give us, now and then, some of those luxurious sterile emotions that have a certain charm for the weak. That is all that can be said for them. They are simply cheques that men draw on a bank where they have no account."

"Harry," cried Dorian Gray, coming over and sitting down beside him, "why is it that I cannot feel this tragedy as much as I want to? I don't think I am heartless. Do you?"

"You have done too many foolish things during the last fortnight to be entitled to give yourself that name, Dorian," answered Lord Henry, with his sweet, melancholy smile.

The lad frowned. "I don't like that explanation, Harry," he rejoined, "but I am glad you don't think I am heartless. I am nothing of the kind. I know I am not. And yet I must admit that this thing that has happened does not affect me as it should. It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded."

"It is an interesting question," said Lord Henry, who found an exquisite pleasure in playing on the lad's unconscious egotism—"an extremely interesting question. I fancy that the true explanation is this. It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style. They affect us just as vulgarity affects us. They give us an impression of sheer brute force, and we revolt against that. Sometimes, however, a tragedy that possesses artistic elements of beauty crosses our lives. If these elements of beauty are real, the whole thing simply appeals to our sense of dramatic effect. Suddenly we find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are both. We watch ourselves, and the mere wonder of

the spectacle enthralls us. In the present case, what is it that has really happened? Someone has killed herself for love of you. I wish that I had ever had such an experience. It would have made me in love with love for the rest of my life. The people who have adored me—there have not been very many, but there have been some—have always insisted on living on, long after I had ceased to care for them, or they to care for me. They have become stout and tedious, and when I meet them they go in at once for reminiscences. That awful memory of woman! What a fearful thing it is! And what an utter intellectual stagnation it reveals! One should absorb the colour of life, but one should never remember its details. Details are always vulgar."

"I must sow poppies in my garden," sighed Dorian.

"There is no necessity," rejoined his companion. "Life has always poppies in her hands. Of course, now and then things linger. I once wore nothing but violets all through one season, as a form of artistic mourning for a romance that would not die. Ultimately, however, it did die. I forget what killed it. I think it was her proposing to sacrifice the whole world for me. That is always a dreadful moment. It fills one with the terror of eternity. Well—would you believe it?—a week ago, at Lady Hampshire's, I found myself seated at dinner next the lady in question, and she insisted on going over the whole thing again, and digging up the past, and raking up the future. I had buried my romance in a bed of asphodel. She dragged it out again, and assured me that I had spoiled her life. I am bound to state that she ate an enormous dinner, so I did not feel any anxiety. But what a lack of taste she showed! The one charm of the past is that it is the past. But women never know when the curtain has fallen. They always want a sixth act, and as soon as the interest of the play is entirely over they propose to continue it. If they were allowed their own way, every comedy would have a tragic ending, and every tragedy would culminate in a farce. They are charmingly artificial, but they have no sense of art. You are more fortunate than I am. I assure you, Dorian, that not one of the women I have known would have done for me what Sibyl Vane did for you. Ordinary women always console themselves. Some of them do it by going in for sentimental colours. Never trust a woman who wears mauve, whatever her age may be,

or a woman over thirty-five who is fond of pink ribbons. It always means that they have a history. Others find a great consolation in suddenly discovering the good qualities of their husbands. They flaunt their conjugal felicity in one's face, as if it were the most fascinating of sins. Religion consoles some. Its mysteries have all the charm of a flirtation, a woman once told me; and I can quite understand it. Besides, nothing makes one so vain as being told that one is a sinner. Conscience makes egotists of us all. Yes; there is really no end to the consolations that women find in modern life. Indeed, I have not mentioned the most important one."

"What is that, Harry?" said the lad, listlessly.

"Oh, the obvious consolation. Taking someone else's admirer when one loses one's own. In good society that always whitewashes a woman. But really, Dorian, how different Sibyl Vane must have been from all the women one meets! There is something to me quite beautiful about her death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They make one believe in the reality of the things we all play with, such as romance, passion, and love."

"I was terribly cruel to her. You forget that."

"I am afraid that women appreciate cruelty, downright cruelty, more than anything else. They have wonderfully primitive instincts. We have emancipated them, but they remain slaves looking for their masters, all the same. They love being dominated. I am sure you were splendid. I have never seen you really and absolutely angry, but I can fancy how delightful you looked. And, after all, you said something to me the day before yesterday that seemed to me at the time to be merely fanciful, but that I see now was absolutely true, and it holds the key to everything."

"What was that, Harry?"

"You said to me that Sibyl Vane represented to you all the heroines of romance—that she was Desdemona one night, and Ophelia the other; that if she died as Juliet, she came to life as Imogen."

"She will never come to life again now," muttered the lad, burying his face in his hands.

"No, she will never come to life. She has played her last part. But you must think of that lonely death in the tawdry dressing-room simply as a strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy, as a wonderful scene from Webster, or Ford, or Cyril Tourneur. The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died. To you at least she was always a dream, a phantom that flitted through Shakespeare's plays and left them lovelier for its presence, a reed through which Shakespeare's music sounded richer and more full of joy. The moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away. Mourn for Ophelia, if you like. Put ashes on your head because Cordelia was strangled. Cry out against Heaven because the daughter of Brabantio died. But don't waste your tears over Sibyl Vane. She was less real than they are."

There was a silence. The evening darkened in the room. Noiselessly, and with silver feet, the shadows crept in from the garden. The colours faded wearily out of things.

After some time Dorian Gray looked up. "You have explained me to myself, Harry," he murmured, with something of a sigh of relief. "I felt all that you have said, but somehow I was afraid of it, and I could not express it to myself. How well you know me! But we will not talk again of what has happened. It has been a marvellous experience. That is all. I wonder if life has still in store for me anything as marvellous."

"Life has everything in store for you, Dorian. There is nothing that you, with your extraordinary good looks, will not be able to do."

"But suppose, Harry, I became haggard, and old, and wrinkled? What then?"

"Ah, then," said Lord Henry, rising to go—"then, my dear Dorian, you would have to fight for your victories. As it is, they are brought to you. No, you must keep your good looks. We live in an age that reads too much to be wise, and that thinks too much to be beautiful. We cannot spare you.

And now you had better dress, and drive down to the club. We are rather late, as it is."

"I think I shall join you at the Opera, Harry. I feel too tired to eat anything. What is the number of your sister's box?"

"Twenty-seven, I believe. It is on the grand tier. You will see her name on the door. But I am sorry you won't come and dine."

"I don't feel up to it," said Dorian, listlessly. "But I am awfully obliged to you for all that you have said to me. You are certainly my best friend. No one has ever understood me as you have."

"We are only at the beginning of our friendship, Dorian," answered Lord Henry, shaking him by the hand. "Good-bye. I shall see you before nine-thirty, I hope. Remember, Patti is singing."

As he closed the door behind him, Dorian Gray touched the bell, and in a few minutes Victor appeared with the lamps and drew the blinds down. He waited impatiently for him to go. The man seemed to take an interminable time over everything.

As soon as he had left, he rushed to the screen, and drew it back. No; there was no further change in the picture. It had received the news of Sibyl Vane's death before he had known of it himself. It was conscious of the events of life as they occurred. The vicious cruelty that marred the fine lines of the mouth had, no doubt, appeared at the very moment that the girl had drunk the poison, whatever it was. Or was it indifferent to results? Did it merely take cognizance of what passed within the soul? He wondered, and hoped that some day he would see the change taking place before his very eyes, shuddering as he hoped it.

Poor Sibyl! what a romance it had all been! She had often mimicked death on the stage. Then Death himself had touched her, and taken her with him. How had she played that dreadful last scene? Had she cursed him, as she died? No; she had died for love of him, and love would always be a sacrament to him now. She had atoned for everything, by the sacrifice she had made of her life. He would not think any more of what she had made

him go through, on that horrible night at the theatre. When he thought of her, it would be as a wonderful tragic figure sent on to the world's stage to show the supreme reality of Love. A wonderful tragic figure? Tears came to his eyes as he remembered her childlike look, and winsome fanciful ways, and shy tremulous grace. He brushed them away hastily, and looked again at the picture.

He felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him—life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins—he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all.

A feeling of pain crept over him as he thought of the desecration that was in store for the fair face on the canvas. Once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smiled so cruelly at him. Morning after morning he had sat before the portrait, wondering at its beauty, almost enamoured of it, as it seemed to him at times. Was it to alter now with every mood to which he yielded? Was it to become a monstrous and loathsome thing, to be hidden away in a locked room, to be shut out from the sunlight that had so often touched to brighter gold the waving wonder of its hair? The pity of it! the pity of it!

For a moment he thought of praying that the horrible sympathy that existed between him and the picture might cease. It had changed in answer to a prayer; perhaps in answer to a prayer it might remain unchanged. And, yet, who, that knew anything about Life, would surrender the chance of remaining always young, however fantastic that chance might be, or with what fateful consequences it might be fraught? Besides, was it really under his control? Had it indeed been prayer that had produced the substitution? Might there not be some curious scientific reason for it all? If thought could exercise its influence upon a living organism, might not thought exercise an influence upon dead and inorganic things? Nay, without thought or conscious desire, might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love of strange affinity? But the reason was of no importance. He would never

again tempt by a prayer any terrible power. If the picture was to alter, it was to alter. That was all. Why inquire too closely into it?

For there would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul. And when winter came upon it, he would still be standing where spring trembles on the verge of summer. When the blood crept from its face, and left behind a pallid mask of chalk with leaden eyes, he would keep the glamour of boyhood. Not one blossom of his loveliness would ever fade. Not one pulse of his life would ever weaken. Like the gods of the Greeks, he would be strong, and fleet, and joyous. What did it matter what happened to the coloured image on the canvas? He would be safe. That was everything.

He drew the screen back into its former place in front of the picture, smiling as he did so, and passed into his bedroom, where his valet was already waiting for him. An hour later he was at the Opera, and Lord Henry was leaning over his chair.

CHAPTER IX

As he was sitting at breakfast next morning, Basil Hallward was shown into the room.

"I am so glad I have found you, Dorian," he said, gravely. "I called last night, and they told me you were at the Opera. Of course I knew that was impossible. But I wish you had left word where you had really gone to. I passed a dreadful evening, half afraid that one tragedy might be followed by another. I think you might have telegraphed for me when you heard of it first. I read of it quite by chance in a late edition of *The Globe*, that I picked up at the club. I came here at once, and was miserable at not finding you. I can't tell you how heartbroken I am about the whole thing. I know what you must suffer. But where were you? Did you go down and see the girl's mother? For a moment I thought of following you there. They gave the address in the paper. Somewhere in the Euston Road, isn't it? But I was afraid of intruding upon a sorrow that I could not lighten. Poor woman! What a state she must be in! And her only child, too! What did she say about it all?"

"My dear Basil, how do I know?" murmured Dorian Gray, sipping some pale-yellow wine from a delicate gold-beaded bubble of Venetian glass, and looking dreadfully bored. "I was at the Opera. You should have come on there. I met Lady Gwendolen, Harry's sister, for the first time. We were in her box. She is perfectly charming; and Patti sang divinely. Don't talk about horrid subjects. If one doesn't talk about a thing, it has never happened. It is simply expression, as Harry says, that gives reality to things. I may mention that she was not the woman's only child. There is a son, a charming fellow, I believe. But he is not on the stage. He is a sailor, or something. And now, tell me about yourself and what you are painting."

"You went to the Opera?" said Hallward, speaking very slowly, and with a strained touch of pain in his voice. "You went to the Opera while Sibyl

Vane was lying dead in some sordid lodging? You can talk to me of other women being charming, and of Patti singing divinely, before the girl you loved has even the quiet of a grave to sleep in? Why, man, there are horrors in store for that little white body of hers!"

"Stop, Basil! I won't hear it!" cried Dorian, leaping to his feet. "You must not tell me about things. What is done is done. What is past is past."

"You call yesterday the past?"

"What has the actual lapse of time got to do with it? It is only shallow people who require years to get rid of an emotion. A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure. I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them."

"Dorian, this is horrible! Something has changed you completely. You look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come down to my studio to sit for his picture. But you were simple, natural, and affectionate then. You were the most unspoiled creature in the whole world. Now, I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you. It is all Harry's influence. I see that."

The lad flushed up, and, going to the window, looked out for a few moments on the green, flickering, sun-lashed garden. "I owe a great deal to Harry, Basil," he said, at last—"more than I owe to you. You only taught me to be vain."

"Well, I am punished for that, Dorian—or shall be some day."

"I don't know what you mean, Basil," he exclaimed, turning round. "I don't know what you want. What do you want?"

"I want the Dorian Gray I used to paint," said the artist, sadly.

"Basil," said the lad, going over to him, and putting his hand on his shoulder, "you have come too late. Yesterday when I heard that Sibyl Vane had killed herself——"

"Killed herself! Good heavens! is there no doubt about that?" cried Hallward, looking up at him with an expression of horror.

"My dear Basil! Surely you don't think it was a vulgar accident? Of course she killed herself."

The elder man buried his face in his hands. "How fearful," he muttered, and a shudder ran through him.

"No," said Dorian Gray, "there is nothing fearful about it. It is one of the great romantic tragedies of the age. As a rule, people who act lead the most commonplace lives. They are good husbands, or faithful wives, or something tedious. You know what I mean—middle-class virtue, and all that kind of thing. How different Sibyl was! She lived her finest tragedy. She was always a heroine. The last night she played—the night you saw her—she acted badly because she had known the reality of love. When she knew its unreality, she died, as Juliet might have died. She passed again into the sphere of art. There is something of the martyr about her. Her death has all the pathetic uselessness of martyrdom, all its wasted beauty. But, as I was saying, you must not think I have not suffered. If you had come in yesterday at a particular moment—about half-past five, perhaps, or a quarter to six—you would have found me in tears. Even Harry, who was here, who brought me the news, in fact, had no idea what I was going through. I suffered immensely. Then it passed away. I cannot repeat an emotion. No one can, except sentimentalists. And you are awfully unjust, Basil. You come down here to console me. That is charming of you. You find me consoled, and you are furious. How like a sympathetic person! You remind me of a story Harry told me about a certain philanthropist who spent twenty years of his life in trying to get some grievance redressed, or some unjust law altered—I forget exactly what it was. Finally he succeeded, and nothing could exceed his disappointment. He had absolutely nothing to do, almost died of *ennui*, and became a confirmed misanthrope. And besides, my dear old Basil, if you really want to console me, teach me rather to forget what has happened, or to see it from the proper artistic point of view. Was it not Gautier who used to write about *la consolation des arts*? I remember picking up a little vellum-covered book in your studio one day and chancing on that delightful phrase. Well, I am

not like that young man you told me of when we were down at Marlow together, the young man who used to say that yellow satin could console one for all the miseries of life. I love beautiful things that one can touch and handle. Old brocades, green bronzes, lacquer-work, carved ivories, exquisite surroundings, luxury, pomp, there is much to be got from all these. But the artistic temperament that they create, or at any rate reveal, is still more to me. To become the spectator of one's own life, as Harry says, is to escape the suffering of life. I know you are surprised at my talking to you like this. You have not realised how I have developed. I was a schoolboy when you knew me. I am a man now. I have new passions, new thoughts, new ideas. I am different, but you must not like me less. I am changed, but you must always be my friend. Of course I am very fond of Harry. But I know that you are better than he is. You are not stronger—you are too much afraid of life—but you are better. And how happy we used to be together! Don't leave me, Basil, and don't quarrel with me. I am what I am. There is nothing more to be said."

The painter felt strangely moved. The lad was infinitely dear to him, and his personality had been the great turning-point in his art. He could not bear the idea of reproaching him any more. After all, his indifference was probably merely a mood that would pass away. There was so much in him that was good, so much in him that was noble.

"Well, Dorian," he said, at length, with a sad smile, "I won't speak to you again about this horrible thing, after to-day. I only trust your name won't be mentioned in connection with it. The inquest is to take place this afternoon. Have they summoned you?"

Dorian shook his head and a look of annoyance passed over his face at the mention of the word "inquest." There was something so crude and vulgar about everything of the kind. "They don't know my name," he answered.

"But surely she did?"

"Only my Christian name, and that I am quite sure she never mentioned to anyone. She told me once that they were all rather curious to learn who

I was, and that she invariably told them my name was Prince Charming. It was pretty of her. You must do me a drawing of Sibyl, Basil. I should like to have something more of her than the memory of a few kisses and some broken pathetic words."

"I will try and do something, Dorian, if it would please you. But you must come and sit to me yourself again. I can't get on without you."

"I can never sit to you again, Basil. It is impossible!" he exclaimed, starting back.

The painter stared at him. "My dear boy, what nonsense!" he cried. "Do you mean to say you don't like what I did of you? Where is it? Why have you pulled the screen in front of it? Let me look at it. It is the best thing I have ever done. Do take the screen away, Dorian. It is simply disgraceful of your servant hiding my work like that. I felt the room looked different as I came in."

"My servant has nothing to do with it, Basil. You don't imagine I let him arrange my room for me? He settles my flowers for me sometimes—that is all. No; I did it myself. The light was too strong on the portrait."

"Too strong! Surely not, my dear fellow? It is an admirable place for it. Let me see it." And Hallward walked towards the corner of the room.

A cry of terror broke from Dorian Gray's lips, and he rushed between the painter and the screen. "Basil," he said, looking very pale, "you must not look at it. I don't wish you to."

"Not look at my own work! you are not serious. Why shouldn't I look at it?" exclaimed Hallward, laughing.

"If you try to look at it, Basil, on my word of honour I will never speak to you again as long as I live. I am quite serious. I don't offer any explanation, and you are not to ask for any. But, remember, if you touch this screen, everything is over between us."

Hallward was thunderstruck. He looked at Dorian Gray in absolute amazement. He had never seen him like this before. The lad was actually

pallid with rage. His hands were clenched, and the pupils of his eyes were like disks of blue fire. He was trembling all over.

"Dorian!"

"Don't speak!"

"But what is the matter? Of course I won't look at it if you don't want me to," he said, rather coldly, turning on his heel, and going over towards the window. "But, really, it seems rather absurd that I shouldn't see my own work, especially as I am going to exhibit it in Paris in the autumn. I shall probably have to give it another coat of varnish before that, so I must see it some day, and why not to-day?"

"To exhibit it? You want to exhibit it?" exclaimed Dorian Gray, a strange sense of terror creeping over him. Was the world going to be shown his secret? Were people to gape at the mystery of his life? That was impossible. Something—he did not know what—had to be done at once.

"Yes; I don't suppose you will object to that. George Petit is going to collect all my best pictures for a special exhibition in the Rue de Sèze, which will open the first week in October. The portrait will only be away a month. I should think you could easily spare it for that time. In fact, you are sure to be out of town. And if you keep it always behind a screen, you can't care much about it."

Dorian Gray passed his hand over his forehead. There were beads of perspiration there. He felt that he was on the brink of a horrible danger. "You told me a month ago that you would never exhibit it," he cried. "Why have you changed your mind? You people who go in for being consistent have just as many moods as others have. The only difference is that your moods are rather meaningless. You can't have forgotten that you assured me most solemnly that nothing in the world would induce you to send it to any exhibition. You told Harry exactly the same thing." He stopped suddenly, and a gleam of light came into his eyes. He remembered that Lord Henry had said to him once, half seriously and half in jest, "If you want to have a strange quarter of an hour, get Basil to tell you why he won't exhibit your picture. He told me why he wouldn't, and it was a

revelation to me." Yes, perhaps Basil, too, had his secret. He would ask him and try.

"Basil," he said, coming over quite close, and looking him straight in the face, "we have each of us a secret. Let me know yours and I shall tell you mine. What was your reason for refusing to exhibit my picture?"

The painter shuddered in spite of himself. "Dorian, if I told you, you might like me less than you do, and you would certainly laugh at me. I could not bear your doing either of those two things. If you wish me never to look at your picture again, I am content. I have always you to look at. If you wish the best work I have ever done to be hidden from the world, I am satisfied. Your friendship is dearer to me than any fame or reputation."

"No, Basil, you must tell me," insisted Dorian Gray. "I think I have a right to know." His feeling of terror had passed away, and curiosity had taken its place. He was determined to find out Basil Hallward's mystery.

"Let us sit down, Dorian," said the painter, looking troubled. "Let us sit down. And just answer me one question. Have you noticed in the picture something curious?—something that probably at first did not strike you, but that revealed itself to you suddenly?"

"Basil!" cried the lad, clutching the arms of his chair with trembling hands, and gazing at him with wild, startled eyes.

"I see you did. Don't speak. Wait till you hear what I have to say. Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When you were away from me you were still present in my art.... Of course I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it. I hardly understood it myself. I only knew that I had seen perfection face to face, and that the world had become wonderful to my eyes—too wonderful, perhaps, for in such mad worships there is peril, the peril of

losing them, no less than the peril of keeping them.... Weeks and weeks went on, and I grew more and more absorbed in you. Then came a new development. I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You had leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face. And it had all been what art should be, unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it. Then it was that I resolved never to allow the picture to be exhibited. You were a little annoyed; but then you did not realise all that it meant to me. Harry, to whom I talked about it, laughed at me. But I did not mind that. When the picture was finished, and I sat alone with it, I felt that I was right.... Well, after a few days the thing left my studio, and as soon as I had got rid of the intolerable fascination of its presence it seemed to me that I had been foolish in imagining that I had seen anything in it, more than that you were extremely good-looking, and that I could paint. Even now I cannot help feeling that it is a mistake to think that the passion one feels in creation is ever really shown in the work one creates. Art is always more abstract than we fancy. Form and colour tell us of form and colour—that is all. It often seems to me that art conceals the artist far more completely than it ever reveals him. And so when I got this offer from Paris I determined to make your portrait the principal thing in my exhibition. It never occurred to me that you would refuse. I see now that you were right. The picture cannot be shown. You must not be angry with me, Dorian, for what I have told you. As I said to Harry, once, you are made to be worshipped."

Dorian Gray drew a long breath. The colour came back to his cheeks, and a smile played about his lips. The peril was over. He was safe for the time. Yet he could not help feeling infinite pity for the painter who had just made this strange confession to him, and wondered if he himself would ever be so dominated by the personality of a friend. Lord Henry had the charm of being very dangerous. But that was all. He was too clever and too cynical to be really fond of. Would there ever be someone who would fill him with a strange idolatry? Was that one of the things that life had in store?

