

"I don't want anybody to say that I was off my head that night," he said in conclusion. "I mean to do it. I'd rather speak the truth and hang for it than be saved by a lie."

All the plausible rhetoric of a Thurtell or a Fauntleroy, airing a university education in the dock, would have seemed poor beside that unvarnished statement of facts. Already the jury had recommended the guilty man to mercy; the judge strengthened their recommendation by all the might of his own influence. "Thank God, we do not live in hanging days! Of ten men doomed to the gallows six escape their doom, and Richard Redmayne was one of the six. Three days before the date appointed for his execution the jail chaplain informed him that the secretary of state had been pleased to commute his sentence to penal servitude for life."

Richard Redmayne gave a deep sigh of relief when he heard these tidings, but was not wildly elated, like a man for whom the prospect of death had been full of terror.

"I thank you kindly, sir," he said very quietly. "I feel much beholden to you and the other gentlemen for having taken all this trouble to beg me off; and I'm very glad for the sake of the good old name that I'm not going to be jerked out of this world by the common hangman. But as far as my own feelings go, I think I'd as lief have ended my troubles even that way. Hard labour and a prison for the rest of one's life isn't a lively prospect for a man to look forward to."

"But it is a mercy for which you have good reason to be grateful, Redmayne," the chaplain answered gravely, "since it will afford you time for penitence. A crime such as yours is not to be wiped out hastily, though we cannot reckon the mercy of God to sinners, or what special dispensation He may reserve for those who lie under the final sentence of the law. You have a great work to do for your soul in the years to come, Richard; for I fear your mind is not yet awakened to the enormity of your offence. Think how great a sin it was to lurk waiting for your enemy in the darkness of the night."

"It was broad moonlight," said Richard bluntly; "he might have seen me as well as I saw him."

"The act was not the less treacherous," rejoined the chaplain. "Consider how great a sin it is to send a soul unprepared to stand before its Maker. And by your own showing this man had been a sinner; even his sin against your daughter may have been still unpunished."

Richard Redmayne stood for a few moments looking at the ground in thoughtful silence, before he replied to this suggestion.

"I don't know," he said at last, "but I think somehow that he was sorry," and then he told the story of his last visit to the churchyard at Hetheridge, and of the garland of snow-white notho-flowers. "I hardly think he'd have remembered her birthday, and gone yonder to lay that wreath upon her grave, if he hadn't been sorry. It would have been easier for him to forget her. If I'd remembered those flowers upon her grave that night at Clevedon, I don't think I should have shot him."

It was the first expression of any feeling like sorrow or regret which had dropped from Rick Redmayne's lips. The chaplain, although recognising something noble in the man, had begun to fear he was a hardened sinner; but at this first indication that the stubborn heart could melt, the good man took courage, and grew more hopeful about his spiritual patient. He worked this vein with all his might before the prisoner was transferred to Portland: talked much of the dead girl, and of God's providence, which had snatched her from a world that was full of snares for helpless innocent wanderers, who had once strayed from the home-nest. He talked of that mysterious spirit-world, in which the secrets of all hearts are to be made manifest; a world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, neither tears nor death, neither sin nor sorrow; where Richard Redmayne and his daughter, and his daughter's lover, might meet, forgive and forgive.

His labours were not in vain. It was with a softened spirit that the farmer left Maidstone jail and the country of his birth, with no last look at the stubble fields and busy hop-garden of Brierwood, close guarded with other felons in a railway van, roughly shipped as if they had been a small herd of cattle sent up to the London market.

But before the removal of this little band of delinquents to new quarters, Rick Redmayne had an interview with an old friend. John Woot, the steward, paid him a visit in his cell at Maidstone, on the last day of his residence there, and laid him a kindly farewell, but without some show of emotion, as sternly held in check as any rough-and-ready gruff-spoken man of business ever held his more tender emotions.

"Thank God they remitted the sentence, Rick," said the steward. "I daresay it seems hard enough to you to go to Portland. But, bless my soul, I hear the air is uncommonly healthy, and the diet good; and who knows how soon you may get a ticket-of-leave—if you behave well, as of course you will, and attend chapel regularly—though I suppose that'll be compulsory—and read your Bible and what not, and make friends with the chaplain."

