

were in an infamous condition. "Well," I said to her, "how do the sanitary inspectors pass this over?" She answered that the sanitary inspectors were only the servants of the Medical Officer of Health. "Very well, then," I said, "why doesn't the Medical Officer of Health act?" You should have seen the cool frankness with which she looked at me. "You see, Sir," she said, "the Medical Officer of Health is appointed by the vestry; and these houses are the property of Mr. —, who is a vestry-man; and if he was made to put them to rights, he might as well pull them down altogether. So I suppose, Sir, the inspectors don't say much, and the Medical Officer he doesn't say any thing, and Mr. — is not put to any trouble." There is nothing of that sort about Mrs. Grace's property. It is the cleanest bit of white-wash in Westminster. And the way she looks after the water-supply—. But really, Lady Sylvia, I must apologize to you for talking to you about such uninteresting things.'

'Oh, I assure you,' said the girl, earnestly and honestly, 'that I am deeply interested—intensely interested; but it is all so strange and terrible. If—if I knew Mrs. Grace, I would like to—to send her a present.'

If never occurred to Balfour to ask himself why Lady Sylvia Blythe should like to send a present to a woman living in one of the slums of Westminster. Had the girl a wild notion that by a gift she could bribe the virago of Happiness Alley to keep watch over a certain Quixotic young man who wanted to become a Parliamentary Haroun-al-Raschid?

'Mr. Balfour,' said Lady Sylvia, suddenly, 'have you asked this Mrs. Grace about the prudence of your going into that lodging-house?'

'Oh yes, I have got a lot of slang terms from her—hawkers' slang, you know. And she is to get me my suit of clothes and the basket.'

'But surely they will recognize you as having been down there before.'

'Not a bit. I shall have my face plentifully begrimed; and there is no better disguise for a man than his taking off his collar and tying a wisp of black ribbon round his neck instead. Then I can smoke pretty steadily; and I need not talk much

in the kitchen of an evening. But why should I bother you with these things, Lady Sylvia? I only wanted to show you a bit of the training that I think a man should go through before he gets up in Parliament with some delightfully accurate scheme in his hand for the amelioration of millions of human beings—of whose condition he does not really know the smallest particular. It is not the picturesque side of legislation. It is not heroic. But then if you want a fine, bold, ambitious flight of statesmanship, you have only got to go to Oxford or Cambridge; in every college you will find twenty young men ready to remodel the British Constitution in five minutes.'

They walked to the window; Lord Willoby was still asleep in the hushed yellow-lit room. Had they been out a quarter of an hour—half an hour? It was impossible for them to say; their rapidly growing intimacy and friendly confidence took no heed of time.

'And it is very disheartening work,' he added, with a sigh. 'The degradation, physical and mental, you see on the faces you meet in these slums is terrible. You begin to despair of any legislation. Then the children—their white faces, their poor stunted bodies, their weary eyes—thank God you have never seen that sight. I can stand most things: I am not a very soft-hearted person: but—but I can't stand the sight of those children.'

She had never heard a man's sob before. She was terrified, overawed. But the next moment he had burst, into a laugh and was talking in rather a gay and excited fashion.

'Yes,' said he, 'I should like to have my try at heroic legislation too. I should like to be made absolute sovereign and autocrat of this country for one week. Do you know what I should do on day number one? I should go to the gentleman who form the boards of the great City guilds, and I should say to them, "Gentlemen, I assure you you would be far better in health and morals if you would cease to spend your revenues on banquets at five guineas a head. You have had quite as much of that as is good for you. Now I propose to take over the whole of the property at present in your hands, and if I find any reasonable bequest in favor of fishmongers, or skimmers, or any other poor tradesmen, that I will adminis-