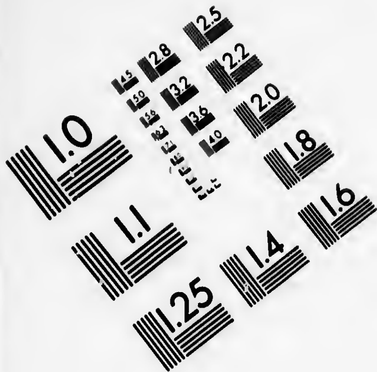

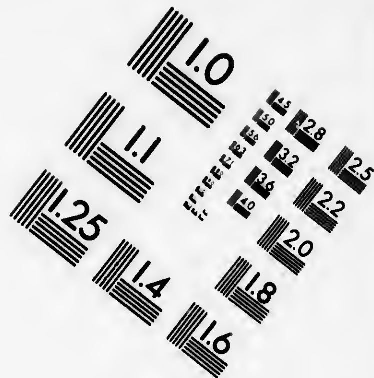

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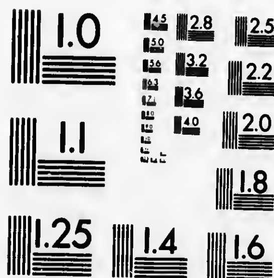

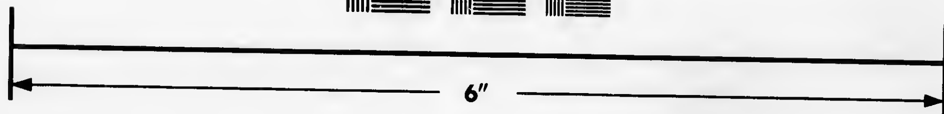

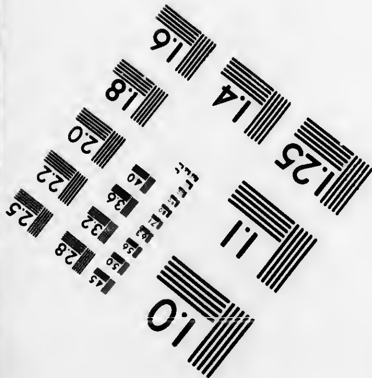

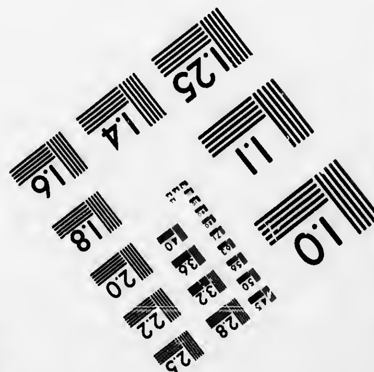

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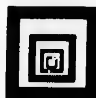

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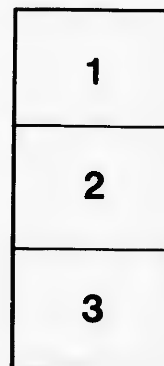

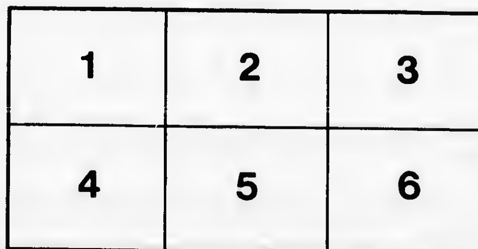

David Lyall's Love Story

David Lyall's Love Story

By the Author of

'The Land o' the Leal'

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DAVID LYALL'S LOVE STORY

A LEAF FROM AN OLD LOVE STORY

'I WOULD like to think it over, Davie. It's a thing that takes a lot of thinking,' Mrs. Cairncross said in that quiet, sweet way of hers, and her eyes looked across the sweet spring dusk into mine with an understanding and sympathetic glance. We were sitting together in the window of her drawing-room at the Ingle, and the quiet of the summer evening was undisturbed by any outward sound. The window was wide open, and the air which stole in upon us across the smooth lawns was odorous with the breath of hawthorn and laburnum and the young shoots of the sweet briar. It was only May month, but summer was upon the land, without a touch of early frost or a nip of east wind to mar the benignity of its smile.

'I don't see that it needs so very much thinking, Mrs. Cairncross,' said I, in the hot, impetuous way

of youth. 'I'm sick of my life here. I simply can't go on with it, and I won't.'

She smiled, and there was a great deal in that smile. Recalling it now to my larger vision, I know that it signified not only a quick understanding of my case, but a boundless patience with all the unreasonableness and impetuosity of youth.

'That's strong speech, Davie, but ye are a great strong lad,' she made answer; 'only there are other things, other folk to be thought o' besides yoursel' in your life, jist as there is in my life, an' ev'rybody's.'

'There's my mother and my grandfather; they're everything that's kind and good, of course, Mrs. Cairncross, and I wouldn't be a brute to them for anything; but oh! they are terribly set in their own narrow way; it's just like going against a stone wall trying to explain anything to them.'

She did not reprove me for this speech so sharply as I expected.

'That's your view in the meantime,' she said, a trifle drily. 'But what I think they'd need to

ken before they let you away is what ye are gaun to do in London. What ails ye at the Byres?'

'Nothing ails me at the Byres, but I want a career. I feel that I am made for better things; and what I want you to do, Mrs. Cairncross, is to speak to my mother, or my grandfather if you like, and try to bring them to a more reasonable view of my case.'

'Ye'll need to bring me to reason first,' she said. 'I'm no very fond o' the idea of you gaun awa' to London. It swallows up ower mony o' oor folk. Besides, we've never heard that Willie Sharp has dune much good for himsel' or ony ither body.'

'He's aye getting a living anyhow, and not asking anybody for help,' I replied savagely, and before I could say any more a servant came into the room.

'Please, ma'am, Miss Wingate is in the drawing-room,' was her message.

'All right, Annie; I'll go and see her. You sit here, Davie, or I send for you. I have long wanted to introduce you an' Euphan Wingate to each other.'

I did not say anything, nor was I particularly interested. Nay, I was a bit irritated because she had come to disturb our talk at a critical stage. I was very intimate at the Ingle, and I could talk to Mrs. Cairncross more frankly than to anybody in the world. She was middle-aged, but not old, and her spirit and heart were the spirit and heart of youth. Her house was the meeting-place of many young folk, who loved her and whom she loved, as she would have loved children of her own. Thus she had earned the gratitude of many parents. I knew Euphan Wingate by name only. Her father was a great Edinburgh doctor, a professor at the University, who had thought so highly of Faulds air on one occasion when out at Inneshall in consultation, that he never rested until he had built himself a house in one of its most beautiful spots. The site had been presented to him by Mr. Claud Innes, and it was part of the policies. The house stood not far from the Ingle, which was occupied by Mr. Cairncross. The Wingates kept two servants in it all the year round, so that there were always some of the family there, even in winter. All

this I knew, and had heard much talk of the Wingates, but I had never met any of them, nor had I any particular desire to meet them, little dreaming what life had in store concerning me and them. I was standing up by the open window listening to the brooding twitter in the trees, which was harmoniously blended with the low, crooning melody of the cushat in the wood, when Mrs. Cairncross's maid came back, and asked me to step into the drawing-room. And there I saw Euphan Wingate for the first time, and so I see her now in my memory and in my dreams. She was sitting in a basket-chair, and she had a grey gown on, soft and dove-like as were her eyes. She got up when Mrs. Cairncross spoke my name, and offered me her hand; and there was in her look and manner a gracious sweetness, and the smile upon her face was, I thought then, as I do now, the loveliest in the world. Yet she was not beautiful, though on her open and frank face there dwelt the bloom of health, and in her happy eye the fearless joy and hopefulness of youth.

'Mrs. Cairncross sings your praises to me every

time I see her, Mr. Lyall,' she said, with an arch and merry glance. 'I believe she sings mine to you, so we must be friends just to please her, who is so good a friend to us all.'

'Yes,' I said, 'surely,' which seemed but a helpless and stupid speech; but what can a man do when he is brought face to face, as I was at that moment, without warning, with the woman who was to reveal to him the hidden and inexpressible joy of life, as well as some of its bitter pain? I wonder is it so with most men?—I knew, as my eyes riveted themselves on Euphan Wingate's face, that she was the wife God had given to me. Whether man would seek to keep her from me remained to be seen.

I cannot now recall what was said during that brief interview, only I know that I took but little part in it, feeling as if a spell had been cast upon me. I think that Euphan herself felt some embarrassment on account of the shy youth evidently rendered speechless by her presence, for she did not stay long. She offered me her hand at parting again, and its touch thrilled me through and through. I saw that her colour

heightened a little as she left the room. Mrs. Cairncross went with her to the door, as was her homely way, and when she came back she fell foul of me at once in gentle banter.

'Bless me, laddie, where 's your tongue? Here have I been cracking ye up to Miss Wingate as the cleverest loon in the Dale, an' ye stand afore her like nothing better than a muckle sheep. She 's laughin' finely at me, I 'se warrant. What ailed ye, Davie Lyall? tell me that.'

'I don't know,' I answered stupidly, for the spell was on me yet. 'O Mrs. Cairncross, I believe you have done an ill work bringing us two together in this room.'

'What for—what d' ye mean?' she asked, some gravity shadowing the mirth on her face.

'I mean what I say. I 'll marry Euphan Wingate some day, if she 'll have me.'

'Nonsense, lad,' she answered sharply; 'that could never be. It 's something higher than a Faulds laddie Professor Wingate 's seekin' for his dochter. There 's nae limit to his ambition. He 's expectin' to be knighted at the Queen's next birthday, and do ye think Sir Robert and Lady

Wingate would look at the likes o' you? Tak my advice, laddie, an' dinna mak' a bigger fule o' yoursel' than you can help. I think I'd better gie ye a hand to get awa' to London efter a'.'

All thought of London was for the time being banished from my mind. Sleeping or waking, I thought of nothing but Euphan Wingate. And one day I saw her again. It was on a Saturday afternoon. I had come out by the train from Edinburgh, and at Faulds station I saw her also alight. She gave me a bow and a smile, and I lifted my hat; but somehow I dared not go to speak to her, though it was the thing I desired above everything. When I got out to the station yard the Byres dogcart, with my grandfather's man Bennet, was waiting for me, but there was apparently neither horse nor man for Miss Wingate. I waited with my heart foolishly beating till she came out, and when I saw her glance round disappointedly, I raised my hat again and stepped forward.

'If there is no one to meet you, Miss Wingate,' I said, 'will you give me the honour and the pleasure——'

'Oh, thank you. I shall be very much obliged; but I can't understand why they haven't come to meet me. I certainly said this train.'

'We may meet them on the road,' I said cheerily, while fervently hoping we should not. Then I helped her in and made Bennet sit on the back seat. I felt a thrill of pride because the dogcart was so well appointed, the horse above reproach, and Bennet such a presentable servant; also I inwardly blessed my grandfather for the little conceit which caused him to keep one of the best turn-outs in the Dale. So we drove away, and my very hands trembled on the reins. But I found my tongue, and we talked as if we had known each other all our days. I was for driving her right up to the house door, but at the private gate which gave admission to that part of the grounds we met the Professor himself. He was a tall, spare person, with a severe, intellectual face, and the most disagreeable manner in the world.

'Who is this young gentleman, Euphan?' he asked, with a pointed and by no means civil glance at me. 'And how comes it you are driving in his trap?'

'This is Mr. David Lyall from the Byres, papa,' she said, 'a great friend of Mrs. Cairncross. It was very kind of him to drive me up, when there was no one to meet me, and I said you would certainly thank him yourself.'

There was a good deal of daring in this speech, but she spoke sweetly enough to disarm all displeasure; nevertheless the frown seemed to deepen on the Professor's brow.

'I am certainly obliged to Mr. Lyall, but I hope you will not trespass on the kindness of a stranger again.'

It was a most uncourteous speech, and it indicated as plainly as possible that Professor Wingate did not desire the pleasure of my acquaintance. Had he said so in as many words, I could not have felt more hurt and humiliated. I saw his daughter redden, and she cast upon me a glance which had something appealing in it. Then her father, with a few brief words of formal thanks, took her away, and I drove away home alone, my heart heaving like a tumultuous sea. And that was the beginning. It would take too long to give the history of that summer, the

manœuvring and scheming to meet, the gradual growth of a love which was strong as death between us two. Mrs. Cairncross tried to check it, and to discourage us as much as possible, nor did we ever meet in her house except when she could not possibly avoid it. In October the whole family went back to town, which was unusual. But my daily occupation in the lawyer's office kept me there all the week, and sometimes we met.

One day as I came down Castle Street to Princes Street I saw her at a shop door, and I knew from her face that some trouble was at her heart. I hastened towards her, and we greeted each other, and save for the light in her eyes which I had learned to look for, she gave no sign that I was more to her than any other man. Till then no word of love had passed between us, for dear as she was to me, I had nothing to offer her, nor had I earned the right to speak.

'You are not looking so well as when I saw you last,' I ventured to say, and to my dismay her eyes suddenly filled with tears. What man could stand that? I was sore put to it to restrain

myself from taking her in my arms, but I dared not.

'For God's sake, Euphan, tell me what is the matter,' I said hoarsely.

'Yes, I will tell you,' she said, trying to calm herself. 'Let us go to the other side, into the gardens for a few minutes. If they see us—well, I don't care.'

I drew her hand through my arm, and together we crossed the street.

'I am in sad trouble, and I have no one to tell it to, now that they will not let me out to dear Mrs. Cairncross,' she began. 'You know this is the examination-time at the University, and the London examiners are down. You have heard of Mr. Spence Morham, the great surgeon, haven't you?'

I said I had, but it wasn't true. All my desire was to hasten what she had to tell.

'He always stays with us. This is the third year he has been, and last year he asked me to marry him. This year he has asked me again, and my father says I must, or that I leave the house and earn my living as I like.'

I can't remember what I said, nor do I think it would be profitable here to set it down.

'If he is an examiner,' I said, when my first wrath was spent, 'he must be an old man.'

'Oh no, not much over forty, and he is very clever, and even handsome too, and he will be a baronet next year, and expects a royal appointment as well. All the same, I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man on earth.'

We had walked down the slope, and were remote from the traffic of the street. It was a chill and grey November day, and the mist hung low from the Castle rock, and almost enveloped us where we stood. Looking upon her dear face, I spoke out all that was in my heart.

'Euphan, I am mad, I believe, but only mad with love of you. I have nothing on earth to offer you but an honest heart and willing hands. But, if you will only let me wait and hope, I'll earn a position for you. I'll achieve everything for your sake.'

She just looked up at me then simply, and murmured—

'Yes, I'll wait for you, till I am old and grey

if need be,' and her eyes shone with that light which is the beacon of every good man's life, pointing him onward and upward always.

'And you won't marry this old examiner?' I cried, full of disrespect and hatred towards him, though I afterwards learned to estimate him at his true worth.

'Not if he were twice a baronet, and Queen's physician ten times over,' she replied, and we plighted our troth in the grey November mist, which was kind and tender to us in that it hid our troth-plighting from the envious and prying eyes of the outside world.

Love makes us brave and strong. That night I bearded the lion in his den—ay, and spoke up boldly to him, too! Even yet it makes my blood course quickly in my veins as I recall the insult I suffered at the hands of Euphan's father. He heard me to the end, and I pleaded well, but his grim silence was never broken, nor did the rigid sternness of his face relax. When I had done, he walked deliberately to the bell-rope and gave it a violent pull. As the servant opened the door he spoke.

'I excuse this gross impertinence on account of your extreme youth,' he said. 'Watters, show this person to the door, and do not admit him again under any pretext whatever.'

God forgive me for the passion of anger which shook me. I could have slain him where he stood.

'Sir,' I said, as I moved towards the door, 'the day will come when you will repent those words—ay, and ask my pardon for them; just as surely as the day will come when I shall take to my heart the wife given to me by God, taken from me by man. But He will not permit your iniquitous pride to work its will. There is only one Arbiter of human destiny, and He is more powerful and more just than you.'

Then I left the house, and the next day I heard that Euphan had been sent to the south of France with an aunt in every way fitted to sustain and further the Wingate family pride.

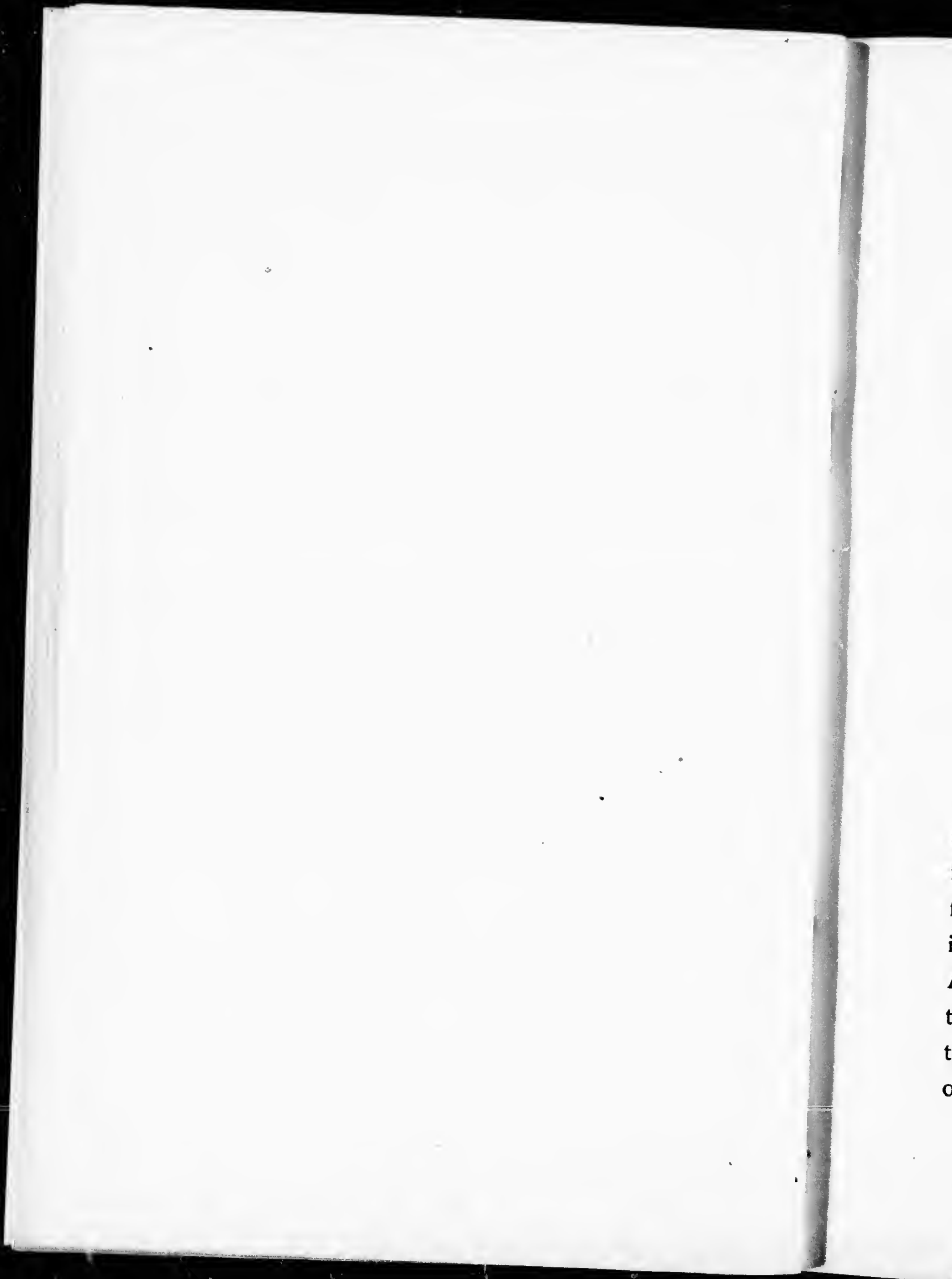
But she managed to convey to me a message that she would be true to me, and bade me make haste to succeed for her sake.

It was but the beginning of the long sickness of hope deferred for her and me.

SCOTS FOLK IN LONDON

I

STRANDED



STRANDED

I HAVE casually mentioned that I was not originally intended for the position I now occupy. The desire of my father's heart was to see me an Edinburgh lawyer, and I know that his ambition for me did not stop at the point when I should write W.S. under my name, but even soared as high as to behold me a judge on the bench. When my schooldays were over, therefore, I was apprenticed to a highly respectable, old-fashioned firm in Castle Street at Edinburgh, but a step from the old house which Sir Walter has made immortal. I used to keep a copy of *Marjorie Fleming* in my pocket in these days, and picture the old man with pet Marjorie in his plaid facing the 'onding' of snow which was the rare delight of both. Dr. John Brown was then a figure in

Edinburgh streets, and my eyes used to follow him with a wistful reverence when I saw him pass the office windows or met him in the street. I know now that I would have done well to have sought speech with him, for his was the large and loving soul which had sympathy for every living thing, and a special tenderness for the trembling aspirations of youth. But I let my opportunity slip, as so many of us do daily from the cradle to the grave, until the day came when I saw the throng at his burying, and knew that I and many, many thousands more had lost a friend who understood us.

It was about that time that the office stool became intolerable to me, and I was on the point of open rebellion, when the awful catastrophe took place at Faulds which made me fatherless. So when my mother in her desolate widowhood retired to the Byres, it did not befit me to add to her care; therefore I stifled my desire for a wider sphere, and continued at the drudgery of the desk. Then my grandfather began to talk continually of me as his successor at the Byres, and even hinted at buying the place, if it could be got

at a reasonable price, and I would lay my mind to it to make it a success. I did not give him much encouragement; for though I loved the place as one loves what is associated with the recollections of happy boyhood, it was not to my mind to settle down to the keeping of sheep, though they were my own, and the tilling of the acres which owned no sway but mine. I spoke first to my mother of my desire to get away to great London, which was ever before me, sleeping and waking, as the place where dreams come true. Alas! now I know that it is also, and in a larger sense, the place of broken hopes and thwarted pride, of heart sorrow and spirit anguish, beside which the simple griefs and lesser cares of country folk are as nothing. My mother looked sad, but said nothing. She was cast in a gentle mould, and could not cope with or strive against those stronger and more headstrong than herself. But she told my grandfather that night, and he came to me next morning in hot anger, his eyes blazing upon me in honest indignation.

'What 's this your mither tells me, lad? that you are for aff to Babylon, tempted, no doubt, as

mony anither fule has been afore ye, by its wicked pomp and sin. Weel, he that will to Cupar maun to Cupar. But I bid ye consider it weel, for not a bawbee o' my siller shall ye finger if ye persist in this deil's self-will.'

'I don't want your money, grandfather,' I answered, a bit sourly, for it is not pleasant to be thus peremptorily put down; and youth likes such treatment less than most. 'I've never sought it yet, and I'm not likely to in future. I can work, I hope, to keep myself.'

'What at?' he demanded in high scorn. 'If it's to write buiks ye want, as your mither thinks, what's to hinder ye to write them here in the lang winter nichts when byre and bucht are steekit, an' the peat roars in the chimley lug?'

I shook my head, and there was a smile on my lips, I know. Write books at the Byres, where the whole talk was of sheep and kye, and seed-time and harvest, and all the literature tolerated was the *Scotsman* and the *Agriculturist*. I have since proved that there was more wisdom in my grandfather's remark than appeared to me at the time, and I learned to regard my brief holiday-

times at the Byres as my opportunity, sacred to any special or dear piece of work I wished to do. But I was ignorant then, and ignorance is always arbitrary and ill to do with, so I do not wonder that my grandfather found me hard to bear.

After I met and parted with Euphan Wingate, I persisted in my determination to go to London and seek my fortune, though I had very vague ideas of what I wished to do. The only person I knew was Willie Sharp, the saddler's son, who had been cut adrift from Faulds because he wanted to be an artist, and nobody would listen to him or help him except Jessie Frier, who was his sweetheart, and still waited for him in the old place, with love burning warm and pure and absolutely faithful in her heart. When my mind was quite made up, and my few arrangements in order, I walked down, the last night I was at the Byres, to Faulds to see Jessie Frier, for the purpose of getting from her Willie Sharp's address in London. She lived in a little cottage not far from the Pitbraden gate with her widowed mother, whose sole support she was. Jessie taught the infant department in the Board School, and had

a good salary, which sufficed for their simple needs. She was a comely, sweet-looking girl, a favourite with everybody. Willie Sharp and she had been sweethearts from their childhood. She was not surprised to see me at the door that night.

'I heard you were going to-morrow, Davie, and I thought you'd come to say good-bye. I wish I was going with you.'

'I only wish you were, and somebody else would jump for joy at the thought,' I replied. 'I've come for Willie's address, Jessie, and that's the selfish truth. I thought I might get lodgings beside him.'

'Oh, I'm sure you will,' she replied brightly. 'He is always at the same place, with a Scotchwoman at Canonbury. Just think how glad he'll be to see you.'

I looked at her as she bent over the table to write down the address, her face looking very sweet and winning in the soft twilight, and a queer feeling came over me which I could not explain. But I knew as well as if it had been told me there and then, that sorrow was awaiting her in the near future.

'How is he getting on?' I asked, for the sake of something to say.

'Fine, I think; he never complains. He seems to have steady work at painting or drawing. The only thing I am vexed at is that he never tells me where any of his things are published. Tell him when you see him how proud we'd be in Faulds to see anything of his in a paper or a book. But Willie was always one for keeping himself in the background.'

'I know he was. I'll find out everything and write you myself, Jessie,' I said as I bade her good-bye, and went off, the address safely lodged in my pocket-book. Next morning I left the Byres with a very sore heart, for my grandfather purposely went out of the house before the gig came round to the door, and never appeared to say good-bye. My mother was tearful and reproachful, but kind and thoughtful as mothers are, and gave me a little gift and a loving word at parting which helped me to bear the thought of my grandfather's ill-will. I shall never forget that red October morning when I drove away down between the hills in time to catch the first train

at Brachead station, which took me to Edinburgh in time for the London train. A raw lad of three-and-twenty, with a heart full of hope and aspirations, and a fat pocket-book which held notes for a hundred pounds, all I had in the world except the bundle of poems and stories lying at the bottom of my trunk which was to win me fame and fortune in the city of my dreams. Ah me! ah me! Neither have come to me, and here an old man sits brooding over the simple records of his youth, over old-time bits of life, which have little to recommend them but their truth.

I arrived at King's Cross about seven o'clock that night, amid pouring rain, and hired a cab to drive me to the address given me by Jessie Frier. It was not so long a drive as I expected, having heard much of the impossible distances to be traversed. I reached my destination, a dull, narrow street, undistinguishable in any way from the labyrinth surrounding it, and having found the number, alighted at the door. My knock was answered by a big, motherly-looking woman with a very Scotch face, and she surveyed me with no small surprise.

'Mr. William Sharp lodges here, doesn't he, Mrs. Syme?' said I boldly. 'I am a friend of his, and from the same place. Perhaps you could accommodate me too.'

'Willie Sharp lodged here once, sir,' she answered. 'But he is gone from me long syne. But I can gie ye a lodging if ye like.'

I could not make this out, but I did not hesitate, for it was a night of pouring rain, and that feeling of desolation which often accompanies a solitary arrival in a strange place was very strong upon me.'

'I'll come in, mistress,' I answered. 'Though I can't understand what you say about my friend Willie Sharp.

So I took down my trunk, paid my cabman, and entered the house. She allowed me to sit by her kitchen fireside until the fire in the sitting-room kindled, and while she got some tea ready for me, told me all she knew about Willie Sharp. It was not much, and that sad, so sad that I could have wept as I listened, only I was too stunned by surprise.

'He only lived wi' me two months, an' then

he couldna afford to pay my rooms,' she said. 'Ye see, sir, I am a weedy woman, an' it is my lodgers I depend on. Willingly would I hae keepit him, but I hadna the means, for when he left he was my only lodger. But he wouldna hae stayed, for he had that pride that wadna let him eat or sleep in a place that wasna paid for.'

'But how comes it, then,' I asked stupidly, 'that he still writes from here, and has his letter sent to this address?'

'That's his pride again, an' it's what I like in him, for it's an honest pride, an' a kind too, so that his ain folk micht no' be vexed. It was a' he askit me to do for him, an' I did it gladly.'

'Then he didn't get my letter telling him I was coming here?'

'No, it's in the dresser drawer, forbye the ither ane that comes aince or twice a week. He'll be here the morn for them.'

'Then what does he do? I understood that he had constant occupation.'

Mrs. Syme shook her head.

'Ye needna believe that. There's mony a day he hasna a bite to eat, excep' what he may get

when he comes here. I aye gie him his tea for auld lang syne. I 've aye been gaun to write his folk, but he daured me to do it, an' I was feared.'

All this, you may be sure, did not tend to raise my spirits. I did but poor justice to the meal my landlady set before me, and when I went to my bed, though tired out, I could not sleep. Next day I never crossed the door, so afraid was I of missing Willie Sharp. About half-past four in the afternoon, when I was sitting disconsolately at the room fireside, I heard some one being let in at the front door, though I had not heard any knock. A few minutes after, Mrs. Syme, with her bonnet on, looked in at my door.

'He 's here,' she said, with a backward jerk of her thumb towards the kitchen door. 'I am gaun oot for some scones till his tea. Maybe ye wad like a word your twa sels.'

So saying, the good soul vanished, but it was quite five minutes before I summoned my courage to go ben the house. At last I strode across the little passage and threw open the kitchen door. He was sitting at the fire with his back to me, and Jessie's letter open in his hand. My own lay

unopened on the table. When he heard my foot he sprang up, and his wan face had a kind of terror in it—the look of a hunted animal brought to bay.

'My God, Dave!' he cried huskily. 'How did ye come here?'

I said nothing, but gripped him by the hand, and there was a great lump in my throat. And no wonder. For want and woe had wrought their fell work on Willie Sharp, and death sat on the face which had once been the bonniest in Adam Fairweather's school. And his clothes! Clad in my own warm homespun, and wearing fine linen which the hill sunshine had whitened and the heather bells scented, I could have sat down to greet. They were not only shabby, but sore put to it to keep together as a decent covering; no man could wear such rags and keep his self-respect.

'If ye are come to spy on me,' he cried defiantly, 'I hope ye are pleased. I am lost: a wastrel here, like drift on the sea-shore; but it's no' my blame, it's no' my blame. I've keepit steady, Dave—only, only I've never gotten onything to do.'

'Wheesht, Willie, wheesht!' I cried, my voice sharp with my bitter pain. 'Why did ye not let us ken? Is there anybody in Faulds that would not have helped Willie Sharp in his straits if they had but known?'

He shook his head.

'I wadna let them ken. I'll carry out the farce now till the end. Ye see for yoursel' it will not be long. It is this that has keepit me frae the Thames a' the time. Ye'll keep up the deception, Dave, for the sake o' auld lang syne.'

