

rather not wear the ring, but live free and ride alone, why, down yonder lies the Abbey—your way is clear.”

For fully three minutes Peter sat silent, gazing at the glimmering lights, weighing his choice.

On the one hand lay the cheery bachelor days, the careless, jovial, untrammelled existence, with no life to reek of save his own, none to please but himself, no ambitions, no enemies, no friends but of his own choosing. To live free and ride alone, the wide world for his hunting-ground, none to call him to account! To take his pleasure of all men, and win a few true friends to share his last bottle and give him a hearty send-off when he must pass out into the dark! What more could a man ask of life?

And in the other side of the scale was only a girl's face, deep trusting eyes beneath dark level brows, and the memory of a girl's voice whispering softly, “God has made me love you, my lord. Will you not marry me now?”

He laughed at his hesitation; for is not the world full of women? And a woman's love—what is it compared with a man's freedom?

And yet—a man grows old, his arm weakens, his taste stales, his stories cease to amuse. Old friends marry and live in their children. He feels himself growing prosy and verbose. His day passes. And when age comes, when pleasures fade and freedom loses its sweetness, were it not something to have such loving eyes to turn to, such loving words to cheer him through the gloom? Were it not something, when ambition dies and a man's courage weakens, to have sons to send out into the world to take up the life he leaves? Surely it were something—much—when Night draws near and the world grows cold, to sit at home with loving hearts about him and dream of the past.

Truly a bachelor lives free, but he rides alone—alone into the dark.

So Peter mused, looking into the future, weighing his choice.

Marvellous indeed are the ways of man, manifold are the motives that shape his course. Many a time a man will waver long, weighing the deepest arguments, and will at last be moved to make his choice by the merest straw in