

ter, but the rest of your wealth—it is only a trifle of twenty millions or so, capitalized—I mean to use for the benefit of yourselves and your fellow-citizens." Then, what next? I issue my edict: "There shall be no more slums. Every house of them must be razed to the ground, and the sites turned into gardens, to tempt currents of air into the heart of the city." But what of the dispossessed people? Why, I have got in my hands twenty millions to whip them off to Nebraska and make of them great stock-raising communities on the richest grass lands in the world. Did I tell you, Lady Sylvia," he added seriously, "that I mean to hang all the directors of the existing water and gas companies?"

"No, you did not say that," she answered, with a smile. But she would not treat this matter altogether as a joke. It might please him to make fun of himself; in her inmost heart she believed that if the country only gave him these unlimited powers for a single year, the millennium would *ipso facto* have arrived.

"And so," said he, after a time, "you see how I am situated. It is a poor business, this Parliamentary life. There is a great deal of mean and shabby work connected with it."

"I think it is the noblest work a man could put his hand to," she said, with a flush on her cheek that he could not see; "and the nobleness of it is that a man will go through the things you have described for the good of others. I don't call that mean or shabby work. I should call it mean or shabby if a man were building up a great fortune to spend on himself. If that was his object, what could be more mean? You go into slums and dens; you interest yourself in the poorest wretches that are alive; you give your days and your nights to studying what you can do for them; and you call all that care and trouble and self-sacrifice mean and shabby!"

"But you forget," he said coldly, "what is my object. I am serving my apprenticeship. I want these facts for my own purposes. You pay a politician for his trouble by giving him a reputation, which is the object of his life—"

"Mr. Balfour," she said proudly, "I don't know much about public men. You may say what you please about them. But I think I know a little about you. And it is useless you saying such things to me."

For a second he felt ashamed of his habit of self-depreciation; the courage of the girl was a rebuke—was an appeal to a higher candour.

"A man has need to beware," he said. "It is safest to put the lowest construction on your own conduct; it will not be much lower than that of the general opinion. But I did wrong, Lady Sylvia, in talking like that to you. You have a great faith in your friends. You could inspire any man with confidence in himself—"

He paused for a moment; but it was not to hear the nightingale sing, or to listen to the whispering of the wind in the dark elms. It was to gain courage for a further frankness.

"It would be a good thing for the public life of this country," said he, "if there were more women like you—ready to give generous encouragement, ready to believe in the disinterestedness of a man, and with a full faith in the usefulness of his work. I can imagine the good fortune of a man who, after being harassed and buffeted about—perhaps by his own self-criticism as much as by the opinions of others—could always find in his own home consolation and trust and courage. Look at his independence; he would be able to satisfy, or he would try to satisfy, one opinion that would be of more value to him than that of all the world besides. What would he care about the ingratitude of others, so long as he had his reward in his own home? But it is a picture, a dream."

"Could a woman be all that to a man?" the girl asked, in a low voice.

"You could," said he boldly; and he stopped and confronted her, and took both her trembling hands in his. "Lady Sylvia, when I have dreamed that dream, it was your face that I saw in it. You are the noblest woman I have known. I—well, I will say it now—I love you, and have loved you almost since the first moment I saw you. That is the truth. If I have pained you—well, you will forgive me after I have gone, and this will be the last of it."

She had withdrawn her hands, and now stood before him, her eyes cast down, her heart beating so that she could not speak.

"If I have pained you," said he, after a moment or two of anxious silence, "my presumption will bring its own punishment."