He fingered his sweetheart's letter lovingly, and with a passion which awed me, pressed it to his lips. I thought of Jessie Frier as I had seen her not forty-eight hours before, with her fair, sweet face unshadowed, and felt that life held more bitter than sweet. I could almost have regretted my own hot-headedness in leaving my boyhood's home, where peace and plenty dwelt. He stayed a good while, and we talked much; but though he told me freely of all his many disappointments, he was singularly reticent about his present way of life. In Faulds we had talked of Willie Sharp going to London to be an artist as we might have

talked of anybody shoeing a horse, or serving behind the counter of a shop, ignorant of the long apprenticeship necessary, the training in various art schools, and then the difficulty of getting on without influence or aid. Willie had begun his career in high scorn of all these, mistaking a taste for drawing and a love of the beautiful for genius, and this was the end.

He said a queer thing at parting that night, after refusing to tell me where he lodged.

'If ye come down to the National Gallery at Trafalgar Square the morn, Dave,' he said in the broadest Scotch, and with a queer dry smile on his sad mouth, 'ye'll see the school of art I've established. It's a' my ain, an' whiles it has its admirers. At twelve o'clock I'll be waiting opposite St. Martin's Church.'

Next day, armed with Mrs. Syme's directions, I hied me on the top of an omnibus to Trafalgar Square. It being my first ride through London streets, I was open-eyed and open-mouthed, and though it was a good hour's ride, it seemed all too short. I was so awed by the sober and solid grandeur of Trafalgar Square that I forgot for a

few minutes the errand on which I had come. Then I had to walk back from the Lions to St. Martin's Church and look for Willie Sharp. I did not see him anywhere, but observing a little throng of people on the other side, I crossed over, and saw that they were taken up by a lot of pictures done in coloured chalks on the pavement of the street. It was something I had never seen or heard tell of, and I pressed forward to take them all in. Then a kind of 'dwam,' as my grandfather would have expressed it, came over me, for every one of the little landscapes, sharply outlined from each other, was a bit from Faulds. There was the auld brig with the burn below, fringed with the birks of Inneshall. And the village street with Bawbie Windrum's shop window, and Peter Mitchell, the starling, in his cage at the door. And last in the row was my own home, the Byres, with the courtyard and the old draw-well faithful to the life. Up against the railings stood the forlorn and shabby artist, out at elbows, down at heels, with his greasy hat drawn down over his brows, and a curious bitter smile on his mouth. One or two tossed a copper

on the pavement ere they passed on, but he did not stoop to pick them up. Then I pressed through the throng and took him by the arm.

'Come with me, Willie Sharp,' I said. 'Ye are a dying man, not fit to be out on a day like this. Oh, why does God let such things be?'

I had awakened from my lethargy, and saw that something must be done for Willie, and that speedily. I put him in a cab and drove him back to Mrs. Symes'. Under my directions she prepared a room for him with a comfortable bed and a blazing fire. I had a hundred pounds in my pocket. Though the half of it went to comfort my poor friend, what mattered it? We got off his poor rags, which I bade Mrs. Syme burn in the backyard after dark; then, when he had had a bath and put on the warm flannels which my mother had bestowed on me in plenty, he fell asleep, and I went out to fetch the doctor. His verdict did not surprise me. He said he could not live above a week or two, and that a fine constitution had been ruined by privation and lack of care.

So the first days of my life in London were

spent in ministering to the need of my old friend. Bit by bit he unfolded to me the sad record of the past two years; then we buried it, and our whole talk was of Faulds and the days of long ago. Many a time I had to turn away, greeting, when he babbled on about the woods and the fields and the trees, the sunset glory on the hills, and the lilt of lark and mavis in the lift. At last, when the end came very near, and we both knew it, I spoke that which had been in my mind for long, and which I had taken it upon myself to do.

'I've written to your mother and to Jessie, Willie, telling them that ye are for a better country, and I've got word that they'll be here the night.'

He raised himself and looked at me. I shall never forget that look; the glory and gratitude of it has warmed my heart many a time, when all else seemed cold and dark and void of hope.

'O Dave!' he cried. 'Davie Lyall, this'll be minded to ye at the Judgment. If I be there, there'll be ane to sound yer praises. I'm believin' again what was so easy in Faulds, that there's a

God abune a'. Eh, in this prison o' stane an' lime an' pitiless streets, He's faur, faur awa', an' hard to seek or find'

'One thing, Willie,' said I gently. 'They must never know all you have gone through. It would kill your mother and Jessie to guess even the half of it. We'll never tell them you've been away from here. It will make their grief easier and gentler to bear.'

And so it was. They came that night, the two women who loved Willie Sharp above anything on earth, and who had believed in him, and still believed him fit to achieve anything. And though their grief was very great, because his sun had set while it was yet day, and his promising career seemed untimely cut short, they were consoled by the immortal hope which dwelt so steadfastly in his great, wonderful eyes. Something of his unspeakable contentment and peace stole into their hearts, and we were happy together with a strange, sad happiness as we waited for the poor shattered barque to be towed into port.

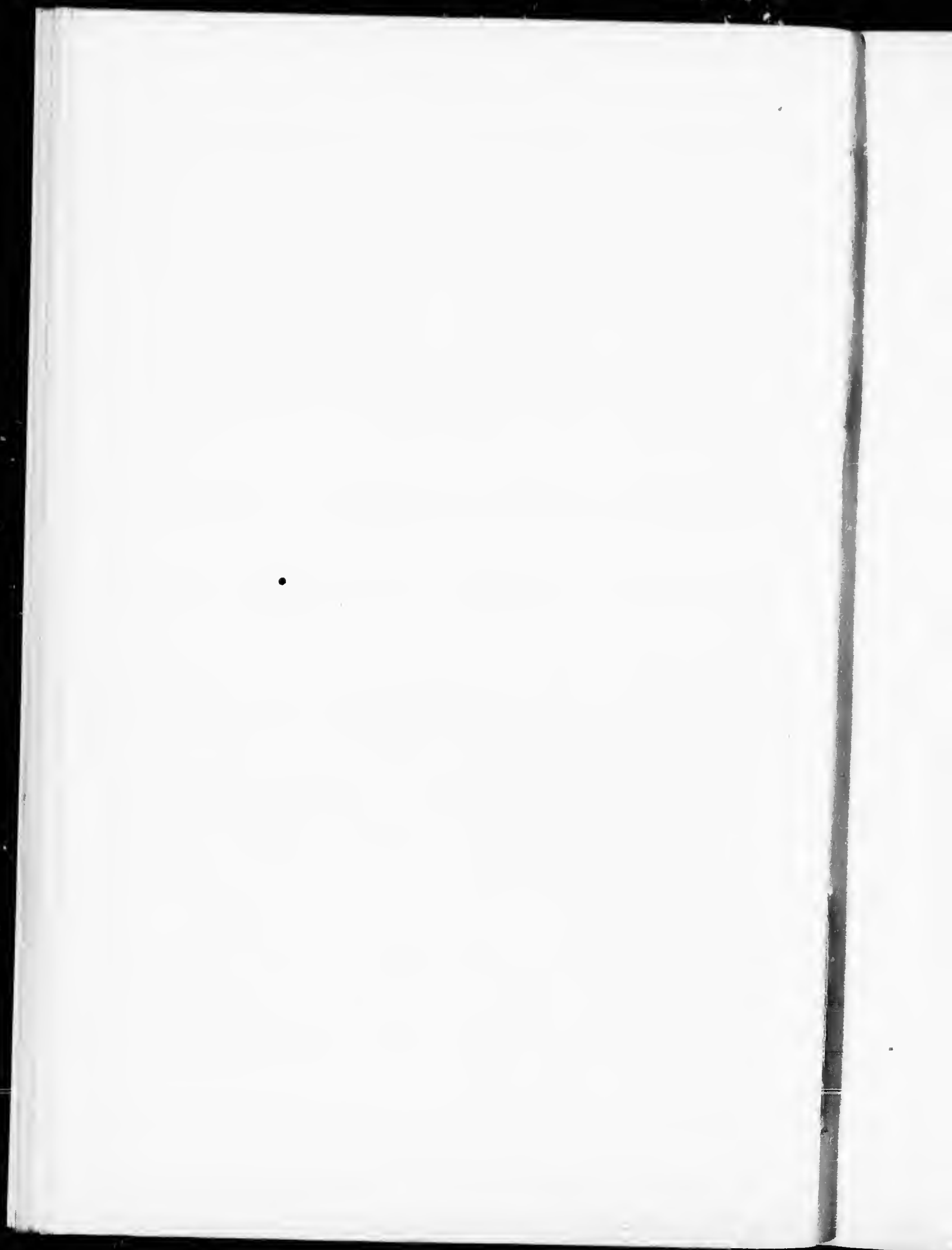
In the old kirkyard at Faulds, not very far from the sunny slope where Adam Fairweather lies, you

will find a simple headstone with these words on it, chosen by Willie himself:—

Here lies
WILLIAM SHARP,
Artist in London,
Who died there in November 18—, in the
twenty-sixth year of his age.

Then below the words of the old hymn he had learned at his mother's knee:—

'Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.



II

DAWN

DAWN

I SHALL never forget the dreary sense of loneliness and desolation which oppressed me that night I came back from the station after seeing Mrs. Sharp and Jessie Frier away to Scotland with their sad burden. The weeks had gone more quickly than we had taken thought or reckoning of, and when I sat down in solitary committee on ways and means, I was startled to remember that it wanted but seven days to Christmas. I had been in London exactly eight weeks, during which I had not only failed to earn a single penny, but I had been spending at the rate of five pounds a week. When I came to examine the contents of my pocket-book, I found therein fifty-nine pounds, fourteen shillings and fourpence. I remember the exact sum, though I

have it set down in the old note-book wherein I was wont to keep strict account of my expenditure. It was a good while before I had anything to set down to my credit in the way of earnings. It must not be thought, however, that during these two months I had been entirely idle. During the intervals of attending upon my poor friend, I not only continued to write, but went forth in search of a market for my wares. But, alas! in all that great city there seemed to be no niche or corner for me, nor did there seem any reason to prevent my becoming a derelict like Willie Sharp. His experience and his sad death were enough to damp an enthusiasm even brighter than mine. I confess I felt very low that night as I drew near to my little fire, and with my head in my hands, faced my position and prospects. I had enough in my pocket to keep me going, with strict economy, the better part of a year. I did not grudge my spending on Willie Sharp; nay, it filled me with a sense of unspeakable satisfaction that I had been able to befriend him in his need. Not a living soul in Faulds ever heard from me of his desperate

straits, and now it matters nothing, since Jessie Frier is in her grave, and all sib to him are gone from the old place. His experience had daunted me not a little; for though I had some money in my pocket, I was as ill-fitted and ill-equipped for the race as he nad been. Both he and I, indeed, belonged to the great, sad army of the unskilled, and the pity of it was that there had been none strong and brave enough to tell us the plain truth concerning ourselves. My grandfather had come very near the truth in his dealing with me; but I had scorned him, thinking that a plain hill farmer could know nothing of such a great, grand ambition as mine. Mrs. Syme came in about eight o'clock, and her step and voice were soft as she entered.

'What wad ye like for your supper, Mr. Lyall?'

I turned round to her, and smiled drearily.

'I've had my supper, thank you, Mrs. Syme. A man feeling as I am at this moment is not apt to be hungry.'

'Oh, but ye maun tak something,' she said cheerily. 'I got some real Finnan haddies frae

my guid-sister at Buckie this morning. A cup o' coffee wi 't wad mak a tasty bit. Brawly do I ken hoo ye feel, lad.'

I was not ashamed to let her see that my eyes were wet. Elspeth Syme has been dead these many years, but the memory of her motherly kindness to me in my dark days is ever green in my heart.

'I 'm thinkin', Mrs. Syme, that I was a bonnie fule to leave the hame I did. But here I am, and here I 'll bide till I succeed. Just leave me, my good woman, till ten o'clock. I 've got something to do which will not wait.'

She looked at me curiously, and withdrew. Then I drew my chair up to the table, got my pad and my writing-paper, and began to pour out all that was in my heart. It was indeed full to overflowing, and it was as if all power to control myself was taken from me, and I was carried clean away. Yet what I wrote was simple enough, all of long ago times, of homely folk, of simple joys and sorrows. Never had the old home seemed so dear to me as it did that night; the hills uplifted themselves before my eyes like

the very hills of heaven; the burn wimpling down the brae face and along the heathery glen had the sheen of the morning on its breast; the purple of the heather, the tender green of hedge and tree, all seemed burned into my heart, and I wrote of them as if they were holy things. As they were to me then, so they are to me now, as I see them in my memory and in my dreams. I did not read over what I had written. I felt that whatever might be its fate, it was the best I had to give; and the mere setting of it down had relieved my sad and overcharged heart. I put it in a large envelope, and addressed it to the editor of an afternoon paper which occasionally gave a place to such descriptive bits. I smiled sadly as I put it into the last of a big packet of envelopes which had been used for the same purpose, and I took it forth to post feeling certain that a post or two would see it returned. Then I came back and ate of Mrs. Syme's guid-sister's haddies, and enjoyed them, too—talking cheerily, and making any pretext to keep Mrs. Syme in the room. For she represented in her own person the one and only friend I had in London, and it behoved me

to make much of her, lest I should never find another.

For several days I heard nothing of my paper; nor, indeed, did this greatly disappoint me, for I did not expect much. I walked out as usual, answered a few advertisements in person, only to be assured, as I had been before, that a person of no experience need not apply. When 'a smart young journalist, well up in pars and leader-writing,' was advertised for, it was the height of presumption on my part to assume the *rôle*. I got many a sneer and many a snub; but I got hardened to them, and even took a certain grim satisfaction in the unvarying monotony of my reception.

I heard nothing of my paper till a good many days after Christmas. I shall not dwell on that Christmas. For me it had few of the attributes of that blessed season, and I do not care to recall it.

On the eleventh of January I received a letter with the name of the journal writ large on it. It was a small envelope and not bulky, therefore my paper was not returned. Yet, though everything

looked hopeful, I sat with the thing in my hand, 'like a muckle sheep,' as Mrs. Cairncross might have said, afraid to open it. At last I broke the seal. The contents were brief, but shall I ever forget the thrill they sent to my heart? It was written by the editor himself, and simply stated that the article was accepted and would be paid for at the usual rate of a guinea a column, and that he would be pleased to look at anything else from my pen. So I got my foot upon the lowest rung of the ladder of fame, but the ascent was slow. As was to be expected, I immediately sat down and wrote something else, which was promptly returned as unsuitable. It was several weeks before anything else was accepted, and then I took courage to write my new friend and ask him whether he could offer or find me permanent employment of any sort. He wrote back kindly promising to do what he could, and appointing a day to call. I was naturally excited that day. The appointment was for four o'clock at the office in Fleet Street; but quite early in the forenoon I took myself out of doors, and wended my way to Trafalgar Square. I don't

know what took me there, unless that I was thinking more than usual of Willie Sharp. Even already he was supplanted, and another artist drew strange and wonderful ships sailing on impossible seas, on the very same flags where Willie had laid bare his heart. The sight made me sad. Feeling some sense of kinship with the poor fellow, though he had the look and the manners of a ne'er-do-weel, I gave him a shilling and then turned into Piccadilly. There was more stir than usual in the streets, for the Queen had just opened Parliament in person with great pomp and circumstance, and the tide of fashion was beginning to roll westward. As I passed by the railings of the Green Park, I seemed to realise all in a moment that winter was over and gone. There was a balmy softness in the air, a tenderness in the sunshine, and an indescribable something everywhere which I could liken to nothing but the trailing of Spring's garments over the land. Also, above the roar and din of the streets I could hear the tender twitterings of a thousand brooding creatures in whom hope was strong. Then, though I had little cause, a hope akin to

theirs began to stir in my heart, and I felt as if all my troubles were at an end. Yet did the sight of green grass and budding boughs, the gleam of snowdrop and crocus in the borders, make me so sick and fain for my own country that I had to hasten my steps lest my foolish eyes should betray me. And so I came with some speed to Hyde Park Corner, and passed within the gates. I had sometimes walked there in winter when all the fashionable resorts were deserted, and I had never seen more than an occasional horseman in the Row. But now it was full, and I drew near with interest and curiosity, more drawn to the beautiful animals than to those who rode them. It was a gay and lively scene. As I stood there, I saw presently approaching a lady and gentleman riding closely together, and followed at a few paces by a fine boy on his pony, attended by a groom. I recognised them at a glance as the Claud Inneses of Inneshall, and then remembered that he had been returned unopposed at the last election as member for his own county. He was now a public man in every sense of the word, and his face, always

finely featured and indicating gifts of the highest order, was a striking one, both by reason of the power it betrayed, but more, I think, because of its expression of serene content. There was in his eye as he glanced at his dear companion an indescribable tenderness, as well as a passion which said that she was more precious to him than anything on earth. As for her face, it reflected the sunshine. I can say no more. Presently I knew that she saw me, and as they rode forward I heard her say—

'Why, Claud, there is a face I ought to know. Of course, it is David Lyall, Mr. Wallace's grandson, from the Byres.' And with that they came across to the railings where I stood, and she bent from her saddle, extending her hand.

'How pleasant to see a Faulds face, Mr. Lyall. Your aunt told me you were in London. I want to hear all about you. When will you come to see us? We have only been in town a very few days.'

I stammered as I thanked her, and said I could come when she pleased. She looked at me a full moment in silence, and it seemed to me that she understood all there was to tell.

'Can you come to lunch with us to-day? We are going down into the country to-morrow, and will not return for a whole week, and that is too long to postpone. You will lunch at home to-day, dear?' she said, turning to her husband.

'Yes, and I think you had better come to-day, David,' he said, as cordially as if I had been a grandson of his own.

'We have some others coming, perhaps one or two you might like to meet. To-day, then, at two o'clock.'

So saying, she waved her hand and rode away, and I walked on, wondering much at what had befallen me. I had no concern about my attire, for I had never grown careless of my dress; so I did not trouble to go home again, but walked about until the hour when I presented myself at the town house of the laird's folk in Grosvenor Street. I was immediately shown into a great and spacious room, in which several folk were gathered; but I saw nobody except Mrs. Innes, who came forward to greet me in a way which at once set me at my ease. I think there is nothing more beautiful than the power of a high-bred,

gracious lady, who is also a kind and gentle woman, to make happy and comfortable those about her. She knows no distinctions of rank or class, but is equally at home with all.

The laird was standing on the hearthrug, talking with a short man dressed in a tweed suit and wearing a double gold eye-glass. He was talking with great animation, and as I passed by with Mrs. Claud, I gathered from a chance word that the theme was political. We went down to lunch at once. It was an informal and pleasant meal—about a dozen present,—and I was amazed that I felt so much at home. I even found my tongue and spoke on my own account, and I observed that the gentleman in the tweed suit and spectacles more than once eyed me keenly. I liked his face, and though I had not heard his name, I felt sure he was of my own nationality. His tongue, though it had caught a little of the southern softness, betrayed him. I afterwards learned that the young lady who sat by me, talking so merrily, was an earl's daughter. It might have discomfited me a little had I known it at the time, and made me less free in my speech. There

were cigars sent round when the ladies left, and then the gentleman in the tweed suit came to my side.

'I liked that second article you sent me,' he said. 'That's your vein; stick to it, and you'll do well—ninety per cent. of failures are brought about by folk attempting what is beyond them.'

I stammered, blushing as red as any girl.

'Who are you?' I blurted out, 'not——'

'My name is Wardrop,' he said, with great good-humour. 'You were coming to see me this afternoon. We can go down to the office together, and see what's what. Yes, Mr. Innes——'

He was called from my side again, and I could not but see the deference with which they listened to him, and I felt stupefied with my own good fortune. He seemed to be an authority on every subject under discussion. I had not dreamed till then of the power wielded by the editor of a first-class journal, and it gave me food for thought.

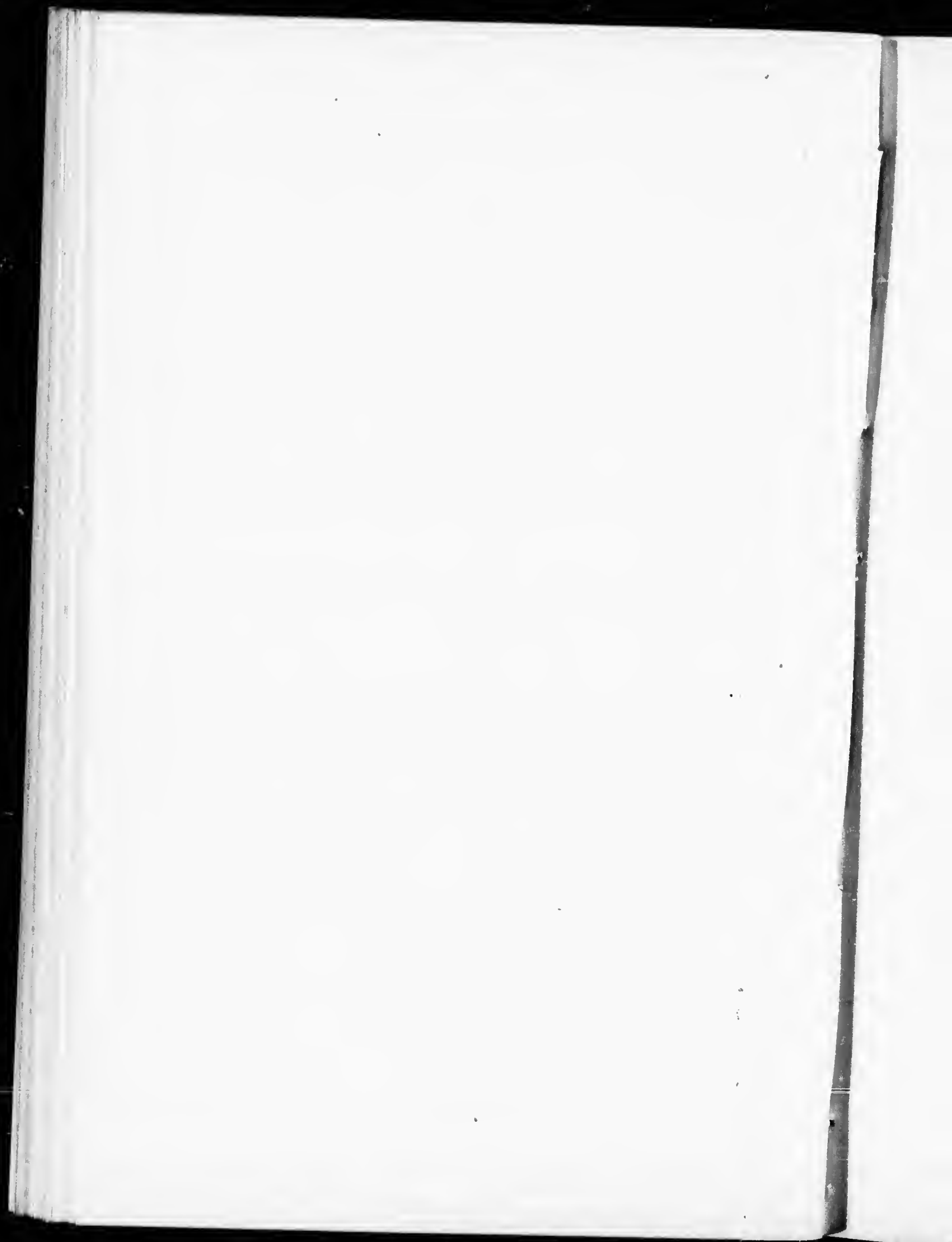
'Shall I tell you something?' said the sweet lady of Inneshall, as she bade me good-bye; and I shall never forget the look in her eyes as she spoke. 'When we come back at Easter somebody

will be with me on a long visit. Certain restrictions I must observe, for you have to win your spurs yet, and you will, with Mr. Wardrop's help, for Euphan's sake.'

I could not speak, but wrung her hand, forgetful of everything but that she was a sympathising and tender-hearted woman, who knew all that was in my heart. And next minute I was beside Mr. Wardrop in his hansom; and as he talked to me kindly and frankly, as if I had been his own brother, whom it was his joy and his duty to help, I felt that my cup was filling to the brim.

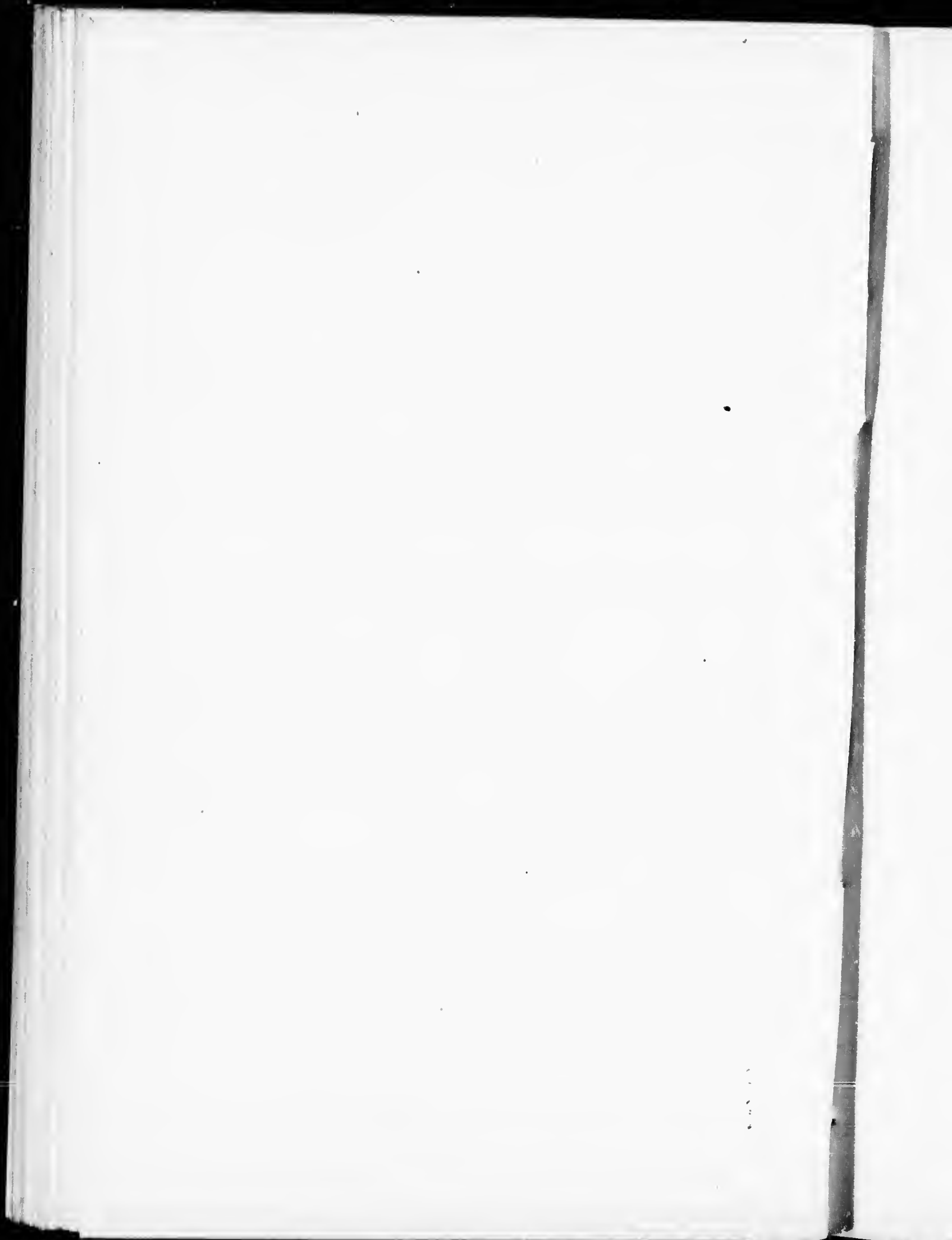
When I left the office that night I was on the staff of the *St. George's*; and so began my life work, which has been more satisfying and fruitful than most—an anxiety sometimes, but a joy always, such as few men can boast. I did not rise by leaps and bounds. Whoever had the good luck to fall into the hands of Robert Wardrop was well moulded by those hands, and every forward step was earned by conscientious, self-denying toil. I would that there were more like him, my chief and comrade, who showed to me the real and inner meaning of life, who taught me all I know,

and made me what I am. On this theme my pen would know no weariness, but as I have much to say of him in connection with the Scots folk whom he helped and cheered and blessed, I will not now go on.



III

THE INNER SANCTUARY



THE INNER SANCTUARY

I SOON found that Wardrop was adored in the office. Yet he was by no means an indulgent chief; nothing but the best passed the bar of his judgment; no ill-doer or shirker of work could exist in his presence. But for the best, for all honest, conscientious work whatsoever, he had a quick, hearty, unstinted commendation which made sweet all labour done for him. He was in some respects a hard taskmaster, but he did not exact from others more than he gave himself. His capacity for work was enormous. I have never seen it excelled, or even equalled. When I recall the length of his working day, and the amount he could put into it, I am afraid to set it down, certain I should not be believed.

It would serve no purpose to give details of our work here; those who are or have been on the staff of an influential journal know how we lived and moved and had our being, from hand to mouth for material always, eager to grasp and even to anticipate every opportunity. It was a matter of no small joy, as well as importance, to find that my work was to be done in the chief's office, under his immediate eye. It was nominally clerical at first; but bit by bit, when he saw how utterly my heart was in the work, he began to enlarge my borders, and to let me do certain things which he had not hitherto intrusted to any hand but his own. He appeared, indeed, to have taken an odd fancy to me, and I repaid his attention with a devotion which was almost slavish, though I am not ashamed of it, but glory in it, because to love Robert Wardrop was a liberal education. He was singularly scrupulous, preserving in a position bristling with innumerable temptations such absolute straightforwardness as he won the respect and esteem even of those who were most bitterly opposed to him, and who envied the genius and the marvellous organising

power by which he had earned success. The charm of his personality was almost irresistible; even those who came into casual contact with him were influenced by it. He was a Selkirk man, and passionately attached to his countryside. To hear him discourse of Tweed and Ettrick and Yarrow was to hear the roar of their floods and the sough of the wind along their bonnie banks. He was full of the rich lore of these matchless hills and glens, but it was only when moved deeply that their spirit laid hold of him, and would not let him be still. He was very reticent about himself, and no one in the office ever spoke of his private life or domestic concerns. Whether loyalty or ignorance kept them silent, I often wondered. I had been four months with him, and was still lodging at Mrs. Syme's, when he said to me suddenly one day, as we were about to go our separate ways—

'Are you pretty comfortable in your lodgings, Lyall? And where is it, again—Highbury?'

'No, sir,' I made answer; 'I am always in the same place—Hill Street, Canonbury.'

'Oh yes, I remember now. It's a goodish

journey every day. I have good rooms in Surrey Street, just on the river. If you ever care to make a change, I shouldn't mind having you there. It would be handy for several things; but just as you like.'

I flushed all over, foolishly, as I had done the first time he had spoken to me in Mrs. Innes's drawing-room. This was indeed a mark of his kindly feeling towards me; nay, more, it indicated that I was something more to him than a mere subordinate.