"It is extraordinary to me, Dorian," said Hallward, "that you should have seen this in the portrait. Did you really see it?"

"I saw something in it," he answered, "something that seemed to me very curious."

"Well, you don't mind my looking at the thing now?"

Dorian shook his head. "You must not ask me that, Basil. I could not possibly let you stand in front of that picture."

"You will some day, surely?"

"Never."

"Well, perhaps you are right. And now good-bye, Dorian. You have been the one person in my life who has really influenced my art. Whatever I have done that is good, I owe to you. Ah! you don't know what it cost me to tell you all that I have told you."

"My dear Basil," said Dorian, "what have you told me? Simply that you felt that you admired me too much. That is not even a compliment."

"It was not intended as a compliment. It was a confession. Now that I have made it, something seems to have gone out of me. Perhaps one should never put one's worship into words."

"It was a very disappointing confession."

"Why, what did you expect, Dorian? You didn't see anything else in the picture, did you? There was nothing else to see?"

"No; there was nothing else to see. Why do you ask? But you mustn't talk about worship. It is foolish. You and I are friends, Basil, and we must always remain so."

"You have got Harry," said the painter, sadly.

"Oh, Harry!" cried the lad, with a ripple of laughter. "Harry spends his days in saying what is incredible, and his evenings in doing what is improbable. Just the sort of life I would like to lead. But still I don't think I would go to Harry if I were in trouble. I would sooner go to you, Basil."

"You will sit to me again?"

"Impossible!"

"You spoil my life as an artist by refusing, Dorian. No man came across two ideal things. Few come across one."

"I can't explain it to you, Basil, but I must never sit to you again. There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own. I will come and have tea with you. That will be just as pleasant."

"Pleasanter for you, I am afraid," murmured Hallward, regretfully. "And now good-bye. I am sorry you won't let me look at the picture once again. But that can't be helped. I quite understand what you feel about it."

As he left the room, Dorian Gray smiled to himself. Poor Basil! how little he knew of the true reason! And how strange it was that, instead of having been forced to reveal his own secret, he had succeeded, almost by chance, in wresting a secret from his friend! How much that strange confession explained to him! The painter's absurd fits of jealousy, his wild devotion, his extravagant panegyrics, his curious reticences—he understood them all now, and he felt sorry. There seemed to him to be something tragic in a friendship so coloured by romance.

He sighed, and touched the bell. The portrait must be hidden away at all costs. He could not run such a risk of discovery again. It had been mad of him to have allowed the thing to remain, even for an hour, in a room to which any of his friends had access.

CHAPTER X

When his servant entered, he looked at him steadfastly, and wondered if he had thought of peering behind the screen. The man was quite impassive, and waited for his orders. Dorian lit a cigarette, and walked over to the glass and glanced into it. He could see the reflection of Victor's face perfectly. It was like a placid mask of servility. There was nothing to be afraid of, there. Yet he thought it best to be on his guard.

Speaking very slowly, he told him to tell the housekeeper that he wanted to see her, and then to go to the frame-maker and ask him to send two of his men round at once. It seemed to him that as the man left the room his eyes wandered in the direction of the screen. Or was that merely his own fancy?

After a few moments, in her black silk dress, with old-fashioned thread mittens on her wrinkled hands, Mrs. Leaf bustled into the library. He asked her for the key of the schoolroom.

"The old schoolroom, Mr. Dorian?" she exclaimed. "Why, it is full of dust. I must get it arranged, and put straight before you go into it. It is not fit for you to see, sir. It is not, indeed."

"I don't want it put straight, Leaf. I only want the key."

"Well, sir, you'll be covered with cobwebs if you go into it. Why, it hasn't been opened for nearly five years, not since his lordship died."

He winced at the mention of his grandfather. He had hateful memories of him. "That does not matter," he answered. "I simply want to see the place

—that is all. Give me the key."

"And here is the key, sir," said the old lady, going over the contents of her bunch with tremulously uncertain hands. "Here is the key. I'll have it off the bunch in a moment. But you don't think of living up there, sir, and you so comfortable here?"

"No, no," he cried, petulantly. "Thank you, Leaf. That will do."

She lingered for a few moments, and was garrulous over some detail of the household. He sighed, and told her to manage things as she thought best. She left the room, wreathed in smiles.

As the door closed, Dorian put the key in his pocket, and looked round the room. His eye fell on a large, purple satin coverlet heavily embroidered with gold, a splendid piece of late seventeenth-century Venetian work that his grandfather had found in a convent near Bologna. Yes, that would serve to wrap the dreadful thing in. It had perhaps served often as a pall for the dead. Now it was to hide something that had a corruption of its own, worse than the corruption of death itself—something that would breed horrors and yet would never die. What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas. They would mar its beauty, and eat away its grace. They would defile it, and make it shameful. And yet the thing would still live on. It would be always alive.

He shuddered, and for a moment he regretted that he had not told Basil the true reason why he had wished to hide the picture away. Basil would have helped him to resist Lord Henry's influence, and the still more poisonous influences that came from his own temperament. The love that he bore him—for it was really love—had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself. Yes, Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now. The past could always be annihilated. Regret, denial, or forgetfulness could do that. But the future was inevitable. There were passions in him

that would find their terrible outlet, dreams that would make the shadow of their evil real.

He took up from the couch the great purple-and-gold texture that covered it, and, holding it in his hands, passed behind the screen. Was the face on the canvas viler than before? It seemed to him that it was unchanged; and yet his loathing of it was intensified. Gold hair, blue eyes, and rose-red lips—they all were there. It was simply the expression that had altered. That was horrible in its cruelty. Compared to what he saw in it of censure or rebuke, how shallow Basil's reproaches about Sibyl Vane had been!—how shallow, and of what little account! His own soul was looking out at him from the canvas and calling him to judgment. A look of pain came across him, and he flung the rich pall over the picture. As he did so, a knock came to the door. He passed out as his servant entered.

"The persons are here, Monsieur."

He felt that the man must be got rid of at once. He must not be allowed to know where the picture was being taken to. There was something sly about him, and he had thoughtful, treacherous eyes. Sitting down at the writing-table, he scribbled a note to Lord Henry, asking him to send him round something to read, and reminding him that they were to meet at eight-fifteen that evening.

"Wait for an answer," he said, handing it to him, "and show the men in here."

In two or three minutes there was another knock, and Mr. Hubbard himself, the celebrated frame-maker of South Audley Street, came in with a somewhat rough-looking young assistant. Mr. Hubbard was a florid, red-whiskered little man, whose admiration for art was considerably tempered by the inveterate impecuniosity of most of the artists who dealt with him. As a rule, he never left his shop. He waited for people to come to him. But he always made an exception in favour of Dorian Gray. There was something about Dorian that charmed everybody. It was a pleasure even to see him.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Gray?" he said, rubbing his fat freckled hands. "I thought I would do myself the honour of coming round in person. I have just got a beauty of a frame, sir. Picked it up at a sale. Old Florentine. Came from Fonthill, I believe. Admirably suited for a religious subject, Mr. Gray."

"I am so sorry you have given yourself the trouble of coming round, Mr. Hubbard. I shall certainly drop in and look at the frame—though I don't go in much at present for religious art—but to-day I only want a picture carried to the top of the house for me. It is rather heavy, so I thought I would ask you to lend me a couple of your men."

"No trouble at all, Mr. Gray. I am delighted to be of any service to you. Which is the work of art, sir?"

"This," replied Dorian, moving the screen back. "Can you move it, covering and all, just as it is? I don't want it to get scratched going upstairs."

"There will be no difficulty, sir," said the genial frame-maker, beginning, with the aid of his assistant, to unhook the picture from the long brass chains by which it was suspended. "And, now, where shall we carry it to, Mr. Gray?"

"I will show you the way, Mr. Hubbard, if you will kindly follow me. Or perhaps you had better go in front. I am afraid it is right at the top of the house. We will go up by the front staircase, as it is wider."

He held the door open for them, and they passed out into the hall and began the ascent. The elaborate character of the frame had made the picture extremely bulky, and now and then, in spite of the obsequious protests of Mr. Hubbard, who had the true tradesman's spirited dislike of seeing a gentleman doing anything useful, Dorian put his hand to it so as to help them.

"Something of a load to carry, sir," gasped the little man, when they reached the top landing. And he wiped his shiny forehead.

"I am afraid it is rather heavy," murmured Dorian, as he unlocked the door that opened into the room that was to keep for him the curious secret of his life and hide his soul from the eyes of men.

He had not entered the place for more than four years—not, indeed, since he had used it first as a play-room when he was a child, and then as a study when he grew somewhat older. It was a large, well-proportioned room, which had been specially built by the last Lord Kelso for the use of the little grandson whom, for his strange likeness to his mother, and also for other reasons, he had always hated and desired to keep at a distance. It appeared to Dorian to have but little changed. There was the huge Italian *cassone*, with its fantastically-painted panels and its tarnished gilt mouldings, in which he had so often hidden himself as a boy. There the satinwood bookcase filled with his dog-eared schoolbooks. On the wall behind it was hanging the same ragged Flemish tapestry, where a faded king and queen were playing chess in a garden, while a company of hawkers rode by, carrying hooded birds on their gauntleted wrists. How well he remembered it all! Every moment of his lonely childhood came back to him as he looked round. He recalled the stainless purity of his boyish life, and it seemed horrible to him that it was here the fatal portrait was to be hidden away. How little he had thought, in those dead days, of all that was in store for him!

But there was no other place in the house so secure from prying eyes as this. He had the key, and no one else could enter it. Beneath its purple pall, the face painted on the canvas could grow bestial, sodden, and unclean. What did it matter? No one could see it. He himself would not see it. Why should he watch the hideous corruption of his soul? He kept his youth—that was enough. And, besides, might not his nature grow finer, after all? There was no reason that the future should be so full of shame. Some love might come across his life, and purify him, and shield him from those sins that seemed to be already stirring in spirit and in flesh—those curious unpictured sins whose very mystery lent them their subtlety and their charm. Perhaps, some day, the cruel look would have passed away from the scarlet sensitive mouth, and he might show to the world Basil Hallward's masterpiece.

No; that was impossible. Hour by hour, and week by week, the thing upon the canvas was growing old. It might escape the hideousness of sin, but the hideousness of age was in store for it. The cheeks would become hollow or flaccid. Yellow crow's-feet would creep round the fading eyes and make them horrible. The hair would lose its brightness, the mouth would gape or droop, would be foolish or gross, as the mouths of old men are. There would be the wrinkled throat, the cold, blue-veined hands, the twisted body, that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so stern to him in his boyhood. The picture had to be concealed. There was no help for it.

"Bring it in, Mr. Hubbard, please," he said, wearily, turning round. "I am sorry I kept you so long. I was thinking of something else."

"Always glad to have a rest, Mr. Gray," answered the frame-maker, who was still gasping for breath. "Where shall we put it, sir?"

"Oh, anywhere. Here: this will do. I don't want to have it hung up. Just lean it against the wall. Thanks."

"Might one look at the work of art, sir?"

Dorian started. "It would not interest you, Mr. Hubbard," he said, keeping his eye on the man. He felt ready to leap upon him and fling him to the ground if he dared to lift the gorgeous hanging that concealed the secret of his life. "I shan't trouble you any more now. I am much obliged for your kindness in coming round."

"Not at all, not at all, Mr. Gray. Ever ready to do anything for you, sir." And Mr. Hubbard tramped downstairs, followed by the assistant, who glanced back at Dorian with a look of shy wonder in his rough, uncomely face. He had never seen anyone so marvellous.

When the sound of their footsteps had died away, Dorian locked the door, and put the key in his pocket. He felt safe now. No one would ever look upon the horrible thing. No eye but his would ever see his shame.

On reaching the library he found that it was just after five o'clock, and that the tea had been already brought up. On a little table of dark perfumed

wood thickly encrusted with nacre, a present from Lady Radley, his guardian's wife, a pretty professional invalid, who had spent the preceding winter in Cairo, was lying a note from Lord Henry, and beside it was a book bound in yellow paper, the cover slightly torn and the edges soiled. A copy of the third edition of *The St. James's Gazette* had been placed on the tea-tray. It was evident that Victor had returned. He wondered if he had met the men in the hall as they were leaving the house, and had wormed out of them what they had been doing. He would be sure to miss the picture—had no doubt missed it already, while he had been laying the tea-things. The screen had not been set back, and a blank space was visible on the wall. Perhaps some night he might find him creeping upstairs and trying to force the door of the room. It was a horrible thing to have a spy in one's house. He had heard of rich men who had been blackmailed all their lives by some servant who had read a letter, or overheard a conversation, or picked up a card with an address, or found beneath a pillow a withered flower or a shred of crumpled lace.

He sighed, and, having poured himself out some tea, opened Lord Henry's note. It was simply to say that he sent him round the evening paper, and a book that might interest him, and that he would be at the club at eight-fifteen. He opened *The St. James's* languidly, and looked through it. A red pencil-mark on the fifth page caught his eye. It drew attention to the following paragraph:—

"INQUEST ON AN ACTRESS.—An inquest was held this morning at the Bell Tavern, Hoxton Road, by Mr. Danby, the District Coroner, on the body of Sibyl Vane, a young actress recently engaged at the Royal Theatre, Holborn. A verdict of death by misadventure was returned. Considerable sympathy was expressed for the mother of the deceased, who was greatly affected during the giving of her own evidence, and that of Dr. Birrell, who had made the post-mortem examination of the deceased."

He frowned, and, tearing the paper in two, went across the room and flung the pieces away. How ugly it all was! And how horribly real ugliness made things! He felt a little annoyed with Lord Henry for having sent him the report. And it was certainly stupid of him to have marked it with red

pencil. Victor might have read it. The man knew more than enough English for that.

Perhaps he had read it, and had begun to suspect something. And, yet, what did it matter? What had Dorian Gray to do with Sibyl Vane's death? There was nothing to fear. Dorian Gray had not killed her.

His eye fell on the yellow book that Lord Henry had sent him. What was it, he wondered. He went towards the little pearl-coloured octagonal stand, that had always looked to him like the work of some strange Egyptian bees that wrought in silver, and taking up the volume, flung himself into an arm-chair, and began to turn over the leaves. After a few minutes he became absorbed. It was the strangest book that he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed.

It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realise in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue, as much as those natural rebellions that wise men still call sin. The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of *argot* and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterises the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolistes*. There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour. The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some mediæval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the

mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows.

Cloudless, and pierced by one solitary star, a copper-green sky gleamed through the windows. He read on by its wan light till he could read no more. Then, after his valet had reminded him several times of the lateness of the hour, he got up, and, going into the next room, placed the book on the little Florentine table that always stood at his bedside, and began to dress for dinner.

It was almost nine o'clock before he reached the club, where he found Lord Henry sitting alone, in the morning-room, looking very much bored.

"I am so sorry, Harry," he cried, "but really it is entirely your fault. That book you sent me so fascinated me that I forgot how the time was going."

"Yes: I thought you would like it," replied his host, rising from his chair.

"I didn't say I liked it, Harry. I said it fascinated me. There is a great difference."

"Ah, you have discovered that?" murmured Lord Henry. And they passed into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XI

For years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never sought to free himself from it. He procured from Paris no less than nine large-paper copies of the first edition, and had them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control. The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him a kind

of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it.

In one point he was more fortunate than the novel's fantastic hero. He never knew—never, indeed, had any cause to know—that somewhat grotesque dread of mirrors, and polished metal surfaces, and still water, which came upon the young Parisian so early in his life, and was occasioned by the sudden decay of a beauty that had once, apparently, been so remarkable. It was with an almost cruel joy—and perhaps in nearly every joy, as certainly in every pleasure, cruelty has its place—that he used to read the latter part of the book, with its really tragic, if somewhat over-emphasised, account of the sorrow and despair of one who had himself lost what in others, and in the world, he had most dearly valued.

For the wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many others besides him, seemed never to leave him. Even those who had heard the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs, could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world. Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them. His mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished. They wondered how one so charming and graceful as he was could have escaped the stain of an age that was at once sordid and sensual.

Often, on returning home from one of those mysterious and prolonged absences that gave rise to such strange conjecture among those who were his friends, or thought that they were so, he himself would creep upstairs to the locked room, open the door with the key that never left him now, and stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and ageing face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with

minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead, or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. He would place his white hands beside the coarse bloated hands of the picture, and smile. He mocked the misshapen body and the failing limbs.

There were moments, indeed, at night, when, lying sleepless in his own delicately-scented chamber, or in the sordid room of the little ill-famed tavern near the Docks, which, under an assumed name, and in disguise, it was his habit to frequent, he would think of the ruin he had brought upon his soul, with a pity that was all the more poignant because it was purely selfish. But moments such as these were rare. That curiosity about life which Lord Henry had first stirred in him, as they sat together in the garden of their friend, seemed to increase with gratification. The more he knew, the more he desired to know. He had mad hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them.

Yet he was not really reckless, at any rate in his relations to society. Once or twice every month during the winter, and on each Wednesday evening while the season lasted, he would throw open to the world his beautiful house and have the most celebrated musicians of the day to charm his guests with the wonders of their art. His little dinners, in the settling of which Lord Henry always assisted him, were noted as much for the careful selection and placing of those invited, as for the exquisite taste shown in the decoration of the table, with its subtle symphonic arrangements of exotic flowers, and embroidered cloths, and antique plate of gold and silver. Indeed, there were many, especially among the very young men, who saw, or fancied that they saw, in Dorian Gray the true realisation of a type of which they had often dreamed in Eton or Oxford days, a type that was to combine something of the real culture of the scholar with all the grace and distinction and perfect manner of a citizen of the world. To them he seemed to be of the company of those whom Dante describes as having sought to "make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty." Like Gautier, he was one for whom "the visible world existed."

And, certainly, to him Life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation. Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment universal, and Dandyism, which, in its own way, is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty, had, of course, their fascination for him. His mode of dressing, and the particular styles that from time to time he affected, had their marked influence on the young exquisites of the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows, who copied him in everything that he did, and tried to reproduce the accidental charm of his graceful, though to him only half-serious, fopperies.

For, while he was but too ready to accept the position that was almost immediately offered to him on his coming of age, and found, indeed, a subtle pleasure in the thought that he might really become to the London of his own day what to imperial Neronian Rome the author of the "Satyricon" once had been, yet in his inmost heart he desired to be something more than a mere *arbiter elegantiarum*, to be consulted on the wearing of a jewel, or the knotting of a necktie, or the conduct of a cane. He sought to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles, and find in the spiritualising of the senses its highest realisation.

The worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are conscious of sharing with the less highly organised forms of existence. But it appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic. As he looked back upon man moving through History, he was haunted by a feeling of loss. So much had been surrendered! and to such little purpose! There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear, and whose result was a degradation infinitely more terrible than that fancied degradation from which, in their

ignorance, they had sought to escape, Nature, in her wonderful irony, driving out the anchorite to feed with the wild animals of the desert and giving to the hermit the beasts of the field as his companions.

Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.

There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie. Gradually white fingers creep through the curtains, and they appear to tremble. In black fantastic shapes, dumb shadows crawl into the corners of the room, and crouch there. Outside, there is the stirring of birds among the leaves, or the sound of men going forth to their work, or the sigh and sob of the wind coming down from the hills, and wandering round the silent house, as though it feared to wake the sleepers, and yet must needs call forth sleep from her purple cave. Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colours of things are restored to them, and we watch the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern. The wan mirrors get back their mimic life. The flameless tapers stand where we had left them, and beside them lies the half-cut book that we had been studying, or the wired flower that we had worn at the ball, or the letter that we had been afraid to read, or that we had read too often. Nothing seems to us changed. Out of the unreal shadows of the night

comes back the real life that we had known. We have to resume it where we had left off, and there steals over us a terrible sense of the necessity for the continuance of energy in the same wearisome round of stereotyped habits, or a wild longing, it may be, that our eyelids might open some morning upon a world that had been refashioned anew in the darkness for our pleasure, a world in which things would have fresh shapes and colours, and be changed, or have other secrets, a world in which the past would have little or no place, or survive, at any rate, in no conscious form of obligation or regret, the remembrance even of joy having its bitterness, and the memories of pleasure their pain.

It was the creation of such worlds as these that seemed to Dorian Gray to be the true object, or amongst the true objects, of life; and in his search for sensations that would be at once new and delightful, and possess that element of strangeness that is so essential to romance, he would often adopt certain modes of thought that he knew to be really alien to his nature, abandon himself to their subtle influences, and then, having, as it were, caught their colour and satisfied his intellectual curiosity, leave them with that curious indifference that is not incompatible with a real ardour of temperament, and that indeed, according to certain modern psychologists, is often a condition of it.

It was rumoured of him once that he was about to join the Roman Catholic communion; and certainly the Roman ritual had always a great attraction for him. The daily sacrifice, more awful really than all the sacrifices of the antique world, stirred him as much by its superb rejection of the evidence of the senses as by the primitive simplicity of its elements and the eternal pathos of the human tragedy that it sought to symbolise. He loved to kneel down on the cold marble pavement, and watch the priest, in his stiff flowered vestment, slowly and with white hands moving aside the veil of the tabernacle, or raising aloft the jewelled lantern-shaped monstrance with that pallid wafer that at times, one would fain think, is indeed the "*panis cælestis*," the bread of angels, or, robed in the garments of the Passion of Christ, breaking the Host into the chalice, and smiting his breast for his sins. The fuming censers, that the grave boys, in their lace and scarlet, tossed into the air like great gilt flowers, had their subtle

fascination for him. As he passed out, he used to look with wonder at the black confessionals, and long to sit in the dim shadow of one of them and listen to men and women whispering through the worn grating the true story of their lives.

But he never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system, or of mistaking, for a house in which to live, an inn that is but suitable for the sojourn of a night, or for a few hours of a night in which there are no stars and the moon is in travail. Mysticism, with its marvellous power of making common things strange to us, and the subtle antinomianism that always seems to accompany it, moved him for a season; and for a season he inclined to the materialistic doctrines of the *Darwinismus* movement in Germany, and found a curious pleasure in tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the brain, or some white nerve in the body, delighting in the conception of the absolute dependence of the spirit on certain physical conditions, morbid or healthy, normal or diseased. Yet, as has been said of him before, no theory of life seemed to him to be of any importance compared with life itself. He felt keenly conscious of how barren all intellectual speculation is when separated from action and experiment. He knew that the senses, no less than the soul, have their spiritual mysteries to reveal.

