

Patience Sparhawk and Her Times 13

which she had found in a trunk in the garret with other relics of finery. She occupied the rocker impartially whether eating or reading. The marble-topped table also served for dining and study.

In a forlorn old bookcase were her only treasures, the few books, mostly classics, which John Sparhawk had reserved when a succession of failures had forced him to sell his library to Mr. Foord. In one corner was a large family Bible on a small table. It was old and worn. Its gilt edges shone dimly through a cobweb of infinite pains.

On the papered walls were two large coloured photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Sparhawk, taken apparently when each was close on thirty years. The woman's face bore traces of dissipation even then, and the red mouth was very sensual. But the cheeks were still delicate and there were no bags under the large flaming eyes. The bare neck and arms and half revealed bust were superb; the poise of the head, the curve of the short upper lip, the fine arched nostril, were the delicate insignia of race; the pride stamped on every feature was that of birth, not of defiance. The man had a slender upright figure and a finely modelled head and face. The deeply set eyes were cold and piercing, but between the stern curves of the mouth there was much passion. Patience had studied these faces, but she was as innocent as if she had been bred in a cloister, and their mystery baffled while it allured her.

She ate her supper with a hearty appetite. Her mother's lapses, being accepted as part of the routine of existence, rarely depressed her spirits. Nevertheless she frowned heavily as turbulent sounds pierced the thin partition, not so much at her mother's iniquity, as