'I can hardly believe my ears, Mr. Wardrop,' I said falteringly. 'I will come joyfully if you mean what you say.'

'I don't usually waste good breath on superfluous words, do I?' he answered. 'Think about it, and if you can change comfortably and without depriving a decent woman of her means of living —why, then, the sooner the better.'

Now it happened that Mrs. Syme had recently let part of her house to a married daughter and her husband, and only suffered me to remain as her lodger because I had refused to leave. I knew she would be glad to be rid of me, if she

felt assured that I had got a comfortable place elsewhere. So within a week the change was effected. Wardrop had a large sitting-room with a quaint projecting window which commanded a good view of the river. His bedroom, also large and airy, opened off. My bedroom was upstairs, but we used the sitting-room as a common room. The first night I sat with Wardrop at that open window, after he had made me quietly welcome, I would not have changed places with any king.

'I hope what we have done will be for our mutual benefit, my boy,' he said, as he lit his big pipe and put his feet upon the chair opposite to him. 'Our first concern must be that we do not bore each other. It is good for man to be sometimes, though not always, alone.'

I took his hint, and during all the years we lived together as brothers in these dear old rooms there never was the slightest strain in our relationship, nor did we once feel that we had made a mistake. They were rich in every comfort—furnished, indeed, with a certain sober elegance which rather astonished me just at first, coming from the unadorned chambers of Canonbury.

But when I recollected that Wardrop must be very well off, I did not wonder that he had surrounded himself with so many beautiful objects. But it was a man's room essentially, absolutely free from feminine frivolities such as I have seen gathered in other bachelors' rooms. Everything was honest, wholesome, unpretentious, like the man who lived in them. What a training and environment for me! And what had I done, I sometimes asked myself, to be so singularly and greatly blessed?

During all the years I lived with Wardrop I only once saw him roused, and out of that incident I learned the sad secret of his life. It was impossible to live closely as I did with him without learning that a shadow dwelt perpetually on the man's heart, and that nothing but toil that had no end kept it from wholly crushing his life. He was often sad, often preoccupied, but I never betrayed the smallest desire to obtain his confidence, nor the faintest curiosity regarding the cause. I knew that if he thought it well he would tell me. Even in those early days I held that the man or woman who seeks to pry into

the sanctuary of another life is little better than the thief who steals his purse or enters his house at midnight by unlawful means. The day on which I saw Wardrop's lion temper roused for the first time, we were sitting together in his private room discussing a series of short articles he wished me to undertake, when the door unceremoniously opened and some one came in. We were used to interruptions, and as I was taking notes at the time I did not look round at the first movement. But Wardrop sprang up with such haste and force that I started up too in no small amazement. There stood within the doorway a man about forty years of age, gentlemanly in appearance, and very carefully and correctly dressed—not a journalist, I saw at a glance. His face was handsome without being striking; it had a fair Saxon beauty which contrasted singularly with the dark, rugged face of Robert Wardrop. I shall never forget him as he looked then. I saw that there was some fearful antagonism, if not hatred, between these two, at least on Wardrop's side. His face, one moment fiery red, paled suddenly the next, leaving him white as death. And the cords stood

out on his temples and on his hands, which looked as if they itched to be at the other's throat. But he never spoke a word, nor did the other man for a full minute, and I stood still also, feeling that it would be seemly in me to depart, but I was rooted to the spot.

'I have to apologise,' began the stranger; and at that, seeing the awfulness of the look on my chief's face, I stepped between them.

'You are right, lad,' Wardrop said, with a laugh which I remember to this day. 'Stand there, or there will be murder done.'

And just then, without waiting to hear further what the man had to say, he disappeared through the inner door. Then I turned to the stranger and bade him go, and my bidding was of the sourest.

'Sir,' I said, 'I don't know your business, but it is evident that it is little to Mr. Wardrop's liking. You had better go.'

'There is nothing for it evidently but to follow the example of our friend. Pray, tell him, however, when he returns, that it might be to his advantage to hear what I have to say,' replied the stranger, with a certain airiness of manner which

quite evidently sought to conceal considerable uneasiness of mind. I inclined my head slightly, and the stranger moved towards the door. I was so concerned about this episode that I could not fix my attention on my work; and though I lingered in the office later than usual, Wardrop did not return, nor did I see him till late that night, long after our usual dinner-hour. He looked hot and tired as he threw himself into his chair, wiping the dust off his brow.

'I have tramped nearly twenty miles since I saw you last, but it has done me good, it has done me good.'

I got him his pipe without a word, and filled my own, nor did we utter another word for a good half-hour.

'I made no mistake when I asked you to come and live with me, David,' he said at length, when his pipe had soothed and comforted him. 'You can keep your own counsel. What a gift that is, and how very rare.'

'It is no man's business to ask about what does not concern him,' I answered lamely, somewhat abashed by his praise.

'Nay, you are wrong; it is the chief business of most people,' he said with a grim smile. 'But now tell me, have you ever heard anything about my domestic life from any of the staff?'

'Nothing,' I answered, and it pleased me greatly that I could say so with absolute truth.

'That's good. I retract what I said; we have very good fellows round the corner—loyal, I believe, to the backbone. Well, it is right that I tell you something—besides, I wish to. There are times when a man's own thoughts consume him, and to pass them on brings a certain relief. Yon was the scoundrel that ruined my home and blighted my whole life.'

He paused a moment and laid down his pipe.

'Ten years ago there was one happy home in London, and it mattered little to me, selfishly speaking, though it had been the only one, since it was mine. It held the treasures a man cherishes and labours for without weariness. I had a wife and a little son.'

He paused again, and I sat still, for the awe and fear of what was coming held me.

'She was a Scotch girl from the south, and I

brought her from the heart of a big family, and perhaps I erred in making our home a little way out; but you know what our life is, and how sweet is the pure air after work is done. She was dull, homesick, wearied to death a thousand times, and I never knew it. I suppose my eyes were holden, and though every hair of her head was precious to me, I was careless of the little things which are a woman's life. So we are made wise too late.

'He was on our staff, taking Walford's work. The year it happened I had a long illness, and Brand—that's his name—had to come and go between the office and our home at Hendon, taking down my notes as I was able to give them. So they met, and got to know each other more intimately of course than would have been otherwise possible, and I thought or feared nothing. I can't explain or expatiate upon it. How it happened I don't know, or how it was that a girl brought up as she had been could be so quickly weaned away from all that was good—only it happened. He took her away.'

'Did she take the child?' I asked, when speech

was possible to me, and I dared break upon his silence.

'No, she left him. If she had taken the boy I must have followed up and killed them both,' he replied, in a quiet, passionless voice, which had something of the sea strength in it.

'He is in the country with a good woman who will mother him. One day you shall see him. That's the story, David—sordid enough. It has made the world a Golgotha for me. Nothing but my work has saved me from absolute shipwreck. When I have the boy's hand in mine I can even look up, and believe as of old that the Omnipotent reigneth.'

'What do you suppose he wanted to-day?' I ventured to ask, at the same time repeating the message Brand had left.

He gave his head an impatient shake.

'I know not, and the day on which I take speech with him will be a different day from this or any other. She is provided for. She is even independent of him. I allow her sufficient to live upon, and it is taken full advantage of. I do it for the boy's sake. Now let us talk of something else.'

I tried to meet his wish, but my tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of my mouth. He looked at me, understanding as well as if I had spoken.

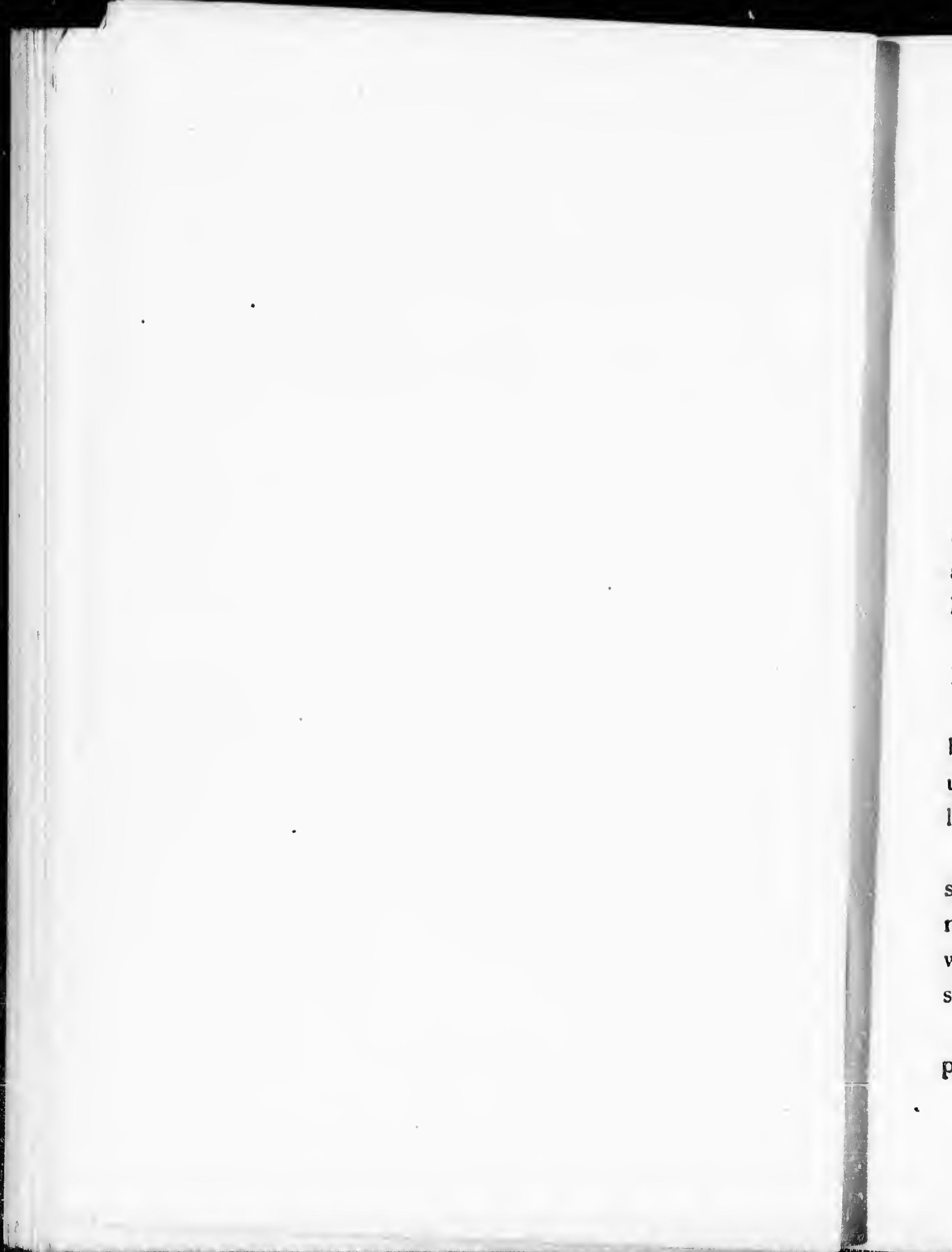
'Perhaps we had better go to bed, David,' he said. 'Good night. I like you well, lad, and I trust that when you build, your house will be on the rock.'

I broke down then, and tried to tell him all that was in my heart. Then we had much further speech, which brought us nearer to each other, but of that I may not write. For many a day the matter was never mentioned between us, though it was seldom long absent from my mind. But he taught me all through the blessed years of our communion that a reticence which scorns to make free or common with the inner sanctuary is one of the finest of human gifts.

I would that another Robert Wardrop would arise in these shameless days to value that gift at its true price, and help us to use it as we ought.

IV

JANET CAIRNS'S 'GUID-DOCHTER'



JANET CAIRNS'S 'GUID-DOCHTER'

'MY idea of an earthly paradise,' said Wardrop, as he ran his fingers wearily through his hair, 'is a place where it is possible to lock the door and keep it locked.'

I did not wonder at his mild grumbling—nay, I wondered that it *was* mild.

'Some men can do it; why can't *you*?' I asked bluntly. 'If you invest me with authority, I'll undertake to hold this door against a siege if you like.'

'Well, you see,' said Wardrop, with a whimsical smile, 'I lost the key at the beginning, and it's no use hunting for it now. And after all, the work does get done; we get warstled through somehow, in spite of the interruptions.'

'Yes,' I admitted grudgingly, 'but at what expense. Your time and strength are fretted away

by dozens of petty affairs and pettier folk, when there's no need for it. I wish you'd let me turn over the leaf for you, or interview them when they come—anything to save you, sir.'

Wardrop smiled, but shook his head. 'I'm something like a doctor, David; you know how people kick at a strange doctor. It's me they want. Well, I've given away seven pound ten this morning, and promised to look for situations for three lads and a young woman.'

I groaned, for I had heard him, and felt wroth within. Also the heinousness of my own offence in having once added to the burden on this good man's shoulders rose up before me accusingly. Yet now I would seek to expiate that offence by closing the door on others who were perhaps more needful than I had been! Human nature all over, that; and I felt a poor, mean wretch as I spoke. But Wardrop did not seem to notice anything odd by suggestion or comparison.

'Here's somebody else, David. Well, I believe I will slip into the other room. Don't betray me if you can help it.'

I said nothing, but inwardly resolved that for

nobody less than the Queen herself would I knock at the inner door. I gave him ample time to disappear before I called 'come in' to the intruder at the outer door.

Great was my astonishment when a country-woman, decently attired, and apparently just off a journey, stepped into the room. She was a bright, winsome-looking woman, with rosy-red cheeks, kind blue eyes, and a certain alertness in her whole appearance which indicated good health and a fund of active energy in reserve. She was 'purpose like,' as we say in Faulds, and that means a lot. I remember the details of her attire because its old-fashioned simplicity appealed to my heart in no ordinary fashion. She had on a skirt of purple merino, trimmed with rows of narrow black velvet at the hem, a plaid of shepherd's tartan, and a black lace bonnet with purple violets at the brim, and black velvet strings tied in a particularly neat bow under her chin. She carried over her arm a little bag of velvet plush with red roses on it, and her woollen-gloved hands were folded in front of her as she surveyed the room with a good deal of disappointment in her eyes.

'It's Maister Wardrop I want to see,' she said, in rather a shrill voice. 'Is he no' in?'

Her tongue had the border twang, and I knew that if Wardrop could but catch its echo through the door it was all up with him. I waited half a moment just to see, and sure enough his head popped round the door.

'Hulloa, Mrs. Cairns! What brings you here?' he asked, coming out with both hands outstretched, and a smile of no ordinary welcome on his face—a smile which was reflected on her face too, as they stood shaking each other by the hand.

'I've come to see Geordie. They tell me he's gotten mairret, an' he's never said a cheep to me aboot it. Do you think it's true, Robert?'

The smile faded from her face, and there came into her eyes a kind of hungry, anxious look I have seen in the eyes of many mothers in my time.

'It's quite true, Mrs. Cairns, I believe,' Wardrop answered, and I fancied a stern note in his voice.

'It was Jeanie Nicoll, her that's in service wi' Lady Marchbank, that wrote to oor Bess, an' she even gied me the address.'

She began to fumble in her velvet bag, and I

observed her fingers trembling a little, and guessed that the confirmation of her fears Wardrop had just given was more than a disappointment to her. It was a shock. Wardrop saw it also, and, taking her by the arm, set her down in a chair.

'I canna understand it,' she went on, still fumbling in the bag. 'If it be true, what for did he no' write? Surely his mither deserved that frae him at least.'

'Yes, surely, but he would mean to write,' answered Wardrop, and his voice was very tender. 'Geordie was not a bad lad, only thoughtless.'

'Eh no, no' a bad lad; naebody could say that,' she answered. 'But he micht hae written. Here's the address.'

She produced a soiled scrap of paper from the bag, and handed it to Wardrop.

'Seventeen Colwyn Avenue, Streatham,' he read. 'Um, that's a goodish bit out. Are you in a hurry, Mrs. Cairns?'

'No' in sic a hurry, as long's I get there afore dark,' she said. 'If it be true that he is mairret, of course they'll be for me stoppin' a' nicht, an' maybe twa-three days, wha kens?'

She looked round with a kind of confident inquiry which touched us both.

'Jeanie Nicoll said it was a terrible braw hoose, for she gaed oot to see it when it was her Sunday oot, an' she even spak till the servant at the door, speirin' if George Cairns bade there, an a' this afore she wrate a line to me ava.'

'Well, Mrs. Cairns, I'm very much occupied just now, and won't be free for two hours. I want to take you there myself; so if you'll let David take you over to our house, the landlady will give you a bite, and you can rest there till I am ready.'

'Very weel, I kent I wad be a' richt wi' you,' said Mrs. Cairns, rising blithely, quite unconscious that she was taking up minutes of time as precious as fine gold. I rose too, but ere we passed out by the door Wardrop called me back.

'See that she gets a good cup of tea and something to it, David, and be as kind to her as you can. Poor soul, poor soul! it would give me no small joy at this minute to kick Mr. George Cairns down that stair and into the street.'

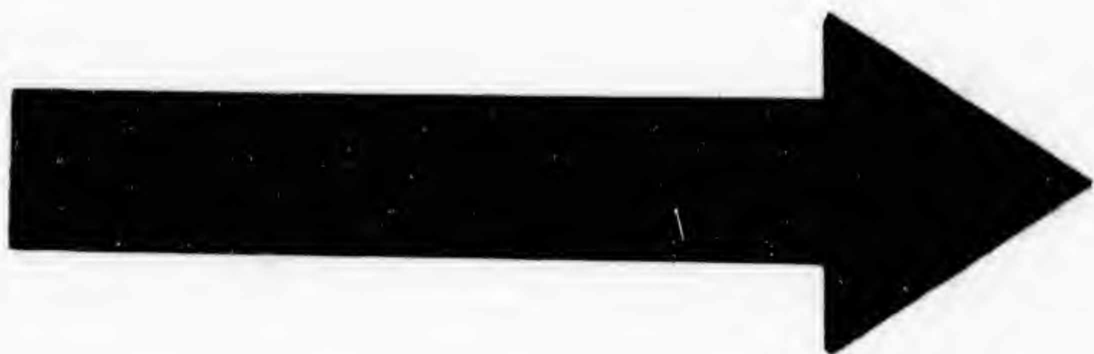
I took Mrs. Cairns over to Surrey Street, saw to her comfort, and left her content and cheerful.

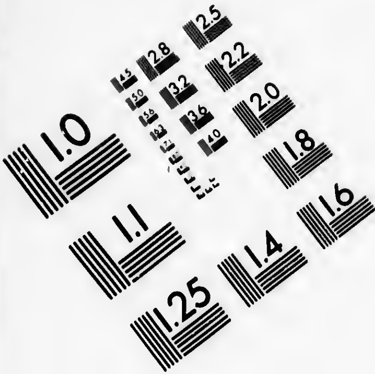
When I got back to the office, I found that Wardrop had been summoned to the House of Commons, and had left a note for [illegible] It simply bade me take Mrs. Cairns out to the Streatham address, and to bring her right back again, unless I was assured by my own eyes and ears that she was made welcome there. I did his bidding joyfully, for it was another mark of his true confidence in me that he passed on the doing of such kindnesses to me, assured that I would not fail him. So I took Janet Cairns from Ludgate Hill to Streatham, and thence in a four-wheeler to her son's house in Colwyn Avenue.

It was one of those commodious and picturesque houses which abound in the suburbs of London, standing in its own grounds, and possessing all the attributes of the country, together with the advantages of proximity to the metropolis.

'Od sakes, man,' observed Mrs. Cairns, as we drove up the avenue to the house. 'My Geordie canna live here. It's a perfect pailace. But Jeanie Nicoll said it was a terrible braw place.'

With that we came to the door, and bidding her sit still, I ran up the steps and rang the bell.





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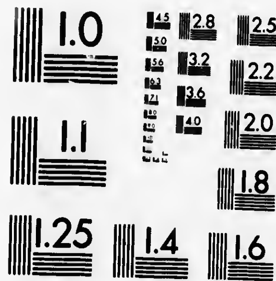

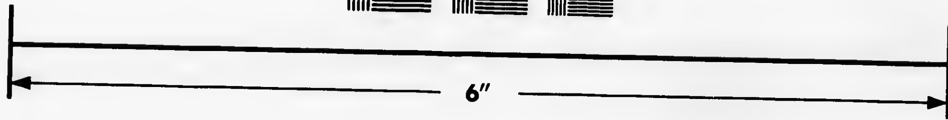

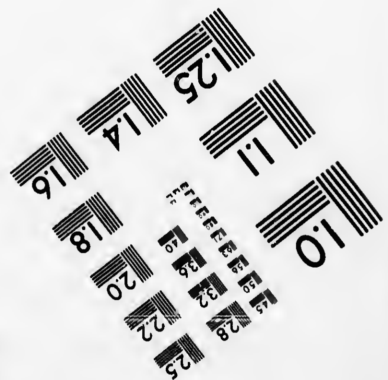

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And when the smart maid-servant answered my summons, I was not surprised to be told that Mr. Cairns was not yet returned from the city. Mrs. Cairns, however, was within. I hesitated a moment, not knowing what to do, and then, asking the maid to wait a moment, I went out to the cab.

'Your son lives here right enough, Mrs. Cairns,' I said. 'But he isn't home from business yet. Hadn't you better go back with me and write to him that you have come to London?'

'What for should I gang back wi' you, my man, if my son bides here?' she inquired in high scorn. 'If he bides here, it maun be true that he has mairret a rich wife, for he had but twa hunder a year, an' that disna gang faur in toons. An' if he's mairret, then his wife is my guid-dochter, an' I wull see her, so there.'

With that she began to get down in haste from the cab. I was sore put to it then to know how to act, and my chief—nay, my sole desire was to spare my countrywoman's feelings from being wounded, as I feared was most likely. I did what seemed best to me when we were admitted by

asking the maid to take my card to her mistress and request private speech with her. We were shown into the library of the house, which was small, but well furnished with books and good pictures and fine bronzes. Mrs. Cairns, I saw, began to feel some weight on her spirits; she sat down on the edge of a chair, and did not look at home. The house was very quiet, but presently there sounded through the stillness the cry of a little child. Then Mrs. Cairns sprang from her chair, and the colour came and went on her homely, kind face.

'Mercy me, there 's a bairn! If that be Geordie's bairn an' me never kent, I 'll never forgie him in this warld.'

Before I could reply, the maid-servant reappeared and asked me to step upstairs. I was intensely relieved at this, as I had feared that the lady of the house might answer my request in person. I whispered to Mrs. Cairns to wait a moment, but I saw that she resented being left. I hoped I was acting wisely. I feared the scene if the two women, who apparently were not aware of each other's existence, should be suddenly confronted

with each other. I was taken up to the drawing-room, where Mrs. George Cairns awaited me. She was young, but not a mere girl, a very stately, lady-like woman, with a frank, pleasant manner, which relieved me a good deal. I knew she was a Londoner before she spoke, and I felt that never in my life had I encountered a more difficult task.

'There is a lady downstairs, madam,' I began, 'who has come a long way to see you, and whom I am sure you will be pleased to see. She has come unexpectedly, but I feel sure her welcome will not be lacking.'

'A lady to see me? Let us go down at once. I was certainly not expecting any vis[illegible] to-day. What is her name?'

'Cairns. She is your husband's mother.'

It was a blunt speech, but how could I put it otherwise? I could only answer her question as straightly as it was put.

Mrs. George Cairns flushed, and looked distinctly distressed.

'My husband's mother!' she repeated with difficulty. 'I—I was not aware that my husband had a mother alive. There has been some mistake.

Sir, who are you? perhaps some relation also of whom I have not heard.'

'No, madam, I am acting for an old friend of Mrs. Cairns, Mr. Robert Wardrop, of the *St. George's Gazette*, who intended to come himself with Mrs. Cairns, but was unavoidably detained.'

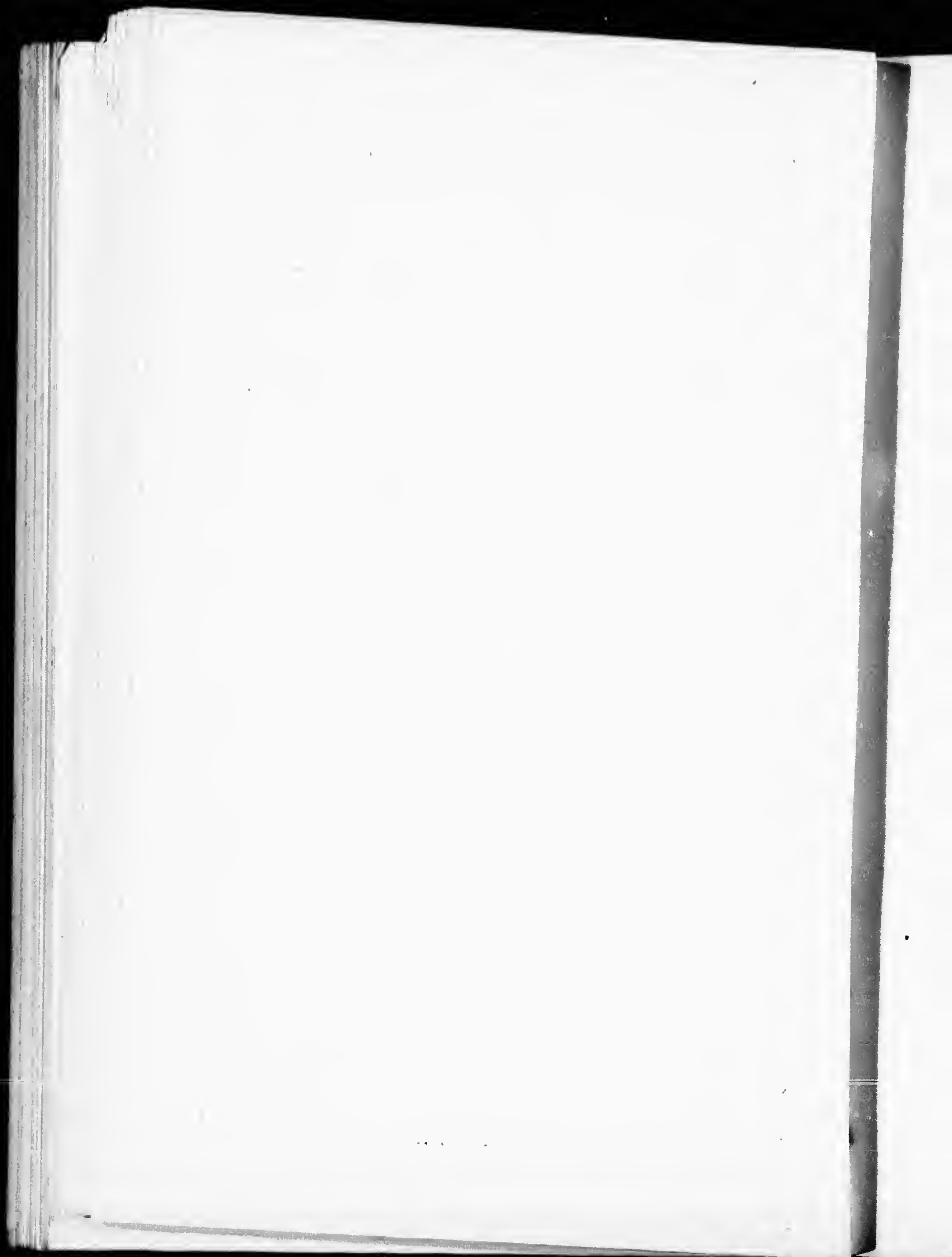
I saw that she was hardly listening to me. Suddenly the child's cry rang through the house again, and without a word of apology she hurried from the room. I was at a loss what to do then, and thought I had better return to the room below. When I got down to the hall I heard some strange sounds, and through the half-open door I saw George Cairns's mother with the baby on her knee, and the 'guid-dochter' she had come so far to see kneeling by her side, and the tears were streaming down her face. There were no tears in the eyes of Janet Cairns, but only a kind of yearning and glorified look which I remember to this day. They had forgotten me entirely, and something whispered that I could leave my charge without fear. The look on the face of the kneeling girl told me that her heart was in the right place, and that Janet Cairns would be welcome there so

long as she elected to stay. So I slipped out by the door with a glow at my heart, thinking of the joy it would be to Wardrop's honest heart to hear such good news in place of the evil he had feared.

It was getting dusk as I drove out by the lodge gate, and just then a gentleman passed me whistling. I put my head out of the window and took a good look at George Cairns, nor could I deny that he was a man of gentlemanly appearance, and handsomer than most. He had made the most of the gifts nature had bestowed on him evidently, having risen from the clerk's stool to be the son-in-law of his master, one of the merchant princes of the city. Nevertheless, as my four-wheeler went lumbering along the muddy road to Streatham Station, and I thought of what would meet him when he got within his own door, there was no man in London I envied less than Mr. George Cairns.

V

A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE



A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

One night about ten o'clock Wardrop and I were sitting in our own room enjoying that unusual luxury, an evening at home. I was writing to my mother, and Wardrop enjoying a new book, when our little maid came in to say a young gentleman wished to see Mr. Wardrop.

'His name, Hetty?' said Wardrop, and I knew from the tone of his voice that he was vexed at being disturbed.

'Mr. Loudoun, sir.'

'Loudoun—Loudoun—oh yes, Jamie Loudoun, from Ettrick Shaws. Show him in,' he said, in evident relief. 'Isn't it wonderful how they find one out, David?' he said to me as Hetty closed the door. 'This is a farmer's son from Ettrick Water, one of the great host that have come to London seeking fortune in vain.'

'What's his line?' I asked.

Wardrop shook his head.

'His line at present is "the drapery," as they say here. He served a while in a Selkirk shop, and because he was a smart lad with ideas above the common, he must needs come to London. If any man or woman would start an organisation for the prevention of immigration to cities it would be one of the great works of the century. But there it is, and here's Jamie Loudoun.'

He rose as he spoke, and giving himself a shake, turned to the door.

A very well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking, and pleasant-faced young man entered, and Wardrop received him cordially, at the same time introducing him to me. Jamie Loudoun did not look like a man who had come seeking help or relief in the ordinary sense, and it presently turned out that his errand was a different one.

'You look as if you were flourishing, Jamie,' said Wardrop kindly. 'How did you manage to find me out?'

'Oh, that's easy enough; everybody knows you,' said the young man. 'And I came to ask

your advice, if you would be so kind as to give it.'

'I will, if it will do you any good, Jamie, with the greatest pleasure in life. But first tell me how are all the Shaws folk?'

'Fine,' answered Jamie Loudoun, and the adjective, which I heard so seldom, but which to a Scotch ear conveys so much, fell with pleasant emphasis from his lips. 'I was there last month, when I had my holidays.'

'And wouldn't you like to go back, eh?'

'For some things, yes,' admitted Jamie. 'Lots of things are easier in the country. It's because I find them difficult I'm here to-night.'

With that he looked expressively at me, and I took the hint.

'I'll go out for half an hour. No, don't apologise. It isn't a hardship. I'm wanting a smoke anyhow, and it tastes better outside.'