And so he would now study perfumes, and the secrets of their manufacture, distilling heavily-scented oils, and burning odorous gums from the East. He saw that there was no mood of the mind that had not its counterpart in the sensuous life, and set himself to discover their true relations, wondering what there was in frankincense that made one mystical, and in ambergris that stirred one's passions, and in violets that woke the memory of dead romances, and in musk that troubled the brain, and in champak that stained the imagination; and seeking often to elaborate a real psychology of perfumes, and to estimate the several influences of sweet-smelling roots, and scented pollen-laden flowers, or aromatic balms, and of dark and fragrant woods, of spikenard that sickens, of hovenia that makes men mad, and of aloes that are said to be able to expel melancholy from the soul.

At another time he devoted himself entirely to music, and in a long latticed room, with a vermilion-and-gold ceiling and walls of olive-green lacquer, he used to give curious concerts, in which mad gypsies tore wild music from little zithers, or grave yellow-shawled Tunisians plucked at the strained strings of monstrous lutes, while grinning negroes beat monotonously upon copper drums, and, crouching upon scarlet mats, slim turbaned Indians blew through long pipes of reed or brass, and charmed, or feigned to charm, great hooded snakes and horrible horned adders. The harsh intervals and shrill discords of barbaric music stirred him at times when Schubert's grace, and Chopin's beautiful sorrows, and the mighty harmonies of Beethoven himself, fell unheeded on his ear. He collected together from all parts of the world the strangest instruments that could be found, either in the tombs of dead nations or among the few savage tribes that have survived contact with Western civilisations, and loved to touch and try them. He had the mysterious *juruparis* of the Rio Negro Indians, that women are not allowed to look at, and that even youths may not see till they have been subjected to fasting and scourging, and the earthen jars of the Peruvians that have the shrill cries of birds, and flutes of human bones such as Alfonso de Ovalle heard in Chili, and the sonorous green jaspers that are found near Cuzco and give forth a note of singular sweetness. He had painted gourds filled with pebbles that rattled when they were shaken; the long *clarin* of the Mexicans, into which the performer does not blow, but through which he inhales the air; the harsh *ture* of the Amazon tribes, that is sounded by the sentinels who sit all day long in high trees, and can be heard, it is said, at a distance of three leagues; the *teponaztli*, that has two vibrating tongues of wood, and is beaten with sticks that are smeared with an elastic gum obtained from the milky juice of plants; the *yotl*-bells of the Aztecs, that are hung in clusters like grapes; and a huge cylindrical drum, covered with the skins of great serpents, like the one that Bernal Diaz saw when he went with Cortes into the Mexican temple, and of whose doleful sound he has left us so vivid a description. The fantastic character of these instruments fascinated him, and he felt a curious delight in the thought that Art, like Nature, has her monsters, things of bestial shape and with hideous voices. Yet, after some time, he wearied of them, and would sit in his box at the Opera, either alone or with Lord Henry, listening in rapt pleasure to "Tannhäuser," and

seeing in the prelude to that great work of art a presentation of the tragedy of his own soul.

On one occasion he took up the study of jewels, and appeared at a costume ball as Anne de Joyeuse, Admiral of France, in a dress covered with five hundred and sixty pearls. This taste enthralled him for years, and, indeed, may be said never to have left him. He would often spend a whole day settling and resettling in their cases the various stones that he had collected, such as the olive-green chrysoberyl that turns red by lamp-light, the cymophane with its wire-like line of silver, the pistachio-coloured peridot, rose-pink and wine-yellow topazes, carbuncles of fiery scarlet with tremulous four-rayed stars, flame-red cinnamon-stones, orange and violet spinels, and amethysts with their alternate layers of ruby and sapphire. He loved the red gold of the sunstone, and the moonstone's pearly whiteness, and the broken rainbow of the milky opal. He procured from Amsterdam three emeralds of extraordinary size and richness of colour, and had a turquoise *de la vieille roche* that was the envy of all the connoisseurs.

He discovered wonderful stories, also, about jewels. In Alphonso's "Clericalis Disciplina" a serpent was mentioned with eyes of real jacinth, and in the romantic history of Alexander, the Conqueror of Emathia was said to have found in the vale of Jordan snakes "with collars of real emeralds growing on their backs." There was a gem in the brain of the dragon, Philostratus told us, and "by the exhibition of golden letters and a scarlet robe" the monster could be thrown into a magical sleep, and slain. According to the great alchemist, Pierre de Boniface, the diamond rendered a man invisible, and the agate of India made him eloquent. The cornelian appeased anger, and the hyacinth provoked sleep, and the amethyst drove away the fumes of wine. The garnet cast out demons, and the hydropicus deprived the moon of her colour. The selenite waxed and waned with the moon, and the meloceus, that discovers thieves, could be affected only by the blood of kids. Leonardus Camillus had seen a white stone taken from the brain of a newly-killed toad, that was a certain antidote against poison. The bezoar, that was found in the heart of the Arabian deer, was a charm that could cure the plague. In the nests of

Arabian birds was the aspidochelone, that, according to Democritus, kept the wearer from any danger by fire.

The King of Ceilan rode through his city with a large ruby in his hand, at the ceremony of his coronation. The gates of the palace of John the Priest were "made of sardius, with the horn of the horned snake inwrought, so that no man might bring poison within." Over the gable were "two golden apples, in which were two carbuncles," so that the gold might shine by day, and the carbuncles by night. In Lodge's strange romance "A Margarite of America" it was stated that in the chamber of the queen one could behold "all the chaste ladies of the world, in chased out of silver, looking through fair mirrours of chrysolites, carbuncles, sapphires, and greene emeraults." Marco Polo had seen the inhabitants of Zipangu place rose-coloured pearls in the mouths of the dead. A sea-monster had been enamoured of the pearl that the diver brought to King Perozes, and had slain the thief, and mourned for seven moons over its loss. When the Huns lured the king into the great pit, he flung it away—Procopius tells the story—nor was it ever found again, though the Emperor Anastasius offered five hundred-weight of gold pieces for it. The King of Malabar had shown to a certain Venetian a rosary of three hundred and four pearls, one for every god that he worshipped.

When the Duke de Valentinois, son of Alexander VI., visited Louis XII. of France, his horse was loaded with gold leaves, according to Brantôme, and his cap had double rows of rubies that threw out a great light. Charles of England had ridden in stirrups hung with four hundred and twenty-one diamonds. Richard II. had a coat, valued at thirty thousand marks, which was covered with balas rubies. Hall described Henry VIII., on his way to the Tower previous to his coronation, as wearing "a jacket of raised gold, the placard embroidered with diamonds and other rich stones, and a great bauderike about his neck of large balasses." The favourites of James I. wore earrings of emeralds set in gold filigrane. Edward II. gave to Piers Gaveston a suit of red-gold armour studded with jacinths, a collar of gold roses set with turquoise-stones, and a skull-cap *parsemé* with pearls. Henry II. wore jewelled gloves reaching to the elbow, and had a hawk-glove sewn with twelve rubies and fifty-two great orients. The ducal hat of

Charles the Rash, the last Duke of Burgundy of his race, was hung with pear-shaped pearls, and studded with sapphires.

How exquisite life had once been! How gorgeous in its pomp and decoration! Even to read of the luxury of the dead was wonderful.

Then he turned his attention to embroideries, and to the tapestries that performed the office of frescoes in the chill rooms of the Northern nations of Europe. As he investigated the subject—and he always had an extraordinary faculty of becoming absolutely absorbed for the moment in whatever he took up—he was almost saddened by the reflection of the ruin that Time brought on beautiful and wonderful things. He, at any rate, had escaped that. Summer followed summer, and the yellow jonquils bloomed and died many times, and nights of horror repeated the story of their shame, but he was unchanged. No winter marred his face or stained his flower-like bloom. How different it was with material things! Where had they passed to? Where was the great crocus-coloured robe, on which the gods fought against the giants, that had been worked by brown girls for the pleasure of Athena? Where, the huge velarium that Nero had stretched across the Colosseum at Rome, that Titan sail of purple on which was represented the starry sky, and Apollo driving a chariot drawn by white gilt-reined steeds? He longed to see the curious table-napkins wrought for the Priest of the Sun, on which were displayed all the dainties and viands that could be wanted for a feast; the mortuary cloth of King Chilperic, with its three hundred golden bees; the fantastic robes that excited the indignation of the Bishop of Pontus, and were figured with "lions, panthers, bears, dogs, forests, rocks, hunters—all, in fact, that a painter can copy from nature;" and the coat that Charles of Orleans once wore, on the sleeves of which were embroidered the verses of a song beginning "*Madame, je suis tout joyeux,*" the musical accompaniment of the words being wrought in gold thread, and each note, of square shape in those days, formed with four pearls. He read of the room that was prepared at the palace at Rheims for the use of Queen Joan of Burgundy, and was decorated with "thirteen hundred and twenty-one parrots, made in broidery, and blazoned with the king's arms, and five hundred and sixty-one butterflies, whose wings were similarly ornamented with the arms of

the queen, the whole worked in gold." Catherine de Médicis had a mourning-bed made for her of black velvet powdered with crescents and suns. Its curtains were of damask, with leafy wreaths and garlands, figured upon a gold and silver ground, and fringed along the edges with broideries of pearls, and it stood in a room hung with rows of the queen's devices in cut black velvet upon cloth of silver. Louis XIV. had gold embroidered caryatides fifteen feet high in his apartment. The state bed of Sobieski, King of Poland, was made of Smyrna gold brocade embroidered in turquoises with verses from the Koran. Its supports were of silver gilt, beautifully chased, and profusely set with enamelled and jewelled medallions. It had been taken from the Turkish camp before Vienna, and the standard of Mohammed had stood beneath the tremulous gilt of its canopy.

And so, for a whole year, he sought to accumulate the most exquisite specimens that he could find of textile and embroidered work, getting the dainty Delhi muslins, finely wrought with gold-thread palmates, and stitched over with iridescent beetles' wings; the Dacca gauzes, that from their transparency are known in the East as "woven air," and "running water," and "evening dew"; strange figured cloths from Java; elaborate yellow Chinese hangings; books bound in tawny satins or fair blue silks, and wrought with *fleurs de lys*, birds, and images; veils of *lacis* worked in Hungary point; Sicilian brocades, and stiff Spanish velvets; Georgian work with its gilt coins, and Japanese *Foukousas* with their green-toned golds and their marvellously-plumaged birds.

He had a special passion, also, for ecclesiastical vestments, as indeed he had for everything connected with the service of the Church. In the long cedar chests that lined the west gallery of his house he had stored away many rare and beautiful specimens of what is really the raiment of the Bride of Christ, who must wear purple and jewels and fine linen that she may hide the pallid macerated body that is worn by the suffering that she seeks for, and wounded by self-inflicted pain. He possessed a gorgeous cope of crimson silk and gold-thread damask, figured with a repeating pattern of golden pomegranates set in six-petalled formal blossoms, beyond which on either side was the pine-apple device wrought in seed-

pearls. The orphreys were divided into panels representing scenes from the life of the Virgin, and the coronation of the Virgin was figured in coloured silks upon the hood. This was Italian work of the fifteenth century. Another cope was of green velvet, embroidered with heart-shaped groups of acanthus-leaves, from which spread long-stemmed white blossoms, the details of which were picked out with silver thread and coloured crystals. The morse bore a seraph's head in gold-thread raised work. The orphreys were woven in a diaper of red and gold silk, and were starred with medallions of many saints and martyrs, among whom was St. Sebastian. He had chasubles, also, of amber-coloured silk, and blue silk and gold brocade, and yellow silk damask and cloth of gold, figured with representations of the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ, and embroidered with lions and peacocks and other emblems; dalmatics of white satin and pink silk damask, decorated with tulips and dolphins and *fleurs de lys*; altar frontals of crimson velvet and blue linen; and many corporals, chalice-veils, and sudaria. In the mystic offices to which such things were put, there was something that quickened his imagination.

For these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne. Upon the walls of the lonely locked room where he had spent so much of his boyhood, he had hung with his own hands the terrible portrait whose changing features showed him the real degradation of his life, and in front of it had draped the purple-and-gold pall as a curtain. For weeks he would not go there, would forget the hideous painted thing, and get back his light heart, his wonderful joyousness, his passionate absorption in mere existence. Then, suddenly, some night he would creep out of the house, go down to dreadful places near Blue Gate Fields, and stay there, day after day, until he was driven away. On his return he would sit in front of the picture, sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling with secret pleasure, at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own.

After a few years he could not endure to be long out of England, and gave up the villa that he had shared at Trouville with Lord Henry, as well as the little white walled-in house at Algiers where they had more than once spent the winter. He hated to be separated from the picture that was such a part of his life, and was also afraid that during his absence someone might gain access to the room, in spite of the elaborate bars that he had caused to be placed upon the door.

He was quite conscious that this would tell them nothing. It was true that the portrait still preserved, under all the foulness and ugliness of the face, its marked likeness to himself; but what could they learn from that? He would laugh at anyone who tried to taunt him. He had not painted it. What was it to him how vile and full of shame it looked? Even if he told them, would they believe it?

Yet he was afraid. Sometimes when he was down at his great house in Nottinghamshire, entertaining the fashionable young men of his own rank who were his chief companions, and astounding the county by the wanton luxury and gorgeous splendour of his mode of life, he would suddenly leave his guests and rush back to town to see that the door had not been tampered with, and that the picture was still there. What if it should be stolen? The mere thought made him cold with horror. Surely the world would know his secret then. Perhaps the world already suspected it.

For, while he fascinated many, there were not a few who distrusted him. He was very nearly blackballed at a West End club of which his birth and social position fully entitled him to become a member, and it was said that on one occasion when he was brought by a friend into the smoking-room of the Churchill, the Duke of Berwick and another gentleman got up in a marked manner and went out. Curious stories became current about him after he had passed his twenty-fifth year. It was rumoured that he had been seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in the distant parts of Whitechapel, and that he consorted with thieves and coiners and knew the mysteries of their trade. His extraordinary absences became notorious, and, when he used to reappear again in society, men would whisper to each other in corners, or pass him with a sneer, or look at him with cold searching eyes, as though they were determined to discover his secret.

Of such insolences and attempted slights he, of course, took no notice, and in the opinion of most people his frank debonair manner, his charming boyish smile, and the infinite grace of that wonderful youth that seemed never to leave him, were in themselves a sufficient answer to the calumnies, for so they termed them, that were circulated about him. It was remarked, however, that some of those who had been most intimate with him appeared, after a time, to shun him. Women who had wildly adored him, and for his sake had braved all social censure and set convention at defiance, were seen to grow pallid with shame or horror if Dorian Gray entered the room.

Yet these whispered scandals only increased, in the eyes of many, his strange and dangerous charm. His great wealth was a certain element of security. Society, civilised society at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are of more importance than morals, and, in its opinion, the highest respectability is of much less value than the possession of a good *chef*. And, after all, it is a very poor consolation to be told that the man who has given one a bad dinner, or poor wine, is irreproachable in his private life. Even the cardinal virtues cannot atone for half-cold *entrées*, as Lord Henry remarked once, in a discussion on the subject; and there is possibly a good deal to be said for his view. For the canons of good society are, or should be, the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic play with the wit and beauty that make such plays delightful to us. Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.

Such, at any rate, was Dorian Gray's opinion. He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. He loved to stroll through the gaunt cold picture-gallery of his country house and

look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins. Here was Philip Herbert, described by Francis Osborne, in his "Memoires on the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James," as one who was "caressed by the Court for his handsome face, which kept him not long company." Was it young Herbert's life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own? Was it some dim sense of that ruined grace that had made him so suddenly, and almost without cause, give utterance, in Basil Hallward's studio, to the mad prayer that had so changed his life? Here, in gold-embroidered red doublet, jewelled surcoat, and gilt-edged ruff and wrist-bands, stood Sir Anthony Sherard, with his silver-and-black armour piled at his feet. What had this man's legacy been? Had the lover of Giovanna of Naples bequeathed him some inheritance of sin and shame? Were his own actions merely the dreams that the dead man had not dared to realise? Here, from the fading canvas, smiled Lady Elizabeth Devereux, in her gauze hood, pearl stomacher, and pink slashed sleeves. A flower was in her right hand, and her left clasped an enamelled collar of white and damask roses. On a table by her side lay a mandolin and an apple. There were large green rosettes upon her little pointed shoes. He knew her life, and the strange stories that were told about her lovers. Had he something of her temperament in him? These oval heavy-lidded eyes seemed to look curiously at him. What of George Willoughby, with his powdered hair and fantastic patches? How evil he looked! The face was saturnine and swarthy, and the sensual lips seemed to be twisted with disdain. Delicate lace ruffles fell over the lean yellow hands that were so over-laden with rings. He had been a macaroni of the eighteenth century, and the friend, in his youth, of Lord Ferrars. What of the second Lord Beckenham, the companion of the Prince Regent in his wildest days, and one of the witnesses at the secret marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert? How proud and handsome he was, with his chestnut curls and insolent pose! What passions had he bequeathed? The world had looked upon him as infamous. He had led the orgies at Carlton House. The star of the Garter glittered upon his breast. Beside him hung the portrait of his wife, a pallid, thin-lipped woman in black. Her blood, also, stirred within him. How curious it all seemed! And his mother with her Lady Hamilton face, and her moist wine-dashed lips—he knew what he had got from her. He had got from her his beauty, and his passion for the beauty of

others. She laughed at him in her loose Bacchante dress. There were vine leaves in her hair. The purple spilled from the cup she was holding. The carnations of the painting had withered, but the eyes were still wonderful in their depth and brilliancy of colour. They seemed to follow him wherever he went.

Yet one had ancestors in literature, as well as in one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious. There were times when it appeared to Dorian Gray that the whole of history was merely the record of his own life, not as he had lived it in act and circumstance, but as his imagination had created it for him, as it had been in his brain and in his passions. He felt that he had known them all, those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world and made sin so marvellous, and evil so full of subtlety. It seemed to him that in some mysterious way their lives had been his own.

The hero of the wonderful novel that had so influenced his life had himself known this curious fancy. In the seventh chapter he tells how, crowned with laurel, lest lightning might strike him, he had sat, as Tiberius, in a garden at Capri, reading the shameful books of Elephantis, while dwarfs and peacocks strutted round him, and the flute-player mocked the swinger of the censer; and, as Caligula, had caroused with the green-shirted jockeys in their stables and supped in an ivory manger with a jewel-frontleted horse; and, as Domitian, had wandered through a corridor lined with marble mirrors, looking round with haggard eyes for the reflection of the dagger that was to end his days, and sick with that ennui, that terrible *tædium vitæ*, that comes on those to whom life denies nothing; and had peered through a clear emerald at the red shambles of the Circus, and then, in a litter of pearl and purple drawn by silver-shod mules, been carried through the Street of Pomegranates to a House of Gold, and heard men cry on Nero Cæsar as he passed by; and, as Elagabalus, had painted his face with colours, and plied the distaff among the women, and brought the Moon from Carthage, and given her in mystic marriage to the Sun.

Over and over again Dorian used to read this fantastic chapter, and the two chapters immediately following, in which, as in some curious tapestries or cunningly-wrought enamels, were pictured the awful and beautiful forms of those whom Vice and Blood and Weariness had made monstrous or mad: Filippo, Duke of Milan, who slew his wife, and painted her lips with a scarlet poison that her lover might suck death from the dead thing he fondled; Pietro Barbi, the Venetian, known as Paul the Second,

who sought in his vanity to assume the title of Formosus, and whose tiara, valued at two hundred thousand florins, was bought at the price of a terrible sin; Gian Maria Visconti, who used hounds to chase living men, and whose murdered body was covered with roses by a harlot who had loved him; the Borgia on his white horse, with Fratricide riding beside him, and his mantle stained with the blood of Perotto; Pietro Riario, the young Cardinal Archbishop of Florence, child and minion of Sixtus IV., whose beauty was equalled only by his debauchery, and who received Leonora of Aragon in a pavilion of white and crimson silk, filled with nymphs and centaurs, and gilded a boy that he might serve at the feast as Ganymede or Hylas; Ezzelin, whose melancholy could be cured only by the spectacle of death, and who had a passion for red blood, as other men have for red wine—the son of the Fiend, as was reported, and one who had cheated his father at dice when gambling with him for his own soul; Giambattista Cibo, who in mockery took the name of Innocent, and into whose torpid veins the blood of three lads was infused by a Jewish doctor; Sigismondo Malatesta, the lover of Isotta, and the lord of Rimini, whose effigy was burned at Rome as the enemy of God and man, who strangled Polyssena with a napkin, and gave poison to Ginevra d'Este in a cup of emerald, and in honour of a shameful passion built a pagan church for Christian worship; Charles VI., who had so wildly adored his brother's wife that a leper had warned him of the insanity that was coming on him, and who, when his brain had sickened and grown strange, could only be soothed by Saracen cards painted with the images of Love and Death and Madness; and, in his trimmed jerkin and jewelled cap and acanthus-like curls, Grifonetto Baglioni, who slew Astorre with his bride, and Simonetto with his page, and whose comeliness was such that, as he lay dying in the yellow piazza of Perugia, those who had hated him could not choose but weep, and Atalanta, who had cursed him, blessed him.

There was a horrible fascination in them all. He saw them at night, and they troubled his imagination in the day. The Renaissance knew of strange manners of poisoning—poisoning by a helmet and a lighted torch, by an embroidered glove and a jewelled fan, by a gilded pomander and by an amber chain. Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were

moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful.

CHAPTER XII

It was on the ninth of November, the eve of his own thirty-eighth birthday, as he often remembered afterwards.

He was walking home about eleven o'clock from Lord Henry's, where he had been dining, and was wrapped in heavy furs, as the night was cold and foggy. At the corner of Grosvenor Square and South Audley Street a man passed him in the mist, walking very fast, and with the collar of his grey ulster turned up. He had a bag in his hand. Dorian recognised him. It was Basil Hallward. A strange sense of fear, for which he could not account, came over him. He made no sign of recognition, and went on quickly in the direction of his own house.

But Hallward had seen him. Dorian heard him first stopping on the pavement, and then hurrying after him. In a few moments his hand was on his arm.

