

396 THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHMAN

Portuguese. Too dull to be beaten and too big to be moved, you were the Englishman.

IV

That is all I have to say, for I am born anew, and all my life lies before me, the past effaced. England has taken me in her strong, warm arms, and I have pressed my face to her broad bosom. Big, strong heart, I hear you beat; there come sorrow, famine, pestilence, and you beat no slower; and now fame and victory, there is no hurry in your throbbing. Fold me close to you, woman with the golden helmet, and hold your trident ready to keep danger at bay: I was not the child of your body, let me be the child of your heart, because I love you, my——

I hear a soft footfall behind me, then a low voice:

"Am I disturbing you?"

I turn, and for a moment consider the young face, unmarked of the fleeting years, the smiling, rosy mouth, the gentle blue eyes. I clasp the slim, white hand, draw towards me the form that so gladly yields. Edith sits across my knees, laughs low as I kiss her neck.

"Have you much more to write?" she asks, at length.

"No," I murmur, "only one word."

"Let me write it," says Edith, and there is in her eyes an appeal with which mingles security.

I whisper into her ear as she takes the pen: "... because I love you, my. . . ." Her left hand still in mine, she bends forward, and I can see nothing save the pale gold tendrils on her neck as she writes the last word:

"... England."

THE END