So I took myself away; and though I extended my smoke and my stroll to an hour, they were still together when I returned. Their faces were rather grave, and I saw from Jamie Loudoun's that he was a good deal troubled in his mind.

'Come and sit down, David; we'll be the better of you. It's a matter of conscience we have under discussion. Do you remember taking Mrs. Cairns out to see her son at Streatham?'

'Yes,' I answered. 'It is not so long ago, and it was memorable besides.'

'Well, Jamie Loudoun serves in the warehouse of which George Cairns is one of the heads, and his conscience is troubled about the sharp practice that goes on there. Tell David Lyall, Jamie. He's a young man himself, and he begins to know London ways. I'll come back to you presently.' And to our no small wonder Wardrop took himself away.

'Do you live here with him?' Loudoun asked me straightway.

'Yes, I work in his office, and live here with him.'

'Then you're very well off, that's all,' retorted Loudoun shortly. 'I'm in a frightful perplexity, and I want him to help me out. Do you think he will?'

'I am sure of it, if he can. What is it—anything very bad?'

'Not so very bad; only I 've got to tell so many lies where I am now, I 'm like to be choked over it. A fellow can't do it glibly all at once.'

'No,' I admitted. 'It takes a while, and there are some, like Wardrop, for instance, who never learn.'

'Ah, but that takes backbone. I haven't enough,' said Jamie Loudoun mournfully. 'It's about the stuff we have to lie, you know; we have different prices for different customers, and I don't just see the justice of it, you know. I 've been told that if I don't sharpen up a bit I must clear out. Do you know George Cairns?'

'No; I 've only seen him.'

'Well, you needn't care. He 's a hound, and hasn't a pennyworth of principle in him. He married the governor's girl, too. I can't make out how men like that flourish; they 're just like the green bay-tree, you know; but it 's hard lines on poor beggars like me looking on. I begin to think honesty doesn't pay.'

'It does in the long-run; but I understand all you are feeling. Can't you leave your present berth?'

He shook his head.

'I could, but where to get another? I was seventeen weeks idle when I came up, and I only got this because I met George Cairns one day and he took pity on me because we were once at the same school. But he doesn't take much notice of me now.'

'I'd leave, I think. From what I've heard of Mr. Cairns I don't think I'd particularly enjoy serving him.'

'You wouldn't, but then you see there are other things to be considered. You don't happen to have a sweetheart, I suppose?'

'I wish I had; they've parted us,' I replied, as simply as I could, though the question stirred my whole heart.

'Well, I've one too. She lives in Selkirk. Mr. Wardrop knows her; Annie Anderson is her name. We've been engaged nearly five years, and, well, you know how a man feels when he keeps a girl hanging on all that time. If I stop on at Cairns's place I could marry her next year. But when I told her something about our business she was horrified, and bade me leave at once. I

did not think it was so bad until I spoke to her.'

'One gets blunted after a bit, but she's right, lad,' I said. 'In matters of conscience women, good women at least, are mostly right. I am sure Wardrop would tell you that.'

'What happened to his wife?' queried Loudoun eagerly. 'They get all sorts of stories in Selkirk, but nobody has heard just the right set of it. You should know.'

'I do, but I am not at liberty to tell,' I answered, and felt glad that he said no more on that theme.

'But don't you think women are a bit narrow in their views?' he began again. 'They don't understand business, and exaggerate things.'

'Perhaps they do,' I replied, but carelessly, for I was thinking of my Euphan, who was so daughterly obedient to her father, to her own heartbreak and mine.

'What did you want Mr. Wardrop to advise you about, then?' I said after a moment, to bring him back to the point.

'Well, it was this. Only to-day George Cairns

came to me and offered me the superintendence of one of the departments. That means, if I accept, I can marry Annie at once.'

'He made some conditions, I suppose?'

'Oh yes; he told me plainly I must not be so scrupulous, and that if I ever wanted to succeed as he has done, I must sharpen up a bit, and learn to embellish the truth. These are the words he used, but he meant that I must not be honest with customers about the value of things. What I wanted Mr. Wardrop to tell me was whether I ought to stay or go. I might never get a chance like it again.'

'Why do you come to him,' I ventured to ask, 'instead of to a minister? Do you go to a church?'

'Oh yes; but I thought the minister would just say leave, without weighing things up. You see it means a lot to me, but I want to do right too, for my mother's sake and for Annie's.'

'And for your own too, lad,' said Wardrop's voice in the doorway. 'Well, lads, what conclusion have you come to, and what do you think, David, of his dilemma?'

'I haven't had time to think it over, sir,' I answered. 'But of one thing I am sure, that I shouldn't care to call George Cairns master.'

'Supposing you leave, Jamie, have you any chance of finding another situation soon?'

'Oh, there are places I could get, I'm not afraid of that; I know more people than I did before I went to Cairns's place. But when would I get a chance like what was offered me to-day?'

Wardrop walked over to the old-fashioned bureau he had brought with him from his father's farmhouse on Ettrick Water, and took from it a well-worn and old-fashioned Bible fastened with a quaint brass clasp. I was well acquainted with the look of it, for Wardrop read from it every night of his life, sometimes aloud, taking actual and deep delight in its pages. He was a man who said little about the religion he lived day by day; it was given to me, dwelling with him at home, to see from whence he drew his secret strength. Jamie Loudoun looked at him somewhat shamefacedly, as he saw him turn the leaves.

'I have thought well over what you have told me, laddie,' said he, 'and this is my answer, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children for My name's sake shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."'

'Then you think I should leave?' said Jamie Loudoun, rising to his feet; and though his eyes were wistful, there was a certain relief in his voice.

'I do. You'll never be a man where you are now, Jamie, only a stunted, miserable creature, growing more sordid day by day. Seek a place where the best that is in you will have room to grow.'

'I'll write to Annie to-night,' he said then. 'It'll make her happy, and I'll sleep the sounder for it. Thank you, Mr. Wardrop. I knew you'd help me.'

Wardrop went with him down the stairs, and was quite a few minutes gone.

'That's an honest lad, David,' he said when he returned, and his face wore a look of quiet satisfaction. 'He'll never rue leaving George Cairns.

But now, having helped him to a decision, I must justify it. To-morrow I'll bestir myself to help him to marry the dear lassie waiting for him by Yarrow braes.'

And he did. There is one man in London to whom that night is an unforgotten memory. He is a prosperous man now, dwelling at ease with the wife of his youth, and their bonnie bairns about their knees. He will forgive me when he reads this, as I know he will, because it is a story he loves to tell, and because he has taught the lads at his knee to love and revere the name of Robert Wardrop. The text given to him from within the old-fashioned clasps of Marjorie Wardrop's Bible he has made the litany of his life. Nor has he rued it. He is not a rich man, as men like George Cairns count riches, but he has enough and to spare. For godliness, with contentment, is great gain.

VI

A GRACELESS PAIR

A GRACELESS PAIR

FROM time to time I went out to Canonbury to see my old landlady Mrs. Syme. I could never forget her kindness to me in the days of my loneliness and desolation, before I had found my feet in the great waters of London life.

She had been greatly pleased at first at the prospect of her having her daughter and son-in-law as permanent inmates of her house, but after a time it was clear to me that things were not going quite so smoothly as she would have liked. She had all the reticence of her nationality and upbringing, however, and I was not one who ever asked any questions concerning the affairs of others. But one day, when she opened the familiar door to me, I saw traces of tears on her face, and knew that things were rather bad with her.

Women of Jean Syme's nature and habit are not lightly provoked to tears.

It seemed to me that she shook my hand with more fervour than usual; but she made no speech whatever until we sat together by the kitchen fire. I was glad to find her alone. I had not taken very kindly to the daughter, whom I had seen once or twice in her mother's house. She had been an assistant before her marriage in one of the large west-end drapery houses, and she had a great many pert airs and foolish ways with which I had but little patience. She had a great idea of her own looks, and having married one of the shop-walkers in the place of business where she was herself engaged, thought herself a person of no mean importance. It was her treatment of her mother which first aroused my indignation, and her absolute refusal to render any assistance whatever in the work of the house. She did nothing much but sit with her hands folded grumbling at the dulness of her existence, until it was time to dress up in her fine feathers and go down to meet her husband as he came from business.

'There is something worrying you, Mrs. Syme,'

I said, after I had regarded her closely for a few moments.

'Oh ay, there is a guid deal worrying me that naebody kens o',' she said. 'I have often had mind on what you said when I telt you Bess and her man were comin' here to bide.'

'What was that?' I asked, for I had forgotten what passed on that occasion, though I know that I had been ready to bring objections against any new arrangement that would turn me out of Mrs. Syme's kindly door.

'You said that new married folks were best in a hoose o' their ain, and I ken now that you were richt.'

'Are you and Mrs. Robinson not getting along all right then?' I inquired.

'We're no' gettin' on ava,' she answered emphatically. 'She's a lazy, guid-for-nothing cat; she'll no' soil her wee finger even to the washin' of a dish that she taks her meat off. Nothing but trimmin' hats and sortin' her claes; an' she'll no' put in a stitch for me.'

'That's bad,' I said sympathetically; 'can't you get her husband to say a word to her?'

I wish I could set down here the look of matchless contempt which came on Mrs. Syme's face at the mere suggestion of him.

'Him,' she said, and her tone was shrill with scorn. 'But I'll haud my tongue, or I'll say what I shouldna say. The thing that's bothering me maist is that they havena paid a penny since Martinmas, and what I'm to dae I dinna ken.'

'He has a good wage, hasn't he?' I asked.

'He has twa pound ten a week, and they agreed to pay me twenty-five shillings for their board and lodgin'. No' owre muckle, I can tell ye, with the beer they drink, and meat three or four times a day.'

'But are you not very simple, Mrs. Syme, to keep on in this way? Why not treat them as you would treat any other lodger who didn't pay? But there, I forgot you have only one treatment—giving away everything you have. I have not forgotten Willie Sharp.'

'Oh, that was different,' she said quickly. 'He was grateful, besides bein' needfu' as weel; they're neither.'

'What do they do with their money?' I asked. 'Do they spend it or save it?'

'Spend it, every penny. Awa' to the theatre every night, and to Richmond or Hampton Court or Epping Forest ridin' every Sunday. I often say there'll be a judgment on them, but they laugh in my very face.'

'I'm very sorry to hear of this, Mrs. Syme,' I said. 'But there is only one thing you can do, and that is to get rid of them as quickly as you can. Just tell them quite plainly that you can't afford to keep people who won't pay. It's no use mincing matters with folks of that sort.'

'Bess is my ain dochter,' she observed: and I well understood what qualms were visiting her motherly heart. 'But there are some things a body canna stand, even from their ain flesh and blood.'

I agreed to that heartily, and then we fell to talking of my prospects and circumstances. There were few things I hid from the kind soul who had mothered me in my time of need. When I left about an hour later she faithfully promised to lose no time in speaking her mind

to her ungrateful daughter and her husband; while I in my turn promised to come back in a few days and hear the result of her plain speaking.

Before that day came, however, she appeared at our office one afternoon, in the greatest possible distress. Wardrop happened to be in at the time, and, though she had never met him before, she was in such extremity that she did not appear to notice the presence of the stranger, who would no doubt have disconcerted her at another time.

'Oh, Mr. Lyall,' she cried, and her strong face bore a look of the deepest distress: 'A terrible thing has happened. Bess and her man have been thievin' richt and left frae the shop. You askit me the ither day what they did wi' their money. I ken noo. Every penny of it was spent in gamblin' and horse-racin', and when he hadna enough to pay as he owed, he took what wisna his ain. They cam the day, the folk frae the shop, and twa policemen with them. It gied me a bonnie turn, I can tell ye, to see them at my door.'

'And what did they find?' I asked eagerly, and

I saw that Wardrop was deeply interested in the tale.

'What did they no' find?' she cried, wringing her hands. 'In Bessie's boxes up the stair, pieces of velvet and silk, and fur and lace, and the deil kens what else. You could hae knockit me doon with a feather when I saw it; and they took away my Bess with them in the cab, and I suppose by this time they are baith in the gaol.'

Wardrop and I exchanged glances; the same thought was in both our minds, that the thing was beyond any possible help. I must say I had but little sympathy or compassion for the ill-doing pair, who richly deserved the retribution that had overtaken them; but my heart was sore for the honest, hard-working, upright Scotch woman, to whom honour and integrity and pure living were the breath of life.

'Can naething be dune?' she wailed, looking somewhat reproachfully from one to the other. 'I have got some money in the bank, and the hoose is mine. I'll sell it rather than they should be brought to open disgrace. That's for the sake o'

them that 's awa'. I 'll gie every penny I hae, and work my fingers to the bane if need be, to pay back what they have ta'en, if only they dinna put it in the papers so that naebody at hame would ken.'

It was a pride which touched us both, and with which we greatly sympathised.

'What is the name of the firm, David,' asked Wardrop in the quick, decisive way peculiar to him.

Mrs. Syme instantly turned her gaze upon his face; the very tones of his voice, firm and quick and emphatic, seemed to awaken in her a new hope. 'Oh,' she said fervently, 'I have heard o' you from Mr. Lyall here, and frae ither folk as weel, and I ken that ye never grudged to help a country man or woman in their distress. Ye ken what it is for me, that was raised among godly folk, to face open disgrace like this. Could ye no' ask them to let me pay, and to let them off? They 'll no' mind what I say—a puir, plain-spoken, auld wife. If you dae onything I will bless your name to my deein' day.'

'I 'll do what I can,' answered Wardrop; and

though he spoke briefly and curtly, his words meant more than the protestations of any other man. 'Where is the place?'

I told him the name of the firm, and he called the office-boy to bring him a hansom, into which he put Jean Syme, and, getting in himself, drove away.

'I 'll take her with me,' he said, as he turned to me at the door. 'There is a power and pathos in that voice and face of hers that will accomplish more than any appeal I can make.'

I went back to my desk, wondering much at the large-heartedness of the man, who not only permitted his work-day to be broken in upon, but cheerfully sacrificed a busy hour to a fellow-countrywoman whom he had seen that day for the first time.

He was not more than an hour gone, when I heard him whistling up the stairs, a sure sign that things had gone well with him.

'We were just in time, David,' he said gaily, as he came within the door; 'and I was right in saying that her eloquence would go further than mine. They 've let him off.'

'Have they?' I asked.

'I never expected they would, but it seems the young man has had a pretty fair record up to now. It is the old story, David, bad company and sinful ways. I must say I was not much impressed by the fellow—a poor, weak-minded specimen. He appeared to have been crying actually at the prospective terrors of the gaol. As for Bess, she 's a minx, and doesn't deserve the mother she 's got.'

'And have they actually let them off scot-free?' I asked, for I could hardly take it in.

'For payment, of course; and the mother is away home with the precious pair as happy as a queen.'

'But his character 's gone,' I said. 'Nobody will employ him now.'

'Not here. It was agreed before they left the shop this morning, that they should be packed off to Australia at once. Poor Australia, to be made the dumping-ground for all our riff-raff. They are actually going to sail on Saturday.'

'And leave poor old Mrs. Syme, I suppose, to meet their liabilities?'

'Oh yes, and she 's better rid of them. Not

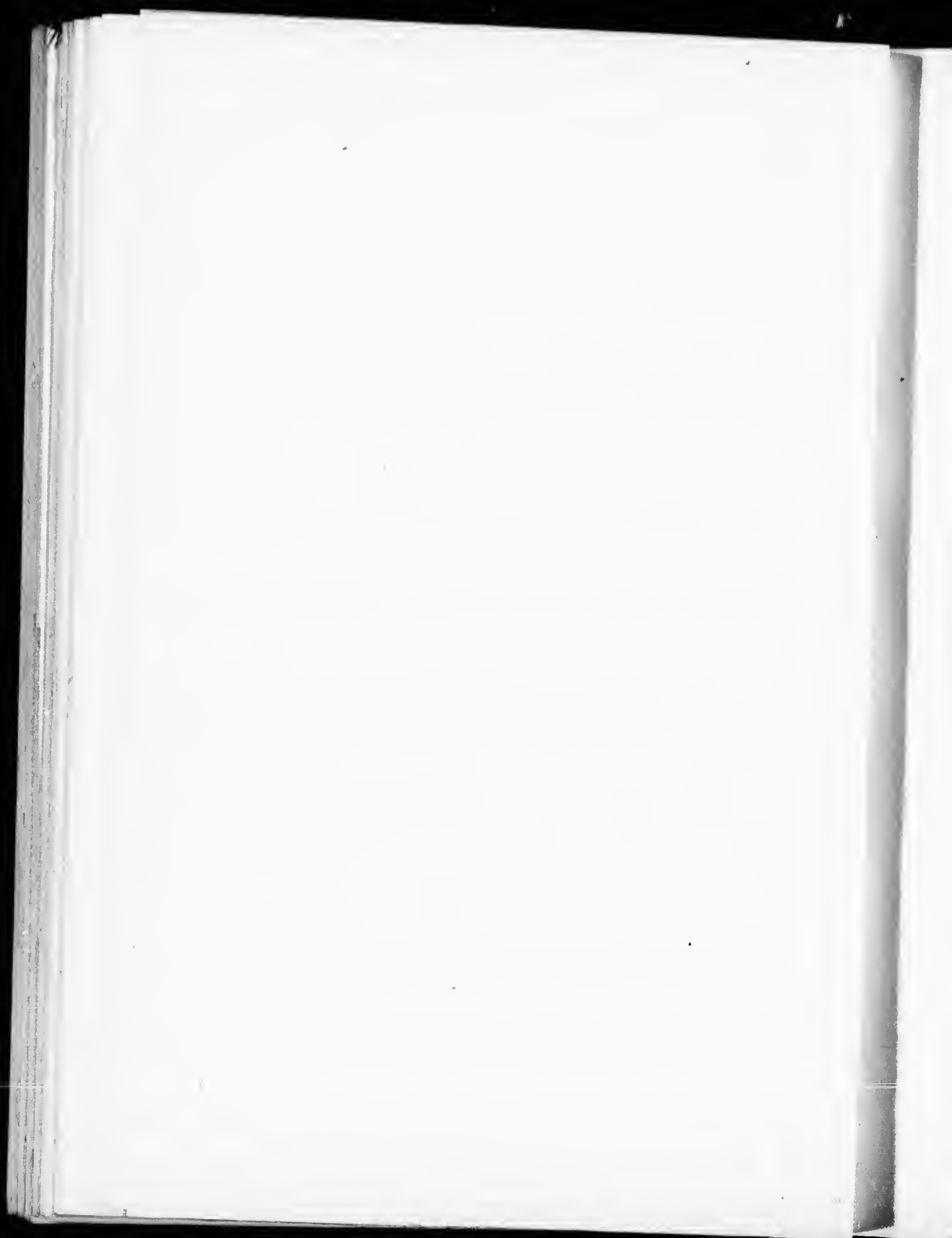
that I believe they are, or ever will be, a bit grateful to her. It isn't in them.'

Time proved that Wardrop was right. Although it cost Mrs. Syme nearly her all to rig them out, and to meet the liabilities they had left behind, they only repaid her with a few commonplace thanks, and from that day to the day of her death she never received a word from them concerning their fortune in the new world, though many a time she was heart-sick, as I knew well, for news of them. But as soon as she died, they were back in London as greedy as hawks to grasp the little property and means she had left.

It somewhat shakes a man's faith in his kind to meet with such heartless and irresponsible persons, who calmly pursue their own selfish path, and sweep aside, without consideration or compunction, all who happen to stand in their way.

VII

BONNIE KATE



BONNIE KATE

ONE day at Easter-time, when I had been about eighteen months in London, I was surprised to receive a visit at the office from Angus Fleming. I was alone in the room at the time, and not particularly occupied, so that I could ask the boy to show him up at once. To my surprise, when he entered he was not alone. My first feeling as I saw him come in at the door was one of swift admiration for his fine figure and noble face. He did not wear his clerical garb, because it was some years now since he had resigned his office in the Free Church of Faulds. Happiness and prosperity had done well by him, and he carried their impress on his face.

'How do you do, David?' he said, extending his hand with that pleasant, heart-winning smile which I remembered of yore; and the grip was no gentle grip, but one which spoke of friendship

and heartiest goodwill. 'You will be astonished to be invaded like this, and I hope that we do not disturb you at an untimely hour.'

'As it happens, I am doing nothing at this particular moment, but had I been ten times busier I should have stopped gladly to welcome you. It is not often I see a Faulds face in this room.'

Then I looked beyond him at the figure which stood half-hesitatingly within the door; the bent figure of an old man who had spent his days in country places, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. His face was familiar to me, although I could not for the moment recall his name and occupation to my remembrance. It was a type not uncommon in the Dale—a keen, shrewd, eager face with a hard, unbending mouth, which tender feeling seldom softened. His shoulders were sorely bent, and his grey hair fringed his temples and his weather-beaten neck. His face was clean-shaven, except under the chin, where his beard grew scantily, sadly whiter since I had last seen him carrying up the books to the pulpit in the Free Kirk of Faulds.

'Andrew Herdman!' said I in astonishment, as

I extended my hand to him likewise. 'Who ever would have thought of seeing you in London?'

I guessed even as I spoke that it was trouble, and trouble of no ordinary kind, that had brought him there. There was a wistful, eager restlessness in his keen grey eye, and a pathetic droop at the corners of the stern, unbending mouth, which spoke assuredly to me of a heart bowed down with care.

'It is no particularly joyful errand which has brought us here, David,' said Angus Fleming, speaking for him. 'You remember our friend's daughter, Bonnie Kate, as she was called? You know that she was in service in London. They have not heard anything about her at home for a long time, and when I wrote to her mistress last week, we were dismayed to hear that she had been gone from her situation for seven months, and that she had left no clue to her whereabouts.'

I was concerned, yet not greatly surprised; it was so common a story. Such had come under my observation a good many times since I had left Faulds.

'When Andrew heard that, of course nothing would satisfy him but that he should come here and find her. It is a task rather beyond most,

is it not, David, to find one solitary unit among these teeming millions?'

'It is,' I admitted, 'and success only depends on chance—or rather Providence, you would have me say, wouldn't you?' I answered, with a smile. 'How long have you been up, and what have you been doing to trace her?'

'We have been up only two days, and I do not know that we have done very much except wander the streets,' answered Angus Fleming. 'Poor Andrew thinks that there is some chance of meeting Katie in the throng; but I think that he has got a bit disheartened now.'

He regarded the old man with a look of deep and peculiar tenderness which moved me not a little, when I recalled the fact that Andrew Herdman had been one of Angus Fleming's bitterest opponents when he sought to become a minister in Faulds. But all that was forgotten now, and I saw by the clinging dependence of the old man upon the young one that they understood each other, and that no shadow of bitterness concerning the past remained; and my heart kindled within me with honest love and admiration for the man who

had cheerfully left the joy of his own fireside and the many duties of his great estate to minister to the need of a simple old man.

'I have thought of you a good many times since we came to London,' he continued presently, 'and it occurred to me only to-day that you in your public position here might be the very man to help us. What would you do, David?'

'I wish you would sit down,' I said, placing chairs for them both, 'and I will just think over it a minute. I have it,' I said suddenly. 'There is a little club in Southampton Street which has for several years been doing a good work unostentatiously. It is a place frequented by young Scotch men and women, when they are in trouble or needing help. The manager there is the very man to help us. I can give you the address—or, stay, perhaps I had better just go with you; it will save a little time.

'We have a cab at the door,' said Angus Fleming, 'and if you can spare the time to do this good deed, David, here is a heart which will not lack in gratitude to you although the lips may not say much.'

With that he laid his hand compassionately on the old man's bent shoulder, and all Andrew Herdman said was 'Ay, ay,' but it was uttered brokenly, and I saw that his heart was full to bursting.

Leaving a letter for my chief, I accompanied them downstairs, and we drove to the place of which I had thought. We were received with the courtesy and consideration which was shown to gentle and simple alike; but when the manager heard our tale I saw by the expression of his face that he entertained little hope of being able to help us. While he was speaking, pointing out the difficulties of conducting a search for the missing girl in the great city, the old man's eyes never for a moment left his face, and the eager, hungry look deepened on his own. I saw that a hopeless and intolerable anguish was settling down on his soul. The man whose help and advice we had come to seek had a very wide experience of the pitfalls and dangers assailing the friendless and unknown in London, and he was also too honest to seek to hold out hopes which had very little chance of fulfilment.

We left him, however, somewhat reassured,

bearing his promise that he would set into operation all the agencies within his power; but I saw very well that there was no doubt in his mind (as, indeed, there was none in mine) that Katie Herdman was lost beyond redemption or recall.

I dined with Angus Fleming that night at his hotel on the Embankment, and he afterwards came round to our rooms and smoked a pipe with Wardrop and me before midnight. That was a rare night, one of the richest in my remembrance. I was not mistaken in my belief that Wardrop and Angus Fleming would find some kinship with each other. Noble and true natures recognise and respond to each other all the world over, and no difference of creed can cast a shadow between them. It contented me beyond measure to sit still and listen to their talk, and think, as I had often done during the last ten months, how little I had deserved or earned such fulness of experience and life.

'It was worth coming all the way to London to look into Wardrop's eyes, David, and hear him speak,' said Angus Fleming to me as we parted at the foot of the stairs. 'Your life is rich in all opportunity, lad; see that you lose none of it.'

'You like him, then?' I said eagerly.

'"Like" is but a poor word in speaking of him, David,' he answered. 'It is love he wins, and nothing less. Well, and how go other things with you? I hear from Mrs. Cairncross that Miss Wingate is coming up with the Inneses after Whitsuntide. Isn't the doctor relenting a bit?'

'Not yet, but it will come,' I answered, for I was in that mood that nothing could depress me, and all the future seemed bright.

'I am sure of it,' he answered heartily. 'You will not have suffered in the waiting, neither you nor she. We only prize what is hardly won in this world, and through soul-travail things become most precious.'

'That's a good man, David,' Wardrop said to me when I rejoined him—'a good man who in different circumstances might have been great. I am very much obliged to you for bringing him to me.'

And that was the beginning of the friendship which never faltered between these two for seven-and-twenty years.

Angus Fleming, or Mr. Fleming-Braden, as I

ought to call him, remained the whole week in London, but nothing was heard of Katie, nor indeed were any of us amazed at this, or unduly disappointed, except the old man himself, whose face became more sharpened day by day with the keenness of his bitter pain and unspoken dread. At the end of this time he went sorrowfully back to Faulds, and as I shook hands with the old man upon the platform, and tried to stem his broken words of thanks for the little I had been able to do, I feared that it was his death-blow he had gotten, and that the blithe face of Andrew Herdman would not be long seen in kirk or market in the Dale.

'The Lord will bless ye, David Lyall, for your extraordinar' kindness to an auld man that has done but few kind deeds himsel' in this world. Twa things I thank Him for now, and wull to my deein' day, that there be guid lads like you left to make glad the hearts o' the mithers that bore them, and the other, that Katie's mother didna live to tak this dreich journey wi' me.'

Weeks, and even months passed, and nothing more was heard of Katie Herdman. I had for-

gotten the incident, except at a rare time when something recalled it to my remembrance, when one day I received a note from the manager of the Scotch club, saying that he thought he had news of the girl we had come about, and that if I could make it convenient to call he would give me the particulars. I made it convenient that very evening. When I arrived at the club I found a great bustle going on preparatory to an evening's entertainment for those residing in the house; and the Secretary was very busy, but he came to me at once.

'I think I have found her,' he said, as we shook hands; 'quite by accident in a poor lodging in Compton Street, Soho. You would know her, I suppose, if you saw her?'

'I think so,' I said cheerfully, 'although I have not seen her since she was a girl at school. What is the story?'

'Sad enough,' he answered, with a shadowing face. 'It seems she ran away from her place to marry a Frenchman, valet to one of the gentlemen who visited at her mistress's house. Poor thing! she knew nothing at all about the risks of

marrying a foreigner, without making any legal inquiries. It turned out that he had a wife already in his own country, and, of course, did not consider himself in any way bound to her. She was a good girl, and had not forgotten the teaching of that honest, stern-faced father of hers, so she left him at once, and found her way back to England, Heaven knows how. The difficulties such poor creatures surmount would appal the strongest of us.'

'And what's she doing for a living now?' I asked, with no small anxiety.

'Nothing. She won't need a living much longer, poor thing; she's dying. It would be worth your while to send for her father, I think, for the sake of her little bairn.'

'I will,' I said; 'I will telegraph to him before I go and see her. Is there nothing we can do to make it easier for her? Wouldn't care and attention save her life?'

The manager shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'I saw the doctor, and he told me so. Hunger and privation have done their work. What a beautiful creature she must have been! you can

see the traces of it yet. I am sorry I cannot come with you, for we are very busy here to-night. But you will easily find the place.'

I thanked him and went my way, stopping at the nearest post-office to wire the sad news to Angus Fleming. Then I set out to look on the changed face of the bonnie girl whom I remembered at Adam Fairweather's school. I found her in the attic room of a very poor house in a foul and evil-smelling neighbourhood, which must have seemed horrible to one reared in a country village, and accustomed all her life to clean and healthful air. It was some minutes before she recognised me, and I saw that there was a good deal of shame mingling with her anxiety to hear from me some news of her father. Her whole talk was of him; her whole regret that she should have been so undutiful, and that through her his old age was now clouded with bitter shame and pain. I did not tell her in what terms I had couched my message to Faulds, nor indeed that I had sent a message at all; and I waited with no small impatience for some answer. It was impossible to look upon the sad and wasted

face and cherish one gleam of resentment or utter one word of blame. The answer came the next night about seven o'clock, as Wardrop and I sat together at dinner in our own rooms. Andrew Herdman brought it in person. He came into the room with a quick, eager step, and all he said was, without word or greeting of any kind, 'Tak me to my lassie, my bonnie Kate.'

I left my dinner as it stood, and, putting him in a hansom, drove to our destination. I could have wished it a quieter and more respectable place, but when I had questioned the doctor about the advisability of moving her, he had absolutely forbidden it.

I saw the old man look about wonderingly as we drove through the throng of the streets, and once or twice he shook his head with a certain mournfulness which indicated what was in his heart concerning it. I led him up the long steep stairs by the arm, and having set him within the door, closed it upon him, and went away. When I came back, making known my return by a slight knock, I was bidden enter by Kate herself, and her voice though weaker than it had been

the night before, had a contented and quiet ring in it, which told me even before I looked upon her face that all was well.