"Dorian! What an extraordinary piece of luck! I have been waiting for you in your library ever since nine o'clock. Finally I took pity on your tired servant, and told him to go to bed, as he let me out. I am off to Paris by the midnight train, and I particularly wanted to see you before I left. I thought it was you, or rather your fur coat, as you passed me. But I wasn't quite sure. Didn't you recognise me?"

"In this fog, my dear Basil? Why, I can't even recognise Grosvenor Square. I believe my house is somewhere about here, but I don't feel at all certain about it. I am sorry you are going away, as I have not seen you for ages. But I suppose you will be back soon?"

"No: I am going to be out of England for six months. I intend to take a studio in Paris, and shut myself up till I have finished a great picture I have in my head. However, it wasn't about myself I wanted to talk. Here we are at your door. Let me come in for a moment. I have something to say to you."

"I shall be charmed. But won't you miss your train?" said Dorian Gray, languidly, as he passed up the steps and opened the door with his latch-key.

The lamp-light struggled out through the fog, and Hallward looked at his watch. "I have heaps of time," he answered. "The train doesn't go till twelve-fifteen, and it is only just eleven. In fact, I was on my way to the club to look for you, when I met you. You see, I shan't have any delay about luggage, as I have sent on my heavy things. All I have with me is in this bag, and I can easily get to Victoria in twenty minutes."

Dorian looked at him and smiled. "What a way for a fashionable painter to travel! A Gladstone bag, and an ulster! Come in, or the fog will get into the house. And mind you don't talk about anything serious. Nothing is serious nowadays. At least nothing should be."

Hallward shook his head as he entered, and followed Dorian into the library. There was a bright wood fire blazing in the large open hearth. The lamps were lit, and an open Dutch silver spirit-case stood, with some siphons of soda-water and large cut-glass tumblers, on a little marqueterie table.

"You see your servant made me quite at home, Dorian. He gave me everything I wanted, including your best gold-tipped cigarettes. He is a most hospitable creature. I like him much better than the Frenchman you used to have. What has become of the Frenchman, by the bye?"

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. "I believe he married Lady Radley's maid, and has established her in Paris as an English dressmaker. *Anglomanie* is very fashionable over there now, I hear. It seems silly of the French, doesn't it? But—do you know?—he was not at all a bad servant. I never liked him, but I had nothing to complain about. One often imagines things that are quite absurd. He was really very devoted to me, and seemed

quite sorry when he went away. Have another brandy-and-soda? Or would you like hock-and-seltzer? I always take hock-and-seltzer myself. There is sure to be some in the next room."

"Thanks, I won't have anything more," said the painter, taking his cap and coat off, and throwing them on the bag that he had placed in the corner. "And now, my dear fellow, I want to speak to you seriously. Don't frown like that. You make it so much more difficult for me."

"What is it all about?" cried Dorian, in his petulant way, flinging himself down on the sofa. "I hope it is not about myself. I am tired of myself tonight. I should like to be somebody else."

"It is about yourself," answered Hallward, in his grave, deep voice, "and I must say it to you. I shall only keep you half an hour."

Dorian sighed, and lit a cigarette. "Half an hour!" he murmured.

"It is not much to ask of you, Dorian, and it is entirely for your own sake that I am speaking. I think it right that you should know that the most dreadful things are being said against you in London."

"I don't wish to know anything about them. I love scandals about other people, but scandals about myself don't interest me. They have not got the charm of novelty."

"They must interest you, Dorian. Every gentleman is interested in his good name. You don't want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded. Of course you have your position, and your wealth, and all that kind of thing. But position and wealth are not everything. Mind you, I don't believe these rumours at all. At least, I can't believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed. People talk sometimes of secret vices. There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even. Somebody—I won't mention his name, but you know him—came to me last year to have his portrait done. I had never seen him before, and had never heard anything about him at the time, though I have heard a good

deal since. He offered an extravagant price. I refused him. There was something in the shape of his fingers that I hated. I know now that I was quite right in what I fancied about him. His life is dreadful. But you, Dorian, with your pure, bright, innocent face, and your marvellous untroubled youth—I can't believe anything against you. And yet I see you very seldom, and you never come down to the studio now, and when I am away from you, and I hear all these hideous things that people are whispering about you, I don't know what to say. Why is it, Dorian, that a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter it? Why is it that so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your house nor invite you to theirs? You used to be a friend of Lord Staveley. I met him at dinner last week. Your name happened to come up in conversation, in connection with the miniatures you have lent to the exhibition at the Dudley. Staveley curled his lip, and said that you might have the most artistic tastes, but that you were a man whom no pure-minded girl should be allowed to know, and whom no chaste woman should sit in the same room with. I reminded him that I was a friend of yours, and asked him what he meant. He told me. He told me right out before everybody. It was horrible! Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton, and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son, and his career? I met his father yesterday in St. James's Street. He seemed broken with shame and sorrow. What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him?"

"Stop, Basil. You are talking about things of which you know nothing," said Dorian Gray, biting his lip, and with a note of infinite contempt in his voice. "You ask me why Berwick leaves a room when I enter it. It is because I know everything about his life, not because he knows anything about mine. With such blood as he has in his veins, how could his record be clean? You ask me about Henry Ashton and young Perth. Did I teach the one his vices, and the other his debauchery? If Kent's silly son takes his wife from the streets what is that to me? If Adrian Singleton writes his friend's name across a bill, am I his keeper? I know how people chatter in

England. The middle classes air their moral prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they call the profligacies of their betters in order to try and pretend that they are in smart society, and on intimate terms with the people they slander. In this country it is enough for a man to have distinction and brains for every common tongue to wag against him. And what sort of lives do these people, who pose as being moral, lead themselves? My dear fellow, you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite."

"Dorian," cried Hallward, "that is not the question. England is bad enough, I know, and English society is all wrong. That is the reason why I want you to be fine. You have not been fine. One has a right to judge of a man by the effect he has over his friends. Yours seem to lose all sense of honour, of goodness, of purity. You have filled them with a madness for pleasure. They have gone down into the depths. You led them there. Yes: you led them there, and yet you can smile, as you are smiling now. And there is worse behind. I know you and Harry are inseparable. Surely for that reason, if for none other, you should not have made his sister's name a by-word."

"Take care, Basil. You go too far."

"I must speak, and you must listen. You shall listen. When you met Lady Gwendolen, not a breath of scandal had ever touched her. Is there a single decent woman in London now who would drive with her in the Park? Why, even her children are not allowed to live with her. Then there are other stories—stories that you have been seen creeping at dawn out of dreadful houses and slinking in disguise into the foulest dens in London. Are they true? Can they be true? When I first heard them, I laughed. I hear them now, and they make me shudder. What about your country house, and the life that is led there? Dorian, you don't know what is said about you. I won't tell you that I don't want to preach to you. I remember Harry saying once that every man who turned himself into an amateur curate for the moment always began by saying that, and then proceeded to break his word. I do want to preach to you. I want you to lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name and a fair record. I want you to get rid of the dreadful people you associate with.

Don't shrug your shoulders like that. Don't be so indifferent. You have a wonderful influence. Let it be for good, not for evil. They say that you corrupt everyone with whom you become intimate, and that it is quite sufficient for you to enter a house, for shame of some kind to follow after. I don't know whether it is so or not. How should I know? But it is said of you. I am told things that it seems impossible to doubt. Lord Gloucester was one of my greatest friends at Oxford. He showed me a letter that his wife had written to him when she was dying alone in her villa at Mentone. Your name was implicated in the most terrible confession I ever read. I told him that it was absurd—that I knew you thoroughly, and that you were incapable of anything of the kind. Know you? I wonder do I know you? Before I could answer that, I should have to see your soul."

"To see my soul!" muttered Dorian Gray, starting up from the sofa and turning almost white from fear.

"Yes," answered Hallward, gravely, and with deep-toned sorrow in his voice—"to see your soul. But only God can do that."

A bitter laugh of mockery broke from the lips of the younger man. "You shall see it yourself, to-night!" he cried, seizing a lamp from the table. "Come: it is your own handiwork. Why shouldn't you look at it? You can tell the world all about it afterwards, if you choose. Nobody would believe you. If they did believe you, they would like me all the better for it. I know the age better than you do, though you will prate about it so tediously. Come, I tell you. You have chattered enough about corruption. Now you shall look on it face to face."

There was the madness of pride in every word he uttered. He stamped his foot upon the ground in his boyish insolent manner. He felt a terrible joy at the thought that someone else was to share his secret, and that the man who had painted the portrait that was the origin of all his shame was to be burdened for the rest of his life with the hideous memory of what he had done.

"Yes," he continued, coming closer to him, and looking steadfastly into his stern eyes, "I shall show you my soul. You shall see the thing that you

fancy only God can see."

Hallward started back. "This is blasphemy, Dorian!" he cried. "You must not say things like that. They are horrible, and they don't mean anything."

"You think so?" He laughed again.

"I know so. As for what I said to you to-night, I said it for your good. You know I have been always a staunch friend to you."

"Don't touch me. Finish what you have to say."

A twisted flash of pain shot across the painter's face. He paused for a moment, and a wild feeling of pity came over him. After all, what right had he to pry into the life of Dorian Gray? If he had done a tithe of what was rumoured about him, how much he must have suffered! Then he straightened himself up, and walked over to the fireplace, and stood there, looking at the burning logs with their frost-like ashes and their throbbing cores of flame.

"I am waiting, Basil," said the young man, in a hard, clear voice.

He turned round. "What I have to say is this," he cried. "You must give me some answer to these horrible charges that are made against you. If you tell me that they are absolutely untrue from beginning to end, I shall believe you. Deny them, Dorian, deny them! Can't you see what I am going through? My God! don't tell me that you are bad, and corrupt, and shameful."

Dorian Gray smiled. There was a curl of contempt in his lips. "Come upstairs, Basil," he said, quietly. "I keep a diary of my life from day to day, and it never leaves the room in which it is written. I shall show it to you if you come with me."

"I shall come with you, Dorian, if you wish it. I see I have missed my train. That makes no matter. I can go to-morrow. But don't ask me to read anything to-night. All I want is a plain answer to my question."

"That shall be given to you upstairs. I could not give it here. You will not have to read long."

CHAPTER XIII

He passed out of the room, and began the ascent, Basil Hallward following close behind. They walked softly, as men do instinctively at night. The lamp cast fantastic shadows on the wall and staircase. A rising wind made some of the windows rattle.

When they reached the top landing, Dorian set the lamp down on the floor, and taking out the key turned it in the lock. "You insist on knowing, Basil?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"I am delighted," he answered, smiling. Then he added, somewhat harshly, "You are the one man in the world who is entitled to know everything about me. You have had more to do with my life than you think:" and, taking up the lamp, he opened the door and went in. A cold current of air passed them, and the light shot up for a moment in a flame of murky orange. He shuddered. "Shut the door behind you," he whispered, as he placed the lamp on the table.

Hallward glanced round him, with a puzzled expression. The room looked as if it had not been lived in for years. A faded Flemish tapestry, a curtained picture, an old Italian *cassone*, and an almost empty bookcase—that was all that it seemed to contain, besides a chair and a table. As Dorian Gray was lighting a half-burned candle that was standing on the mantel-shelf, he saw that the whole place was covered with dust, and that the carpet was in holes. A mouse ran scuffling behind the wainscoting. There was a damp odour of mildew.

"So you think that it is only God who sees the soul, Basil? Draw that curtain back, and you will see mine."

The voice that spoke was cold and cruel. "You are mad, Dorian, or playing a part," muttered Hallward, frowning.

"You won't? Then I must do it myself," said the young man; and he tore the curtain from its rod, and flung it on the ground.

An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! it was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvellous beauty. There was still some gold in the thinning hair and some scarlet on the sensual mouth. The sodden eyes had kept something of the loveliness of their blue, the noble curves had not yet completely passed away from chiselled nostrils and from plastic throat. Yes, it was Dorian himself. But who had done it? He seemed to recognise his own brush-work, and the frame was his own design. The idea was monstrous, yet he felt afraid. He seized the lighted candle, and held it to the picture. In the left-hand corner was his own name, traced in long letters of bright vermilion.

It was some foul parody, some infamous, ignoble satire. He had never done that. Still, it was his own picture. He knew it, and he felt as if his blood had changed in a moment from fire to sluggish ice. His own picture! What did it mean? Why had it altered? He turned, and looked at Dorian Gray with the eyes of a sick man. His mouth twitched, and his parched tongue seemed unable to articulate. He passed his hand across his forehead. It was dank with clammy sweat.

The young man was leaning against the mantel-shelf, watching him with that strange expression that one sees on the faces of those who are absorbed in a play when some great artist is acting. There was neither real sorrow in it nor real joy. There was simply the passion of the spectator, with perhaps a flicker of triumph in his eyes. He had taken the flower out of his coat, and was smelling it, or pretending to do so.

"What does this mean?" cried Hallward, at last. His own voice sounded shrill and curious in his ears.

"Years ago, when I was a boy," said Dorian Gray, crushing the flower in his hand, "you met me, flattered me, and taught me to be vain of my good looks. One day you introduced me to a friend of yours, who explained to me the wonder of youth, and you finished the portrait of me that revealed to me the wonder of beauty. In a mad moment, that, even now, I don't know whether I regret or not, I made a wish, perhaps you would call it a prayer...."

"I remember it! Oh, how well I remember it! No! the thing is impossible. The room is damp. Mildew has got into the canvas. The paints I used had some wretched mineral poison in them. I tell you the thing is impossible."

"Ah, what is impossible?" murmured the young man, going over to the window, and leaning his forehead against the cold, mist-stained glass.

"You told me you had destroyed it."

"I was wrong. It has destroyed me."

"I don't believe it is my picture."

"Can't you see your ideal in it?" said Dorian, bitterly.

"My ideal, as you call it...."

"As you called it."

"There was nothing evil in it, nothing shameful. You were to me such an ideal as I shall never meet again. This is the face of a satyr."

"It is the face of my soul."

"Christ! what a thing I must have worshipped! It has the eyes of a devil."

"Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him, Basil," cried Dorian, with a wild gesture of despair.

Hallward turned again to the portrait, and gazed at it. "My God! if it is true," he exclaimed, "and this is what you have done with your life, why, you must be worse even than those who talk against you fancy you to be!" He held the light up again to the canvas, and examined it. The surface seemed to be quite undisturbed, and as he had left it. It was from within, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come. Through some strange quickening of inner life the leprosy of sin were slowly eating the thing away. The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful.

His hand shook, and the candle fell from its socket on the floor, and lay there sputtering. He placed his foot on it and put it out. Then he flung himself into the rickety chair that was standing by the table and buried his face in his hands.

"Good God, Dorian, what a lesson! what an awful lesson!" There was no answer, but he could hear the young man sobbing at the window. "Pray, Dorian, pray," he murmured. "What is it that one was taught to say in one's boyhood? 'Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our sins. Wash away our iniquities.' Let us say that together. The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also. I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished."

Dorian Gray turned slowly around, and looked at him with tear-dimmed eyes. "It is too late, Basil," he faltered.

"It is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try if we cannot remember a prayer. Isn't there a verse somewhere, 'Though your sins be as scarlet; yet I will make them as white as snow'?"

"Those words mean nothing to me now."

"Hush! don't say that. You have done enough evil in your life. My God! don't you see that accursed thing leering at us?"

Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by

those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it, and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again.

There was a stifled groan, and the horrible sound of someone choking with blood. Three times the outstretched arms shot up convulsively, waving grotesque stiff-fingered hands in the air. He stabbed him twice more, but the man did not move. Something began to trickle on the floor. He waited for a moment, still pressing the head down. Then he threw the knife on the table, and listened.

He could hear nothing but the drip, drip on the threadbare carpet. He opened the door and went out on the landing. The house was absolutely quiet. No one was about. For a few seconds he stood bending over the balustrade, and peering down into the black seething well of darkness. Then he took out the key and returned to the room, locking himself in as he did so.

The thing was still seated in the chair, straining over the table with bowed head, and humped back, and long fantastic arms. Had it not been for the red jagged tear in the neck, and the clotted black pool that was slowly widening on the table, one would have said that the man was simply asleep.

How quickly it had all been done! He felt strangely calm, and, walking over to the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. The wind had blown the fog away, and the sky was like a monstrous peacock's tail, starred with myriads of golden eyes. He looked down, and saw the policeman going his rounds and flashing the long beam of his lantern on

the doors of the silent houses. The crimson spot of a prowling hansom gleamed at the corner, and then vanished. A woman in a fluttering shawl was creeping slowly by the railings, staggering as she went. Now and then she stopped, and peered back. Once, she began to sing in a hoarse voice. The policeman strolled over and said something to her. She stumbled away, laughing. A bitter blast swept across the Square. The gas-lamps flickered, and became blue, and the leafless trees shook their black iron branches to and fro. He shivered, and went back, closing the window behind him.

Having reached the door, he turned the key, and opened it. He did not even glance at the murdered man. He felt that the secret of the whole thing was not to realise the situation. The friend who had painted the fatal portrait to which all his misery had been due, had gone out of his life. That was enough.

Then he remembered the lamp. It was a rather curious one of Moorish workmanship, made of dull silver inlaid with arabesques of burnished steel, and studded with coarse turquoises. Perhaps it might be missed by his servant, and questions would be asked. He hesitated for a moment, then he turned back and took it from the table. He could not help seeing the dead thing. How still it was! How horribly white the long hands looked! It was like a dreadful wax image.

Having locked the door behind him, he crept quietly downstairs. The woodwork creaked, and seemed to cry out as if in pain. He stopped several times, and waited. No: everything was still. It was merely the sound of his own footsteps.

When he reached the library, he saw the bag and coat in the corner. They must be hidden away somewhere. He unlocked a secret press that was in the wainscoting, a press in which he kept his own curious disguises, and put them into it. He could easily burn them afterwards. Then he pulled out his watch. It was twenty minutes to two.

He sat down, and began to think. Every year—every month, almost—men were strangled in England for what he had done. There had been a

madness of murder in the air. Some red star had come too close to the earth.... And yet what evidence was there against him? Basil Hallward had left the house at eleven. No one had seen him come in again. Most of the servants were at Selby Royal. His valet had gone to bed.... Paris! Yes. It was to Paris that Basil had gone, and by the midnight train, as he had intended. With his curious reserved habits, it would be months before any suspicions would be aroused. Months! Everything could be destroyed long before then.

A sudden thought struck him. He put on his fur coat and hat, and went out into the hall. There he paused, hearing the slow heavy tread of the policeman on the pavement outside, and seeing the flash of the bull's-eye reflected in the window. He waited, and held his breath.

After a few moments he drew back the latch, and slipped out, shutting the door very gently behind him. Then he began ringing the bell. In about five minutes his valet appeared half dressed, and looking very drowsy.

"I am sorry to have had to wake you up, Francis," he said, stepping in; "but I had forgotten my latch-key. What time is it?"

"Ten minutes past two, sir," answered the man, looking at the clock and blinking.

"Ten minutes past two? How horribly late! You must wake me at nine to-morrow. I have some work to do."

"All right, sir."

"Did anyone call this evening?"

"Mr. Hallward, sir. He stayed here till eleven, and then he went away to catch his train."

"Oh! I am sorry I didn't see him. Did he leave any message?"

"No, sir, except that he would write to you from Paris, if he did not find you at the club."

"That will do, Francis. Don't forget to call me at nine to-morrow."

"No, sir."

The man shambled down the passage in his slippers.

Dorian Gray threw his hat and coat upon the table, and passed into the library. For a quarter of an hour he walked up and down the room biting his lip, and thinking. Then he took down the Blue Book from one of the shelves, and began to turn over the leaves. "Alan Campbell, 152, Hertford Street, Mayfair." Yes; that was the man he wanted.

CHAPTER XIV

At nine o'clock the next morning his servant came in with a cup of chocolate on a tray, and opened the shutters. Dorian was sleeping quite peacefully, lying on his right side, with one hand underneath his cheek. He looked like a boy who had been tired out with play, or study.

The man had to touch him twice on the shoulder before he woke, and as he opened his eyes a faint smile passed across his lips, as though he had been lost in some delightful dream. Yet he had not dreamed at all. His night had been untroubled by any images of pleasure or of pain. But youth smiles without any reason. It is one of its chiefest charms.

He turned round, and, leaning upon his elbow, began to sip his chocolate. The mellow November sun came streaming into the room. The sky was bright, and there was a genial warmth in the air. It was almost like a morning in May.

Gradually the events of the preceding night crept with silent blood-stained feet into his brain, and reconstructed themselves there with terrible distinctness. He winced at the memory of all that he had suffered, and for a moment the same curious feeling of loathing for Basil Hallward that had made him kill him as he sat in the chair, came back to him, and he grew cold with passion. The dead man was still sitting there, too, and in the

sunlight now. How horrible that was! Such hideous things were for the darkness, not for the day.

He felt that if he brooded on what he had gone through he would sicken or grow mad. There were sins whose fascination was more in the memory than in the doing of them; strange triumphs that gratified the pride more than the passions, and gave to the intellect a quickened sense of joy, greater than any joy they brought, or could ever bring, to the senses. But this was not one of them. It was a thing to be driven out of the mind, to be drugged with poppies, to be strangled lest it might strangle one itself.

When the half-hour struck, he passed his hand across his forehead, and then got up hastily, and dressed himself with even more than his usual care, giving a good deal of attention to the choice of his necktie and scarf-pin, and changing his rings more than once. He spent a long time also over breakfast, tasting the various dishes, talking to his valet about some new liveries that he was thinking of getting made for the servants at Selby, and going through his correspondence. At some of the letters he smiled. Three of them bored him. One he read several times over, and then tore up with a slight look of annoyance in his face. "That awful thing, a woman's memory!" as Lord Henry had once said.

After he had drunk his cup of black coffee, he wiped his lips slowly with a napkin, motioned to his servant to wait, and going over to the table sat down and wrote two letters. One he put in his pocket, the other he handed to the valet.

"Take this round to 152, Hertford Street, Francis, and if Mr. Campbell is out of town, get his address."

As soon as he was alone, he lit a cigarette, and began sketching upon a piece of paper, drawing first flowers, and bits of architecture, and then human faces. Suddenly he remarked that every face that he drew seemed to have a fantastic likeness to Basil Hallward. He frowned, and, getting up, went over to the bookcase and took out a volume at hazard. He was determined that he would not think about what had happened until it became absolutely necessary that he should do so.