"I'm a liver," said Richard grimly; "I don't suppose tickets-of-leave are dealt out very free to livers."

"O, but there's no knowing. There are exceptional cases, you know. And favouritism goes a good way. You'll start with a good character, and be sure you make friends with the chaplain."

"I'll curry favour with no man," said Rick proudly.

"Curry favour! of course not; but you like your Bible, don't you? and you may just as well read it."

"I should like to see Queensland and the new farm again before I die, and to see what Jim has made of it," said Rick thoughtfully; "else I don't think it much matters whether I'm in jail or out of it. I suppose my work at Portland island will be out of doors, and that I shall have the open sky above my head, and feel the sea wind blowing over me. I don't care how hard the work may be, so long as it isn't inside four walls."

"But if over you do get free, Rick, a few years ahead of us—"

"If ever I do, I'll sail straight away for Brisbane. I shan't come back to Kent, to be pointed at as the first that ever brought disgrace on the name of Redmayne."

"O, Rick, I don't believe there's a man

among us who doesn't pity you," said the steward earnestly. "Sir Francis was one of those that tried hardest to get the sentence commuted. Lady Clevedon—well, there—the tears were in her eyes when she talked to me about you."

"Tender-hearted soul," murmured Richard gently. "I was sorry for her when I thought Ed killed her husband; but I can't for the life of me get to feel friendly towards him, though I know he's never done me any harm, and has even stood my friend since my trial. He's too much like that other, God, God! I couldn't have believed such a likeness was possible between men who were nothing to each other!"

"The likeness was strong, certainly, but hardly so close as you think. You only saw Harcross in the moonlight; if you'd seen both men by broad day, you'd have seen plenty of difference between them. The strangest thing was the accidental likeness in that miniature, an accident that might have cost Sir Francis his life. But they were like each other, there's no denying that, only the resemblance may not be quite so strange as you think."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Come, Rick, I believe you're to be trusted—not a man to blab everything you know, or to talk where talking would be a breach of honour—so I'll tell you a secret. Those two were something more than casual acquaintances, though Sir Francis doesn't know it, and is never likely to know it. They were half-brothers!"

"Half-brothers. Ten years before Sir Lucas Clevedon married Miss Agnes Wilder, he ran away with an actress, a pretty woman, and a woman who was, for a few seasons, the rage up in London. She went by the name of Mrs. Mestyn, but whether she had a husband, living or dead, is more than I know; and whether Sir Lucas ever married her is more than I know. But my belief is that he did; for just before she died he sold an estate that his mother had left him, and settled every sixpence of the purchase money in trust for the benefit of the son that had been born somewhere in Italy. Lord Dartmoor was one of the trustees, and I was the other, and it was Lord Dartmoor made him do it, as I heard drop from him in the course of the business. It was a good lump of money that he parted with this way, and I knew Sir Lucas well enough to know that he wouldn't have sacrificed as much as a twentieth part of the sum for any generous or manly consideration—in plain words, not unless he was obliged. So I have always suspected there was some kind of marriage—if not strictly legal, still strong enough to frighten Sir Lucas—and that the poor lady was persuaded to sell her son's birthright for this settlement. Sir Lucas had just come home from the Continent, and was paying his court to another lady at the time, the only daughter and heiress of a great banker, a young lady who afterwards married a nobleman. That courtship never came to anything. Sir Lucas was going down hill by this time, and his character had got to be pretty well known; so the young lady's father shut the door in his face, and he came down to Clevedon, and shut himself up and sulked like a wounded wild beast. As to his son, I don't believe he ever took the trouble to see him after he left him somewhere in foreign parts, with the poor mother. If anything was wanted to be done, I did it; and when Lord Dartmoor died, I had the whole management of the boy's business till he came of age, when my trusteeship expired. We gave him a first-rate education—there was just enough income to do that liberally, and leave a small margin for accumulation. He was a clever, steady-going lad, and seemed to do well wherever he went. As a young man he was free from all his father's vices. I had as much trust and confidence in him as I might have had in my own son, or I should never have brought him across your threshold. You'll believe that of me, won't you, Richard Redmayne? I should never have brought him to Brierwood, if I hadn't thought him an honest man."