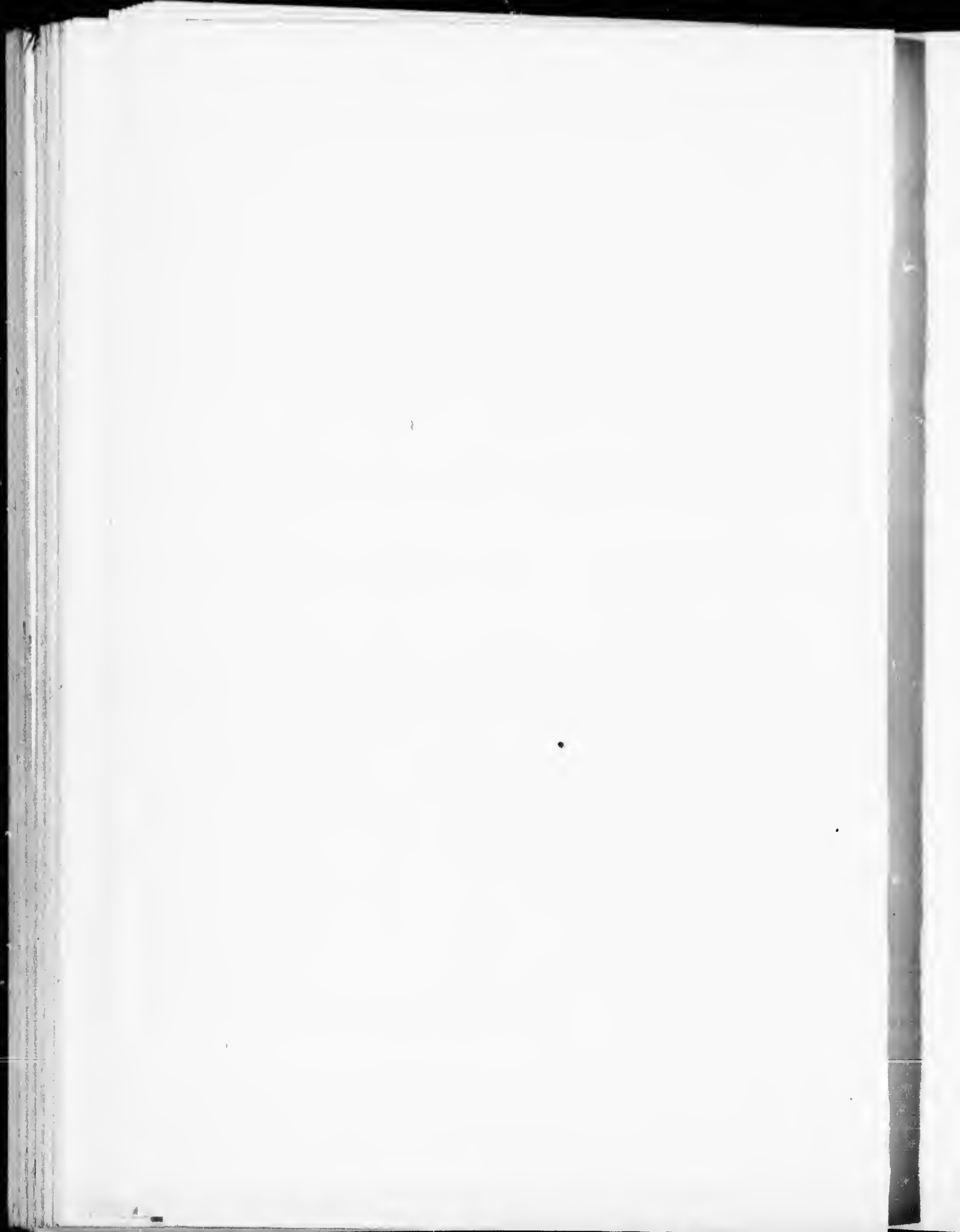
She was sitting up in her bed, the little child asleep by her side, and her father on the chair before her holding her poor frail hand in his.

'Father has forgi'en me,' she said, with a sweet, sad smile, 'and he says he will tak my little bairn back to Faulds, and let him grow up and play about the doors as his mither did in the time that is gane by for ever.'

Then I saw the old man, from whose face all the hardness and sternness had departed for ever, lay his cheek down upon the frail hand of the bairn who had so wrung his heart, and my eyes were dim so that I could not see, my tongue holden so that I could not speak.

She died in the early morning of the next day, and the old man journeyed back to Faulds, taking with him the dead mother and the living child. A Scotch girl returning from a situation to Edinburgh volunteered to take care of the little one on the journey, and so his care was somewhat lightened. But it was a pathetic

picture, which has long remained in my memory, and I think of it now when I go back to Faulds, and see the tall, strapping youth who answers to the name of Andrew Herdman, and who cherishes the memory of the old man who was father and mother to him, and who lies beside the daughter he loved in a nameless grave.



VIII

THIS THORNY PATH

THIS THORNY PATH

It was a long time before Wardrop spoke again to me of his boy, and of the tragedy of his life. He used to leave London from time to time, and I guessed—though he said nothing—that he had been in the country seeing the child.

It was about three years, I think, after my happy introduction to him that I began to notice a slight change in him, which at times occasioned me considerable uneasiness. I saw that something was troubling him, and that his mind strayed from his work in a manner which proved that something serious was at the bottom of it. He said suddenly to me one Saturday morning, 'I'm going down to Guildford this afternoon, to stay till to-morrow night or Monday, and I would like you to come, David.'

'All right,' I answered cheerfully, 'I'm ready.'

'We can go down about five, and if the weather is fine you 'll enjoy it. It 's a bonnie place.'

'I suppose we 'll be staying at an hotel,' I said, 'and the clothes we go in will be sufficient.'

'Yes, we sleep at an inn, and there 's no use taking anything. It 's the boy I 'm going to see, and I want you to see him too.'

I nodded, and turned to my desk to expedite the work of the day. About tour o'clock we drove to Waterloo, and so by train to Guildford. It was my first peep at Surrey, and I was enthusiastic over its rich and varied beauty, and astonished that such variety and beauty should be found within so easy a distance of London. I have since tramped almost every hill and dale of it on foot, and I don't believe that there 's a remote village or old-fashioned hostelry unknown to me within its borders. We got out at Guildford Station, where Wardrop hired a fly, and gave directions to the driver.

'It 's about three miles out, and a beautiful road all the way,' he said as we got in. 'You 'll enjoy it, but don't speak to me, David; I 'm not in the mood for speech.'

A singular and deep depression seemed to have laid hold of him, and it troubled me much ; and I could only come to the conclusion, as I sat by his side, that some new complication had arisen to render more disturbing the peculiar circumstances of his life. When we got quite clear of Guildford, we began to ascend what looked to me a very steep hill, after the level stretches of the city we had left; and glancing back upon the quaint town scattered on the richly wooded slopes, I thought I had never seen a fairer picture since I had crossed the border ; and I think so to this day.

Once over the brow of the hill, we seemed to come into a rich and solitary land, well wooded, and, though it was only June, giving abundant promise of a noble harvest. Wardrop was generally uplifted and stirred by the beauty of solitary places, so that I became even more concerned because of his silence and evident depression.

'Do you see yon spire?' he asked presently, pointing towards a graceful, slender outline showing sharp and clear against the sky. 'That's the parish church of Redgrave. Redgrave village is hard by, and that's our destination.'

It was a sweet, secluded spot—a handful of quaint houses clustered about the church and vicarage, and surrounded by the most exquisite sylvan scenery.

'He doesn't know we are coming, poor little chap, but I daresay he won't be far from home. He will be astonished at seeing me so soon again. I was here ten days ago.'

'Were you?' I said. 'I suppose you come pretty often?'

'Oftener than I ought; and I have brought you here to-day to share the responsibilities of the future with me.'

I did not understand these words, but many of his utterances were obscure, although generally explained by subsequent words or actions. He said no more, and presently we came to a white gateway, which seemed to give entrance to a bower of trees, though no house was visible; and there the fly stopped and was dismissed.

Wardrop pushed open the gate, and we walked up the avenue, which was well kept; the turf on either side being as smooth as the finest velvet. Before we had gone many steps the house broke

upon our view. It was a curious, old-fashioned, rambling place with quaint gables, and odd windows, about which the ivy clung tenderly. The front was a mass of perfect June roses, but there were no flower-beds marring or adorning the round stretch of exquisite lawn before the door. The weeping willow in the centre formed a natural bower, and there within the pleasant shade the tea-table was spread, and we looked for a moment unobserved at the unconscious picture.

A lady in a black gown and a white sun-hat sat in a basket-chair feeding two grizzled Scotch terriers, which sat upright on their hind legs begging with the most solemn and earnest look on their intelligent faces. The boy, in a knicker-bocker suit, and a bare head, squatted on the grass beside them, evidently administering to them words of encouragement and counsel, interspersed with sundry lumps of sugar and sweet cake.

At sight of all this there came on the sad face of Wardrop a light which I had never before seen there, and which was to me a great revelation.

'That's the boy,' he said, with a kind of quick,

nervous ring in his voice. 'I don't believe I have ever told you that his name is Roddie, short for Roderick. He was called after my mother's father. She was a Highland woman from the Spital of Glenshee.'

'He's a fine little chap,' I said; and just then a short, sharp bark from one of the terriers gave warning of our approach, and the boy flew to us in a very ecstasy. As Wardrop stooped to kiss him I saw that his eyes were full of tears. He was a sturdy, well-built little chap, with a plain honest Scotch face, not unlike Wardrop's own—just the sort of boy of whom a father would take delight in making a chum or companion.

'This is David Lyall, of whom I have told you so often, Roddie,' said Wardrop when the greeting was over. 'Tell him you are very glad to see him, and be kind to him always. He is your father's best friend.'

I lifted the boy in my arms, partly to hide my own emotion, and though he proudly told me he was seven, he did not resent being carried across the lawn to the tea-table under the willow tree. I was interested, though in a lesser degree,

in the woman to whom Wardrop had intrusted the precious charge of his boy, and when he introduced her to me as Mrs. Deane, I regarded her with a very straight and keen look. She looked about Wardrop's age, and though not beautiful in the ordinary acceptance of that abused term, there was a sweetness and strength in her face which made it interesting. She was English, as I gathered from the softness of her speech, and her manners were those of a gentlewoman. I have seldom seen such a mingling of repose and sweetness; it was a rest to be in her presence.

'Roddie and I thought you would be here today, Mr. Wardrop,' she said. 'It's odd, is it not, how we know things by intuition. So this is Mr. Lyall. You are often talked of in this quiet spot,' she said, turning to me, 'and it's long since Roddie and I asked his father to bring you down.'

I gathered from this that Wardrop was in the habit of discussing at least certain details of his daily life with the boy and his guardian; but it did not occur to me just at that moment that there was anything more underlying his frequent

visits to the place. It was a spot so lovely and retired, indeed, that I did not marvel at his desire to come often, and the companionship of the happy boy and the sweet woman who had so long mothered him must have been a rare rest to the man whose daily life was hedged about by so many harassing cares.

'What do you call the doggies, Roddie?' I asked. 'They're very intelligent chaps. They look as if they came from Aberdeen.'

'So they did,' he answered. 'My Uncle Alec sent them to me. One last Christmas and one the Christmas before. This is Crony, and this is Fegs.'

The dogs made no objection to the introduction, and Roddie and I became very friendly, discussing their various points, while Mrs. Deane made some fresh tea for us, and we enjoyed ourselves to the full. I had never seen Wardrop in such merry mood before. It was as if he had thrown aside every care which oppressed him. His sadness and depression had disappeared, and he was like a boy himself in his talk. Roddie was allowed to stay an hour later out of bed, in

honour of his father's visit, and Wardrop went up, as he explained he always did when he came, to sit by him till he fell asleep.

Mrs. Deane and I were left together in the dining-room ; it was lighted by a lamp set on the table under a soft pink shade, and through an open window I heard for the first time in my life the thrilling and exquisite song of the nightingale.

'Roddie Wardrop is well off here, Mrs. Deane,' I said bluntly, for the peace—I had almost written sacredness—of the place impressed me.

I saw a slight change cross her face, and when she spoke her voice was touched by a little restraint.

'He is happy here with me, I think ; but it is not as it should be—it is not as it should be. It was all very well when he was a mere child, but now he needs his father, and I'm afraid that in a little while some change will be necessary.'

'I don't see it,' I answered. 'It's a short journey to London ; there's nothing to hinder Mr. Wardrop from coming here as often as he likes. He permits himself too little relaxation always ; he thinks that his happiness is in his work.'

'You are privileged to be his intimate friend. Tell me, is he not a great, strong influence in the world in which he moves? I have often thought he must be. He is so good and great a man.'

The question was one after my own heart, and I was not slow to pour forth words in reply which must have satisfied the most exacting. In the middle of my eulogium Wardrop slipped into the room unseen.

'Is that all ye have learnt since ye came across the border, David, to exaggerate and tell lees? Never mind him, Mrs. Deane; he is a good lad, and he has but one fault—he thinks too much of your humble servant.'

We remained another hour at the cottage, and I gathered from the talk which followed that Wardrop and this woman were friends, in the close and intimate sense only understood by the few. She was evidently a person of no ordinary intelligence, and of keen, rare perception, which rendered conversation with her a delight and refreshment. Wardrop talked without restraint, and I saw that it was his object to interest her and to give her the cream of his own experience

and opportunities. She went with us to the gate, when we left to go to our inn, and I remember yet how she looked that night, with a black, filmy thing wound about her head, and nothing white about her but the widow's band at her throat.

Directly we had got beyond the precincts of that secluded abode Wardrop's depression seemed to return.

'Well, David, what do you think of her,' he asked; and I was astonished that he asked that instead of my opinion of the boy.

'I think,' I answered frankly enough, 'that you are fortunate in having got such a guardian for Roddie. How did you hear of her?'

'She is the widow of an old friend of mine, Edward Deane of the *Advance*. He died at his desk suddenly one morning about five years ago. She was caring for the boy before Deane died, and having no children of her own was glad to keep him after for company's sake.'

'She is quite young yet, and very attractive,' I said at hazard, and not thinking much of my words. 'She might marry again.'

'She might,' he answered; and I could not

understand the change in his voice. 'But the chances are against it.'

Then he suddenly changed the subject, and we talked of different matters till we got back to the inn where we were to sleep. We were sitting at the open lattice window of the little sitting-room, which Wardrop explained was always given up to him when he came to Redgrave, no matter how full the inn might be, and I felt that his silence was charged with some emotion which would presently find relief in speech.

'I brought you down here, David,' he said suddenly, 'to help me out of the worst hole I have ever been in. Perhaps you can guess what it is.'

'I think I can,' I answered, the thing coming to me in an inspiration. 'You would like to make her the boy's mother in name as well as in theory.'

'You have said it,' he answered; and rising suddenly, began to pace to and fro. 'My very soul cleaves to her, lad, and you can see for yourself what life might be for a man with such a woman at his side. Tell me, tell me what I am to do.'

I could not speak a word for a moment, being moved far beyond utterance of any kind. To see my chief and my hero standing before me, a simple, raw, country lad, whom his friendship had so unspeakably blessed, asking me to tell him what to do, in perhaps the greatest crisis of his life, was more than I could bear. But words came to me at last, sent, as I believe, from heaven.

'There's only one thing you can do, sir, and that speedily. Get the law to free you, and make her your wife.'

'I have thought it all out, lad, again and again. You know that I have made the Bible the chief study of my life, and I have never found it fail me when most I wanted help. It has not failed me now, and it points with unrelenting finger the way I am to go, but it is the opposite way.'

I was staggered for a moment, recalling the words with which the Bible deals with the divorced woman. As Wardrop said, there was no uncertain sound about them.

'That injunction was given in the old dispensation to the Jews,' I said. 'It is hardly binding on us to-day.'

But Wardrop shook his head. 'We can't pick and choose the bits of the Bible we like, lad, or that 'll fall in with our inclinations,' he said grimly, 'we must accept it all or leave it. But I confess that I 'm a miserable man, and I wish that the Lord in His mercy would shed some light on this thorny path of mine. It is too bad, David, to harass you in your youth with my sorrows. I have often told you that you have been a comfort to me, and I tell you again. Yes, you can pray for me if you like.' With that he left me, and I saw him long after midnight walking—a solitary and pathetic figure in the white moonlight—along the bank of the river which watered that pleasant land.

I was in my bed before he came in, but I neither looked up nor spoke, because I felt that the man had been alone with his Maker, and that even I had no right to share the deep thoughts of which his sad heart was full. Before he came to bed he knelt down, and it was evident that he had forgotten my presence, because he uttered his prayer aloud. I will not transcribe it here, but I gathered from it, to my great comfort,

that in the night, under the pitying stars, some great uplifting of soul had come to him, and that renunciation seemed less difficult than before. I prayed also, and, though silently, more fervently than I had ever done, that the cloud might be lifted from that good man's life, and that he who spent his days in making the highway less hard and dreary for the feet of others should taste of the sunshine himself. Our prayers are not always answered as we desire and hope for, but the day comes to most of us when we are shown beyond doubt or question that while we thought ourselves forgotten of God, He only waited to fulfil His great purpose in us.

IX

A SCOTCH CHRISTMAS IN LONDON

A SCOTCH CHRISTMAS IN LONDON

'I WANT to give a party, David,' said Wardrop one day about a fortnight before Christmas. 'A big Christmas party; but I wish I knew where to give it, and where to get the right sort of woman to take it in hand.'

Wardrop, continually moved by such generous impulses, and full of all sorts of schemes to make other folks happy, was often handicapped by his own solitary and unattached condition. There were many things he had the heart to do, but which he had to abandon because he had no woman to help him. Often I sighed, thinking what an immensely increased power for good Wardrop would have been with a wife like-minded at his side. Since our visit to Redgrave village, we had not again alluded to the heart-wrung confidence he had given me. There were even

moments when I thought I must have dreamed the whole thing, he gave so little evidence that it still lay upon his heart.

'What kind of a party? You'll dine the staff, as usual, I suppose?'

'Oh yes; it isn't of them I'm thinking; but there's a lot of folk, David, who are strangers in London, though they may have lived in it for years, and as every Christmas comes round they feel stranger still—Scotch folk mostly. If only we could get a big party of them together and have a good substantial Christmas dinner, and some fun afterwards, ending up with a good Scotch reel, don't you think it would be a good thing?'

'Rather,' said I, as the idea took hold of me. 'Whom would you want to ask?'

'Oh, I'd run up the list fast enough. We'd begin with your old chum Mrs. Syme, bless her good heart! and we'd have the Loudouns, and Alec Cochrane—you remember the [illegible]es lad that's in Constable's. I met him the other day, and when I asked him if he was to get home for Christmas, he shook his head, and I saw that he

was near the greeting. Then there's two Edinburgh lassies engaged as clerks in their uncle's warehouse in Wood Street. He lives at Rickmansworth in a red-brick Elizabethan manor-house with fifty bedrooms, but not one to spare for these two poor lassies—his own sister's children. And their landlady has told them she expects them to dine out on Christmas Day. Where are they to go, David? We must dine them, even if they have to come here.'

I nodded; the thing was growing, and it seemed more and more necessary and delightful; the very thing to make memorable any Christmas Day.

'I got the names of a lot more from Cardross. I have them in my pocket-book; but before we go over them, we 'd need to consider where we could entertain them.'

'In the church hall?' I suggested, the name of Mr. Cardross, who was the minister of the Scotch church we attended, suggesting the idea to me. But it evidently didn't strike Wardrop as successful, for he promptly shook his head.

'Cardross spoke of that, and Mrs. Cardross offered to do all she could; but I declined for two

reasons. One is that they ought to dine out themselves on that day, when all the other days of the year they are doing for other folk. The other is that I don't want to make it a church thing. Some would be certain to think it was going to be a prayer-meeting or a religious service with the dinner thrown in as a kind of bait. It's a house-party I want, a real jollification, where the grace is the only religious ceremony, though the spirit of the whole thing, I hope, would do no shame to the festival we want to keep. Do I carry you with me, lad?'

'You do,' I said. 'I saw in the *Telegraph* this morning that Mr. and Mrs. Claud Innes had come to Belgrave Square, where they intend to spend Christmas.'

Up jumped Wardrop then, his face all aglow.

'David Lyall, you are a wizard; that's the woman, the very woman. I grant that something may be achieved by an occasional glance at the fashionable intelligence column. I'm off to her now. Will you come?'

'I can't; I'm not half through my work,' I said, with a glance at the stuff lying in shoals on my

desk and on the floor. 'Besides, you'll do better without me.'

Wardrop nodded, gave me a great slap on the back, and ran down the stairs whistling like any schoolboy. He was a long time gone. I had got through the press of my work, and was rewarding myself with a puff or two at my pipe, when I heard his foot on the stair. It was not less buoyant than when he went away, so I knew he had fared well. I was hardly prepared, however, for the triumphant success he had achieved.

'David, yon's a woman—yon's a woman,' he said, the moment he was within the door. 'A woman after the Lord's own heart.'

'She received you kindly, then—your idea, I mean?'

'She did. You'd have thought, David, that it was the very thing she had been praying for, and sitting waiting on.'

'Tell me all about it, sir—tell me every word she said.'

'Faith, I can't promise that, for the English tongue is sweet and very glib, David; but I can give you the gist of it. They've had to come up

for a political reason I needn't enter into here. He's got a ticklish job on hand in the East, and he's going to carry it through well. We'll hear of Claud Innes yet, David, in the very forefront of diplomatists. He's one of the rare few public men who know when to speak and when to hold their tongues—and he knows the untold value of being always on the spot. So he stays till Parliament reopens. He told me all this himself. I saw him, too, and he was as enthusiastic over it as his wife. Yon's a man, David, whom a good woman has made, and she may be proud of her creation.'

'I rather think she is,' I answered. 'But I wish you'd get me quickly to the most important bit.'

'Tak time, ye bantam cock, and dinna craw in the face of your betters,' said Wardrop, with that dry humour which only came out when he was very light of heart. 'I'll tell ye just when and as muckle as I think fit.'

'Very well,' I replied meekly. 'But you would never have been there but for me.'

'That's true. Well, she caught on like a dry whin bush when a match is set to it; and the dinner is to take place in her own big dining-

room, where fifty can be dined with ease. And the reels will be danced in the ball-room, to the music of the pipes from the Caledonian Asylum. What think ye o' that, lad? We'll need to get our kilts aired; but I doubt I wouldn't feel at home in mine, for I've never had one on in my life.'

'They'll let us in without kilts, maybe,' I suggested mildly. 'It's an expensive dress, and nobody wants to make a fule of the thing by going in an imitation.'

'No, the kilt is not to be insisted on, on that account. I never saw anything like the resource hidden in a woman's head. Before we had done speaking, she had the whole thing planned, cut and dry, even to the invitation card, which is to have a thistle in the corner, and the menu, which is to include a haggis decorated with heather.'

'Will she send out the invitations?'

'She says so; and the very wording is like her sweet, gracious nature. Here it is: "Mrs. Claud Innes requests the pleasure of Mr. Alec Cochrane's company on Christmas eve to meet a few Scotch friends at dinner, for auld lang syne."'

'I hope they'll all have the grace to accept.'

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'They will. I'll see to it. And if we don't have one jolly good night's fun enough to keep our hearts green through the mirk of a London year, I'll know the reason why.'

During the next fortnight Wardrop went a good deal to the Claud Innes's town house; but he never asked me to go, nor did he tell me much about the preparations. That they were satisfactory, I could easily gather from the continued buoyancy of his demeanour. Only the day before Christmas he showed me the list of guests, which by some strange means he had got swelled up to forty-six.

'And the bairns are extra,' he said cheerfully. 'Mrs. Innes wouldn't have a bairn left out; and there's a separate entertainment for them in the picture gallery. She has even made arrangements for the little ones to be put to bed, so that the mothers needn't leave early. There'll be about twenty bairns.'

'She has been astonishingly kind. But it's you—you can make folk do anything.'

'It's going to be the finest thing in London to-morrow, I tell you. And there's nothing of

charity or patronage about it. It 's a dinner of friends; you 'll see that. They 're as excited over it as if the Queen had been coming herself.'

Next day, at four o'clock in the afternoon, we repaired in a hansom to Belgrave Square. Wardrop had taken great pains with his toilet, and I had seldom seen him look so manly or so well. We were early; but the guests, unlike some in the higher walks of life, began to arrive with commendable punctuality. Mrs. Claud Innes received them just within the drawing-room door. I remember she wore a black gown, trimmed with some filmy, sheeny white stuff, which set off the dazzling fairness of her neck and throat. I shall never forget her manner, nor the sweet friendliness of her smile. It had the effect of making even the shyest feel at home.

'Don't go far away from me, Mr. Lyall,' she whispered to me as I paid my respects and was about to pass by. 'Just wait till I have spoken to these two young ladies; then I have a word to say to you.'

I stepped back a little behind Wardrop, who was doing his best to enlighten Mrs. Innes regard-

ing each of her guests as they came within sight. Wardrop's face was positively beaming. He was completely happy—for the moment not a care or a bitter regret had the power to trouble him. Just then, who should march in proudly, with his head in the air, and an expectant, delighted look on his face, but Roddie Wardrop, followed by his gentle guardian, Mrs. Deane. I saw that this was a surprise Mrs. Innes had prepared for him; and as she saw him start, she laid her soft hand on his arm and smiled into his face.

'Not a word. You thought of everybody. It was time somebody should think of you.'

Then Roddie sprang into his father's arms, and I turned my head away. It was a strange thing that I, who fought manfully against all home-sickness and feelings of loneliness, should in that animated throng begin to feel a strange sense of isolation creep over me. Perhaps I showed it in my face, for presently the lad Alec Cochrane, to whom Wardrop had introduced me one night in the Strand, came to my elbow.

'You and I seem to be the only two who have nobody belonging to them in this big party, Mr.

Lyall,' said he. 'May I hang on to you? I say, isn't this a stunning room? What kind of a show is it going to be? Do you think we'll enjoy it?'

'I don't think it, I know it,' I answered positively. 'Wait till you see.'

'Who do you think the prettiest girl here?' was the boy's next question. He was one of the garrulous sort, with a tongue which wagged at both ends, as I've heard my Aunt Robina say of the maids at the Byres.

'I haven't thought of it.'

'There aren't any great beauties. Say, who's that talking to Mr. Wardrop? She's been beautiful once.'

'Her name is Mrs. Deane,' I answered, but vouchsafed no further information.

'Isn't Mr. Innes fine-looking? and they say he's an A1 speaker, too. Talking of girls, I saw one downstairs I liked. She isn't here. She looked as if she was staying in the house; at least, she had a party frock on, and didn't arrive at the door.'

With that Mrs. Innes beckoned to me, and I stepped to her side.

'There is some one here in the house with me; you will see her presently. It is Euphan.'

I answered nothing, but felt the room swimming round me.

'She only came last night, and till the last her coming was uncertain, but I thought she would help to make our party a success.

'I trust you, and because I do you can go down to the library now and speak to her a moment. You can come up again in less than five minutes, and bring her with you; then dinner will be served.'

With that she left me, and I made haste from the room. I had not seen the love of my life for two whole long years. What wonder, then, if my heart beat to suffocation, or that in my haste I seemed to tread on air? When I opened and closed the library door and saw my Euphan standing there with a tremulous, expectant look on her sweet face, I am ashamed—no, I am not ashamed—to say I straightway clasped her to my heart. I had been less than a man had I done otherwise; but she was quick to release herself.

'O David, you forget we ought not! and yet—and yet——'

She looked up at me, and straightway hid her face again on my heart; and so we stood a moment in silence, that had very deep things hid in it.

'I have made up my mind,' I said at length, 'that this must come to an end. I have a few days next month, Euphan, and to Edinburgh I go; and you can guess on what errand. I am in a different position now, and I think I have the right to speak.'

But Euphan only shook her head. Then, though we were very reluctant, preferring each other's company to the best Christmas dinner that was ever cooked, we had to join the throng upstairs. From there we marched two and two to the great dining-room, and seated ourselves at the laden table, which was a sight to see. It seemed to me that all the silver chests of the Inneses had been emptied to do honour to these Christmas guests—such a blaze of light, and sheen, and colour. I could see that it dazzled the eyes of many. Euphan sat by my side. This much Mrs. Innes had smilingly permitted us, and so the merry meal began. Euphan and I have

often spoken of it since. It may be that some who read this will remember it kindly and freshly to this day. For it was a great night—a night of loving-kindness and sweet, homely feeling such as I have never seen on such a scale. Whether it was the sweet tenderness of our hostess, or the frank kindliness of her husband, or chiefly Wardrop's uproarious humour, or all combined, I cannot say; only we were as one family, and I question if the stately mansion of the Inneses had ever rung with such spontaneous and hearty laughter. There were two speeches only, the few graceful words in which Wardrop proposed the health of our entertainers, and the few in which Mr. Claud Innes replied. Then there was a song or two, and then we heard the pipes playing up somewhere, and we all got to our feet. Nothing was lacking to emphasise the fact that we were a Scotch Christmas party, for the ball-room was hung with the tartan of the clans, draped up with bunches of heather, and when the pipers played up 'Kate Dalrymple,' and 'Lady Anne Gordon,' and the 'Diel among the Tailors,' there were not many quiet pulses or silent feet. Euphan did not

refuse me a dance, nor did Mrs. Innes forbid it; and then when I had the honour to lead our hostess out in a schottishe, I saw Wardrop slip into a seat beside my Euphan, and they talked long together. Roddie was wildly excited over the whole proceedings, never having seen anything like it in his life. About nine o'clock we gathered together in a great circle, old and young of us, and sang with might and main the good old parting song, 'Auld Lang Syne.' There were few dry eyes and a good many faltering tongues when we came to the last verse, but we managed it, and then the good-byes had to be said; some of them reluctantly, and with the expressed hope of a speedy meeting. That happy Christmas dinner was the birthday of more than one true friendship between lonely and kindred souls who but for the kind offices of the gentle mistress of Inneshall had never crossed each other in the great wilderness of London. We lingered a little after the general company left to talk it over, but I was surprised that Wardrop had so little to say. He had certainly worked hard all the evening, but I thought it a bit ungracious in him to relapse all

at once into silence. I saw that one of his fits of depression had overtaken him, and I feared that in inviting Roddie and his guardian Mrs. Innes had done Wardrop a mistaken kindness. They were to sleep under her hospitable roof, and remain till Boxing Day was over. But I observed that Wardrop was not greatly elated over the fact, though he made arrangements to come and take Roddie out in the morning. Mrs. Deane he did not ask. Then we left.

'Any objections to walking home?' he asked, as we descended the wide, shallow steps before the door.

'None,' I answered. 'In fact, I'd rather.'

And no other word, good or bad, did we utter till we were crossing from the corner of the Mall to Trafalgar Square.

We had both, however, industriously smoked all the way.

'Went off very well, didn't it? They seemed to enjoy it.'

'Every man and woman of them. It was perfect. Didn't *you* enjoy yourself?'

'I——' Wardrop looked surprised. 'I had no

chance. I couldn't get away from my past nor my hopeless future. But she didn't mean it; God bless her, there was nothing but kindness in her heart. You must never tell her she made a mistake, David.'

It was my turn to look surprised and hurt.

'I am not in the habit of discussing you, sir—with Mrs. Claud Innes or anybody else.'

'I didn't say you were, did I? We're both a bit peppery—perhaps the mince-pies didn't agree with us—but we might have danced them down. Another Christmas night, the seventeenth I have passed here. God—what a place it is! It crushes the life out of most of us, and yet we can't get away from it. Its spell, once woven, can't be broken, but binds for ever and ever.'

'I don't feel like that yet,' I said stoutly. 'I could go back to the Byres to-morrow, and drive the old man's harrows as happy as a king.'