When he had stretched himself on the sofa, he looked at the title-page of the book. It was Gautier's "Émaux et Camées," Charpentier's Japanese-paper edition, with the Jacquemart etching. The binding was of citron-green leather, with a design of gilt trellis-work and dotted pomegranates. It had been given to him by Adrian Singleton. As he turned over the pages his eye fell on the poem about the hand of Lacenaire, the cold yellow hand "*du supplice encore mal lavée*," with its downy red hairs and its "*doigts de faune*." He glanced at his own white taper fingers, shuddering slightly in spite of himself, and passed on, till he came to those lovely stanzas upon Venice:—

"Sur une gamme chromatique,
Le sein de perles ruisselant,
La Vénus de l'Adriatique
Sort de l'eau son corps rose et blanc.

"Les dômes, sur l'azur des ondes
Suivant la phrase au pur contour,
S'enflent comme des gorges rondes
Que soulève un soupir d'amour.

"L'esquif aborde et me dépose,
Jetant son amarre au pilier,
Devant une façade rose,
Sur le marbre d'un escalier."

How exquisite they were! As one read them, one seemed to be floating down the green water-ways of the pink and pearl city, seated in a black gondola with silver prow and trailing curtains. The mere lines looked to him like those straight lines of turquoise-blue that follow one as one pushes out to the Lido. The sudden flashes of colour reminded him of the gleam of the opal-and-iris-throated birds that flutter round the tall honey-combed Campanile, or stalk, with such stately grace, through the dim, dust-stained arcades. Leaning back with half-closed eyes, he kept saying over and over to himself:—

"Devant une façade rose,
Sur le marbre d'un escalier."

The whole of Venice was in those two lines. He remembered the autumn that he had passed there, and a wonderful love that had stirred him to mad, delightful follies. There was romance in every place. But Venice, like Oxford, had kept the background for romance, and, to the true romantic, background was everything, or almost everything. Basil had been with him part of the time, and had gone wild over Tintoret. Poor Basil! what a horrible way for a man to die!

He sighed, and took up the volume again, and tried to forget. He read of the swallows that fly in and out of the little café at Smyrna where the Hadjis sit counting their amber beads and the turbaned merchants smoke their long tasselled pipes and talk gravely to each other; he read of the Obelisk in the Place de la Concorde that weeps tears of granite in its lonely sunless exile, and longs to be back by the hot lotus-covered Nile, where there are Sphinxes, and rose-red ibises, and white vultures with gilded claws, and crocodiles, with small beryl eyes, that crawl over the green steaming mud; he began to brood over those verses which, drawing music from kiss-stained marble, tell of that curious statue that Gautier compares to a contralto voice, the "*monstre charmant*" that couches in the porphyry-room of the Louvre. But after a time the book fell from his hand. He grew nervous, and a horrible fit of terror came over him. What if Alan Campbell should be out of England? Days would elapse before he could come back. Perhaps he might refuse to come. What could he do then? Every moment was of vital importance. They had been great friends once, five years before—almost inseparable, indeed. Then the intimacy had come suddenly to an end. When they met in society now, it was only Dorian Gray who smiled; Alan Campbell never did.

He was an extremely clever young man, though he had no real appreciation of the visible arts, and whatever little sense of the beauty of poetry he possessed he had gained entirely from Dorian. His dominant intellectual passion was for science. At Cambridge he had spent a great deal of his time working in the Laboratory, and had taken a good class in the Natural Science Tripos of his year. Indeed, he was still devoted to the

study of chemistry, and had a laboratory of his own, in which he used to shut himself up all day long, greatly to the annoyance of his mother, who had set her heart on his standing for Parliament, and had a vague idea that a chemist was a person who made up prescriptions. He was an excellent musician, however, as well, and played both the violin and the piano better than most amateurs. In fact, it was music that had first brought him and Dorian Gray together—music and that indefinable attraction that Dorian seemed to be able to exercise whenever he wished, and indeed exercised often without being conscious of it. They had met at Lady Berkshire's the night that Rubinstein played there, and after that used to be always seen together at the Opera, and wherever good music was going on. For eighteen months their intimacy lasted. Campbell was always either at Selby Royal or in Grosvenor Square. To him, as to many others, Dorian Gray was the type of everything that is wonderful and fascinating in life. Whether or not a quarrel had taken place between them no one ever knew. But suddenly people remarked that they scarcely spoke when they met, and that Campbell seemed always to go away early from any party at which Dorian Gray was present. He had changed, too—was strangely melancholy at times, appeared almost to dislike hearing music, and would never himself play, giving as his excuse, when he was called upon, that he was so absorbed in science that he had no time left in which to practise. And this was certainly true. Every day he seemed to become more interested in biology, and his name appeared once or twice in some of the scientific reviews, in connection with certain curious experiments.

This was the man Dorian Gray was waiting for. Every second he kept glancing at the clock. As the minutes went by he became horribly agitated. At last he got up, and began to pace up and down the room, looking like a beautiful caged thing. He took long stealthy strides. His hands were curiously cold.

The suspense became unbearable. Time seemed to him to be crawling with feet of lead, while he by monstrous winds was being swept towards the jagged edge of some black cleft of precipice. He knew what was waiting for him there; saw it indeed, and, shuddering, crushed with dank hands his burning lids as though he would have robbed the very brain of

sight, and driven the eyeballs back into their cave. It was useless. The brain had its own food on which it battered, and the imagination, made grotesque by terror, twisted and distorted as a living thing by pain, danced like some foul puppet on a stand, and grinned through moving masks. Then, suddenly, Time stopped for him. Yes: that blind, slow-breathing thing crawled no more, and horrible thoughts, Time being dead, raced nimbly on in front, and dragged a hideous future from its grave, and showed it to him. He stared at it. Its very horror made him stone.

At last the door opened, and his servant entered. He turned glazed eyes upon him.

"Mr. Campbell, sir," said the man.

A sigh of relief broke from his parched lips, and the colour came back to his cheeks.

"Ask him to come in at once, Francis." He felt that he was himself again. His mood of cowardice had passed away.

The man bowed, and retired. In a few moments Alan Campbell walked in, looking very stern and rather pale, his pallor being intensified by his coal-black hair and dark eyebrows.

"Alan! this is kind of you. I thank you for coming."

"I had intended never to enter your house again, Gray. But you said it was a matter of life and death." His voice was hard and cold. He spoke with slow deliberation. There was a look of contempt in the steady searching gaze that he turned on Dorian. He kept his hands in the pockets of his Astrakhan coat, and seemed not to have noticed the gesture with which he had been greeted.

"Yes: it is a matter of life and death, Alan, and to more than one person. Sit down."

Campbell took a chair by the table, and Dorian sat opposite to him. The two men's eyes met. In Dorian's there was infinite pity. He knew that what he was going to do was dreadful.

After a strained moment of silence, he leaned across and said, very quietly, but watching the effect of each word upon the face of him he had sent for, "Alan, in a locked room at the top of this house, a room to which nobody but myself has access, a dead man is seated at a table. He has been dead ten hours now. Don't stir, and don't look at me like that. Who the man is, why he died, how he died, are matters that do not concern you. What you have to do is this——"

"Stop, Gray. I don't want to know anything further. Whether what you have told me is true or not true, doesn't concern me. I entirely decline to be mixed up in your life. Keep your horrible secrets to yourself. They don't interest me any more."

"Alan, they will have to interest you. This one will have to interest you. I am awfully sorry for you, Alan. But I can't help myself. You are the one man who is able to save me. I am forced to bring you into the matter. I have no option. Alan, you are scientific. You know about chemistry, and things of that kind. You have made experiments. What you have got to do is to destroy the thing that is upstairs—to destroy it so that not a vestige of it will be left. Nobody saw this person come into the house. Indeed, at the present moment he is supposed to be in Paris. He will not be missed for months. When he is missed, there must be no trace of him found here. You, Alan, you must change him, and everything that belongs to him, into a handful of ashes that I may scatter in the air."

"You are mad, Dorian."

"Ah! I was waiting for you to call me Dorian."

"You are mad, I tell you—mad to imagine that I would raise a finger to help you, mad to make this monstrous confession. I will have nothing to do with this matter, whatever it is. Do you think I am going to peril my reputation for you? What is it to me what devil's work you are up to?"

"It was suicide, Alan."

"I am glad of that. But who drove him to it? You, I should fancy."

"Do you still refuse to do this for me?"

"Of course I refuse. I will have absolutely nothing to do with it. I don't care what shame comes on you. You deserve it all. I should not be sorry to see you disgraced, publicly disgraced. How dare you ask me, of all men in the world, to mix myself up in this horror? I should have thought you knew more about people's characters. Your friend Lord Henry Wotton can't have taught you much about psychology, whatever else he has taught you. Nothing will induce me to stir a step to help you. You have come to the wrong man. Go to some of your friends. Don't come to me."

"Alan, it was murder. I killed him. You don't know what he had made me suffer. Whatever my life is, he had more to do with the making or the marring of it than poor Harry has had. He may not have intended it, the result was the same."

"Murder! Good God, Dorian, is that what you have come to? I shall not inform upon you. It is not my business. Besides, without my stirring in the matter, you are certain to be arrested. Nobody ever commits a crime without doing something stupid. But I will have nothing to do with it."

"You must have something to do with it. Wait, wait a moment; listen to me. Only listen, Alan. All I ask of you is to perform a certain scientific experiment. You go to hospitals and dead-houses, and the horrors that you do there don't affect you. If in some hideous dissecting-room or fetid laboratory you found this man lying on a leaden table with red gutters scooped out in it for the blood to flow through, you would simply look upon him as an admirable subject. You would not turn a hair. You would not believe that you were doing anything wrong. On the contrary, you would probably feel that you were benefiting the human race, or increasing the sum of knowledge in the world, or gratifying intellectual curiosity, or something of that kind. What I want you to do is merely what you have often done before. Indeed, to destroy a body must be far less horrible than what you are accustomed to work at. And, remember, it is the only piece of evidence against me. If it is discovered, I am lost; and it is sure to be discovered unless you help me."

"I have no desire to help you. You forget that. I am simply indifferent to the whole thing. It has nothing to do with me."

"Alan, I entreat you. Think of the position I am in. Just before you came I almost fainted with terror. You may know terror yourself some day. No! don't think of that. Look at the matter purely from the scientific point of view. You don't inquire where the dead things on which you experiment come from. Don't inquire now. I have told you too much as it is. But I beg of you to do this. We were friends once, Alan."

"Don't speak about those days, Dorian: they are dead."

"The dead linger sometimes. The man upstairs will not go away. He is sitting at the table with bowed head and outstretched arms. Alan! Alan! if you don't come to my assistance I am ruined. Why, they will hang me, Alan! Don't you understand? They will hang me for what I have done."

"There is no good in prolonging this scene. I absolutely refuse to do anything in the matter. It is insane of you to ask me."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"I entreat you, Alan."

"It is useless."

The same look of pity came into Dorian Gray's eyes. Then he stretched out his hand, took a piece of paper, and wrote something on it. He read it over twice, folded it carefully, and pushed it across the table. Having done this, he got up, and went over to the window.

Campbell looked at him in surprise, and then took up the paper, and opened it. As he read it, his face became ghastly pale, and he fell back in his chair. A horrible sense of sickness came over him. He felt as if his heart was beating itself to death in some empty hollow.

After two or three minutes of terrible silence, Dorian turned round, and came and stood behind him, putting his hand upon his shoulder.

"I am so sorry for you, Alan," he murmured, "but you leave me no alternative. I have a letter written already. Here it is. You see the address.

If you don't help me, I must send it. If you don't help me, I will send it. You know what the result will be. But you are going to help me. It is impossible for you to refuse now. I tried to spare you. You will do me the justice to admit that. You were stern, harsh, offensive. You treated me as no man has ever dared to treat me—no living man, at any rate. I bore it all. Now it is for me to dictate terms."

Campbell buried his face in his hands, and a shudder passed through him.

"Yes, it is my turn to dictate terms, Alan. You know what they are. The thing is quite simple. Come, don't work yourself into this fever. The thing has to be done. Face it, and do it."

A groan broke from Campbell's lips, and he shivered all over. The ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to him to be dividing Time into separate atoms of agony, each of which was too terrible to be borne. He felt as if an iron ring was being slowly tightened round his forehead, as if the disgrace with which he was threatened had already come upon him. The hand upon his shoulder weighed like a hand of lead. It was intolerable. It seemed to crush him.

"Come, Alan, you must decide at once."

"I cannot do it," he said, mechanically, as though words could alter things.

"You must. You have no choice. Don't delay."

He hesitated a moment. "Is there a fire in the room upstairs?"

"Yes, there is a gas-fire with asbestos."

"I shall have to go home and get some things from the laboratory."

"No, Alan, you must not leave the house. Write out on a sheet of note-paper what you want, and my servant will take a cab and bring the things back to you."

Campbell scrawled a few lines, blotted them, and addressed an envelope to his assistant. Dorian took the note up and read it carefully. Then he rang

the bell, and gave it to his valet, with orders to return as soon as possible, and to bring the things with him.

As the hall door shut, Campbell started nervously, and, having got up from the chair, went over to the chimney-piece. He was shivering with a kind of ague. For nearly twenty minutes, neither of the men spoke. A fly buzzed noisily about the room, and the ticking of the clock was like the beat of a hammer.

As the chime struck one, Campbell turned round, and, looking at Dorian Gray, saw that his eyes were filled with tears. There was something in the purity and refinement of that sad face that seemed to enrage him. "You are infamous, absolutely infamous!" he muttered.

"Hush, Alan: you have saved my life," said Dorian.

"Your life? Good heavens! what a life that is! You have gone from corruption to corruption, and now you have culminated in crime. In doing what I am going to do, what you force me to do, it is not of your life that I am thinking."

"Ah, Alan," murmured Dorian, with a sigh, "I wish you had a thousandth part of the pity for me that I have for you." He turned away as he spoke, and stood looking out at the garden. Campbell made no answer.

After about ten minutes a knock came to the door, and the servant entered, carrying a large mahogany chest of chemicals, with a long coil of steel and platinum wire and two rather curiously-shaped iron clamps.

"Shall I leave the things here, sir?" he asked Campbell.

"Yes," said Dorian. "And I am afraid, Francis, that I have another errand for you. What is the name of the man at Richmond who supplies Selby with orchids?"

"Harden, sir."

"Yes—Harden. You must go down to Richmond at once, see Harden personally, and tell him to send twice as many orchids as I ordered, and to

have as few white ones as possible. In fact, I don't want any white ones. It is a lovely day, Francis, and Richmond is a very pretty place, otherwise I wouldn't bother you about it."

"No trouble, sir. At what time shall I be back?"

Dorian looked at Campbell. "How long will your experiment take, Alan?" he said, in a calm, indifferent voice. The presence of a third person in the room seemed to give him extraordinary courage.

Campbell frowned, and bit his lip. "It will take about five hours," he answered.

"It will be time enough, then, if you are back at half-past seven, Francis. Or stay: just leave my things out for dressing. You can have the evening to yourself. I am not dining at home, so I shall not want you."

"Thank you, sir," said the man, leaving the room.

"Now, Alan, there is not a moment to be lost. How heavy this chest is! I'll take it for you. You bring the other things." He spoke rapidly, and in an authoritative manner. Campbell felt dominated by him. They left the room together.

When they reached the top landing, Dorian took out the key and turned it in the lock. Then he stopped, and a troubled look came into his eyes. He shuddered. "I don't think I can go in, Alan," he murmured.

"It is nothing to me. I don't require you," said Campbell, coldly.

Dorian half opened the door. As he did so, he saw the face of his portrait leering in the sunlight. On the floor in front of it the torn curtain was lying. He remembered that, the night before he had forgotten, for the first time in his life, to hide the fatal canvas, and was about to rush forward, when he drew back with a shudder.

What was that loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood? How horrible it was!—more horrible, it seemed to him for the moment, than the silent

thing that he knew was stretched across the table, the thing whose grotesque misshapen shadow on the spotted carpet showed him that it had not stirred, but was still there, as he had left it.

He heaved a deep breath, opened the door a little wider, and with half-closed eyes and averted head walked quickly in, determined that he would not look even once upon the dead man. Then, stooping down, and taking up the gold and purple hanging, he flung it right over the picture.

There he stopped, feeling afraid to turn round, and his eyes fixed themselves on the intricacies of the pattern before him. He heard Campbell bringing in the heavy chest, and the irons, and the other things that he had required for his dreadful work. He began to wonder if he and Basil Hallward had ever met, and, if so, what they had thought of each other.

"Leave me now," said a stern voice behind him.

He turned and hurried out, just conscious that the dead man had been thrust back into the chair, and that Campbell was gazing into a glistening yellow face. As he was going downstairs he heard the key being turned in the lock.

It was long after seven when Campbell came back into the library. He was pale, but absolutely calm. "I have done what you asked me to do," he muttered. "And now, good-bye. Let us never see each other again."

"You have saved me from ruin, Alan. I cannot forget that," said Dorian, simply.

As soon as Campbell had left, he went upstairs. There was a horrible smell of nitric acid in the room. But the thing that had been sitting at the table was gone.

CHAPTER XV

That evening, at eight-thirty, exquisitely dressed and wearing a large buttonhole of Parma violets, Dorian Gray was ushered into Lady Narborough's drawing-room by bowing servants. His forehead was throbbing with maddened nerves, and he felt wildly excited, but his manner as he bent over his hostess's hand was as easy and graceful as ever. Perhaps one never seems so much at one's ease as when one has to play a part. Certainly no one looking at Dorian Gray that night could have believed that he had passed through a tragedy as horrible as any tragedy of our age. Those finely-shaped fingers could never have clutched a knife for sin, nor those smiling lips have cried out on God and goodness. He himself could not help wondering at the calm of his demeanour, and for a moment felt keenly the terrible pleasure of a double life.

It was a small party, got up rather in a hurry by Lady Narborough, who was a very clever woman, with what Lord Henry used to describe as the remains of really remarkable ugliness. She had proved an excellent wife to one of our most tedious ambassadors, and having buried her husband properly in a marble mausoleum, which she had herself designed, and married off her daughters to some rich, rather elderly men, she devoted herself now to the pleasures of French fiction, French cookery, and French *esprit* when she could get it.

Dorian was one of her special favourites, and she always told him that she was extremely glad she had not met him in early life. "I know, my dear, I should have fallen madly in love with you," she used to say, "and thrown my bonnet right over the mills for your sake. It is most fortunate that you were not thought of at the time. As it was, our bonnets were so unbecoming, and the mills were so occupied in trying to raise the wind, that I never had even a flirtation with anybody. However, that was all Narborough's fault. He was dreadfully short-sighted, and there is no pleasure in taking in a husband who never sees anything."

Her guests this evening were rather tedious. The fact was, as she explained to Dorian, behind a very shabby fan, one of her married daughters had come up quite suddenly to stay with her, and, to make matters worse, had actually brought her husband with her. "I think it is most unkind of her, my dear," she whispered. "Of course I go and stay with

them every summer after I come from Homburg, but then an old woman like me must have fresh air sometimes, and besides, I really wake them up. You don't know what an existence they lead down there. It is pure unadulterated country life. They get up early, because they have so much to do, and go to bed early because they have so little to think about. There has not been a scandal in the neighbourhood since the time of Queen Elizabeth, and consequently they all fall asleep after dinner. You shan't sit next either of them. You shall sit by me, and amuse me."

Dorian murmured a graceful compliment, and looked round the room. Yes: it was certainly a tedious party. Two of the people he had never seen before, and the others consisted of Ernest Harrowden, one of those middle-aged mediocrities so common in London clubs who have no enemies, but are thoroughly disliked by their friends; Lady Ruxton, an over-dressed woman of forty-seven, with a hooked nose, who was always trying to get herself compromised, but was so peculiarly plain that to her great disappointment no one would ever believe anything against her; Mrs. Erlynne, a pushing nobody, with a delightful lisp, and Venetian-red hair; Lady Alice Chapman, his hostess's daughter, a dowdy dull girl, with one of those characteristic British faces, that, once seen, are never remembered; and her husband, a red-cheeked, white-whiskered creature who, like so many of his class, was under the impression that inordinate joviality can atone for an entire lack of ideas.

He was rather sorry he had come, till Lady Narborough, looking at the great ormolu gilt clock that sprawled in gaudy curves on the mauve-draped mantel-shelf, exclaimed: "How horrid of Henry Wotton to be so late! I sent round to him this morning on chance, and he promised faithfully not to disappoint me."

It was some consolation that Harry was to be there, and when the door opened and he heard his slow musical voice lending charm to some insincere apology, he ceased to feel bored.

But at dinner he could not eat anything. Plate after plate went away untasted. Lady Narborough kept scolding him for what she called "an insult to poor Adolphe, who invented the *menu* specially for you," and now

and then Lord Henry looked across at him, wondering at his silence and abstracted manner. From time to time the butler filled his glass with champagne. He drank eagerly, and his thirst seemed to increase.

"Dorian," said Lord Henry, at last, as the *chaud-froid* was being handed round, "what is the matter with you to-night? You are quite out of sorts."

"I believe he is in love," cried Lady Narborough, "and that he is afraid to tell me for fear I should be jealous. He is quite right. I certainly should."

"Dear Lady Narborough," murmured Dorian, smiling, "I have not been in love for a whole week—not, in fact, since Madame de Ferrol left town."

"How you men can fall in love with that woman!" exclaimed the old lady. "I really cannot understand it."

"It is simply because she remembers you when you were a little girl, Lady Narborough," said Lord Henry. "She is the one link between us and your short frocks."

"She does not remember my short frocks at all, Lord Henry. But I remember her very well at Vienna thirty years ago, and how *décolletée* she was then."

"She is still *décolletée*," he answered, taking an olive in his long fingers; "and when she is in a very smart gown she looks like an *édition de luxe* of a bad French novel. She is really wonderful, and full of surprises. Her capacity for family affection is extraordinary. When her third husband died, her hair turned quite gold from grief."

"How can you, Harry!" cried Dorian.

"It is a most romantic explanation," laughed the hostess. "But her third husband, Lord Henry! You don't mean to say Ferrol is the fourth."

"Certainly, Lady Narborough."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, ask Mr. Gray. He is one of her most intimate friends."

"Is it true, Mr. Gray?"