"Ay, ay," said Rick gloomily, "you trusted him, I daresay; but the wrong was done for all that. A stranger was brought into my house while I was away, a stranger who broke my daughter's heart."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It is the fate of noble natures to be deceived, my dear Augustus," he said with a sympathetic air. "Suffering such as you are called upon to endure is a heritage of sorrow which but too often accompanies nobility of heart."

Mrs. Harcross was the last of women to brook any sentimental impertinence of this kind. All the cousinship in the world could not, in her eyes, justify such violation of her sacred grief.

"Who taught you to grieve my sorrow?" she cried, with passionate disdain; "or to measure his sins with your petty plumb-line? At his worst he was better and nobler than you ever were or can be. Stick to your office desk, and your copying machine, and your gutta-serena speaking-tubes, Weston, if you please, and do not presume to talk of my troubles."

This was rather a knock-down blow for Weston Vallery, who had fancied the course very smooth and straight before him now that Providence in its wisdom had removed that stumbling-block, Hubert Harcross. He left his cousin's presence crestfallen, but not despairing. Augustus's words and manner had been contemptuous to an unbearable degree; but then a woman in a passion will say anything; and he had perhaps been somewhat premature in his offers of sympathy. The aspect of things would be different by and by, no doubt. He would resent this outrage by a lofty silence, and a dignified withdrawal of his presence; he would hold himself aloof from Augustus for some time to come, until that foolish infatuated woman should discover that the man who had always been useful had perforce of habit become necessary.

He went back to his office desk, as his cousin had bidden him, and worked on steadily, adding brick to brick in that vast edifice the firm of Harcross and Vallery, and looking forward with a hopeful patience to that future day in which Augustus and her fortune should be his, and when the butler and his satellites, and all the household in Mastodon-creescent, should bow down before him, and own him for their master. With such a house and such a wife, supported and sustained by the business in Old Jewry, which must eventually become all his own, what more of earth's splendours or fame's laurels could he desire? He would not have exchanged such a lot for the might of Cæsar, or Darius, or Alexander, or Hamulbal, or Poly-crates, or any of those classical "parties," whose works had made the burden of his school-days, who abode in hourly dread of unpleasant oracles, and altogether appeared to be more subject to the fluctuation of fortune, and the malice of the gods, than any modern adventurer.

So Mr. Vallery junior held his soul in patience, and his faith was strong in time; whereby it was something of a shock to him to learn one fine morning from his uncle that Augustus was going to sell off the splendid goods and chattels in Mastodon-creescent, and to travel on the continent for a year or so with her father.

"You can get on very well without me here, Weston," Mr. Vallery observed graciously; "and I really feel it my duty to look after Augustus. This business has been an awful blow. I think she felt that horrid story of Harcross's past life, which came out during that scoundrel Redmayne's trial, almost more than her husband's death, although she has never admitted as much to me. I am very glad to take her abroad; change of scene and all that kind of thing may do wonders, you know. And I'm very glad she has decided upon selling the lease and furniture in Mastodon-creescent; she'll get rid of all melancholy associations, you see."

"And sacrifice no end of money," said Weston, with a lugubrious look. "She'll realise about as many hundreds as she spent thousands. I have no doubt there's a good deal of consolation in that to anything as inconsistent and unreasonable as a woman."

"In her present state of mind money is hardly a consideration," Weston replied Mr. Vallery, in his pompous way. "When my daughter returns to England she will reside with me. I have felt my house no home without her. Even my cook has fallen off; I rarely get my favorite curries, or the only soup I really care for. Not that Augustus ever interfered about such trifles; but there was an influence, you know—an influence."