'Try it,' said Wardrop drily; and with that we came to the door of our own lodging in Surrey Street, and observed some one there either seeking admittance or waiting for us. It was a woman, of a very common class, and

as we came near to her I smelt the smell of drink.

'Well,' said Wardrop sharply, noticing it too. There was nothing he had less patience with than drink—though he had had many a poor drunkard through his hands, and been the salvation of not a few.

'Are you Mister Wardrop?' she asked, in a thick, wheezy voice.

'Yes, *my* woman; what do you want with him?'

'I was to bring you this note, and show you the road back; it isn't far.'

Wardrop stepped back to the gas-lamp, and tore open the envelope. Then I saw an awful change come upon his face. In a moment it grew grey and wan, and sharp in outline, as if some evil hand had been passed over it.

'It is from her who was once my wife,' he said to me. 'She is dying, she says, and would speak with me. Whistle a hansom, and if I am more than an hour gone, come after me.' He tore the bottom part of the note and handed it to me. The hansom drove up to the kerb. He helped

the unsavoury messenger in, and gave the order. Then I, like a man in a dream, entered the house alone. When I had turned up the light and mechanically broken up the fire, I looked at the address, which was an obscure street in Lambeth. Then I sat down to finish my pipe, and ponder these things in my heart. I gave him nearly an hour and a half. It was half-past eleven as I drove across Westminster Bridge to the Surrey side. My man found the place without difficulty. It was a mean street, one of those which have no distinguishing feature except dismal squalor. It was very quiet, however, and badly lighted, so that we had some trouble in finding the number. When we did find it, I bade the man wait, thinking it possible that Wardrop might be glad to drive home. To my surprise, Wardrop himself opened the door.

'Come in,' he said. 'I've been expecting you.'

I followed him in dumbly, for there was that in his face which froze my speech. He led me into a room on the ground floor, and closed the door.

'The woman who was my wife is upstairs,' he

said, forgetting apparently that he had told me so before. 'She is dead.'

'Did you see her—were you in time?' I asked.

He nodded.

'Will you come up, David? I should like you to see her. You have helped me through with it. I should like you to see her—Roddie's mother.'

I could not speak. Had I ventured, I must have burst into weeping. I saw that his great heart was full—full and sore; yet I could do nothing to help him, only follow him dumbly, like a sheep, though somehow I felt that in some strange, inexplicable way I comforted him in his hour of need. So we came together to the room where the dead woman lay; and the door was shut. His hand was quite steady as he turned up the gas, and we stood together for a moment in silence by the bed. She was a young creature—young and bonnie yet—though she had earned the bitter wages of sin.

I thought of all she had given up, of the man whose love a queen might have envied, and whom she had so bitterly betrayed; of the little boy with the face of the morning; of all that might, nay,

that had been hers, but which she had trampled underfoot.

'God pity her,' I breathed, very low, but Wardrop caught it.

'He has—pitied and saved her,' he answered, in a grave whisper. 'I was in time to remind her that the Son of man came to seek and save the lost. She has suffered many things, and is at peace. I thank God for it.'

He leaned past me, over the bed, and kissed her brow.

'She would like to have seen the boy. It was well, perhaps, that no opportunity was given. It might have left a shadow on his heart. I was able to tell her that there is no bitterness in my heart against her. David, David, I think she loved me all the time!'

And with that his composure left him, and he flung himself upon his knees, and I, who loved him as my own soul, had to stand by, a helpless witness to his anguish. But when the storm was spent there came a great calm, which showed that the heart long pent had found relief. As we crossed the river again, walking side by side,

suddenly the tongues of a thousand bells rang out the Christmas peal.

'Christ was born in Bethlehem,' said Wardrop, more to himself than to me; then he raised his eyes to the quiet sky, where the stars of heavenly promise shone. 'When the waters roll over us, where were we but for our kinship with Him, the Man of Sorrows? He is very near me to-night, David. He has been with me and with her in the room we have left. It may be that in the hereafter we shall meet again.'

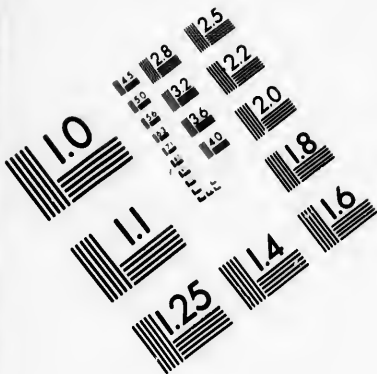
I said nothing, for how is a man to make reply to such words as these?

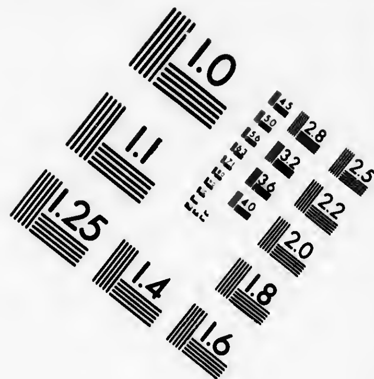
'I saw the dawn of the light in the darkness. She thought herself a lost soul, yet was her cry for mercy heard. Poor heart! she thought if I forgave her, Jesus might. Yet they will tell us that it is but a superstition, a sentiment, a fable for children and fools. The loss is theirs, the gain is ours, David—the gain is ours.'

We slept but little that night, for the waits made melody in the streets. When they came with their harsh but not unmelodious voices beneath our window, I heard Wardrop joining in

with all his might, 'Peace on earth, goodwill to men. Hallelujah!'

When they had gone away, I wondered if he had fallen asleep, and stole in to see. And there he was, sleeping peacefully as a child, though his face bore traces of the deep waters he had been through—traces which neither time nor the fulness of happy after days were able entirely to remove.





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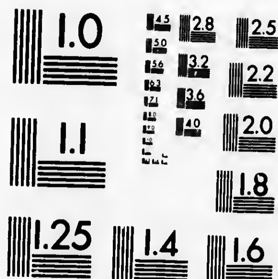

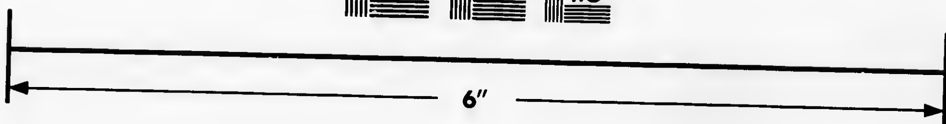

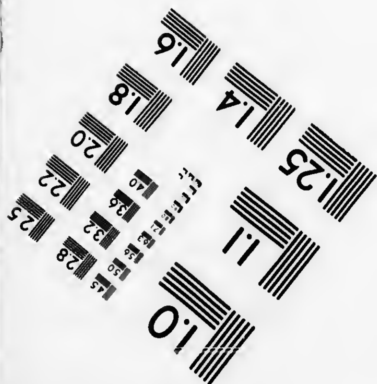

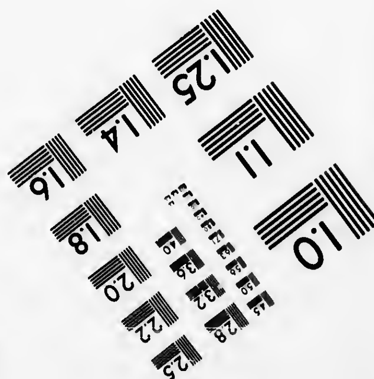

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X

THE CAREER OF THE DUKE

THE CAREER OF THE DUKE

HE was not a real duke, though a good deal more interesting than some who are called by that august title. He was only a medical student at Edinburgh University when I was attending the Arts classes, and I got to know him rather intimately at the club of which we were both members. His name in private life was Richard Gemmell Bryden, but nobody called him anything but the Duke, and the title suited him well. He was very good-looking, tall and lithe and slender, with a fine carriage and a clear cut, handsome face. But he was too well aware of the fact. And his airs! He was let loose rather young in a University town, before he had sense to guide his conduct or his tongue. He had been at college four years when I first met him, and to my certain knowledge three years after that, and when he

finally disappeared from the horizon of student life, he had only passed a part of his second examination.

His father was a solicitor, a man with a large county connection in a flourishing northern town. The Duke talked very tall always about his people, and it was his boasted intimacy with his father's aristocratic clients which really earned for him the title of the Duke. There is always a ferret in every school and college—a sneaking, objectionable sort of person who makes it his business to find out everything he can about the fellows, and who invents what he can't find out. The ferret of our year was a little chap called Ingram, whose father kept a grocer's shop at Stockbridge. Ingram soon found out all about Bryden's people, and told us that they lived in good style, and had a small country place where they did their best to edge themselves in among the county families, and that Bryden's mater was a veritable matchmaker, whose ambition for her daughters knew no limit. The Duke was lazy, but not vicious. There was something lovable about him in spite of all his airs, and he and

I were always rather chummy, though I often lectured him on the way he wasted both his time and his talents. He took it all in good part, but it had no effect on him whatever. After a time I held my tongue, for if his father found no fault with him, it was no business of mine. The Duke, of course, was a great favourite with the girls. I used to think he knew every pretty girl in the town, and he spent half his allowance on theatre tickets and flowers and dainty trifles on girls who for the most part laughed at him. He was often in love, and had many sweethearts during the years I knew him, but he managed to keep out of any serious entanglement till he took the final and, for him, fatal step. During the last year of my college life I lodged in town all the week, and went home on Friday night. I was gathering my things together as usual one Friday evening near the end of the last session, when the Duke came up to my rooms. I was surprised to see him, for he knew I went out of town that day; but he looked so woebegone that I refrained from telling him to get out, as I at first felt inclined to do.

'I know you're getting ready to go, David,' he

said. 'But you've got to sit here and listen to me, if you should never get out of town. I'm in the most awful mess, and I don't know how I'm to get out of it.'

'A new girl, I suppose?' I said, with mild sarcasm.

'Well, it's a girl, but certainly not a new one. You've seen Mamie Ross, the young lady at the house where I dig?'

'Yes, but I thought she was an old flame, and that you were off years ago,' said I, with the feeblest interest, wondering how long I could give him and not miss my train.

'I've never been right off. I've never really cared for anybody but her—and well, there's no use beating about the bush—we've been married for over four months.'

I dropped my clothes brush and stared at him open-mouthed. I could not really take it in. I should have thought the Duke the very last man on earth to make such a disastrous mesalliance.

'Married four months, Duke!—oh, come, you're cramming.'

'No, I'm not, worse luck,' answered the Duke,

with a groan. 'Not that I go back on her—bless her—I don't, and never will. But it's come out too soon. That little brute Ingram's got to the bottom of it, and sent word to my governor, who has promptly stopped supplies.'

'You're piling too much on me at once, Duke,' said I. 'I haven't taken in the primary fact yet. How, and for what reason, did you come to marry Mamie Ross?'

'Well, you see, it was like this; she lives with her aunt, who is jolly hard on her, makes a regular Cinderella of her, and there was another chap they wanted her to marry, a horrid old sea-captain with nothing to recommend him but his tin. I couldn't stand the way they were bullying her, so I took her to a registrar's office one morning, and we got married.'

'Well, and what then?'

'Well, we told her aunt, of course, and though she made a scene, she got pretty civil after a bit, and came to reason, so that I could explain things to her. She quite saw that it was important to keep it dark from my governor, till I had passed the final, anyhow; and we were getting along all

right till that little sneak Ingram ferreted it all out and sent an anonymous letter to the governor.'

'He deserves to be tarred and feathered, Duke,' I said sympathetically. 'But what happened after that?'

'Why, my father came down, of course, and stole a regular march on us. There was no use denying it. And he was past speech with rage, and has cut me off, and how I'm to get through that final, or find the money for the exam. fee even, is more than I know. What's to be done, old chappie?'

'You must get through, Duke,' I said cheerfully; 'you've made a fine ass of yourself, but we must get you through for your wife's sake. Do you think your father won't relent?'

The Duke mournfully shook his head. 'He won't; he said he'd never forgive me, and he meant it. No, I'm done in that quarter, and it's myself I must look to now. It'll be bad enough if I pass, David; but if I fail, think of that.'

'You won't fail, you can't, you daren't,' I said. 'Now I'm going, for I've only ten minutes to get my train. Come up on Monday night, and we'll

think it out. Good night,' I said, and ran out of the house.

The finals, with their long drawn out agony of suspense, began in a fortnight, and I was very sorry for the Duke all through. He was as nervous as a girl, and I didn't wonder at it, for he had a lot at stake; and besides, he did not know his work. I got to know him better in those days, and to think more of him than I had ever done; and it was quite evident that he was devoted to the young wife he had so foolishly married. I confess I was not surprised that he failed. I was not in town when the names were posted, but when I missed his name from the printed list in the newspapers, I went in to try and see him. But he had disappeared, and nobody could tell me anything about him. It was six long years before I saw the Duke again, and then it was in an unlikely place, and the unexpected sight of him has always been one of the nightmares of my London life.

I was walking hurriedly along the Strand one night about eleven o'clock, on my way home from a dinner I had been at in a man's rooms in

Piccadilly, when my attention was arrested by a man selling wax vestas under one of the street lamps. It was pouring rain at the time, and I saw that the poor wretch was soaked through and through. He was a great tall fellow, wearing a greasy old frock-coat and a battered hat drawn over his brows. My cigar had just gone out, and, after hunting in vain for a match, I stepped back to the street seller and asked for a box. And when I got near enough to see his face, a something came over me, the same kind of 'dwam' I had felt when I saw Willie Sharp's pictures on the pavement of Trafalgar Square.

'Good God, Duke!' I said hoarsely; 'it can't be you!'

He gave a great start, and looked for the moment as if he would flee my sight.

'Yes, it's me, sure enough,' he answered grimly. 'Nice sort of end I'm coming to presently, to die in the gutter like a dog.'

'How have you managed to get to this, and where's your wife?' I asked.

'She's at home, waiting on the supper that won't come. I've been standing here in the rain

since six o'clock, and I haven't sold a blooming box,' he said, affecting the airy speech of long ago.

But it wouldn't do. I saw he was dead beat, and on the verge of hysterical tears. If you have never seen a man in that desperate state through hunger and weakness and woe, you should thank God upon your knees. It is a sight to make the angels weep.

We were standing directly opposite one of Lockhart's cocoa-shops. I took him by the arm and marched him in. I ordered a cup of coffee to keep him company, but I never touched it. If I had, it must have choked me. The wolfish way he attacked the viands proved his long fast, and I, well fed, well clothed, and practically without a care, looked on, wondering to see the man, who once bade fair to carry all before him, sunk so low.

'You must excuse me,' he said, with a half-shamed glance. 'I haven't tasted since this morning, and then it was only a bite of dry bread and a glass of water.'

Suddenly he stopped, and let his head fall on his hands bitterly.

'God forgive me for eating so greedily, and

never a thought of my poor Mamie! David, for auld acquaintance' sake, will you let me take the rest home?'

'Go on,' I said with difficulty. 'Eat as much as you can. I'll see that Mrs. Bryden has her supper as well.'

With that he set to again, and ate his fill. We were at a table in a quiet corner, and nobody observed us, at which I was glad.

'Tell me in as few words as you can, Duke, what you have been doing with yourself all these years,' I said at length.

'Oh, it won't take long to tell. I couldn't face the music in Edinburgh when I was stumped, and Mamie agreed with me, so we came to London. But what was I fit for? I couldn't work. I had no business training. I knew nothing but my medical work—and that but scantily. But I learned, after it was all up with me, that it was the only thing in the world I could ever do or be, and I would have sold my soul almost for another chance. It is only a record of going from bad to worse all these years. I've never had a job for longer than three months; you can imagine what

she has suffered all that time. She 's worked her poor fingers to the bone to keep a little room for us. We 've always had that, even though we were empty inside. We 've never herded with the ruck of this great city, but that 's the next move.'

'No, it isn't, now I 've found you. Hold your peace, Duke, and don't tell me another word. I can't bear it. I 've sometimes grumbled at imaginary deprivations in my own lot; this opens my eyes. Now give me your address.'

He gave it, but shamefacedly, and the fact that he felt his position so acutely proved to me that he still retained his self-respect.

'Take that home to your wife,' I said, slipping some gold into his hand. 'Hush! what is it for, if not to keep a chum out of distress? Now promise me I 'll find you at this address to-morrow. You won't shift your camp?'

'No, honour bright; thank you, David. Will you let me go now? She 'll have a fire to-night, and a cup of tea and something to it, thanks to you. But I can't wait—let me go.'

And he went, with tears rolling down his cheeks. As for me, my cigar had so bitter a flavour, I threw

it, half-smoked, into the gutter. I felt a strong disgust at myself, at the fine evening clothes I wore, the spotless linen, all the dainty accessories of the well-dressed man. I felt mean and little and ashamed, and I cried to God to forgive my arrogance and pride and wicked discontent, because of some trifles that had been denied me. I was glad to find Wardrop reading by the fire, and before he could ask me a question about my evening's entertainment, I began pouring into his astonished ears the whole history of the Duke. That his interest and sympathy would be enlisted by such as story was a foregone conclusion.

'We must get him something to do to-morrow, sir,' I said, 'and so help them to get a home together.'

'That 'll be easy enough—but the question is what?' said Wardrop shrewdly. 'How far through did you say he was with his medical course?'

'He was spun in the final,' I answered, with open eyes.

'That means another session at college, doesn't it?'

'Practically.'

'How much would it cost?'

'Roughly speaking, about a hundred and fifty pounds.'

'Well, supposing he had not entirely lost the student habit, and was willing to go back and grind hard, how much would you go?'

'How much would I pay, do you mean?'

Wardrop nodded.

'Why, the whole sum,' I shouted gleefully. 'I have three hundred pounds odd in the bank. What a genius you are! To get the Duke through, what a thing that would be!'

'Wouldn't it?' asked Wardrop, his face reflecting the glow on mine. 'But if you go fifty, I'll give the hundred. Tush, it's nothing! He'll pay it back every penny, if he's the right sort, as somehow I think he is. We'll go and interview him in the morning. This is the twenty-seventh of October. He could begin the session yet, and we'll see him capped next August.'

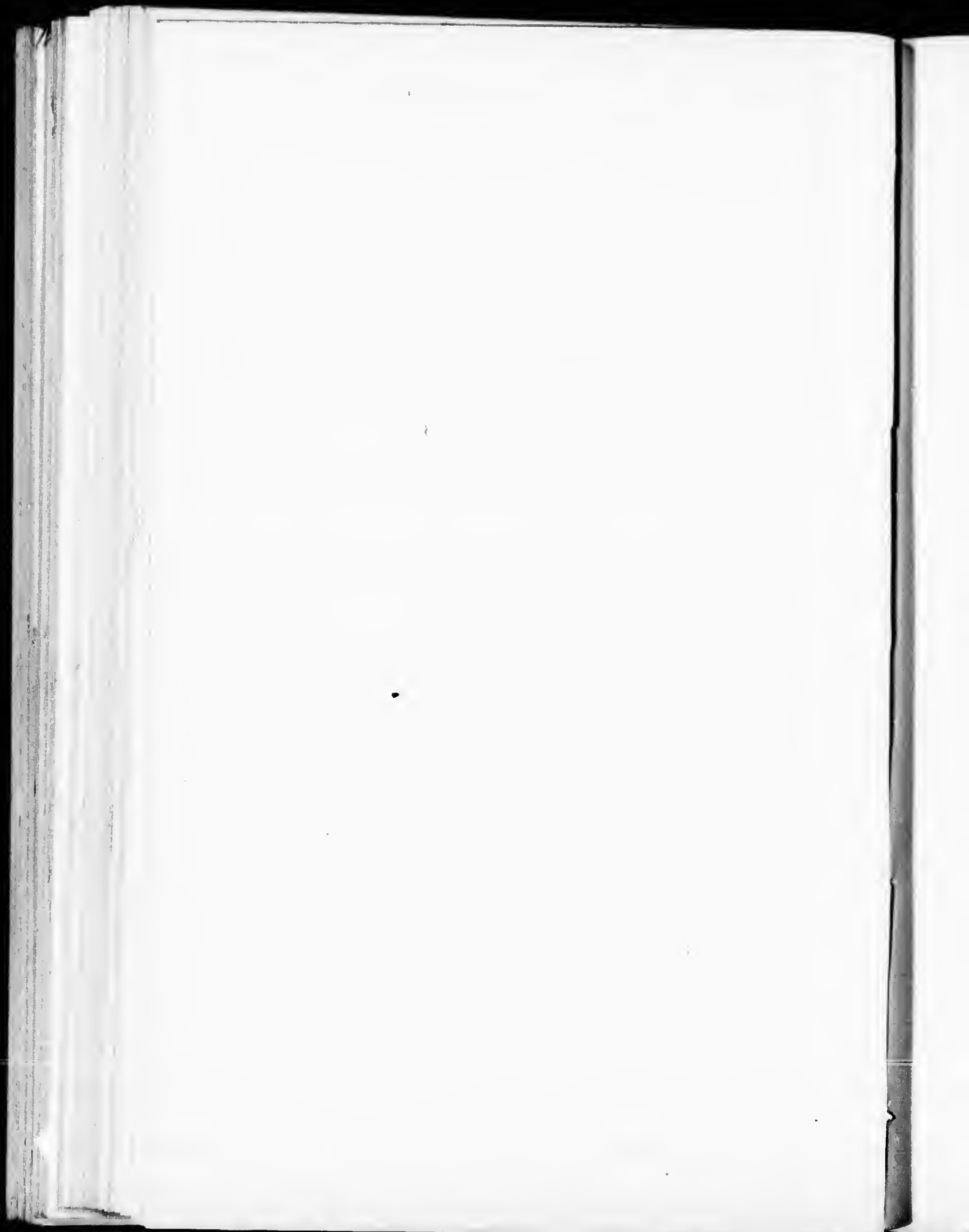
And we did—yes, we did. If there is any purer joy on earth than was ours that August day in the great Synod Hall at Edinburgh, when we

saw Richard Gemmell Bryden go up to receive his diploma at the hands of the Principal, I have yet to find it. And on Wardrop's other side, her sweet, worn face transfigured, sat the Duke's wife; of her gratitude my pen is too feeble and inadequate to write.

In a flourishing midland town there is a substantial doctor's house with a roomy surgery attached, and every sign of prosperity without and within. Sometimes to that happy and comfortable home there came two hard-worked London journalists on a flying visit, which never failed to make a green oasis in their lives. And if they sometimes forgot and addressed the handsome doctor as the Duke and his wife as the Duchess, nobody except the initiated were any the wiser. But often there is a laughter that is akin to tears, and it is absolutely necessary at these times to keep up a constant stream of raillery lest there should be a scandalous breakdown all round, which no Scotch person can thole. In that home you will find a fair-faced little lad, who rejoices in the curious name of Wardrop Lyall Bryden. And that is our reward.

XI

O MINE ENEMY!



O MINE ENEMY!

'WHEN is the chief coming back, Lyall?'

The question was put to me by Jack Girdlestone, one of the chaps who had been in the office before I came to London, and who was much esteemed by Wardrop, though his qualities were solid rather than brilliant. It was the month of June, and Wardrop, who preferred rather to distribute his holidays through the year, than to take a long spell at one time, had gone down to Brighton to spend a week with his boy.

I had thought of him a good deal in his absence, wondering whether he would come back an engaged man. Eighteen months had passed since that memorable Christmas eve, when we had stood together by the deathbed of his poor wife, but he seemed in no haste to seek to build up another home, or to forge new ties for himself.

As for me, I was glad of his delay; it was not sweet to me to contemplate the day when the old Surrey Street chambers should know him no more.

'I shouldn't think he'd be back till Monday now,' I answered, it being about one o'clock on Saturday afternoon. 'I'm expecting a wire every minute saying whether I'm to go down.'

'Till Monday; that's forty-eight hours,' said Girdlestone musingly. 'It might be too late.'

'What for?'

'For—for the fellow who wants to see him. He's awfully ill—had a serious operation day before yesterday. It hasn't been successful, and he may peg out any moment.'

'Who is he?' I asked, with interest; 'anybody I know?'

'You've heard of him—Gilbert Brand,' said Girdlestone, with a good deal of restraint in his voice.

'Does *he* want to see Wardrop?' I asked. 'I suppose he wants to make his peace.'

'I suppose so. No man felt more keenly his betrayal of our chief, Lyall, than I did; but Brand was my friend once, and when they sent

from the nursing-home last night begging some of the old fellows to go and see him, I—well, I had to go.'

'That was all right, but Wardrop is a different matter. I shouldn't like to ask him, Jack; and that's a fact.'

'Well, if you won't, how do you suppose I can?' he bluntly asked. 'Poor Brand said to me last night he had a lot on his mind he could only tell to Wardrop, and the Sister who is nursing him came out to the passage and begged me to try and persuade Wardrop to come. Not that she had the faintest idea of the story, mind you, but she said his whole talk in his half-delirious moments was of Wardrop and somebody he called Peggy.'

Before I could think of anything to say, Wardrop's wire was brought in to me, saying that he would not be up till Sunday night or first train on Monday, and asking me to go down.

'You'd catch the two,' said Girdlestone suggestively; 'and supposing Wardrop was willing to come, he could easily get back to-night.'

'I don't like the job, Jack, I tell you frankly,

but I suppose it 's got to be done. But mind, I 'm not at all sure that he 'll come. Put yourself in his place; that is the only way to get an understanding of his case.'

'But you see Wardrop can't be judged from the common standpoint. It is the unexpected he always does. I think myself he 'll come.'

'We 'll see,' was all I said, and we parted without further speech concerning the matter. I think I mentioned before that there was much loyalty towards Wardrop in the office, and we would have felt it sacrilegious to have made his private affairs the subject of our common talk. Thus he had left his mark on us. There was nothing more loathsome to him than the vulgar and personal gossip which is the food of certain journals and their promoters. But I sometimes thought he carried his prejudice against gossip of every kind rather far.

I journeyed to Brighton by the two o'clock train, though it cost me first-class fare. Mrs. Deane and Roddie were living at a boarding-house in the Old Steine; but I did not know whether Wardrop was there or at an hotel.

It was the afternoon of a most perfect June day; and it did not surprise me that they were not indoors. They were able to tell me at the house, however, that they had gone on the pier to hear the concert, which was direction explicit enough for me.

As I walked along the sea front, the fresh, salt-laden wind filled me with an indescribable exhilaration. The hot rays of the sun were tempered by that delicious breeze, and I did not wonder at the great throng of folks on the front. I have never fancied Brighton as a holiday place, but Wardrop was very fond of it, and said it always did him good, both physically and mentally. The pier was inconveniently crowded, and it was some considerable time before I found my friends. I caught sight of Roddie first, amusing himself at the railings at the far end, watching some sports in the water, and his father was not far off. They all gave me hearty welcome. I had not seen Mrs. Deane for some time, and I thought she looked different, somehow, and much younger. I learned afterwards that it was because she no longer wore widow's weeds.

Wardrop was in great spirits. I saw that he had completely thrown off the stress of London life, and I hated myself for the errand on which I had come. But I had to deliver it, and I took the opportunity when Mrs. Deane walked over to Roddie's side and left us.

'I have something to say which will vex you, sir,' I began boldly. 'If I could keep it from you I would, but it concerns a dying man.'

'Who is he?'

I shall never forget how his lightning glance flashed upon me. I think he guessed the truth even then.

'Gilbert Brand.'

'Well, what more? Living or dying, he does not now concern me,' he said harshly.

'He wishes to see you,' I answered simply. 'He has no peace for his desire. He will not live forty-eight hours. I said I would bring the message, but I feared you would not come.'

'You feared rightly,' he said; and though his voice was low, I knew by its tenseness that all that was harshest in him was roused. 'Why should I see him? I have spared him again and

again when a word of mine or a turn of my little finger would have crushed him. But for me he would not have had bread to eat. Can any more be asked of me than that? I have long left him to God's vengeance. I would so leave him still.'

I answered nothing, for indeed I knew no words to say. I was glad when he released me from his pitiless stare and walked away, pressing through the throng out of sight of us all. It was about half an hour before he came back. I feared to look at him, and kept on ahead with Roddie, leaving him to follow with Mrs. Deane. Presently he called me back.

'I have just been telling Mrs. Deane that we can't stay over Sunday, as we thought. You have knocked that little ploy on the head. We'll go back to the Old Steine, get a cup of tea, and go up by the five forty-five.'

'All right, sir,' I answered mechanically, but inwardly sore amazed. For what did he mean by this rapid decision, and why did he wish me to go with him? The train was almost empty; we had one end of the Pullman entirely to ourselves, and might have talked to our hearts' content.

But our speech was slight indeed. Wardrop never spoke at all till we had passed Croydon.

'Where is he lying?' he asked then. 'At one of the hospitals?'

'No; at a nursing-home in Devonshire Place,' I answered.

'We'll go home first,' he said then, in the same curt way; so I to my paper again, and left him undisturbed, as I knew he desired. My one hope was that he would not ask me to accompany him. It was something from which I shrank; yet if he did, I knew I could not refuse.

We drove home in a hansom, and Wardrop changed his clothes. I was rather surprised at this, for as a rule he was careless about conventional attire.

'We'd better go, then; are you ready? We'll walk, if you like.'

'You wish me to go, then?' I stammered.

'Of course; that is why I brought you. You must go in—in with me to the man's very bedside, lad, and stay there, to keep me from saying what I ought not. The devil will be at my elbow, David, and you'll need to help me to fight him.

I was saying with Saul all the way up, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?'

I took my hat without a word, and we walked away together through the sweet spring dusk; along the Mall, where the sweet smell of the lilacs and hawthorns in the Green Park came floating to us on the gentle wind; then up Regent Street, from which, with the closing of the shops, the throng had slackened, and so round by the Langham to Devonshire Place. The air was very rare and clear for a London night, and it seemed to my stirred imagination that a strange stillness seemed to brood upon the city. It was as if its hurrying feet were stilled, its many hands folded in preparation for the Sabbath day. Wardrop left me to take the initiative. It was I who knocked at the door of the nursing-home, and inquired of the pleasant woman who opened it whether we could see Gilbert Brand.

'He is very ill, and sinking fast,' she answered. 'But if you are Mr. Wardrop——' and she paused, looking inquiringly from one to the other.

'This is Mr. Wardrop,' I said, with a glance at my friend; and so we went in, and the door was shut.

While we were left a moment in the waiting-room, I tried again to suggest that I should remain where I was, while he went upstairs. I can never forget how he looked at me—what compelling power was in his sad, piercing eyes.

'I tell ye, David, I will not go a foot without you. I feel that I cannot trust myself. Let that be sufficient for you.'

So when the Sister came to fetch us, I followed him meekly upstairs. We were ushered into a large and pleasant room, which smelt of fresh flowers, of which many were about.

Wardrop, with his jaw firmly set, walked straight across to the bed. I pitied Brand at that moment, and trembled for what might happen. But I had no need. As Wardrop's eyes fell on the face of the man who had so cruelly wronged him, they softened, and his mouth took on a mobile curve.

