

Constance's knocks were hard ones ; several of them had struck home.

Curiously enough, it was the materialism of his nature which perceived the justice of her demands—that materialism which had once sided with him against Vivian. The hard common-sense she showed was exactly what he had once shown himself.

"I, my husband, and my child, against you," she said to him in other words, summing up the new situation which had some elements of the old. "We are innocent, and you are guilty, or at least unfortunate. Why should we be pilloried for the sake of your soul?"

She was one of the last members of the family with whom he had expected to reckon ; but it was so natural, now he thought it over, that it should be she who cared the most : her whole existence was cast in the mould of convention. To cultivate the world's good opinion was her aim ; to be, in herself and her belongings, above the tongue of scandal, to advance quietly with St John along the road to prosperity and honour, unhampered by anything disgraceful which would put her at a disadvantage among other women, and leave a flaw for ever in the armour of her self-satisfaction. Her ambition was dictated by filial pride—conjugal pride, maternal pride. She desired her household should be in perfect order—how admirable!—that there should be no dirty corner, no dark cupboard, in which she would be ashamed for her acquaintances to look. It was not quite the ambition he had entertained, but, allowing for the different circumstances, equally natural no doubt, and far—yes, far more commendable ! And as they were only relations-in-law and she could not be expected to have a deep affection for him, it was quite right, from the practical point of view which he always studied himself, that she should feel more aggrieved even than his own people, and more eager in self-defence.

"A very good wife for St John," he mused. "He will go far with her. She has just the calculating qualities he lacks—just the right amount of hardness to counteract his tendency to visions and ideals."

It was like playing with dolls after he had been playing with