So Mrs. Harcross departed, and wintered at Rome, with her carriages and horses, and all the paraphernalia of Acropolis-square existence, went with her; where she drove daily upon the Corso with her father, gloomily handsome in her widow's weeds, leaning back listlessly in her open carriage, with eyes that seemed to see neither landscape nor people. She stayed here till the end of March, and spent the summer in pottering about from one German bath to another, in quest of the magical elixir which was to cure her father's gout. They spent the following winter in Paris, where Mr. Vallery hired a luxurious first floor in the Rue

over the chimney-piece in Richard's room—a poor faint shadow of the sweet changeable face. What was it for this insignificant countenance he had betrayed her? She questioned Mrs. Bush closely about the dead girl. Was she prettier than that picture—much prettier? Mrs. Bush replied that she was "pleasing," and could not be induced to venture beyond that cautious epithet. Augustus asked permission to walk round the garden once more, by herself; and having obtained it, went slowly along the path where Hubert and Grace had lingered quoting *Romeo and Juliet* in the summer night; looked drearily into the orchard where they had sat on sultry afternoons, she with some never-to-be-finished needlework in her lap, he reading and expounding Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, and thinking how sweet it would be to spend the rest of his days in a garden or an orchard at Grace Redmayne's feet. Augustus gazed upon this humble scene with tired aching eyes, marveling strangely, in the midst of her despair, how he, to whom all the glories of the Acropolis-square district were open, could have endured existence in such a scene as this, even for a week. And then she went back to the fly that had brought her from the station, and made her dismal journey home, there to seclude herself from all companionship, and brood upon this new trouble.

It was a cruel blow, a most humiliating revelation; for she had loved the traitor, still loved him, holding his memory dearer than any earthly affection. Still more bitter even than the first shock of the discovery was Weston Vallery's visit of condolence, with the *Times* newspaper in his pocket, and a smug smile of satisfaction lurking at the corners of his cunning mouth.

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César-Auguste, and the Acropolis-square mansion still languished in brown holland in darkness. The irrepressible Weston employed a great deal of his leisure during this winter—which was unusually severe—in crossing and recrossing the channel. The mail-boat that carried this modern Cæsar and his fortunes ran foul of a French steamer one blustering midnight, whereby Weston narrowly escaped drowning; but still he held on, dauntless and unflinching as a Queen's Messenger, that hapless slave of the State, whose perils equal those of a famous warrior, and who is, under the chess-playing system of our present administration, paid very little better than a butler. He presented himself every now and then in the drawing-room in the Rue César-Auguste to do homage to his cousin Augustus, half an hour before dinner, white-cravated and spotless, with no odour of steamboat or railway clinging to his garments. He had his pet chamber, No. 33 bis, at Maurice's, and rarely found it occupied when he required it. By this unflinching attention—by solicitude that knew no weariness—he did at last contrive to slip back into his old position of usefulness; fetched and carried music and books, and patterns and threads for point-lace work; and felt that he was gaining ground. The star of hope began to shine for him again. The days went on—Mr. Vallery and his daughter came back to England. The Kyle villa and the yacht had been sold, at Augustus's request; were they not bitter to her soul, being so closely associated with the days of her courtship and married life? So Mr. Vallery bought an estate in Warwickshire, seven hundred acres or so, with a huge stucco-fronted mansion, called Coppelstocke Manor, a few miles from Leamington, and began a new phase of existence as a country gentleman; taking the chair at vestry meetings, and sitting on the bench at petty sessions, and vexing the souls of rural legislators with the abstruse technicalities of the law.

Hitherto, too, came Weston Vallery, always eager to be useful; but although Mrs. Harcross tolerated him graciously enough in his capacity of light porter, for him there was no riding by her side in hawthorn alleys, or biting under star-proof elms in the summer night; or drifting gently on the narrow winding river, with a lay dip of the oars now and then, and an occasional entanglement among green masses of many wood. He felt himself a guest on sufferance, and there were times when the star of hope grew dim.

Mrs. Harcross had been three years a widow, but still wore mourning,—resolutely refusing Madame Boniface the privilege of making her any dress which was not of the black silk and bigly order,—when the star of hope sank altogether in the blackest darkness. Weston had been unusually busy in Old Jewry during the winter term, and had not seen his cousin, either in London or at Coppelstocke Manor, for nearly three months, when he came down to the country house for a brief visit.

He arrived at dusk, after a snow-storm, when the drive from the lodge to the house was like a journey through fairyland, although the idea did not occur to Weston, who, like the famous French Blue-stocking, admired the beauties of nature. He fancied the house had a more festive appearance than usual, even while he lingered for a few minutes in the hall, giving directions about some packages he had brought for Augustus. There were more hot-house flowers, brighter fires, more lights; the servants had a gayer air, for the mansion had been a somewhat sequestered abode, despite its grandeur, hitherto.