'I am here as you desire,' he said, in a low voice, and not ungently. 'What do you wish to say to me?'

I walked away to the window, and there stood; but in the stillness I could not avoid hearing what passed. There can be no harm in setting it down,

since there are none alive now to whom it would give pain.

'I am dying, Wardrop,' said the prostrate man, in a wonderfully clear, strong voice. 'I could not die without making my peace with you. I did you the worst wrong one man can do to another; but have pity on me, at the last.'

'You had but small pity on her,' said Wardrop, and his voice now sounded strained and harsh and cold. 'But it is not to me you must sue for forgiveness. Have you made your peace with Him whose law you broke?'

'No. I am not a craven hound to try to sneak in at the end with a few whining prayers. I will take my deserts from my Maker, but I beg you to forgive me, Wardrop, as you hope to be forgiven.'

'Hush!' said Wardrop sternly. 'My forgiveness is nothing. As God is my witness, I have tried to forgive you all these years. It was hardest when I stood by her deathbed.'

'I want to tell you that she left me very soon—in little more than a month. I would have married her if I could, and if she would, but she hated me, and never sought to hide the fact. No sooner had

she taken the irrevocable step than she regretted it; she loved you, and you only, all the time, and it was that that killed her. I came to the office that day long ago to try and tell you, for it was on my conscience an awful weight night and day. I have had my punishment, Wardrop. Whatever may await me where I am going, don't think I 've got off scot-free here.'

He stopped there for want of breath, and I saw Wardrop get down upon his knees. Then I turned about and stole away, for the rest that passed in that room was between these two and their God.

When Wardrop came downstairs I saw that he had been weeping. It was quite dark as we walked through the streets, and when we came to the Mall again, Wardrop asked if we could extend our walk a little in the Park.

'One little sin, David—how vast are its ravages! Yet let no man say the sinner escapes even here. Some men's sins go before to judgment, and some follow after. God forgive me my stony heart.'

'You are glad you went?'

'Yes; it is some small compensation to me for

what I have suffered that God has permitted me to bear the cup of cold water to these two at the last, but it has riven my heart, David. Oh that men could know and feel the blessedness of the Christian life, its compelling power in all that makes for righteousness and lasting peace!'

'You have taught me, sir,' I said quietly. 'Religion such as yours, lived from day to day, is a compelling power if you like, compelling others to salvation.'

'Ay, but you were brought up by godly folk, and never strayed far from the door of the Kingdom. That is a privilege for which you may thank God on your knees. I have said the Lord's prayer for over forty years, David, and there is one of its petitions of which I have had no understanding until to-night.'

'What is it?'

'"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Had God not melted my heart this night, David, I should myself have been a castaway.'

XII

A LAST RESOURCE

A LAST RESOURCE

ONE day a respectably dressed, elderly man called at the office and asked to see Wardrop. He happened to be out at lunch at the time, and as the boy said he had come some distance, I told him to show him in, so that he might wait until Wardrop returned.

The moment my eyes fell upon him as he came within the door, I saw that he was a Scotchman, and I could almost have told from his general appearance that he belonged to the farming class.

'You are not Mr. Wardrop,' he said, looking at me keenly.

'Oh no,' I answered, 'my name is Lyall; but if you can wait a few minutes, I am sure that Mr. Wardrop won't be long; he has only gone out to lunch.'

'Oh, I can wait,' he said quietly. 'I 'm no' in

a hurry. Time is no' that much of an object to me now. Things have got sae bad that naething matters much.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' I answered, 'especially as I hear you are a Scotchman by your tongue. Have you been long in London?'

'I dinna live in London at all,' he answered, 'but down in Essex. I 've a farm there.'

'Oh,' I said with interest. 'Are you one of the Scotch colony who are trying to make a living where the English farmers failed?'

'Yes, you 've said it,' he answered, with a certain mournfulness. 'I 've done my best, but I 've failed.'

'And what do you want to see Mr. Wardrop about?' I asked cautiously, for my chief had been so continually taken advantage of, and had given away so much, that I was always trying to guard him against further obligations; but before I had any answer, Wardrop himself returned. His keen, cheery glance fell at once upon the stranger sitting on the office chair, nd he bade him a pleasant good-day. The old man rose somewhat hurriedly from his seat, and the look he cast upon Wardrop

was at once inquiring and wistful; it seemed to mutely ask for help even before he spoke.

'My name is Glover, sir,' he said, 'William Glover, and I come from a place called Elvanfoot, in the upper ward of Lanarkshire. Maybe ye have heard tell of the place?'

'Yes,' said Wardrop, 'I know it well. Well, Mr. Glover, what can I do for you?'

'I 've just been telling this young gentleman,' said Glover then, 'that I am farming down in Essex, at a place called Rayleigh. Maybe ye ken that too? It 's not far from Southend-on-Sea.'

'Yes,' answered Wardrop promptly, 'I know Rayleigh well. So you are one of the Scotch farmers who have been trying to lick a living out of the Essex wastes. I doubt you haven't succeeded very well.'

'No, that I 've not,' answered the old man. 'I 've dune my best, working early and late. I hae never spared mysel', but we had such a terrible drought last year, we were completely burned up. There was hardly a blade of corn on the place last harvest, and I hadna the wherewithal to pay my rent.'

'Well?' said Wardrop inquiringly, wishing, I could see, to hear the whole story before he committed himself to a remark.

'I havena come to-day, Mr. Wardrop, to borrow money off you,' he said, with a certain mingling of dignity and pathos, 'although I will not deny that I am sair needin' it. What I 've come about is to see whether you would be minded to show up a great and crying evil that has been the ruin of many a poor hard-up crater besides me.'

'Ah, what 's that?' asked Wardrop, with growing interest; anything in the nature of an abuse always roused his concern. Before he uttered another word, the old man took out a well-worn pocket-book, from which he extracted some small pieces of printed paper, folded in the inside of certain letters. One of these he handed to Wardrop, and asked him to read it, which he did aloud, with a curious stern look on his face:—

'"Having had considerable experience of over thirty years in the private financing of some of the largest farms in the southern counties, and possessing a considerable amount of invested

capital, I am prepared to assist farmers and agriculturists with temporary financial aid in any sums from £50 upwards at a very low rate of interest upon note of hand alone, and in a manner of repayment easy and satisfactory to clients." Well,' said Wardrop, when he had slowly read out this interesting and tempting advertisement, 'you applied, I suppose, to this philanthropic individual to help you out of your difficulty?'

'Yes,' said the old man, 'I borrowed £50 from him last Michaelmas to help to pay my rent, then I borrowed another £50 about a month ago to buy seed and potatoes for the planting. I 've paid some instalments back and also the interest, but I dinna think I understand it, for he says now that I owe him £250, and that if I dinna pay he 'll put in the bailiffs.'

'I suppose he has a bill of sale on your stock?' said Wardrop inquiringly.

'Ay,' answered the old man; 'he said it was his only security.'

'Would you mind letting me see all the papers, Mr. Glover?' said Wardrop, and I saw by his face that he was much interested in the affair.

Willingly, and with the manner of one who is glad to be relieved of the responsibility, poor old Glover emptied his pocket-book, and Wardrop laid out the precious documents on his table.

'Just look here, David,' said he, after he had studied them for a moment. 'This poor man has been paying this unscrupulous scoundrel at the rate of a hundred per cent. Do you see how they suck them in? The interest is charged monthly instead of yearly. There are more people ruined by this sort of thing than by all the disasters which can overtake humanity. The next move on the board will be that this villain will seize the whole stock of the farm and turn the tenant out, to die in his own fields, or to go to the workhouse, whichever he may prefer.'

'But, dear me,' I said, 'has he no redress? Is there no law that can touch the money-lender?'

Wardrop shook his head.

'None. The law can't touch him. What we do want badly is some new legislation on this very point. The press could do something towards obviating this crying evil if they would decline to insert such skilfully worded advertise-

ments as these, which are nothing less than traps to catch the unwary. Well, my friend,' he said, turning to the old man, 'what do you want me to do?'

'If you could expose this scoundrel,' said the old man, 'it micht help others. Naebody can help me now, because I am ruined. But it would be some satisfaction to me if he could be prevented from ruining others. I've often heard of you, sir, although you dinna ken me, and I thought that in your paper maybe you would draw folks' attention to sic iniquity as this.'

'Where did you say your place was, Mr. Glover?' he asked kindly. 'I should like very much to take a run down and see it if I might.'

'Ye will be welcome,' replied the farmer fervently. 'It is very easy got at. Rayleigh is the station, and the place is not a mile from it. Once I could have offered to drive you up in my own gig, but that'll never be again. When will you come?'

'Saturday afternoon,' said Wardrop, 'and meantime, if you will leave these papers with me, I will see Mr. Tomlinson, as he calls himself. It is just

possible that if I take him in hand he may get a fright.'

The gloom somewhat lightened on the worn and anxious face of the poor old man, who at the close of a hard-working, self-denying life saw nothing but ruin staring him in the face.

As it happened, the next two days were very full and busy, and Saturday came without offering any opportunity to Wardrop to investigate the case which had thus been laid before him. He did not, however, forget his promise to go out to the farm, and about four o'clock on Saturday afternoon we left Fenchurch Street together.

It was an exquisite April afternoon, the sky dappled with the tender spring clouds. As we got beyond the precincts of the city and came to the level stretches of the Essex marshes, we saw the greenness of the hastening summer upon the earth. It was the time of hope and promise, and yet we feit depressed, because the country through which we sped seemed less uplifted by the hopeful benison of spring than any country we had ever seen. More than once, looking out of the carriage window, Wardrop shook his head.

'It 's a dreich business, I doubt, farming here, David; and I wonder that a man who had once tasted life among the Lanark hills could suffer it here.'

But when we got beyond Grays and Tilbury the prospect brightened, and became more like the farming lands to which we had been accustomed in our youth. We found the village of Rayleigh a picturesque and thriving-looking place, scattered on the slope of a pleasant hill. We had to pass through it on our way to our destination, which rejoiced in the somewhat pretentious designation of Appleton Lodge. The house was built of red brick, and, being surrounded by some goodly trees, presented rather a sheltered and homelike appearance; but the surrounding land was wretched. Nothing could redeem it. And Wardrop kept shaking his head as we walked up the ill-made and ill-kept road to the house.

As we crossed the last paddock and came within sight of the front door, we saw a covered wagon standing before it, into which they appeared to be storing the furniture of the house.

'We 're too late, David, I doubt,' said Wardrop,

somewhat excitedly. 'I'm sure they have sold them up.'

We hastened forward, and reached the door just as two stalwart men carried through the porch a heavy mahogany bedstead such as one only sees in old-fashioned houses. Just within the door stood the old farmer, looking more dejected and aged in his working garb than he had done the day we saw him in the office. His face hardly brightened at the sight of us.

'It's too late, sir,' he said. 'They've ta'en everything; there's not even a beast left upon the place. We'll have to sleep on the bare floor this nicht if we stop here, and the only refuge we have in this earth now is the puirhoose.'

'Where is your wife?' asked Wardrop.

'I dinna ken,' answered the old man. 'When they came with the cart to take away the things, the heart seemed to gang clean out of her, and she just ran out of the house. You see, she likes the bit things; they're what we've had all our days, what we got when we married five-and-thirty years syne in the auld hoose at hame.'

'Can nothing be done to stay this execution, sir?' I asked hurriedly, for the sight of the old man's hopeless anguish was more than I could bear. 'I've got some money. I'll give every penny of it cheerfully to help. At least they must keep some of their things.'

Wardrop stepped across to a man who stood a little aside from the cart watching the operations, and apparently superintending the two who were carrying out the things. I did not hear what he said, but I could see that the discussion was sharp and caustic on both sides. However, what he said had some effect, for the men received their orders to stay execution, and began, though with some reluctance, to carry the things back into the house. When they were all restored, Wardrop dismissed the bailiff's men with scant courtesy, and we stepped within the house. Before the empty cart had gone out of sight, a thin-faced, weary-looking woman came stealing, almost like a hunted thing, down the side of the sheltered trees, and crept into the house, looking about her with surprise, scarcely able to believe the evidence of her own eyes at sight of her restored household

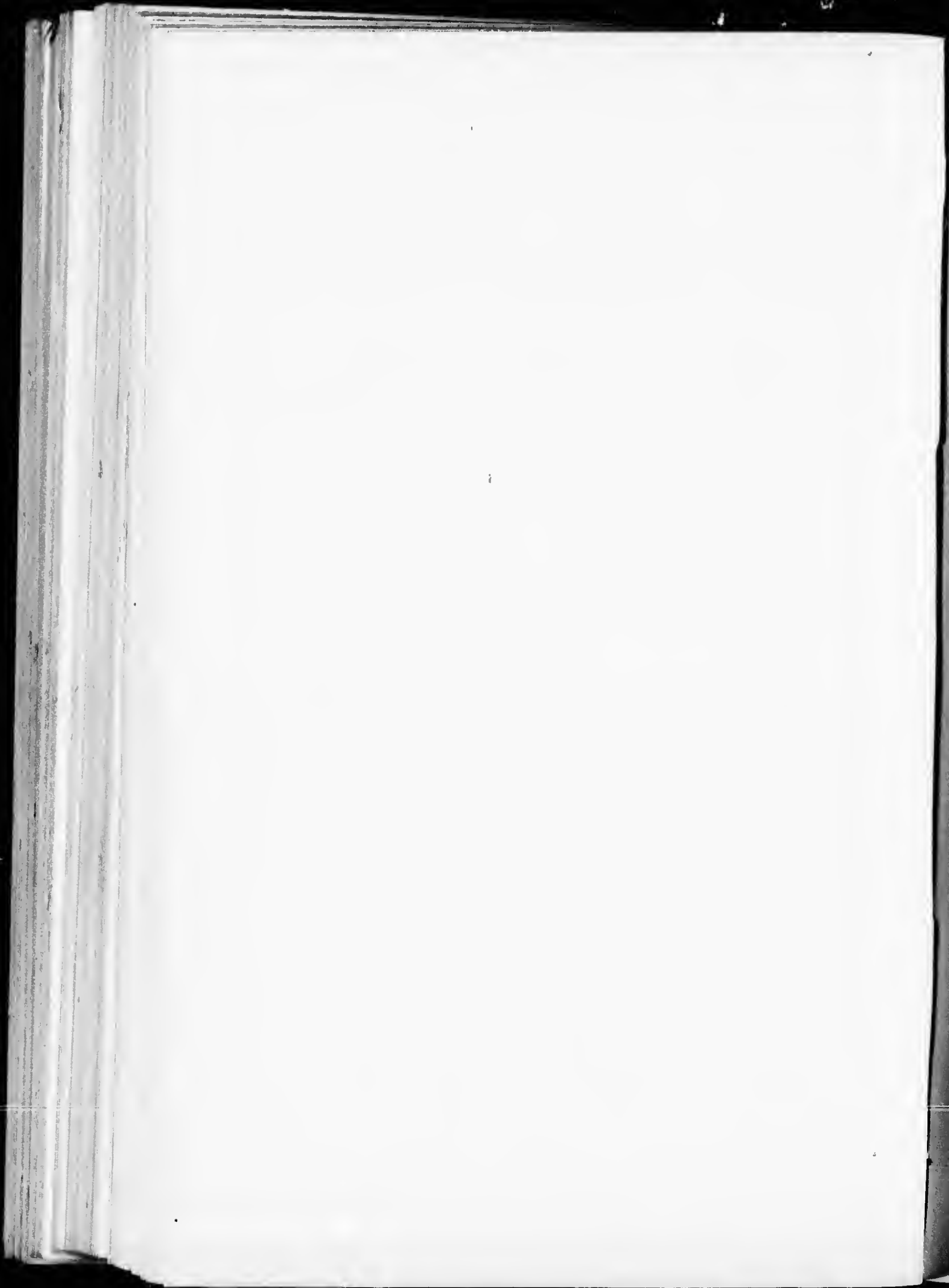
gods. To her Wardrop spoke a few words of kind sympathy, and she, unable to answer him, sat down on the old nursing-chair upon which she had rocked all her babies, and burst into helpless tears. I shall never forget the pathos of that picture. The poor old man and woman in their dismantled house, without hope for the present or for the future, was one of the saddest sights I have ever seen.

Wardrop's prompt action relieved them from immediate difficulties, but their case was beyond permanent help. The Glovers were obliged to leave the farm in which they had fared so sadly. Through Wardrop's influence he obtained a situation in the city at a weekly wage, sufficient to keep him and his wife in the necessaries and a few of the simpler comforts of life, but neither of them lived long. It is difficult to transplant the old, and it was natural that, having been accustomed to the freedom of the fields and woods, they should suffer when removed to the city.

That night, after we went home, Wardrop, angered beyond what was common with him, wrote a very scathing article for the *Gazette*,

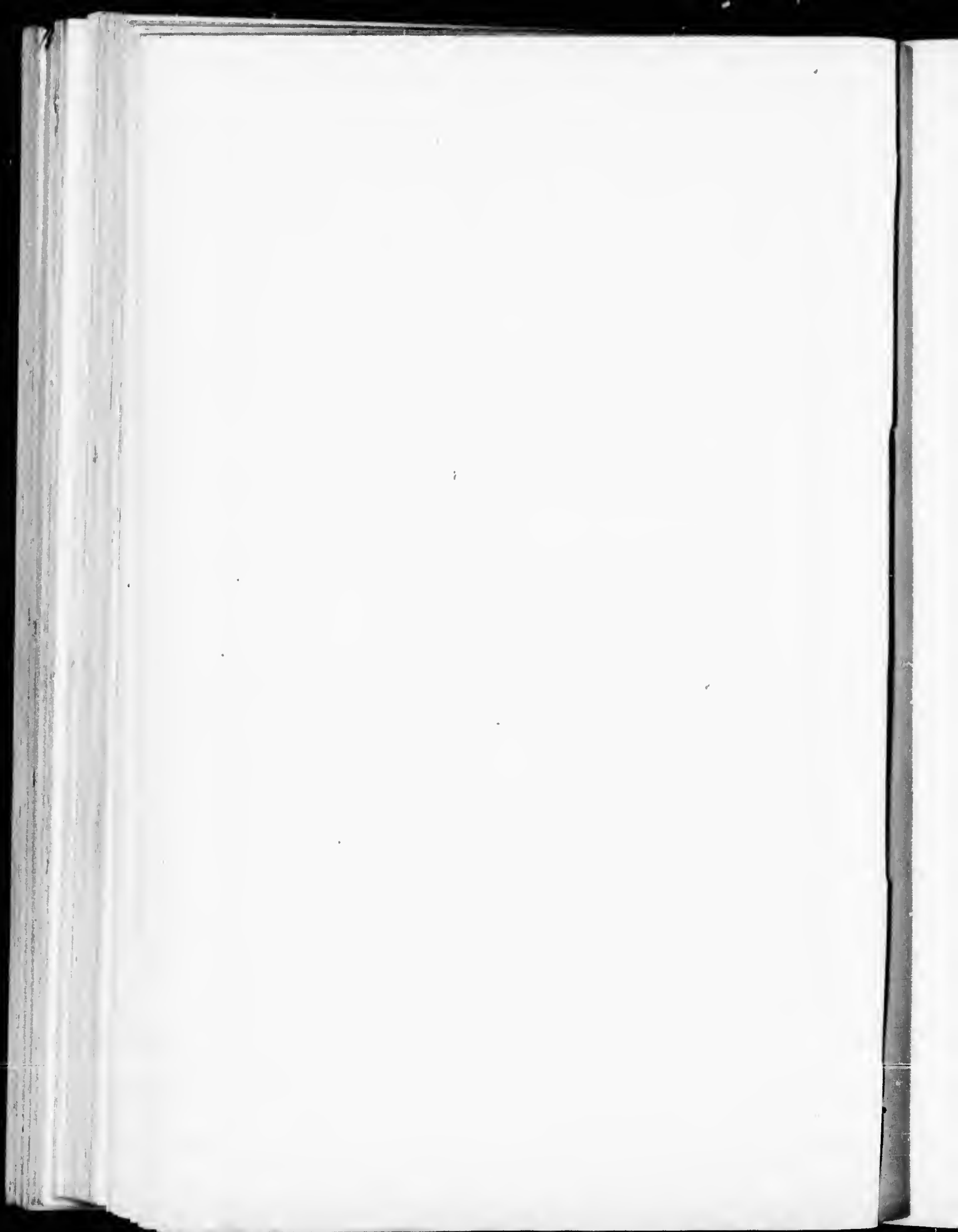
couched in his bitterest and most caustic style, exposing the methods of the vile money-lending fraternity, who, having got such simple creatures as the Glovers into their clutches, battened on their misery, and never rested until they robbed them of everything they possessed.

The article attracted some attention at the time, but it was not fruitful of any practical good. Lift any paper you may in these days, you will find advertisements couched in the same seductive terms, and any man or woman who will take the trouble to inquire into the matter will find that the case of the Glovers is not solitary or unique, but only one of many.



XIII

A REAL MOTHER



A REAL MOTHER

'RODDIE isn't well,' said Wardrop to me one day. 'The doctor says he can't winter in England; I suppose you know what that means?'

'Why, he has seemed a sturdy little chap up to now,' I said, when I had recovered from the shock his words gave me. 'When did he develop his present weakness?'

'It has come on gradually. I have known for a long time that he has been outgrowing his strength, and his precocity has stabbed me a thousand times of late. I shall have to give him up, David. I have faced it already. Oh, how hard life is, and how clean these things take the heart out of one!'

I had seldom seen Wardrop so moved; certainly I had never heard him express himself with such hopeless bitterness.

'What are you going to do, then?' I asked, after a moment's pause. Expressed sympathy seemed vain. I did not attempt it, certain my silence would not be misunderstood.

'Do? Oh, send him abroad, I suppose. Mrs. Deane has a sister married to one of the English doctors in Florence. She suggests taking him there.'

'It is a long way,' I said quickly, 'and you would want to come and go a good deal. Would Nice or Cannes not be better?'

'For some things, yes; but it would be something to have him under the care of a medical man we know something about. His wife's health compels Dr. Duncombe to live abroad, otherwise he would have made a career for himself here.'

'I see,' I answered. 'And will they go soon?'

'Yes, immediately, I expect. The fogs will be upon us before we know where we are, and there is no time to lose.'

When Wardrop left me, my mind was full of his news, and all the circumstances connected with it. It was now close upon two years since the night he and I stood by the deathbed of his unhappy

wife, and I had often wondered if he would ever build up another home for himself. I could not understand the delay, but it was not a subject I dared approach to him. I could only wait to see what time would bring forth.

As was to be expected, Wardrop was very much engaged during the next few days making arrangements for the travellers, and getting his own work forward in order to journey with them.

'I wish that you had been going, David,' he said to me, as we sat together by the fire in the old Surrey Street rooms on that bleak October night. 'But you have become so indispensable to the *Gazette* that you can't be spared. I see that that thought is not ill-pleasing to you.'

Indeed it was not, and it was something of a surprise to me to hear Wardrop admit that my services were of such value. We did not talk very much as we sat together that night in the familiar, memory-haunted room. A kind of shadow seemed to be between us, a something more than the thought of a temporary parting. Had I known that it was the last night Wardrop and I should sit together as comrades and room-mates at that fire-

side, I should have been no fit company for him or for anybody. It is well, always well, that certain things are hid until they come upon us swiftly, and often accompanied by circumstances which for the moment make regret impossible.

'Well, we have been very happy here together, lad,' he said, breaking a long silence. 'How long has the same roof covered us?'

'Nearly five years,' I answered. 'It will be five years when February comes round again.'

'Well, they have been years of jolly good comradeship,' he said heartily, 'and I can honestly say that on my part your friendship has been one of the precious things of my life. Your young courage and hope has often given me heart when I must have faltered and perhaps fallen by the way.'

'O sir!' I cried, almost overcome, 'if you can say that I have been some comfort to you, what can I say of all you have been to me?'

'Tut, tut! let that pass. You have borne with me in many a queer mood, David, and your patience and loving-kindness have never had an

end. If I ever forget or grow cold to you, I am not deserving of such a comrade.'

'I don't like your tone,' I said, when the moment of emotion had passed, and commonplace speech was again possible to me. 'You speak as if you were not coming back. If I thought there was any chance of that, I would lock you up here and now to prevent your exit.'

'Oh, I'll be back, sure enough, but I may take a good holiday while I am at it. I have never been in Florence, and I have no anxiety about affairs when you are at the helm.'

Next morning I saw the little party off at Victoria. Roddie certainly looked a bit delicate and fragile. He had shot up, it seemed to me, in a few months from sturdy childhood into lank boyhood, and looked exactly as Wardrop had said, as if he were outgrowing his strength. But he was in great spirits over the thought of his trip, and apparently had no understanding of the terrible anxiety which gnawed at his father's heart. Mrs. Deane was the same gracious, gentle, and kindly woman she had ever been, but I fancied that her face was a little sadder than it used to be, and

her fine eyes shadowed, but there could be no doubt about her anxious solicitude concerning her charge. It betrayed itself in every glance and tone.

London seemed empty to me without them, but I threw myself heart and soul into my work, eager to deserve still further the commendation which my chief had so freely given me. It had been small credit to me, if after five years of his close companionship, five years' study of his wonderful example, he could not have left me in charge with an easy mind. It was my aim so to conduct the journal that the master hand would not be missed; but that was a task beyond my powers, for while I could carry out faithfully every detail of the work, and try and carry his spirit into all I did, the touch of the master was lacking, and it seemed to me that each number that appeared was poorer stuff than the last, because it was not illumined by the grace and fire of his genius.

For the first time in his life Wardrop took a perfect holiday; for three weeks we never saw his face, nor did we hear from him except an occasional wire to say all was well. It was near the

end of November before he returned, bronzed, rested, and refreshed, and with his mind somewhat eased, I could see, concerning his boy.

'Well, David,' was his greeting, 'I have lived with the lotus-eaters for three weeks, and now I am as a giant refreshed, ready to pound away at everything and everybody for the next year or two, so you can gird up your loins now if you like, and take a trip north or south, or wherever you have a mind.'

I did not, however, avail myself of his permission, but worked steadily on till Christmas week, intending then to take a run to Scotland. My own affairs were lying somewhat heavily on my soul, and I had begun to grow weary of the heart sickness of hope deferred. Five years had passed since I had parted from my Euphan in the green gardens of Princes Street, and once only in that long exile had I seen her face. Another day I will explain how it came about that we had borne that long probation so patiently. Now it is Wardrop's love-story I must tell.

Two days before Christmas a telegram suddenly summoned Wardrop to Florence; the boy was

dangerously ill, and his illness was such as to baffle for the time being all the skill they could find. Wardrop went off at once, taking with him a London physician whose moments had to be paid for in gold, and I waited with what patience I might for further news of those whom I loved so well.

For three days came no message, good or bad, and though I tried to comfort myself with the thought that no news is good news, I was bowed down with the weight of my anxiety.

A telegram which came to me at last was not reassuring. It contained only three words, 'Come at once.' I could ill be spared, but that was a message there was no ignoring. After a few hours' superhuman work to keep things from standing still in the double absence, I went off by the Club train to Paris, and travelled right on without a moment's stoppage by the Orient to Florence. I arrived there about seven o'clock on the following day, and drove straight to Dr. Duncombe's house on the Lung Arno. It was also my first visit to Florence, but I was too much engrossed with my own foreboding thoughts to pay much heed to my

surroundings. I did notice, however, as I drove through the gay evening crowd on the Lung Arno, the rapid flow and the muddy waters of the river whose banks are so rich in memory and in romance.

Dr. Duncombe occupied a beautiful and spacious mansion directly facing the river. The windows were all lit, I could see, as I drove up to the door, and that gave me hope, for when death enters a house the lights are lowered, and all is in keeping with the solemnity of the hour.

A servant in English dress and with an English face opened the door to me, and welcomed me with a smile; but I saw that her eyes were red with recent weeping.

'How is he?' I asked quickly.

'Still alive, sir; but he has asked for you many times. Here is Mr. Wardrop.'

Wardrop, having heard in the sickroom the jingle of the fiacre bells as it entered the court-yard, met me half-way up the stairs.

'He is still alive, David; thank you for coming so quickly. Are you too tired to come in now? He has so longed, poor little chap, to see you.'

'I can come now,' I said; 'but tell me first what is the matter.'

'A touch of malarial fever, and one or two other complications which are rather obscure. Anyhow, his life is hanging by a thread. I have never left him, night or day, since I came.'

'I suppose the London man has gone back?' I said, as I followed him upstairs.

'Oh yes, yesterday. He says we may be entirely satisfied with Duncombe; he is a fine fellow, and it is something to be in the midst of such true friends in a time of trouble.'

The sickroom was large and spacious, well lighted from the west; a pleasant place in which to lie if one must be set aside from the active duty of life. The doctor was in the room, a tall man with a grave, kind face and a short pointed beard. He gave me a nod from the other side of the bed, evidently requiring no introduction. Mrs. Deane sat on a chair by the bed, gently fanning the poor little lad, who seemed to me to be as one dead upon the bed. But suddenly, as I stooped over him, he opened his eyes. Shall I ever forget to my dying day the joy which

leaped in them as he saw me? It moved us all to tears, but me most of all.

'O David!' he said joyfully, 'so you have come. Oh, that is nice.'

'I think I shall be jealous,' said Wardrop, with a wavering smile, whereat Roddie essayed a smile also.

'O you silly dad!' he said; and at these words, the likest to his ordinary talk that Roddie had uttered for many an hour, I saw an unspeakable relief come into Wardrop's face.

'Dad, I want to speak to David all by myself, nobody in the room, not even auntie,' Roddie said, in quite a strong, clear voice.

This surprised us all, but no demur was made.

'You shall do so, Roddie,' said the doctor, 'if you promise not to talk too much. I dare say David, as you call him, will see to that.'

'Yes, indeed I will,' I said; and after a few minutes they all, on some pretext or other, slipped away, and we were left alone.

'What do you mean by carrying on like this, old chap?' and sitting down on the bed, I regarded him with affected indignation. 'Do

you know that you have upset the whole show? Just think of what is happening in Fleet Street while both your father and I are dancing attendance on you.'

'Oh, it's all right,' he said quickly. 'You can go back to-morrow if you like, after I have told you what I want. I say, they all think I'm going to die, don't they?'

He spoke the words with considerable difficulty; the momentary gleam of strength and brightness had passed, and I saw his appalling weakness. It was indeed true, as Wardrop had said, his life was hanging by a thread.

'They have never said anything of the kind to me,' I answered, as stoutly as I could, 'and I don't believe you are going to die either.'

'I don't think it myself, although I feel pretty bad,' he whispered. 'There is something I want dreadfully. I have been trying to tell dad about it, or auntie, but somehow I couldn't, so then I thought of you.'

'All right,' I said, with the utmost unconcern; 'go ahead. If it's anything within my power, you may consider it done, Roddie.'

'But then you see I don't know whether it is in your power or not,' he said; 'only dad does mostly everything you want, doesn't he?'

'That's rather a strong way of putting it, Roddie,' I answered, 'but sometimes he considers what I say.'