"She assures me so, Lady Narborough," said Dorian. "I asked her whether, like Marguerite de Navarre, she had their hearts embalmed and hung at her girdle. She told me she didn't, because none of them had had any hearts at all."

"Four husbands! Upon my word that is *trop de zèle*."

"*Trop d'audace*, I tell her," said Dorian.

"Oh! she is audacious enough for anything, my dear. And what is Ferrol like? I don't know him."

"The husbands of very beautiful women belong to the criminal classes," said Lord Henry, sipping his wine.

Lady Narborough hit him with her fan. "Lord Henry, I am not at all surprised that the world says that you are extremely wicked."

"But what world says that?" asked Lord Henry, elevating his eyebrows. "It can only be the next world. This world and I are on excellent terms."

"Everybody I know says you are very wicked," cried the old lady, shaking her head.

Lord Henry looked serious for some moments. "It is perfectly monstrous," he said, at last, "the way people go about nowadays saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true."

"Isn't he incorrigible?" cried Dorian, leaning forward in his chair.

"I hope so," said his hostess, laughing. "But really if you all worship Madame de Ferrol in this ridiculous way, I shall have to marry again so as to be in the fashion."

"You will never marry again, Lady Narborough," broke in Lord Henry. "You were far too happy. When a woman marries again it is because she detested her first husband. When a man marries again, it is because he adored his first wife. Women try their luck; men risk theirs."

"Narborough wasn't perfect," cried the old lady.

"If he had been, you would not have loved him, my dear lady," was the rejoinder. "Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them they will forgive us everything, even our intellects. You will never ask me to dinner again, after saying this, I am afraid, Lady Narborough; but it is quite true."

"Of course it is true, Lord Henry. If we women did not love you for your defects, where would you all be? Not one of you would ever be married. You would be a set of unfortunate bachelors. Not, however, that that would alter you much. Nowadays all the married men live like bachelors, and all the bachelors like married men."

"*Fin de siècle*," murmured Lord Henry.

"*Fin du globe*," answered his hostess.

"I wish it were *fin du globe*," said Dorian, with a sigh. "Life is a great disappointment."

"Ah, my dear," cried Lady Narborough, putting on her gloves, "don't tell me that you have exhausted Life. When a man says that one knows that Life has exhausted him. Lord Henry is very wicked, and I sometimes wish that I had been; but you are made to be good—you look so good. I must find you a nice wife. Lord Henry, don't you think that Mr. Gray should get married?"

"I am always telling him so, Lady Narborough," said Lord Henry, with a bow.

"Well, we must look out for a suitable match for him. I shall go through Debrett carefully to-night, and draw out a list of all the eligible young ladies."

"With their ages, Lady Narborough?" asked Dorian.

"Of course, with their ages, slightly edited. But nothing must be done in a hurry. I want it to be what *The Morning Post* calls a suitable alliance, and I

want you both to be happy."

"What nonsense people talk about happy marriages!" exclaimed Lord Henry. "A man can be happy with any woman, as long as he does not love her."

"Ah! what a cynic you are!" cried the old lady, pushing back her chair, and nodding to Lady Ruxton. "You must come and dine with me soon again. You are really an admirable tonic, much better than what Sir Andrew prescribes for me. You must tell me what people you would like to meet, though. I want it to be a delightful gathering."

"I like men who have a future, and women who have a past," he answered. "Or do you think that would make it a petticoat party?"

"I fear so," she said, laughing, as she stood up. "A thousand pardons, my dear Lady Ruxton," she added. "I didn't see you hadn't finished your cigarette."

"Never mind, Lady Narborough. I smoke a great deal too much. I am going to limit myself, for the future."

"Pray don't, Lady Ruxton," said Lord Henry. "Moderation is a fatal thing. Enough is as bad as a meal. More than enough is as good as a feast."

Lady Ruxton glanced at him curiously. "You must come and explain that to me some afternoon, Lord Henry. It sounds a fascinating theory," she murmured, as she swept out of the room.

"Now, mind you don't stay too long over your politics and scandal," cried Lady Narborough from the door. "If you do, we are sure to squabble upstairs."

The men laughed, and Mr. Chapman got up solemnly from the foot of the table and came up to the top. Dorian Gray changed his seat, and went and sat by Lord Henry. Mr. Chapman began to talk in a loud voice about the situation in the House of Commons. He guffawed at his adversaries. The word *doctrinaire*—word full of terror to the British mind—reappeared from time to time between his explosions. An alliterative prefix served as

an ornament of oratory. He hoisted the Union Jack on the pinnacles of Thought. The inherited stupidity of the race—sound English common sense he jovially termed it—was shown to be the proper bulwark for Society.

A smile curved Lord Henry's lips, and he turned round and looked at Dorian.

"Are you better, my dear fellow?" he asked. "You seemed rather out of sorts at dinner."

"I am quite well, Harry. I am tired. That is all."

"You were charming last night. The little Duchess is quite devoted to you. She tells me she is going down to Selby."

"She has promised to come on the twentieth."

"Is Monmouth to be there too?"

"Oh, yes, Harry."

"He bores me dreadfully, almost as much as he bores her. She is very clever, too clever for a woman. She lacks the indefinable charm of weakness. It is the feet of clay that makes the gold of the image precious. Her feet are very pretty, but they are not feet of clay. White porcelain feet, if you like. They have been through the fire, and what fire does not destroy, it hardens. She has had experiences."

"How long has she been married?" asked Dorian.

"An eternity, she tells me. I believe, according to the peerage, it is ten years, but ten years with Monmouth must have been like eternity, with time thrown in. Who else is coming?"

"Oh, the Willoughbys, Lord Rugby and his wife, our hostess, Geoffrey Clouston, the usual set. I have asked Lord Grotrian."

"I like him," said Lord Henry. "A great many people don't, but I find him charming. He atones for being occasionally somewhat over-dressed, by being always absolutely over-educated. He is a very modern type."

"I don't know if he will be able to come, Harry. He may have to go to Monte Carlo with his father."

"Ah! what a nuisance people's people are! Try and make him come. By the way, Dorian, you ran off very early last night. You left before eleven. What did you do afterwards? Did you go straight home?"

Dorian glanced at him hurriedly, and frowned. "No, Harry," he said at last, "I did not get home till nearly three."

"Did you go to the club?"

"Yes," he answered. Then he bit his lip. "No, I don't mean that. I didn't go to the club. I walked about. I forget what I did... How inquisitive you are, Harry! You always want to know what one has been doing. I always want to forget what I have been doing. I came in at half-past two, if you wish to know the exact time. I had left my latch-key at home, and my servant had to let me in. If you want any corroborative evidence on the subject you can ask him."

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, as if I cared! Let us go up to the drawing-room. No sherry, thank you, Mr. Chapman. Something has happened to you, Dorian. Tell me what it is. You are not yourself to-night."

"Don't mind me, Harry. I am irritable, and out of temper. I shall come round and see you to-morrow or next day. Make my excuses to Lady Narborough. I shan't go upstairs. I shall go home. I must go home."

"All right, Dorian. I daresay I shall see you to-morrow at tea-time. The Duchess is coming."

"I will try to be there, Harry," he said, leaving the room. As he drove back to his own house he was conscious that the sense of terror he thought he had strangled had come back to him. Lord Henry's casual questioning had made him lose his nerves for the moment, and he wanted his nerve still. Things that were dangerous had to be destroyed. He winced. He hated the idea of even touching them.

Yet it had to be done. He realised that, and when he had locked the door of his library, he opened the secret press into which he had thrust Basil Hallward's coat and bag. A huge fire was blazing. He piled another log on it. The smell of the singeing clothes and burning leather was horrible. It took him three-quarters of an hour to consume everything. At the end he felt faint and sick, and having lit some Algerian pastilles in a pierced copper brazier, he bathed his hands and forehead with a cool musk-scented vinegar.

Suddenly he started. His eyes grew strangely bright, and he gnawed nervously at his under-lip. Between two of the windows stood a large Florentine cabinet, made out of ebony, and inlaid with ivory and blue lapis. He watched it as though it were a thing that could fascinate and make afraid, as though it held something that he longed for and yet almost loathed. His breath quickened. A mad craving came over him. He lit a cigarette and then threw it away. His eyelids drooped till the long fringed lashes almost touched his cheek. But he still watched the cabinet. At last he got up from the sofa on which he had been lying, went over to it, and, having unlocked it, touched some hidden spring. A triangular drawer passed slowly out. His fingers moved instinctively towards it, dipped in, and closed on something. It was a small Chinese box of black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with round crystals and tasselled in plaited

metal threads. He opened it. Inside was a green paste, waxy in lustre, the odour curiously heavy and persistent.

He hesitated for some moments, with a strangely immobile smile upon his face. Then shivering, though the atmosphere of the room was terribly hot, he drew himself up, and glanced at the clock. It was twenty minutes to twelve. He put the box back, shutting the cabinet doors as he did so, and went into his bedroom.

As midnight was striking bronze blows upon the dusky air, Dorian Gray dressed commonly, and with a muffler wrapped round his throat, crept quietly out of the house. In Bond Street he found a hansom with a good horse. He hailed it, and in a low voice gave the driver an address.

The man shook his head. "It is too far for me," he muttered.

"Here is a sovereign for you," said Dorian. "You shall have another if you drive fast."

"All right, sir," answered the man, "you will be there in an hour," and after his fare had got in he turned his horse round, and drove rapidly towards the river.

CHAPTER XVI

A cold rain began to fall, and the blurred street-lamps looked ghastly in the dripping mist. The public-houses were just closing, and dim men and women were clustering in broken groups round their doors. From some of the bars came the sound of horrible laughter. In others, drunkards brawled and screamed.

Lying back in the hansom, with his hat pulled over his forehead, Dorian Gray watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city, and now and then he repeated to himself the words that Lord Henry had said to him on the first day they had met, "To cure the soul by means of the senses, and

the senses by means of the soul." Yes, that was the secret. He had often tried it, and would try it again now. There were opium-dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new.

The moon hung low in the sky like a yellow skull. From time to time a huge misshapen cloud stretched a long arm across and hid it. The gas-lamps grew fewer, and the streets more narrow and gloomy. Once the man lost his way, and had to drive back half a mile. A steam rose from the horse as it splashed up the puddles. The side-windows of the hansom were clogged with a grey-flannel mist.

"To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul!" How the words rang in his ears! His soul, certainly, was sick to death. Was it true that the senses could cure it? Innocent blood had been spilt. What could atone for that? Ah! for that there was no atonement; but though forgiveness was impossible, forgetfulness was possible still, and he was determined to forget, to stamp the thing out, to crush it as one would crush the adder that had stung one. Indeed, what right had Basil to have spoken to him as he had done? Who had made him a Judge over others? He had said things that were dreadful, horrible, not to be endured.

On and on plodded the hansom, going slower, it seemed to him, at each step. He thrust up the trap, and called to the man to drive faster. The hideous hunger for opium began to gnaw at him. His throat burned, and his delicate hands twitched nervously together. He struck at the horse madly with his stick. The driver laughed, and whipped up. He laughed in answer, and the man was silent.

The way seemed interminable, and the streets like the black web of some sprawling spider. The monotony became unbearable, and, as the mist thickened, he felt afraid.

Then they passed by lonely brickfields. The fog was lighter here, and he could see the strange bottle-shaped kilns with their orange fan-like tongues of fire. A dog barked as they went by, and far away in the darkness

some wandering sea-gull screamed. The horse stumbled in a rut, then swerved aside, and broke into a gallop.

After some time they left the clay road, and rattled again over rough-paven streets. Most of the windows were dark, but now and then fantastic shadows were silhouetted against some lamp-lit blind. He watched them curiously. They moved like monstrous marionettes, and made gestures like live things. He hated them. A dull rage was in his heart. As they turned a corner a woman yelled something at them from an open door, and two men ran after the hansom for about a hundred yards. The driver beat at them with his whip.

It is said that passion makes one think in a circle. Certainly with hideous iteration the bitten lips of Dorian Gray shaped and reshaped those subtle words that dealt with soul and sense, till he had found in them the full expression, as it were, of his mood, and justified, by intellectual approval, passions that without such justification would still have dominated his temper. From cell to cell of his brain crept the one thought; and the wild desire to live, most terrible of all man's appetites, quickened into force each trembling nerve and fibre. Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason. Ugliness was the one reality. The coarse brawl, the loathsome den, the crude violence of disordered life, the very vileness of thief and outcast, were more vivid, in their intense actuality of impression, than all the gracious shapes of Art, the dreamy shadows of Song. They were what he needed for forgetfulness. In three days he would be free.

Suddenly the man drew up with a jerk at the top of a dark lane. Over the low roofs and jagged chimney stacks of the houses rose the black masts of ships. Wreaths of white mist clung like ghostly sails to the yards.

"Somewhere about here, sir, ain't it?" he asked huskily through the trap.

Dorian started, and peered round. "This will do," he answered, and, having got out hastily, and given the driver the extra fare he had promised him, he walked quickly in the direction of the quay. Here and there a lantern gleamed at the stern of some huge merchantman. The light shook

and splintered in the puddles. A red glare came from an outward-bound steamer that was coaling. The slimy pavement looked like a wet mackintosh.

He hurried on towards the left, glancing back now and then to see if he was being followed. In about seven or eight minutes he reached a small shabby house, that was wedged in between two gaunt factories. In one of the top-windows stood a lamp. He stopped, and gave a peculiar knock.

After a little time he heard steps in the passage, and the chain being unhooked. The door opened quietly, and he went in without saying a word to the squat misshapen figure that flattened itself into the shadow as he passed. At the end of the hall hung a tattered green curtain that swayed and shook in the gusty wind which had followed him in from the street. He dragged it aside, and entered a long, low room which looked as if it had once been a third-rate dancing-saloon. Shrill flaring gas-jets, dulled and distorted in the fly-blown mirrors that faced them, were ranged round the walls. Greasy reflectors of ribbed tin backed them, making quivering discs of light. The floor was covered with ochre-coloured sawdust, trampled here and there into mud, and stained with dark rings of spilt liquor. Some Malays were crouching by a little charcoal stove playing with bone counters, and showing their white teeth as they chattered. In one corner, with his head buried in his arms, a sailor sprawled over a table, and by the tawdrily-painted bar that ran across one complete side stood two haggard women mocking an old man who was brushing the sleeves of his coat with an expression of disgust. "He thinks he's got red ants on him," laughed one of them, as Dorian passed by. The man looked at her in terror and began to whimper.

At the end of the room there was a little staircase, leading to a darkened chamber. As Dorian hurried up its three rickety steps, the heavy odour of opium met him. He heaved a deep breath, and his nostrils quivered with pleasure. When he entered, a young man with smooth yellow hair, who was bending over a lamp, lighting a long thin pipe, looked up at him, and nodded in a hesitating manner.

"You here, Adrian?" muttered Dorian.

"Where else should I be?" he answered, listlessly. "None of the chaps will speak to me now."

"I thought you had left England."

"Darlington is not going to do anything. My brother paid the bill at last. George doesn't speak to me either.... I don't care," he added, with a sigh. "As long as one has this stuff, one doesn't want friends. I think I have had too many friends."

Dorian winced, and looked round at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes, fascinated him. He knew in what strange heavens they were suffering, and what dull hells were teaching them the secret of some new joy. They were better off than he was. He was prisoned in thought. Memory, like a horrible malady, was eating his soul away. From time to time he seemed to see the eyes of Basil Hallward looking at him. Yet he felt he could not stay. The presence of Adrian Singleton troubled him. He wanted to be where no one would know who he was. He wanted to escape from himself.

"I am going on to the other place," he said, after a pause.

"On the wharf?"

"Yes."

"That mad-cat is sure to be there. They won't have her in this place now."

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. "I am sick of women who love one. Women who hate one are much more interesting. Besides, the stuff is better."

"Much the same."

"I like it better. Come and have something to drink. I must have something."

"I don't want anything," murmured the young man.

"Never mind."

Adrian Singleton rose up wearily, and followed Dorian to the bar. A half-caste, in a ragged turban and a shabby ulster, grinned a hideous greeting as he thrust a bottle of brandy and two tumblers in front of them. The women sidled up, and began to chatter. Dorian turned his back on them, and said something in a low voice to Adrian Singleton.

A crooked smile, like a Malay crease, writhed across the face of one of the women. "We are very proud to-night," she sneered.

"For God's sake don't talk to me," cried Dorian, stamping his foot on the ground. "What do you want? Money? Here it is. Don't ever talk to me again."

Two red sparks flashed for a moment in the woman's sodden eyes, then flickered out, and left them dull and glazed. She tossed her head, and raked the coins off the counter with greedy fingers. Her companion watched her enviously.

"It's no use," sighed Adrian Singleton. "I don't care to go back. What does it matter? I am quite happy here."

"You will write to me if you want anything, won't you?" said Dorian, after a pause.

"Perhaps."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night," answered the young man, passing up the steps, and wiping his parched mouth with a handkerchief.

Dorian walked to the door with a look of pain in his face. As he drew the curtain aside a hideous laugh broke from the painted lips of the woman who had taken his money. "There goes the devil's bargain!" she hiccupped, in a hoarse voice.

"Curse you!" he answered, "don't call me that."

She snapped her fingers. "Prince Charming is what you like to be called, ain't it?" she yelled after him.

The drowsy sailor leapt to his feet as she spoke, and looked wildly round. The sound of the shutting of the hall door fell on his ear. He rushed out as if in pursuit.

Dorian Gray hurried along the quay through the drizzling rain. His meeting with Adrian Singleton had strangely moved him, and he wondered if the ruin of that young life was really to be laid at his door, as Basil Hallward had said to him with such infamy of insult. He bit his lip, and for a few seconds his eyes grew sad. Yet, after all, what did it matter to him? One's days were too brief to take the burden of another's errors on one's shoulders. Each man lived his own life, and paid his own price for living it. The only pity was one had to pay so often for a single fault. One had to pay over and over again, indeed. In her dealings with man Destiny never closed her accounts.

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin, or for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their terrible end as automatons move, Choice is taken from them, and conscience is either killed, or, if it lives at all, lives but to give rebellion its fascination, and disobedience its charm. For all sins, as theologians weary not of reminding us, are sins of disobedience. When that high spirit, that morning-star of evil, fell from heaven, it was as a rebel that he fell.

Callous, concentrated on evil, with stained mind, and soul hungry for rebellion, Dorian Gray hastened on, quickening his step as he went, but as he darted aside into a dim archway, that had served him often as a short cut to the ill-famed place where he was going, he felt himself suddenly seized from behind, and before he had time to defend himself he was thrust back against the wall, with a brutal hand round his throat.

He struggled madly for life, and by a terrible effort wrenched the tightening fingers away. In a second he heard the click of a revolver, and saw the gleam of a polished barrel pointing straight at his head, and the dusky form of a short thick-set man facing him.

"What do you want?" he gasped.

"Keep quiet," said the man. "If you stir, I shoot you."

"You are mad. What have I done to you?"

"You wrecked the life of Sibyl Vane," was the answer, "and Sibyl Vane was my sister. She killed herself. I know it. Her death is at your door. I swore I would kill you in return. For years I have sought you. I had no clue, no trace. The two people who could have described you were dead. I knew nothing of you but the pet name she used to call you. I heard it to-night by chance. Make your peace with God, for to-night you are going to die."

Dorian Gray grew sick with fear. "I never knew her," he stammered. "I never heard of her. You are mad."

"You had better confess your sin, for as sure as I am James Vane, you are going to die." There was a horrible moment. Dorian did not know what to say or do. "Down on your knees!" growled the man. "I give you one minute to make your peace—no more. I go on board to-night for India, and I must do my job first. One minute. That's all."

Dorian's arms fell to his side. Paralysed with terror, he did not know what to do. Suddenly a wild hope flashed across his brain. "Stop," he cried. "How long ago is it since your sister died? Quick, tell me!"

"Eighteen years," said the man. "Why do you ask me? What do years matter?"

"Eighteen years," laughed Dorian Gray, with a touch of triumph in his voice. "Eighteen years! Set me under the lamp and look at my face!"

James Vane hesitated for a moment, not understanding what was meant. Then he seized Dorian Gray and dragged him from the archway.

Dim and wavering as was the wind-blown light, yet it served to show him the hideous error, as it seemed, into which he had fallen, for the face of the man he had sought to kill had all the bloom of boyhood, all the unstained purity of youth. He seemed little more than a lad of twenty summers, hardly older, if older indeed at all, than his sister had been when they had parted so many years ago. It was obvious that this was not the man who had destroyed her life.

He loosened his hold and reeled back. "My God! my God!" he cried, "and I would have murdered you!"

Dorian Gray drew a long breath. "You have been on the brink of committing a terrible crime, my man," he said, looking at him sternly. "Let this be a warning to you not to take vengeance into your own hands."

"Forgive me, sir," muttered James Vane. "I was deceived. A chance word I heard in that damned den set me on the wrong track."

"You had better go home, and put that pistol away, or you may get into trouble," said Dorian, turning on his heel, and going slowly down the street.

James Vane stood on the pavement in horror. He was trembling from head to foot. After a little while a black shadow that had been creeping along the dripping wall, moved out into the light and came close to him with stealthy footsteps. He felt a hand laid on his arm and looked round with a start. It was one of the women who had been drinking at the bar.

"Why didn't you kill him?" she hissed out, putting her haggard face quite close to his. "I knew you were following him when you rushed out from Daly's. You fool! You should have killed him. He has lots of money, and he's as bad as bad."

"He is not the man I am looking for," he answered, "and I want no man's money. I want a man's life. The man whose life I want must be nearly forty

now. This one is little more than a boy. Thank God, I have not got his blood upon my hands."

The woman gave a bitter laugh. "Little more than a boy!" she sneered. "Why, man, it's nigh on eighteen years since Prince Charming made me what I am."

"You lie!" cried James Vane.

She raised her hand up to heaven. "Before God I am telling the truth," she cried.

"Before God?"

"Strike me dumb if it ain't so. He is the worst one that comes here. They say he has sold himself to the devil for a pretty face. It's nigh on eighteen years since I met him. He hasn't changed much since then. I have though," she added, with a sickly leer.

"You swear this?"

"I swear it," came in hoarse echo from her flat mouth. "But don't give me away to him," she whined; "I am afraid of him. Let me have some money for my night's lodging."