"Has my uncle many visitors?" he asked the butler carelessly.

"No, sir; not many, sir. Lord Stanmore and Edgware is staying with us, sir, and Captain Purfleet; nobody else."

"Stanmore and Edgware! A new acquaintance," thought Weston, whose only knowledge of that nobleman was obtained from the *Peerage* and the *Morning Post*. He had an idea that Stanmore and Edgware was elderly, and had never done anything to add lustre to his title, except condescend to exist. "Humph!" he said, not displeased to find that he was to hobnob with a peer, not a horse-racing or insolvent nobleman, but a respectable landowner. "Lord Stanmore has a place near here, I suppose?"

"No, sir; his lordship's estates are in the North, sir. His lordship was stopping at Lord Leigh's for the 'untin, before Christmas, and his lordship has been here ever since." The butler gave a faint cough, not without some kind of significance, which puzzled Weston a little. But of course it was only the man's elation at having ministered so long to the peerage.

Weston went up-stairs to dress, and arrayed himself with a little more care than usual; put on his favourite boots, and a shirt with Valenciennes medallions which he deemed inviolable; his studs were black enamel skulls with diamond eyes; the parting of his hair was perfection. Never had he felt better satisfied with himself, with his arched instep, his moustache, with all his small graces, than as he went down the wide oak staircase, where unobtrusive parterres of scented geranium and stephanotis regarded his nostrils as he went.

"Tommy loves a lord," he said to himself with a cynical grin. "I suppose my poor uncle is not exempt from that pardonable weakness of humanity."

There were only three persons in the drawing-room when he entered—his uncle, Augustus, and a tall bald-headed man with gray moustachios, who stood with his back to the fireplace. Mrs. Harcross was seated in a low chair opposite the fire, holding a spangled fan between her face and the blaze of the logs piled on the wide old-fashioned hearth. She wore crimson caucelias in her hair and in the bosom of her gauzy black dress, the first gleam of colour that Weston had ever seen her wear since her husband's death; and the gentleman with the gray moustachios was bending down to speak to her, with such an air of chivalrous devotion as may have distinguished King Arthur in the days when Guinevere was true, and the serpent had not yet entered the sacred circle of the king's chosen knights.

The attitude, the look, the tone, revealed all to Weston Vallery's rapid comprehension. The star of hope shot downward to abysses unathomable, never to rise again. Before he went to his comfortable bachelor bedroom in the western wing, he had learnt the worst. His uncle told him everything over a bottle of claret, when the Earl and his satellite Captain Purfleet had left the dining-room, only lingering a few minutes after Augustus's departure.

"It was not a thing I cared to write about,"

said Mr. Vallery. "They have only been engaged three weeks; but from the day we first met Lord Stanmore at a hunting breakfast at Stoneleigh, the business was settled. It was a 'case,' as you fast young men say. Augustus was very much disinclined to hear of such a thing; but I felt that in an affair of this kind her opposition must be borne down—an estate like Stanmore and Edgware, improving in value every year, miles of building frontages on the outskirts of the most populous towns in the North, coal mines, slate quarries, and a man of blameless character,—thirty years or so her senior, I grant; but we know by the experience of mankind that these marriages, founded on a mutual esteem, and—aw, hum—the desire to consolidate a vast estate, are often the happiest."

"Yes," cried Weston, breaking in with a bitter laugh; "but if she had fallen in love with some paragon of the same age, I wonder what you'd have called it? A vicious infatuation, which argues—the sort of thing which Hugo says of Desdemona, you know; but of course, as he's an earl and the estate is all right, it's quite another matter."

"I don't think that's a very genial way of receiving my communication, Weston; I thought you'd be naturally delighted. The match is really a brilliant one, the sort of marriage I always dreamed of for my daughter, before her unfortunate alliance with poor Harcross. And even you will profit by it; your status will be not a little improved when you can claim cousinship with a countess. That sort of thing ought to be worth a thousand a year to a man in your position; to say nothing of the probability that you may get the Stanmore land agency before long, and no end of leases and deeds of agreement."