He broke from her with an oath, and rushed to the corner of the street, but Dorian Gray had disappeared. When he looked back, the woman had vanished also.

CHAPTER XVII

A week later Dorian Gray was sitting in the conservatory at Selby Royal talking to the pretty Duchess of Monmouth, who with her husband, a jaded-looking man of sixty, was amongst his guests. It was tea-time, and the mellow light of the huge lace-covered lamp that stood on the table lit up the delicate china and hammered silver of the service at which the

Duchess was presiding. Her white hands were moving daintily among the cups, and her full red lips were smiling at something that Dorian had whispered to her. Lord Henry was lying back in a silk-draped wicker chair looking at them. On a peach-coloured divan sat Lady Narborough pretending to listen to the Duke's description of the last Brazilian beetle that he had added to his collection. Three young men in elaborate smoking-suits were handing tea-cakes to some of the women. The house-party consisted of twelve people, and there were more expected to arrive on the next day.

"What are you two talking about?" said Lord Henry, strolling over to the table, and putting his cup down. "I hope Dorian has told you about my plan for rechristening everything, Gladys. It is a delightful idea."

"But I don't want to be rechristened, Harry," rejoined the Duchess, looking up at him with her wonderful eyes. "I am quite satisfied with my own name, and I am sure Mr. Gray should be satisfied with his."

"My dear Gladys, I would not alter either name for the world. They are both perfect. I was thinking chiefly of flowers. Yesterday I cut an orchid, for my buttonhole. It was a marvellous spotted thing, as effective as the seven deadly sins. In a thoughtless moment I asked one of the gardeners what it was called. He told me it was a fine specimen of *Robinsoniana*, or something dreadful of that kind. It is a sad truth, but we have lost the faculty of giving lovely names to things. Names are everything. I never quarrel with actions. My one quarrel is with words. That is the reason I hate vulgar realism in literature. The man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one. It is the only thing he is fit for."

"Then what should we call you, Harry?" she asked.

"His name is Prince Paradox," said Dorian.

"I recognise him in a flash," exclaimed the Duchess.

"I won't hear of it," laughed Lord Henry, sinking into a chair. "From a label there is no escape! I refuse the title."

"Royalties may not abdicate," fell as a warning from pretty lips.

"You wish me to defend my throne, then?"

"Yes."

"I give the truths of to-morrow."

"I prefer the mistakes of to-day," she answered.

"You disarm me, Gladys," he cried, catching the wilfulness of her mood.

"Of your shield, Harry: not of your spear."

"I never tilt against Beauty," he said, with a wave of his hand.

"That is your error, Harry, believe me. You value beauty far too much."

"How can you say that? I admit that I think that it is better to be beautiful than to be good. But on the other hand no one is more ready than I am to acknowledge that it is better to be good than to be ugly."

"Ugliness is one of the seven deadly sins, then?" cried the Duchess.
"What becomes of your simile about the orchid?"

"Ugliness is one of the seven deadly virtues, Gladys. You, as a good Tory, must not underrate them. Beer, the Bible, and the seven deadly virtues have made our England what she is."

"You don't like your country, then?" she asked.

"I live in it."

"That you may censure it the better."

"Would you have me take the verdict of Europe on it?" he inquired.

"What do they say of us?"

"That Tartuffe has emigrated to England and opened a shop."

"Is that yours, Harry?"

"I give it to you."

"I could not use it. It is too true."

"You need not be afraid. Our countrymen never recognise a description."

"They are practical."

"They are more cunning than practical. When they make up their ledger, they balance stupidity by wealth, and vice by hypocrisy."

"Still, we have done great things."

"Great things have been thrust on us, Gladys."

"We have carried their burden."

"Only as far as the Stock Exchange."

She shook her head. "I believe in the race," she cried.

"It represents the survival of the pushing."

"It has development."

"Decay fascinates me more."

"What of Art?" she asked.

"It is a malady."

"Love?"

"An illusion."

"Religion?"

"The fashionable substitute for Belief."

"You are a sceptic."

"Never! Scepticism is the beginning of Faith."

"What are you?"

"To define is to limit."

"Give me a clue."

"Threads snap. You would lose your way in the labyrinth."

"You bewilder me. Let us talk of someone else."

"Our host is a delightful topic. Years ago he was christened Prince Charming."

"Ah! don't remind me of that," cried Dorian Gray.

"Our host is rather horrid this evening," answered the Duchess, colouring. "I believe he thinks that Monmouth married me on purely scientific principles as the best specimen he could find of a modern butterfly."

"Well, I hope he won't stick pins into you, Duchess," laughed Dorian.

"Oh! my maid does that already, Mr. Gray, when she is annoyed with me."

"And what does she get annoyed with you about, Duchess?"

"For the most trivial things, Mr. Gray, I assure you. Usually because I come in at ten minutes to nine and tell her that I must be dressed by half-past eight."

"How unreasonable of her! You should give her warning."

"I daren't, Mr. Gray. Why, she invents hats for me. You remember the one I wore at Lady Hilstone's garden-party? You don't, but it is nice of you to pretend that you do. Well, she made it out of nothing. All good hats are made out of nothing."

"Like all good reputations, Gladys," interrupted Lord Henry. "Every effect that one produces gives one an enemy. To be popular one must be a mediocrity."

"Not with women," said the Duchess, shaking her head; "and women rule the world. I assure you we can't bear mediocrities. We women, as someone says, love with our ears, just as you men love with your eyes, if you ever love at all."

"It seems to me that we never do anything else," murmured Dorian.

"Ah! then, you never really love, Mr. Gray," answered the Duchess, with mock sadness.

"My dear Gladys!" cried Lord Henry. "How can you say that? Romance lives by repetition, and repetition converts an appetite into an art. Besides, each time that one loves is the only time one has ever loved. Difference of object does not alter singleness of passion. It merely intensifies it. We can have in life but one great experience at best, and the secret of life is to reproduce that experience as often as possible."

"Even when one has been wounded by it, Harry?" asked the Duchess, after a pause.

"Especially when one has been wounded by it," answered Lord Henry.

The Duchess turned and looked at Dorian Gray with a curious expression in her eyes. "What do you say to that, Mr. Gray?" she inquired.

Dorian hesitated for a moment. Then he threw his head back and laughed. "I always agree with Harry, Duchess."

"Even when he is wrong?"

"Harry is never wrong, Duchess."

"And does his philosophy make you happy?"

"I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure."

"And found it, Mr. Gray?"

"Often. Too often."

The Duchess sighed. "I am searching for peace," she said, "and if I don't go and dress, I shall have none this evening."

"Let me get you some orchids, Duchess," cried Dorian, starting to his feet, and walking down the conservatory.

"You are flirting disgracefully with him," said Lord Henry to his cousin. "You had better take care. He is very fascinating."

"If he were not, there would be no battle."

"Greek meets Greek, then?"

"I am on the side of the Trojans. They fought for a woman."

"They were defeated."

"There are worse things than capture," she answered.

"You gallop with a loose rein."

"Pace gives life," was the *riposte*.

"I shall write it in my diary to-night."

"What?"

"That a burnt child loves the fire."

"I am not even singed. My wings are untouched."

"You use them for everything, except flight."

"Courage has passed from men to women. It is a new experience for us."

"You have a rival."

"Who?"

He laughed. "Lady Narborough," he whispered. "She perfectly adores him."

"You fill me with apprehension. The appeal to Antiquity is fatal to us who are romanticists."

"Romanticists! You have all the methods of science."

"Men have educated us."

"But not explained you."

"Describe us as a sex," was her challenge.

"Sphynxes without secrets."

She looked at him, smiling. "How long Mr. Gray is!" she said. "Let us go and help him. I have not yet told him the colour of my frock."

"Ah! you must suit your frock to his flowers, Gladys."

"That would be a premature surrender."

"Romantic Art begins with its climax."

"I must keep an opportunity for retreat."

"In the Parthian manner?"

"They found safety in the desert. I could not do that."

"Women are not always allowed a choice," he answered, but hardly had he finished the sentence before from the far end of the conservatory came a stifled groan, followed by the dull sound of a heavy fall. Everybody started up. The Duchess stood motionless in horror. And with fear in his eyes Lord Henry rushed through the flapping palms to find Dorian Gray lying face downwards on the tiled floor in a death-like swoon.

He was carried at once into the blue drawing-room, and laid upon one of the sofas. After a short time he came to himself, and looked round with a dazed expression.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Oh! I remember. Am I safe here, Harry?" He began to tremble.

"My dear Dorian," answered Lord Henry, "you merely fainted. That was all. You must have overtired yourself. You had better not come down to dinner. I will take your place."

"No, I will come down," he said, struggling to his feet. "I would rather come down. I must not be alone."

He went to his room and dressed. There was a wild recklessness of gaiety in his manner as he sat at table, but now and then a thrill of terror ran through him when he remembered that, pressed against the window of the conservatory, like a white handkerchief, he had seen the face of James Vane watching him.

CHAPTER XVIII

The next day he did not leave the house, and, indeed, spent most of the time in his own room, sick with a wild terror of dying, and yet indifferent to life itself. The consciousness of being hunted, snared, tracked down, had begun to dominate him. If the tapestry did but tremble in the wind, he shook. The dead leaves that were blown against the leaded panes seemed to him like his own wasted resolutions and wild regrets. When he closed his eyes, he saw again the sailor's face peering through the mist-stained glass, and horror seemed once more to lay its hand upon his heart.

But perhaps it had been only his fancy that had called vengeance out of the night, and set the hideous shapes of punishment before him. Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination. It was the imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin. It was the imagination that made each crime bear its misshapen brood. In the common world of fact the wicked were not punished, nor the good rewarded. Success was given to the strong, failure thrust upon the weak. That was all. Besides, had any stranger been prowling round the house he would have been seen by the servants or the keepers. Had any footmarks been found on the flower-beds, the gardeners would have reported it. Yes:

it had been merely fancy. Sibyl Vane's brother had not come back to kill him. He had sailed away in his ship to founder in some winter sea. From him, at any rate, he was safe. Why, the man did not know who he was, could not know who he was. The mask of youth had saved him.

And yet if it had been merely an illusion, how terrible it was to think that conscience could raise such fearful phantoms, and give them visible form, and make them move before one! What sort of life would his be, if day and night, shadows of his crime were to peer at him from silent corners, to mock him from secret places, to whisper in his ear as he sat at the feast, to wake him with icy fingers as he lay asleep! As the thought crept through his brain, he grew pale with terror, and the air seemed to him to have become suddenly colder. Oh! in what a wild hour of madness he had killed his friend! How ghastly the mere memory of the scene! He saw it all again. Each hideous detail came back to him with added horror. Out of the black cave of Time, terrible and swathed in scarlet, rose the image of his sin. When Lord Henry came in at six o'clock, he found him crying as one whose heart will break.

It was not till the third day that he ventured to go out. There was something in the clear, pine-scented air of that winter morning that seemed to bring him back his joyousness and his ardour for life. But it was not merely the physical conditions of environment that had caused the change. His own nature had revolted against the excess of anguish that had sought to maim and mar the perfection of its calm. With subtle and finely-wrought temperaments it is always so. Their strong passions must either bruise or bend. They either slay the man, or themselves die. Shallow sorrows and shallow loves live on. The loves and sorrows that are great are destroyed by their own plenitude. Besides, he had convinced himself that he had been the victim of a terror-stricken imagination, and looked back now on his fears with something of pity and not a little of contempt.

After breakfast he walked with the Duchess for an hour in the garden, and then drove across the park to join the shooting-party. The crisp frost lay like salt upon the grass. The sky was an inverted cup of blue metal. A thin film of ice bordered the flat reed-grown lake.

At the corner of the pine-wood he caught sight of Sir Geoffrey Clouston, the Duchess's brother, jerking two spent cartridges out of his gun. He jumped from the cart, and having told the groom to take the mare home, made his way towards his guest through the withered bracken and rough undergrowth.

"Have you had good sport, Geoffrey?" he asked.

"Not very good, Dorian. I think most of the birds have gone to the open. I dare say it will be better after lunch, when we get to new ground."

Dorian strolled along by his side. The keen aromatic air, the brown and red lights that glimmered in the wood, the hoarse cries of the beaters ringing out from time to time, and the sharp snaps of the guns that followed, fascinated him, and filled him with a sense of delightful freedom. He was dominated by the carelessness of happiness, by the high indifference of joy.

Suddenly from a lumpy tussock of old grass, some twenty yards in front of them, with black-tipped ears erect, and long hinder limbs throwing it forward, started a hare. It bolted for a thicket of alders. Sir Geoffrey put his gun to his shoulder, but there was something in the animal's grace of movement that strangely charmed Dorian Gray, and he cried out at once, "Don't shoot it, Geoffrey. Let it live."

"What nonsense, Dorian!" laughed his companion, and as the hare bounded into the thicket he fired. There were two cries heard, the cry of a hare in pain, which is dreadful, the cry of a man in agony, which is worse.

"Good heavens! I have hit a beater!" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey. "What an ass the man was to get in front of the guns! Stop shooting there!" he called out at the top of his voice. "A man is hurt."

The head-keeper came running up with a stick in his hand.

"Where, sir? Where is he?" he shouted. At the same time the firing ceased along the line.

"Here," answered Sir Geoffrey, angrily, hurrying towards the thicket. "Why on earth don't you keep your men back? Spoiled my shooting for the day."

Dorian watched them as they plunged into the alder-clump, brushing the lithe, swinging branches aside. In a few moments they emerged, dragging a body after them into the sunlight. He turned away in horror. It seemed to him that misfortune followed wherever he went. He heard Sir Geoffrey ask if the man was really dead, and the affirmative answer of the keeper. The wood seemed to him to have become suddenly alive with faces. There was the trampling of myriad feet, and the low buzz of voices. A great copper-breasted pheasant came beating through the boughs overhead.

After a few moments, that were to him, in his perturbed state, like endless hours of pain, he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. He started, and looked round.

"Dorian," said Lord Henry, "I had better tell them that the shooting is stopped for to-day. It would not look well to go on."

"I wish it were stopped for ever, Harry," he answered, bitterly. "The whole thing is hideous and cruel. Is the man...?"

He could not finish the sentence.

"I am afraid so," rejoined Lord Henry. "He got the whole charge of shot in his chest. He must have died almost instantaneously. Come; let us go home."

They walked side by side in the direction of the avenue for nearly fifty yards without speaking. Then Dorian looked at Lord Henry, and said, with a heavy sigh, "It is a bad omen, Harry, a very bad omen."

"What is?" asked Lord Henry. "Oh! this accident, I suppose. My dear fellow, it can't be helped. It was the man's own fault. Why did he get in front of the guns? Besides, it's nothing to us. It is rather awkward for Geoffrey, of course. It does not do to pepper beaters. It makes people think that one is a wild shot. And Geoffrey is not; he shoots very straight. But there is no use talking about the matter."

Dorian shook his head. "It is a bad omen, Harry. I feel as if something horrible were going to happen to some of us. To myself, perhaps," he added, passing his hand over his eyes, with a gesture of pain.

The elder man laughed. "The only horrible thing in the world is *ennui*, Dorian. That is the one sin for which there is no forgiveness. But we are not likely to suffer from it, unless these fellows keep chattering about this thing at dinner. I must tell them that the subject is to be tabooed. As for omens, there is no such thing as an omen. Destiny does not send us heralds. She is too wise or too cruel for that. Besides, what on earth could happen to you, Dorian? You have everything in the world that a man can want. There is no one who would not be delighted to change places with you."

"There is no one with whom I would not change places, Harry. Don't laugh like that. I am telling you the truth. The wretched peasant who has just died is better off than I am. I have no terror of Death. It is the coming of Death that terrifies me. Its monstrous wings seem to wheel in the leaden air around me. Good heavens! don't you see a man moving behind the trees there, watching me, waiting for me?"

Lord Henry looked in the direction in which the trembling gloved hand was pointing. "Yes," he said, smiling, "I see the gardener waiting for you. I suppose he wants to ask you what flowers you wish to have on the table tonight. How absurdly nervous you are, my dear fellow! You must come and see my doctor, when we get back to town."

Dorian heaved a sigh of relief as he saw the gardener approaching. The man touched his hat, glanced for a moment at Lord Henry in a hesitating manner, and then produced a letter, which he handed to his master. "Her Grace told me to wait for an answer," he murmured.

Dorian put the letter into his pocket. "Tell her Grace that I am coming in," he said, coldly. The man turned round, and went rapidly in the direction of the house.

"How fond women are of doing dangerous things!" laughed Lord Henry. "It is one of the qualities in them that I admire most. A woman will flirt

with anybody in the world as long as other people are looking on."

"How fond you are of saying dangerous things, Harry! In the present instance you are quite astray. I like the Duchess very much, but I don't love her."

"And the Duchess loves you very much, but she likes you less, so you are excellently matched."

"You are talking scandal, Harry, and there is never any basis for scandal."

"The basis of every scandal is an immoral certainty," said Lord Henry, lighting a cigarette.

"You would sacrifice anybody, Harry, for the sake of an epigram."

"The world goes to the altar of its own accord," was the answer.

"I wish I could love," cried Dorian Gray, with a deep note of pathos in his voice. "But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the desire. I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden to me. I want to escape, to go away, to forget. It was silly of me to come down here at all. I think I shall send a wire to Harvey to have the yacht got ready. On a yacht one is safe."

"Safe from what, Dorian? You are in some trouble. Why not tell me what it is? You know I would help you."

"I can't tell you, Harry," he answered, sadly. "And I dare say it is only a fancy of mine. This unfortunate accident has upset me. I have a horrible presentiment that something of the kind may happen to me."

"What nonsense!"

"I hope it is, but I can't help feeling it. Ah! here is the Duchess, looking like Artemis in a tailor-made gown. You see we have come back, Duchess."

"I have heard all about it, Mr. Gray," she answered. "Poor Geoffrey is terribly upset. And it seems that you asked him not to shoot the hare. How

curious!"

"Yes, it was very curious. I don't know what made me say it. Some whim, I suppose. It looked the loveliest of little live things. But I am sorry they told you about the man. It is a hideous subject."

"It is an annoying subject," broke in Lord Henry. "It has no psychological value at all. Now if Geoffrey had done the thing on purpose, how interesting he would be! I should like to know someone who had committed a real murder."

"How horrid of you, Harry!" cried the Duchess. "Isn't it, Mr. Gray? Harry, Mr. Gray is ill again. He is going to faint."

Dorian drew himself up with an effort, and smiled. "It is nothing, Duchess," he murmured; "my nerves are dreadfully out of order. That is all. I am afraid I walked too far this morning. I didn't hear what Harry said. Was it very bad? You must tell me some other time. I think I must go and lie down. You will excuse me, won't you?"

They had reached the great flight of steps that led from the conservatory on to the terrace. As the glass door closed behind Dorian, Lord Henry turned and looked at the Duchess with his slumberous eyes. "Are you very much in love with him?" he asked.

She did not answer for some time, but stood gazing at the landscape. "I wish I knew," she said at last.

He shook his head. "Knowledge would be fatal. It is the uncertainty that charms one. A mist makes things wonderful."

"One may lose one's way."

"All ways end at the same point, my dear Gladys."

"What is that?"

"Disillusion."

"It was my *début* in life," she sighed.

"It came to you crowned."

"I am tired of strawberry leaves."

"They become you."

"Only in public."

"You would miss them," said Lord Henry.

"I will not part with a petal."

"Monmouth has ears."

"Old age is dull of hearing."

"Has he never been jealous?"

"I wish he had been."

He glanced about as if in search of something. "What are you looking for?" she inquired.

"The button from your foil," he answered. "You have dropped it."

She laughed. "I have still the mask."

"It makes your eyes lovelier," was his reply.

She laughed again. Her teeth showed like white seeds in a scarlet fruit.

Upstairs, in his own room, Dorian Gray was lying on a sofa, with terror in every tingling fibre of his body. Life had suddenly become too hideous a burden for him to bear. The dreadful death of the unlucky beater, shot in the thicket like a wild animal, had seemed to him to prefigure death for himself also. He had nearly swooned at what Lord Henry had said in a chance mood of cynical jesting.

At five o'clock he rang his bell for his servant and gave him orders to pack his things for the night-express to town, and to have the brougham at the door by eight-thirty. He was determined not to sleep another night at

Selby Royal. It was an ill-omened place. Death walked there in the sunlight. The grass of the forest had been spotted with blood.

Then he wrote a note to Lord Henry, telling him that he was going up to town to consult his doctor, and asking him to entertain his guests in his absence. As he was putting it into the envelope, a knock came to the door, and his valet informed him that the head-keeper wished to see him. He frowned, and bit his lip. "Send him in," he muttered, after some moments' hesitation.

As soon as the man entered Dorian pulled his chequebook out of a drawer, and spread it out before him.

"I suppose you have come about the unfortunate accident of this morning, Thornton?" he said, taking up a pen.

"Yes, sir," answered the gamekeeper.

"Was the poor fellow married? Had he any people dependent on him?" asked Dorian, looking bored. "If so, I should not like them to be left in want, and will send them any sum of money you may think necessary."

"We don't know who he is, sir. That is what I took the liberty of coming to you about."

"Don't know who he is?" said Dorian, listlessly. "What do you mean? Wasn't he one of your men?"

"No, sir. Never saw him before. Seems like a sailor, sir."

The pen dropped from Dorian Gray's hand, and he felt as if his heart had suddenly stopped beating. "A sailor?" he cried out. "Did you say a sailor?"

"Yes, sir. He looks as if he had been a sort of sailor; tattooed on both arms, and that kind of thing."

"Was there anything found on him?" said Dorian, leaning forward and looking at the man with startled eyes. "Anything that would tell his name?"

"Some money, sir—not much, and a six-shooter. There was no name of any kind. A decent-looking man, sir, but rough-like. A sort of sailor, we think."

Dorian started to his feet. A terrible hope fluttered past him. He clutched at it madly. "Where is the body?" he exclaimed. "Quick! I must see it at once."

"It is in an empty stable in the Home Farm, sir. The folk don't like to have that sort of thing in their houses. They say a corpse brings bad luck."

"The Home Farm! Go there at once and meet me. Tell one of the grooms to bring my horse round. No. Never mind. I'll go to the stables myself. It will save time."

In less than a quarter of an hour Dorian Gray was galloping down the long avenue as hard as he could go. The trees seemed to sweep past him in spectral procession, and wild shadows to fling themselves across his path. Once the mare swerved at a white gate-post and nearly threw him. He lashed her across the neck with his crop. She cleft the dusky air like an arrow. The stones flew from her hoofs.

At last he reached the Home Farm. Two men were loitering in the yard. He leapt from the saddle and threw the reins to one of them. In the farthest stable a light was glimmering. Something seemed to tell him that the body was there, and he hurried to the door, and put his hand upon the latch.

There he paused for a moment, feeling that he was on the brink of a discovery that would either make or mar his life. Then he thrust the door open, and entered.

On a heap of sacking in the far corner was lying the dead body of a man dressed in a coarse shirt and a pair of blue trousers. A spotted handkerchief had been placed over the face. A coarse candle, stuck in a bottle, sputtered beside it.

Dorian Gray shuddered. He felt that his could not be the hand to take the handkerchief away, and called out to one of the farm-servants to come to him.

"Take that thing off the face. I wish to see it," he said, clutching at the doorpost for support.

When the farm-servant had done so, he stepped forward. A cry of joy broke from his lips. The man who had been shot in the thicket was James Vane.

He stood there for some minutes looking at the dead body. As he rode home, his eyes were full of tears, for he knew he was safe.

CHAPTER XIX

"There is no use your telling me that you are going to be good," cried Lord Henry, dipping his white fingers into a red copper bowl filled with rose-water. "You're quite perfect. Pray, don't change."

Dorian Gray shook his head. "No, Harry, I have done too many dreadful things in my life. I am not going to do any more. I began my good actions yesterday."

"Where were you yesterday?"

"In the country, Harry. I was staying at a little inn by myself."

"My dear boy," said Lord Henry, smiling, "anybody can be good in the country. There are no temptations there. That is the reason why people who live out of town are so absolutely uncivilised. Civilisation is not by any means an easy thing to attain to. There are only two ways by which man can reach it. One is by being cultured, the other by being corrupt. Country people have no opportunity of being either, so they stagnate."

"Culture and corruption," echoed Dorian. "I have known something of both. It seems terrible to me now that they should ever be found together. For I have a new ideal, Harry. I am going to alter. I think I have altered."

"You have not yet told me what your good action was. Or did you say you had done more than one?" asked his companion, as he spilt into his plate a little crimson pyramid of seeded strawberries, and through a perforated shell-shaped spoon snowed white sugar upon them.

"I can tell you, Harry. It is not a story I could tell to anyone else. I spared somebody. It sounds vain, but you understand what I mean. She was quite beautiful, and wonderfully like Sibyl Vane. I think it was that which first attracted me to her. You remember Sibyl, don't you? How long ago that seems! Well, Hetty was not one of our own class, of course. She was simply a girl in a village. But I really loved her. I am quite sure that I loved her. All during this wonderful May that we have been having, I used to run down and see her two or three times a week. Yesterday she met me in a little orchard. The apple-blossoms kept tumbling down on her hair, and she was laughing. We were to have gone away together this morning at dawn. Suddenly I determined to leave her as flower-like as I had found her."

"I should think the novelty of the emotion must have given you a thrill of real pleasure, Dorian," interrupted Lord Henry. "But I can finish your idyll for you. You gave her good advice, and broke her heart. That was the beginning of your reformation."

"Harry, you are horrible! You mustn't say these dreadful things. Hetty's heart is not broken. Of course she cried, and all that. But there is no disgrace upon her. She can live, like Perdita, in her garden of mint and marigold."

"And weep over a faithless Florizel," said Lord Henry, laughing, as he leant back in his chair. "My dear Dorian, you have the most curiously boyish moods. Do you think this girl will ever be really contented now with anyone of her own rank? I suppose she will be married some day to a rough carter or a grinning ploughman. Well, the fact of having met you, and loved you, will teach her to despise her husband, and she will be wretched. From a moral point of view, I cannot say that I think much of your great renunciation. Even as a beginning, it is poor. Besides, how do

you know that Hetty isn't floating at the present moment in some star-lit mill-pond, with lovely water-lilies round her, like Ophelia?"

"I can't bear this, Harry! You mock at everything, and then suggest the most serious tragedies. I am sorry I told you now. I don't care what you say to me. I know I was right in acting as I did. Poor Hetty! As I rode past the farm this morning, I saw her white face at the window, like a spray of jasmine. Don't let us talk about it any more, and don't try to persuade me that the first good action I have done for years, the first little bit of self-sacrifice I have ever known, is really a sort of sin. I want to be better. I am going to be better. Tell me something about yourself. What is going on in town? I have not been to the club for days."

"The people are still discussing poor Basil's disappearance."

"I should have thought they had got tired of that by this time," said Dorian, pouring himself out some wine, and frowning slightly.

"My dear boy, they have only been talking about it for six weeks, and the British public are really not equal to the mental strain of having more than one topic every three months. They have been very fortunate lately, however. They have had my own divorce-case, and Alan Campbell's suicide. Now they have got the mysterious disappearance of an artist. Scotland Yard still insists that the man in the grey ulster who left for Paris by the midnight train on the ninth of November was poor Basil, and the French police declare that Basil never arrived in Paris at all. I suppose in about a fortnight we shall be told that he has been seen in San Francisco. It is an odd thing, but everyone who disappears is said to be seen at San Francisco. It must be a delightful city, and possess all the attractions of the next world."

"What do you think has happened to Basil?" asked Dorian, holding up his Burgundy against the light, and wondering how it was that he could discuss the matter so calmly.

"I have not the slightest idea. If Basil chooses to hide himself, it is no business of mine. If he is dead, I don't want to think about him. Death is the only thing that ever terrifies me. I hate it."

"Why?" said the younger man, wearily.

"Because," said Lord Henry, passing beneath his nostrils the gilt trellis of an open vinaigrette box, "one can survive everything nowadays except that. Death and vulgarity are the only two facts in the nineteenth century that one cannot explain away. Let us have our coffee in the music-room, Dorian. You must play Chopin to me. The man with whom my wife ran away played Chopin exquisitely. Poor Victoria! I was very fond of her. The house is rather lonely without her. Of course married life is merely a habit, a bad habit. But then one regrets the loss even of one's worst habits. Perhaps one regrets them the most. They are such an essential part of one's personality."

Dorian said nothing, but rose from the table and, passing into the next room, sat down to the piano and let his fingers stray across the white and black ivory of the keys. After the coffee had been brought in, he stopped, and, looking over at Lord Henry, said, "Harry, did it ever occur to you that Basil was murdered?"

Lord Henry yawned. "Basil was very popular, and always wore a Waterbury watch. Why should he have been murdered? He was not clever enough to have enemies. Of course he had a wonderful genius for painting. But a man can paint like Velasquez and yet be as dull as possible. Basil was really rather dull. He only interested me once, and that was when he told me, years ago, that he had a wild adoration for you, and that you were the dominant motive of his art."

"I was very fond of Basil," said Dorian, with a note of sadness in his voice. "But don't people say that he was murdered?"

"Oh, some of the papers do. It does not seem to me to be at all probable. I know there are dreadful places in Paris, but Basil was not the sort of man to have gone to them. He had no curiosity. It was his chief defect."

"What would you say, Harry, if I told you that I had murdered Basil?" said the younger man. He watched him intently after he had spoken.

"I would say, my dear fellow, that you were posing for a character that doesn't suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder. I am sorry if I hurt your vanity by saying so, but I assure you it is true. Crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders. I don't blame them in the smallest degree. I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations."

"A method of procuring sensations? Do you think, then, that a man who has once committed a murder could possibly do the same crime again? Don't tell me that."

"Oh! anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often," cried Lord Henry, laughing. "That is one of the most important secrets of life. I should fancy, however, that murder is always a mistake. One should never do any thing that one cannot talk about after dinner. But let us pass from poor Basil. I wish I could believe that he had come to such a really romantic end as you suggest; but I can't. I dare say he fell into the Seine off an omnibus, and that the conductor hushed up the scandal. Yes: I should fancy that was his end. I see him lying now on his back under those dull-green waters with the heavy barges floating over him, and long weeds catching in his hair. Do you know, I don't think he would have done much more good work. During the last ten years his painting had gone off very much."

Dorian heaved a sigh, and Lord Henry strolled across the room and began to stroke the head of a curious Java parrot, a large grey-plumaged bird, with pink crest and tail, that was balancing itself upon a bamboo perch. As his pointed fingers touched it, it dropped the white scurf of crinkled lids over black glass-like eyes, and began to sway backwards and forwards.

"Yes," he continued, turning round, and taking his handkerchief out of his pocket; "his painting had quite gone off. It seemed to me to have lost something. It had lost an ideal. When you and he ceased to be great friends, he ceased to be a great artist. What was it separated you? I suppose he bored you. If so, he never forgave you. It's a habit bores have. By the way, what has become of that wonderful portrait he did of you? I

don't think I have ever seen it since he finished it. Oh! I remember your telling me years ago that you had sent it down to Selby, and that it had got mislaid or stolen on the way. You never got it back? What a pity! It was really a masterpiece. I remember I wanted to buy it. I wish I had now. It belonged to Basil's best period. Since then, his work was that curious mixture of bad painting and good intentions that always entitles a man to be called a representative British artist. Did you advertise for it? You should."

"I forget," said Dorian. "I suppose I did. But I never really liked it. I am sorry I sat for it. The memory of the thing is hateful to me. Why do you talk of it? It used to remind me of those curious lines in some play—'Hamlet,' I think—how do they run?—

"Like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart.'

Yes: that is what it was like."

Lord Henry laughed. "If a man treats life artistically, his brain is his heart," he answered, sinking into an arm-chair.

Dorian Gray shook his head, and struck some soft chords on the piano. "Like the painting of a sorrow," he repeated, "'a face without a heart.'"

The elder man lay back and looked at him with half-closed eyes. "By the way, Dorian," he said, after a pause, "'what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose'—how does the quotation run?—'his own soul?'"

The music jarred and Dorian Gray started, and stared at his friend. "Why do you ask me that, Harry?"

"My dear fellow," said Lord Henry, elevating his eyebrows in surprise, "I asked you because I thought you might be able to give me an answer. That is all. I was going through the Park last Sunday, and close by the Marble Arch there stood a little crowd of shabby-looking people listening to some vulgar street-preacher. As I passed by, I heard the man yelling out that question to his audience. It struck me as being rather dramatic. London is very rich in curious effects of that kind. A wet Sunday, an uncouth

Christian in a mackintosh, a ring of sickly white faces under a broken roof of dripping umbrellas, and a wonderful phrase flung into the air by shrill, hysterical lips—it was really very good in its way, quite a suggestion. I thought of telling the prophet that Art had a soul, but that man had not. I am afraid, however, he would not have understood me."

"Don't, Harry. The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect. There is a soul in each one of us. I know it."

"Do you feel quite sure of that, Dorian?"

"Quite sure."

"Ah! then it must be an illusion. The things one feels absolutely certain about are never true. That is the fatality of Faith, and the lesson of Romance. How grave you are! Don't be so serious. What have you or I to do with the superstitions of our age? No: we have given up our belief in the soul. Play me something. Play me a nocturne, Dorian, and, as you play, tell me, in a low voice, how you have kept your youth. You must have some secret. I am only ten years older than you are, and I am wrinkled, and worn, and yellow. You are really wonderful, Dorian. You have never looked more charming than you do to-night. You remind me of the day I saw you first. You were rather cheeky, very shy, and absolutely extraordinary. You have changed, of course, but not in appearance. I wish you would tell me your secret. To get back my youth I would do anything in the world, except take exercise, get up early, or be respectable. Youth! There is nothing like it. It's absurd to talk of the ignorance of youth. The only people to whose opinions I listen now with any respect are people much younger than myself. They seem in front of me. Life has revealed to them her latest wonder. As for the aged, I always contradict the aged. I do it on principle. If you ask them their opinion on something that happened yesterday, they solemnly give you the opinions current in 1820, when people wore high stocks, believed in everything, and knew absolutely nothing. How lovely that thing you are playing is! I wonder did Chopin write it at Majorca, with the sea weeping round the villa, and the salt spray dashing against the panes? It is marvellously romantic. What a blessing it

is that there is one art left to us that is not imitative! Don't stop. I want music to-night. It seems to me that you are the young Apollo, and that I am Marsyas listening to you. I have sorrows, Dorian, of my own, that even you know nothing of. The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young. I am amazed sometimes at my own sincerity. Ah, Dorian, how happy you are! What an exquisite life you have had! You have drunk deeply of everything. You have crushed the grapes against your palate. Nothing has been hidden from you. And it has all been to you no more than the sound of music. It has not marred you. You are still the same."

"I am not the same, Harry."

"Yes: you are the same. I wonder what the rest of your life will be. Don't spoil it by renunciations. At present you are a perfect type. Don't make yourself incomplete. You are quite flawless now. You need not shake your head: you know you are. Besides, Dorian, don't deceive yourself. Life is not governed by will or intention. Life is a question of nerves, and fibres, and slowly built-up cells in which thought hides itself and passion has its dreams. You may fancy yourself safe, and think yourself strong. But a chance tone of colour in a room or a morning sky, a particular perfume that you had once loved and that brings subtle memories with it, a line from a forgotten poem that you had come across again, a cadence from a piece of music that you had ceased to play—I tell you, Dorian, that it is on things like these that our lives depend. Browning writes about that somewhere; but our own senses will imagine them for us. There are moments when the odour of *lilas blanc* passes suddenly across me, and I have to live the strangest month of my life over again. I wish I could change places with you, Dorian. The world has cried out against us both, but it has always worshipped you. It always will worship you. You are the type of what the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found. I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets."

Dorian rose up from the piano, and passed his hand through his hair. "Yes, life has been exquisite," he murmured, "but I am not going to have the same life, Harry. And you must not say these extravagant things to me.

You don't know everything about me. I think that if you did, even you would turn from me. You laugh. Don't laugh."

"Why have you stopped playing, Dorian? Go back and give me the nocturne over again. Look at that great honey-coloured moon that hangs in the dusky air. She is waiting for you to charm her, and if you play she will come closer to the earth. You won't? Let us go to the club, then. It has been a charming evening, and we must end it charmingly. There is some one at White's who wants immensely to know you—young Lord Poole, Bournemouth's eldest son. He has already copied your neckties, and has begged me to introduce him to you. He is quite delightful, and rather reminds me of you."

"I hope not," said Dorian, with a sad look in his eyes. "But I am tired to-night, Harry. I shan't go to the club. It is nearly eleven, and I want to go to bed early."

"Do stay. You have never played so well as to-night. There was something in your touch that was wonderful. It had more expression than I had ever heard from it before."

"It is because I am going to be good," he answered, smiling, "I am a little changed already."

"You cannot change to me, Dorian," said Lord Henry. "You and I will always be friends."

"Yet you poisoned me with a book once. I should not forgive that. Harry, promise me that you will never lend that book to any one. It does harm."

"My dear boy, you are really beginning to moralise. You will soon be going about like the converted, and the revivalist, warning people against all the sins of which you have grown tired. You are much too delightful to do that. Besides, it is no use. You and I are what we are, and will be what we will be. As for being poisoned by a book, there is no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame. That is all. But we won't discuss literature. Come round to-morrow. I am going to ride at eleven. We might go together, and I will take you to lunch afterwards with Lady Branksome."

She is a charming woman, and wants to consult you about some tapestries she is thinking of buying. Mind you come. Or shall we lunch with our little Duchess? She says she never sees you now. Perhaps you are tired of Gladys? I thought you would be. Her clever tongue gets on one's nerves. Well, in any case, be here at eleven."

"Must I really come, Harry?"

"Certainly. The Park is quite lovely now. I don't think there have been such lilacs since the year I met you."

"Very well. I shall be here at eleven," said Dorian. "Good-night, Harry." As he reached the door he hesitated for a moment, as if he had something more to say. Then he sighed and went out.

CHAPTER XX

It was a lovely night, so warm that he threw his coat over his arm, and did not even put his silk scarf round his throat. As he strolled home, smoking his cigarette, two young men in evening dress passed him. He heard one of them whisper to the other, "That is Dorian Gray." He remembered how pleased he used to be when he was pointed out, or stared at, or talked about. He was tired of hearing his own name now. Half the charm of the little village where he had been so often lately was that no one knew who he was. He had often told the girl whom he had lured to love him that he was poor, and she had believed him. He had told her once that he was wicked, and she had laughed at him, and answered that wicked people were always very old and very ugly. What a laugh she had!—just like a thrush singing. And how pretty she had been in her cotton dresses and her large hats! She knew nothing, but she had everything that he had lost.

When he reached home, he found his servant waiting up for him. He sent him to bed, and threw himself down on the sofa in the library, and began to

think over some of the things that Lord Henry had said to him.

Was it really true that one could never change? He felt a wild longing for the unstained purity of his boyhood—his rose-white boyhood, as Lord Henry had once called it. He knew that he had tarnished himself, filled his mind with corruption, and given horror to his fancy; that he had been an evil influence to others, and had experienced a terrible joy in being so; and that, of the lives that had crossed his own, it had been the fairest and the most full of promise that he had brought to shame. But was it all irretrievable? Was there no hope for him?

Ah! in what a monstrous moment of pride and passion he had prayed that the portrait should bear the burden of his days, and he keep the unsullied splendour of eternal youth! All his failure had been due to that. Better for him that each sin of his life had brought its sure, swift penalty along with it. There was purification in punishment. Not "Forgive us our sins," but "Smite us for our iniquities" should be the prayer of a man to a most just God.

The curiously carved mirror that Lord Henry had given to him, so many years ago now, was standing on the table, and the white-limbed Cupids laughed round it as of old. He took it up, as he had done on that night of horror, when he had first noted the change in the fatal picture, and with wild, tear-dimmed eyes looked into its polished shield. Once, some one who had terribly loved him had written to him a mad letter, ending with these idolatrous words: "The world is changed because you are made of ivory and gold. The curves of your lips rewrite history." The phrases came back to his memory, and he repeated them over and over to himself. Then he loathed his own beauty, and, flinging the mirror on the floor, crushed it into silver splinters beneath his heel. It was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for. But for those two things, his life might have been free from stain. His beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery. What was youth at best? A green, an unripe time, a time of shallow moods and sickly thoughts. Why had he worn its livery? Youth had spoiled him.

It was better not to think of the past. Nothing could alter that. It was of himself, and of his own future, that he had to think. James Vane was hidden in a nameless grave in Selby churchyard. Alan Campbell had shot himself one night in his laboratory, but had not revealed the secret that he had been forced to know. The excitement, such as it was, over Basil Hallward's disappearance would soon pass away. It was already waning. He was perfectly safe there. Nor, indeed, was it the death of Basil Hallward that weighed most upon his mind. It was the living death of his own soul that troubled him. Basil had painted the portrait that had marred his life. He could not forgive him that. It was the portrait that had done everything. Basil had said things to him that were unbearable, and that he had yet borne with patience. The murder had been simply the madness of a moment. As for Alan Campbell, his suicide had been his own act. He had chosen to do it. It was nothing to him.

A new life! That was what he wanted. That was what he was waiting for. Surely he had begun it already. He had spared one innocent thing, at any rate. He would never again tempt innocence. He would be good.

As he thought of Hetty Merton, he began to wonder if the portrait in the locked room had changed. Surely it was not still so horrible as it had been? Perhaps if his life became pure, he would be able to expel every sign of evil passion from the face. Perhaps the signs of evil had already gone away. He would go and look.

He took the lamp from the table and crept upstairs. As he unbarred the door a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face and lingered for a moment about his lips. Yes, he would be good, and the hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already.

He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before—and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter,

and more like blood newly spilt. Then he trembled. Had it been merely vanity that had made him do his one good deed? Or the desire for a new sensation, as Lord Henry had hinted, with his mocking laugh? Or that passion to act a part that sometimes makes us do things finer than we are ourselves? Or, perhaps, all these? And why was the red stain larger than it had been? It seemed to have crept like a horrible disease over the wrinkled fingers. There was blood on the painted feet, as though the thing had dripped—blood even on the hand that had not held the knife. Confess? Did it mean that he was to confess? To give himself up, and be put to death? He laughed. He felt that the idea was monstrous. Besides, even if he did confess, who would believe him? There was no trace of the murdered man anywhere. Everything belonging to him had been destroyed. He himself had burned what had been below-stairs. The world would simply say that he was mad. They would shut him up if he persisted in his story.... Yet it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement. There was a God who called upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin. His sin? He shrugged his shoulders. The death of Basil Hallward seemed very little to him. He was thinking of Hetty Merton. For it was an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at. Vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that? There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could tell?... No. There had been nothing more. Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognised that now.

But this murder—was it to dog him all his life? Was he always to be burdened by his past? Was he really to confess? Never. There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself—that was evidence. He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred many

moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it.

He looked round, and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright, and glistened. As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and, without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it.

There was a cry heard, and a crash. The cry was so horrible in its agony that the frightened servants woke, and crept out of their rooms. Two gentlemen, who were passing in the Square below, stopped, and looked up at the great house. They walked on till they met a policeman, and brought him back. The man rang the bell several times, but there was no answer. Except for a light in one of the top windows, the house was all dark. After a time, he went away and stood in an adjoining portico and watched.

"Whose house is that, constable?" asked the elder of the two gentlemen.

"Mr. Dorian Gray's, sir," answered the policeman.

They looked at each other, as they walked away and sneered. One of them was Sir Henry Ashton's uncle.

Inside, in the servants' part of the house, the half-clad domestics were talking in low whispers to each other. Old Mrs. Leaf was crying and wringing her hands. Francis was as pale as death.

After about a quarter of an hour, he got the coachman and one of the footmen and crept upstairs. They knocked, but there was no reply. They called out. Everything was still. Finally, after vainly trying to force the door, they got on the roof, and dropped down on to the balcony. The windows yielded easily; their bolts were old.

When they entered they found, hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress,

with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognised who it was.

THE END

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

PIRATED EDITIONS

Owing to the number of unauthorised editions of "THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY" issued at various times both in America and on the Continent of Europe, it has become necessary to indicate which are the only authorised editions of Oscar Wilde's masterpiece.

Many of the pirated editions are incomplete in that they omit the Preface and seven additional chapters which were first published in the London edition of 1891. In other cases certain passages have been mutilated, and faulty spellings and misprints are numerous.

AUTHORISED EDITIONS

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