"I ought to be amazingly grateful, I daresay," replied Weston, "but the news is rather startling. I thought my cousin was a model widow, wedded to the dead."

"Weston," exclaimed Mr. Vallery, with acerbity, "I believe you're a radical!"

So Augustus Harcross, in due time and with no unseasonable haste, was translated into the other sphere, in which she knew not Weston, or only remembered him faintly at infrequently intervals, when she permitted his name to be inscribed by some menial hand on one of her invitation cards.

Her husband's private secretary attended to these minor details. He had a book given him, upon whose right-hand pages were inserted the names, or exalted personages, who must be invited to all large assemblies, and upon whose left-hand appeared the obscure herd of goats, who were to be hidden once or so in a season, if convenient.

Augustus had prime ministers and royal dukes to dine with her in these latter days, and Weston attended receptions so crowded that he was fain to depart without having so much as caught a "little look across the crowd" from his hostess and kinswoman. But he did in some wise console himself with the idea that he gained in social distinction by his cousin's advancement, and he received numerous applications from acquaintances of his own who wanted to obtain Lady Stanmore's influence for this or for that. It was a meagre consolation, but it was something. He had his dainty little villa at Norwood, his well-groomed horses, roses that were never permitted to suffer from the green fly, and he had all the keen delights of an ever-increasing business in old Jewry.

For some favoured creatures life seems all sunshine. No shadow has darkened Clevedon Hall since the horror of Hubert Harcross's murder, and some new joys have come to brighten that pleasant home. Little voices sound gaily and little feet patter swiftly in the corridors of Clevedon to-day, and in these latter years there are larger but-terflies than "Greeks" or "Trojans," "Camdenwell beauties," "Pennyroyal eyes," or "Painted ladies" to be seen hovering about the flower-beds in the old-fashioned garden. Sibil Vallery has become Sibil Hardywood, and brings her babies from Tunbridge Wells every other day to compare Tuttle's new tooth with her cousin Lettice's, or to inquire if Migg's symptoms in the opening stage of measles are as satisfactory as those exhibited by Popsy in the same disease. Happy English households, about which there is so little to tell! The Colonel exists in a seventh heaven of grand-paternal rapture, which verges on senility. The Bungalow brim over with babies—for are not Sibil's children a kind of left-handed grandchildren of his?—and the quadruple favourites during these irruptions of the juvenile population, feel themselves more or less at a disadvantage. Pedro snugs or spits his displeasure; the dogs retire under low curtains to growl at the invader; the mongoose disappears from human ken, to be found perhaps at nightfall, by some frightened housemaid, singly coiled under the Colonel's duvet. The Colonel stalks the little ones with corrobait, and Bombay ducks, which provoke unwonted thirst in these small epicures, and dried fruits from Afghanistan, and West-Indian preserved ginger, and ministers to their little appetites with all the art he knows; for which reason lengthened visits to the Bungalow are apt to result in bilious attacks and the exhibition of doctor's stuff.

Brierwood, forfeited for ever by Richard Redmayne's crime, has passed into the hands of the stranger. The deed of gift by which he bestowed Brierwood Meads upon his brother James has preserved the Gippaland farm from the grasp of the law; but the gray old Kentish landscape has gone from the house of Redmayne for ever. The day will come perhaps, distant but dimly possible in the future, when Rick Redmayne's bonds may be loosened; when, as a reward for unflinching toil and unvarying good conduct, the quiet submission of a repentant sinner, who feels that his burden can never be too heavy for the measure of his offence, he may go forth from the drear monotony of that prison island, an old man, with grizzled hair, and rugged deep-lined countenance, a man whose shoulders are bent with long labour, go forth, free at last, to that furer, wider world for which his soul longs. Not to Brierwood, the lost home of sad memories, the place whose gloomy influence well-nigh drove him mad; but to the fertile plains and inland seas of Gippaland, to the mountains and the water-sheds where tall gum-trees shoot upward under the cloudless blue sky, where the ringing note of the bell-bird sounds keen and clear in the tranquil distance.

THE END.

"The law is now more merciful: the property of a lion is no longer escheated to the crown."