'Well, then, do you know what I want you to do?'

'I couldn't guess,' I said, shaking my head.

'I want you to tell dad to marry auntie, here in this room, so that I can see it.'

I sat quite still a moment, truth to tell, completely overwhelmed. For here the very thought which had been in my heart for many a day, the problem for which I could find no solution, was put fair and square by Roddie in a way from which there was no escape.

'That is a larger order than usual, Roddie,' I said thoughtfully. 'How is it to be done?'

'Why, as easy as Punch,' said Roddie confidently. 'Just you go down now and tell dad. There's a nice clergyman here; he's been to see me. He could do it all right, couldn't he?'

'Oh yes; but tell me, Roddie, why do you want this? Would it help you to get well?'

'I think that if father and auntie were married, I should get well,' he said, with a shrewd, faraway look in his eyes. 'Then, you see, I should have a real mother.'

These words revealed something of the child's inner heart, a something which brought a lump in my throat.

'Well, since you have sent for me all the way from London to do this, Roddie, I suppose there is no escaping. But I am quite prepared for consequences the most terrible. What if your father should be very angry?'

'Oh, he won't be,' said Roddie confidently. 'You see, it's what he wants; I know it is, and he will be very much obliged to me for letting him know.'

From this conclusive argument there was no escaping, and observing the increasing pallor on the child's face, which showed that already he had overtaxed his strength, I rose hastily and rang the bell. In a moment Mrs. Deane was by his side. I intercepted Wardrop just as he was entering the room.

'Come downstairs. Roddie has said his say,' I said, hardly knowing how I expressed myself. 'It is something he wishes me to tell you.'

Wardrop pushed open his own room door, and motioned me in. It was almost in darkness, but the reflection of the lamps along the river's brim cast a light across the walls and floor. The window was open, and the happy din of the evening crowd was borne in to us upon the flower-scented air. Wardrop looked at me inquiringly.

'What was it? What did he say?'

I saw that he had no expectation of what he was to hear, and I was silent a moment, casting about for fitting words to convey the message to him.

'Roddie wants you to marry Mrs. Deane,' I said at length, as bluntly as I have ever said anything in my life.

He stared at me a moment, and then walked to the open window, where he stood with his back to me.

'Do you mean to say he sent you to me with that message?' he asked at length, but without looking round.

'Yes; he says he wants to have a real mother.'

Then Wardrop, taking a deep breath, turned round and walked out of the room.

After a few moments I followed him, and left the house; the sweet evening air and the fascination of the beautiful city wooed me out of doors. But while I smoked my cigar, and looked about me with lively interest, my thoughts were back in the house I had left. I even felt a certain nervousness in returning, and delayed it as long as I possibly could.

The bells were ringing ten o'clock as I stepped once more into the cool, dusky courtyard before Dr. Duncombe's door. A great tree grew in the centre of it, casting its dark and grateful shade in the daytime upon the burning pavement. At night it seemed to make dusky corners and quiet nooks undreamed of in the narrow space. I heard voices as I passed through the gate and closed it behind me, and before I had reached the door, Wardrop called me by my name. I saw that he was not alone, and I approached them shamefacedly as a girl. He had her hand on his arm, and her sweet face was suffused

with that soft, tender light only seen when emotion has reached some rare and blessed height.

'This is Roddie's new mother,' Wardrop said simply. 'We owe you something for being the intermediary.'

Then I saw that all was well with them, and that whatever had kept them apart so long had now become a thing of the past. I leaned forward and kissed her; then I wrung Wardrop's hand, and passed within the house, without having uttered a single word. My own loneliness and passionate heart-hunger was greater than I could bear. As I passed by Roddie's room, I pushed open the door softly and looked in. The English maid watching by the bed motioned me in with a smile on her pleasant face. He was sound asleep, and his face was more like the face of the happy boy whose acquaintance I had made long ago on the Surrey hills. I learned afterwards that he had seen the desire of his heart before he slept. Next day they were married by special licence; and I returned by the evening train to England.

From that day Roddie Wardrop, defying every expectation of those who watched him, began to get well; and sometimes, in the happy mood which was always with him from that day, his father would say—

'Ah, you rascal, it was all a fraud, a regular all round take-in to get your own ends.'

What cared Roddie? He had got his 'real mother,' and his father the home for which he had longed, and which he, more than most men, so abundantly deserved.

XIV

AFTER MANY DAYS

AFTER MANY DAYS

AFTER Wardrop married, I remained solitary in the old rooms in Surrey Street. Sometimes when more than usually depressed I thought of seeking another comrade, but I never did. Wardrop's place no man could fill, and mostly I preferred the memories he had left behind to the companionship of any other human being.

They lived at Sydenham Hill, where Wardrop had bought a beautiful house, in which he took a pride and delight at once keen and touching. The place seemed to agree with the boy, and in that home was to be found a happiness rare in this mundane sphere.

As was to be expected, I paid them many visits, spending part of every Sunday with them, and never failing to return to my solitary rooms

with an increased sense of loneliness and heart-ache.

Six years had been the long probation endured by Euphan and by me, and the heart-sickness of hope deferred, especially since Wardrop left me, had taken much of the sweetness out of existence.

One Sunday evening about seven o'clock I had just returned from Sydenham Hill, and was smoking a pipe at my solitary fireside, preparatory to stepping across to the office, when I heard a cab rattle up to the door. This was an unusual occurrence on a Sunday evening, there being few quieter thoroughfares in all London than that little artery which ran from the Strand to the Embankment. Directly the cab stopped, I felt, by some strange intuition, that it was a summons of some kind for me, therefore I was not at all surprised when my landlady came quickly to my door and said a gentleman wished to see me, but would not give his name.

'Show him up,' I said, and almost before the words were out of my mouth he was in the room, having evidently followed the woman upstairs.

He was an elderly man of fine, even striking appearance, professional, I saw at a glance.

'Probably my name may not be quite unknown to you, Mr. Lyall,' he said, with a strange smile. 'I am Mr. Spence-Morham of Harley Street.'

'I have heard your name, of course,' I answered stiffly, and my face flushed, 'in connection with Miss Wingate of Edinburgh.'

'Quite so.' He inclined his head, and a somewhat sad look crossed his face. 'You and I had the misfortune, shall I call it? to be simultaneous suitors for that young lady's hand. As it happened, neither of us has as yet been successful, although there can be no doubt which of us the young lady herself prefers.'

I stood still, saying nothing, my heart beating tumultuously; that there was something behind all this I could easily guess, and I wished he would make haste to enlighten me.

'I have to-night received a telegram summoning me to Edinburgh. I am on my way there now. Dr. Wingate, it seems, has had a shock, apoplectic probably, from premonitions I know he has had. All that is simple enough, but the odd part is to

come. This telegram, which is from Lawrence Wingate, the eldest son, says I am to go on to-night and take you with me. There it is; you can read it for yourself.'

He drew the crushed pink message from the outer pocket of his overcoat, and handed it to me. It was as he had said, but it conveyed to me nothing more than the simple summons.

'I am on my way to Euston now. It is not an hour since I received the message, and I had some things to arrange. I had several appointments for to-morrow that had to be postponed. Can you come?'

'Not easily, but I must manage it, Mr. Morham,' I answered. 'How long can you give me?'

The surgeon took out his watch.

'Twenty minutes from now.'

'That 'll do,' I said. 'I have time to rush over to the office and explain matters; then they can wire for the chief.'

Although my heart was still beating madly, my brain was wonderfully clear, and I was able to think and to arrange almost in a moment every detail of my hurried journey.

Within the specified time I had rejoined him, and my landlady having hastily packed my bag, we entered the hansom together.

'I must take the Pullman, Mr. Lyall,' my companion remarked as we rattled through Covent Garden. 'At my age a man can't afford to do without his night's rest. If you will allow me to advise you, you will do the same.'

'I couldn't sleep,' I said, 'but I can take your advice. Are you summoned professionally to Dr. Wingate?'

'You know as much as I do,' he answered drily. 'But I should think it likely. I have known him for twenty-five years, and he has often said that he would accept no verdict but mine when anything happened to him.'

No further word passed between us, and we presently came to Euston, to find the train but sparsely occupied. As there was no difficulty about getting a first-class compartment to ourselves, Morham changed his mind about the Pullman, and contented himself with one side of the compartment, where his rug and pillow made him a very comfortable bed.

He slept quickly and soundly, but I sat up in the corner, wide-eyed and on the alert, my mind a confused whirl of thoughts.

It was difficult for me to realise that I was being carried at express speed back to Edinburgh, and that in a few hours' time I should find myself face to face with Euphan. After a time I became conscious that my companion was awake, also that he was steadily regarding me with those piercing eyes which had been trained by a lifetime of observation.

'I have been watching you for some time,' he said, with a quiet smile. 'You are tremendously excited, I can see. Take my word for it, it doesn't pay. There are few things in this life worth the expenditure of so much vital energy.'

I made no reply to this, not caring to remind him that he offered the result of a life's experience to one who stood little removed from its threshold. The words were on my lips, it must be told, but I was deterred from utterance by an odd sense of delicacy because of our peculiar relations to each other, both having been, and perhaps still, suitors for the hand of Euphan Wingate. He sat up

suddenly, evidently thoroughly awakened, and, wrapping his warm fur rug closely round him, peered out at me from under his strongly marked brows.

'I have often heard of you, of course,' he said, 'and I wish that I had seen you before now.'

'Why?' was my natural question.

'Why? because if I had I should certainly have given up the unequal contest,' he answered drily, and there was sufficient flattery in these blunt words to render me distinctly uncomfortable. 'I have loved the girl for ten years and more,' he went on, in the same dry, steady voice, 'and when love comes thus late in life to a man of my temperament, it is not mere midsummer madness with him; it lasts all the year round. She is a pearl among women. I hope that you will cherish her as she deserves, and as I should have tried to do had that unspeakable happiness come in my way.'

My heart went out to him, the grim, cold man of science, whose inner self, hidden from the world, was thus in the silent watches of the night so strangely laid bare to me.

'Sir,' I said, and I know that my strong feeling vibrated in my voice, 'I have thought some hard thoughts of you in the past. I beg you to forgive me for them. If the happiness of which you speak, and which God knows is precious in my sight, should ever be mine, it will be somewhat marred by the thought that it has been snatched from you.'

'Nay, lad, it would never have been mine, and I see now how foolish it was of me to think it. It is not well to mate May and December. You and she will make a fitting pair, and I think you are worthy of her.'

Then he curled himself in his corner and appeared to go to sleep again, and I was left with my bewildering thoughts.

In the exquisite dawn of that April morning we ran into the Caledonian Station at Edinburgh up to time. No one met us, of course, but a cab quickly took us to the house in Queen Street. Our arrival was evidently anxiously watched for, for the door was opened immediately the cab drove up, and before either of us had alighted. It was Euphan herself who stood in the hall, her face

pale and worn with a long vigil, her eyes heavy with a mist of tears. Morham stepped in first, took her hand in his a moment, whispered something to her, and quickly passed upstairs. Then she and I were left with no prying eye to witness our meeting, but we simply shook hands, and then Euphan opened the library door.

'Come in, David, just a moment,' she said quickly. 'I hardly dared hope that you would come. Papa has asked for you so often since he has been able to speak a little. You will be glad to hear that his voice has come back to him in some degree, and we think that is a hopeful sign.'

'When was he seized?' I asked, because it was expected of me, but I may be forgiven if my whole heart and mind was full of her. I had not looked upon her face for four long years. Those who have suffered the like heart-hunger will know something of my feelings then.

'How strange that you and Mr. Morham should travel together! How do you like him, David?'

'Very well,' I answered. 'I have misjudged him, Euphan, as we so often misjudge persons and things we know nothing about.'

'I have always liked him, and I am so relieved that he has come. We shall now know exactly how papa is, and what we may expect.'

'He expressed a wish to see me, didn't he, Euphan?' I said inquiringly. 'Do you think it likely he will relent towards us now?'

'I—I think so, David,' she answered, and the sweet colour flickered a moment in her pale cheek, and her voice trembled. 'But it is selfish, is it not, to think of such things when he is so ill?'

'I don't think so,' I answered, a trifle gloomily. 'Just think what it has been to me all these years, alone in London, when I ought to have had you, Euphan. It takes a lot of forgiving to get over that.'

'Hush, hush!' she said. 'We shall be none the worse for our waiting, but perhaps all the better. And how well you look! You don't look at all as if you had missed me.'

I tried to catch her in my arms to punish her for this saucy speech, but she eluded my clasp, and darted from the room. Before I saw her again, a servant came to tell me that breakfast waited for us in the dining-room, and that Mr. Morham had come down.

'I have seen him,' he said briefly to me when I joined him there. 'He can't recover, and he knows it. He would like to see you after you have breakfasted, but he can't speak much; in fact, you will have the greatest difficulty in understanding a word he says.'

We breakfasted alone; it was not surprising that neither ate much.

I followed him silently upstairs, noting with something of a pang how familiar he was in the house where I was an utter stranger. Only once before had I crossed its threshold, and then—but let me not dwell on that sad memory now. There was a wonderful compelling power about Morham, which I have never seen to the same extent in any other man. It came naturally to him to command and direct; as naturally did it come to those about him to obey. From the moment we entered the house it seemed as if he took the direction of all its internal affairs; yet he spoke little—less, I think, than any man I have ever met.

When I had finished a refreshing toilet, Morham came and said Dr. Wingate was extremely im-

patient to see me. He led me himself to the room. Lawrence, the eldest son, was sitting by the bed. Although we now met for the first time, we gripped hands like brothers. He greatly resembled Euphan, and I thought his eyes expressed his sympathy, proclaiming him mutely to be on our side. Dr. Wingate sat up in bed, propped by pillows, and the ghastly change in him, which I will not attempt to describe, gave me a strong shock. He made a motion as if to hold out his hand, but was unable to accomplish it. Then he said something which I could not understand, though I bent over the bed eager to catch the slightest word.

'I am sorry to see you like this, sir,' I said, speaking sincerely from the heart.

'You do not bear me the malice you ought, then,' he muttered indistinctly, and a faint, grim humour seemed to creep to his mouth.

'I have sent for you—you must guess why—to say I will give you Euphan,' he said then, and, growing accustomed to his imperfect articulation, I now caught every word. 'You have been very patient, both of you. She has been too good—

nothing but a reproach to me all the time. I didn't think it was in you to be so constant.'

It must not be supposed that he uttered these sentences consecutively as they are written; they were spoken disjointedly and with great difficulty, but we grasped their meaning.

'Sir,' I said, 'if you will give her to me, you will never regret it, I swear. I will take the utmost care of her, and I am not now a poor man. I can keep her in a position of which you need not be ashamed.'

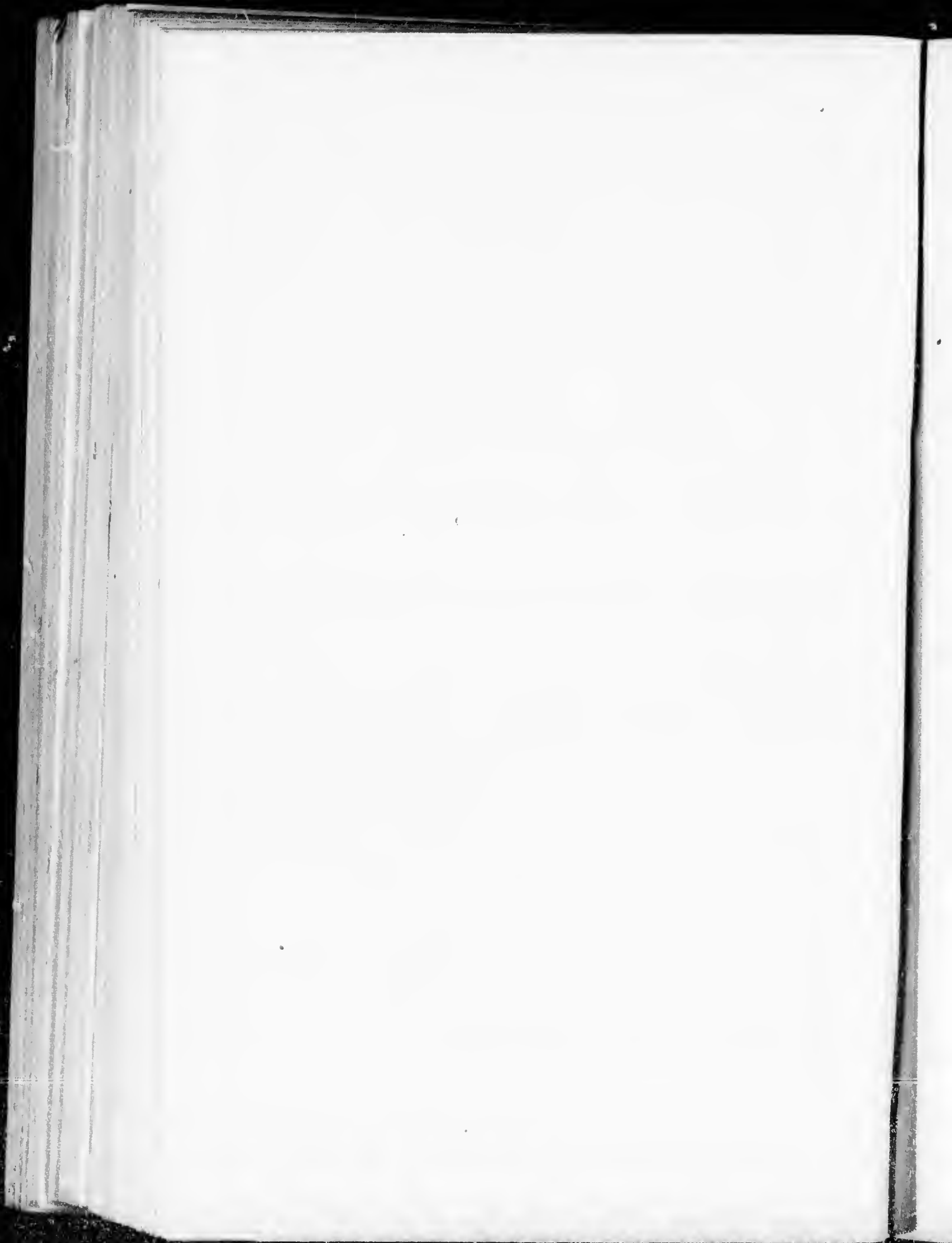
'So they tell me; but that's neither here nor there to me now—nor to Euphan. She would as lief as not share a garret with you as a palace. You have won a love that is rare in this sordid world.' And with that he looked at me with a strange keenness which was infinitely pathetic.

'My hours are numbered, my old friend tells me,' he said presently, turning a look of indescribable confidence and love on Morham's face. 'I would see you and her happy before I die. It is my wish, isn't it, Morham, that they should be married here by my bedside.'

More surprised than I could express, what could

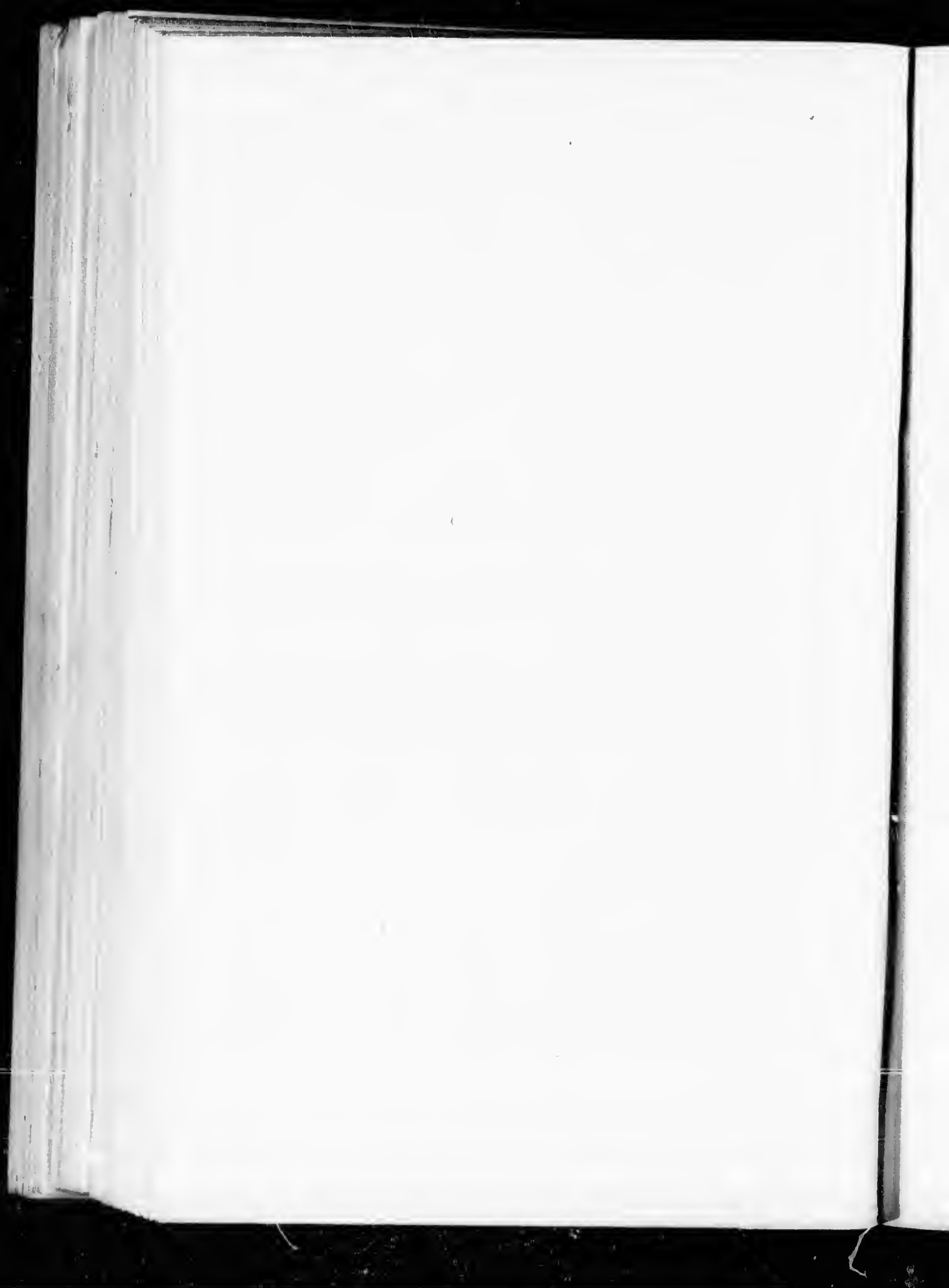
I do but express my willingness, though my heart beat tumultuously at the thought. Space forbids that I should linger over the many details of that most exciting day. Suffice it to say that at noon on the following day a little company gathered in that sad room; several of Euphan's near relatives, and on my side my grandfather and my Aunt Robina from the Byres. And though I say it, my kinsfolk—the dear old man, so true a gentleman in heart and life, and the sweet-faced woman, whom sorrow had sanctified beyond what is common—held their own, and won the respect and honour they deserved. So in such strange circumstances Euphan and I were married. I can scarcely now recall each detail of that hurried yet blessed ceremony. Only of one thing I am sure, that she and I were happy, and that when we rose from our knees we saw a great peace upon her father's face. As for Spence-Morham—God forgive me again, I say, my hardness of heart and bitter judging of him who was one of the best of men. As his voice was the first to wish us joy, so it was the last to bid us God-speed as we started on our brief and unexpected wedding journey.

Where did we go, think you? Only to the dear old Byres, and next day to midday dinner at the Cairncrosses, and so back to Edinburgh. For I saw that my darling's heart was yet in her father's house. Nor did I grudge that she should feel so. It turned out after all that there was no necessity for such haste, for Dr. Wingate, disappointing every known precedent in his disease, was afterwards restored to comparative health. In the early part of the summer he was able to visit Euphan and me in the house we had chosen on Highgate Hill, a visit which was only marred by his continual self-reproach because he had kept us apart so long. Of the blessedness of the home Euphan has made for me these many years it would not become me to write, nor do I feel any temptation thereto. Deep happiness, like all true and profound feeling, is silent, finding its expression in other channels than that of noisy speech.



XV

THE SORROW OF THE SEA



THE SORROW OF THE SEA

THERE was a Faulds laddie at Adam Fairweather's school with me whom I have not yet mentioned in these records. His name was Tam Muirhead, the son of one of the hill farmers, whose place adjoined Easterlaw. Tam Muirhead very early in life earned the title of the ne'er-do-weel. He was one of those careless, easy-going fellows, who are constantly in scrapes, and whose natural atmosphere is one of disturbance and unrest. He got more lickings than any of us, but they had very little effect. In the nesting-time he would play truant three days a week, and take his deserts like a man. Everybody liked him, even the very folk to whom his name was a terror. For he had a twinkle in his eye, and a turn of his lip when he smiled that wiled the heart out of folk before they knew it.

Consequently Tam Muirhead got off scot-free many a time when he had earned and deserved the portion of the ne'er-do-weel. He had plenty of brains, but would not apply himself—the very name of book was hateful to him. What suited him best, and transformed the earth into paradise, was to spend a whole morning on the mill dam on a raft he had constructed with his own hands, and having in tow a fleet of small craft of various sorts and sizes, also of his own building, and which he loved far better than any human thing. There was no doubt that Tam was a sailor from his birth.

One day Doctor Gourlay was called to Northend to see old Muirhead, who had a touch of rheumatism, and found the household in consternation because Tam had disappeared, and they had just learned that he had been up at the reservoir in the Moorfoot Hills, trying his craft on a bigger water, and, having made friends with some of the navvies working there, had spent the night in one of the cabins. What to do with the lad was the burden of his parents' concern.

'I'll tell you what, Northend,' said the doctor

wisely; 'you take my advice and apprentice Tam to the sea without delay. I'll write to my cousin Walter Fairbairn of the Sleuth Line if you like, and he'll make a merchantman of him. It's certain he'll never do any good here.'

But Northend was dour, and would not listen to the doctor's counsel, though in his heart he knew it to be wise. He had his mind made up that Tam should farm Northend after him, and so carry the name down in an unbroken line. So he held at him, and grew harsher and harsher to him, and less sympathetic. At last. in a fit of rage, because Tam had neglected to take in some rakings off the harvest-field, and allowed them to lie sodden in the rain, Northend made a bonfire of the raft and the boats. That very night happened what astonished few—indeed, most of us wondered that it had not happened before. Tam Muirhead ran away to sea. He was just fourteen, and for five years there was not a line or a sign of him, and most folk thought he had been drowned. But not he. I well remember a sunny May morning in the Free Kirk of Faulds, in the first year of Angus

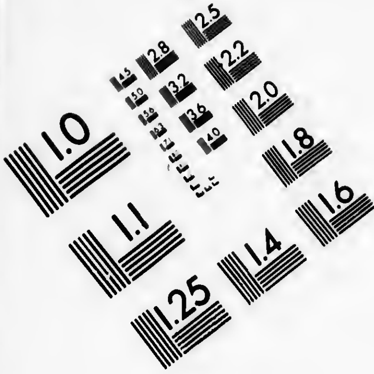
Fleming's treasured ministry. The service had begun—we were well on with the first psalm—when through the open door came the tall figure of a man in sailor's garb, carrying himself very jauntily and with a certain unconscious grace. And his face had lost none of its winsomeness, though it had taken on a man's strength of feature, and was dark-bronzed by many a tropical sun. Straight down the aisle he walked, and into the Northend pew, the door of which he opened, gave his father a little nod, and set himself quietly down. I have often recalled that scene, and I remember Northend's face yet—grim, set, immovable, but strangely flushed; and I saw his hand tremble on the book. So Tam Muirhead came back, well-doing and prosperous, to Faulds, and the tongues of the spiteful and uncharitable were silenced. The story of his adventures during the five years of his absence sounded like a fairy tale in our delighted ears. But it would serve no purpose here to set it down. What I have to tell concerns his later life.

Nobody knew what a blow it had been to Northend and his wife when their one child

turned his back upon his home. They had never spoken of it themselves nor suffered any one else to mention it to them, and for two years they abode alone together in their desolate house. Then they took home to dwell with them a niece called Effie Carmichael, who had been left orphaned and unprovided for.

Effie was one of the prettiest girls in the dale, and a great favourite with us all. She was so sweet-tempered and kindly dispositioned. It was a positive joy to her to do kind and helpful deeds. She was much thought of at Northend, where she filled the place of daughter of the house. This was the position of affairs when Tam Muirhead came home from his long wanderings, like one restored from the dead.

He had obtained leave of absence for six months from the merchantman to which he was bound, and I do not think there had ever been a happier six months in Northend. He made such a stir and bustle about the place, whistling and singing all day long, playing practical jokes sometimes which rather startled the quiet folks, who went through their mono-



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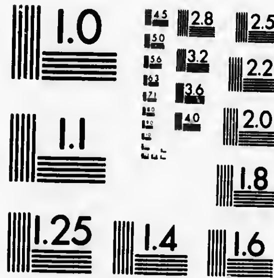

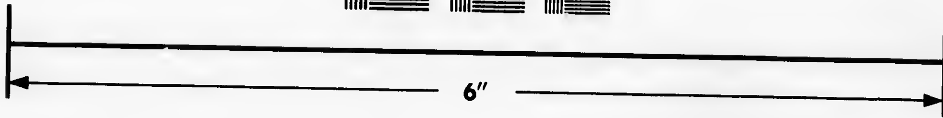

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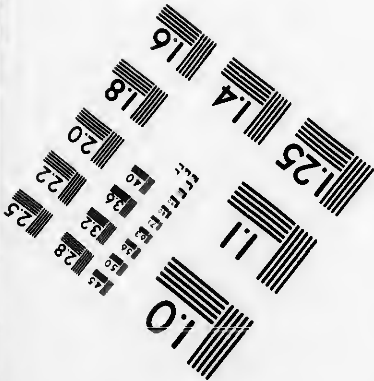

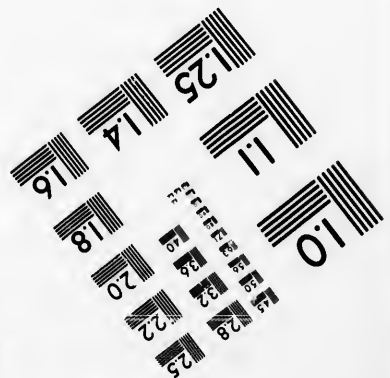

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tonous routine day after day, without much variation or change. The pride of his father and mother in him was a sight to see, and they were never tired of sitting listening to his recital of the experiences through which he had passed during his absence.

Sailors have ever the reputation of being impressionable where affairs of the heart are concerned, so that it was no wonder to anybody that Tam should succumb to the charms of bonnie Effie Carmichael. When his leave of absence expired everybody knew in the dale that they were an engaged pair, and that the marriage would take place when he returned from his next long voyage. They took tremendous voyages in those earlier days. It was quite a common thing for those who had relatives at sea not to look on their faces for two or three years. The third year was wearing to a close before Tam again returned to the home of his youth. By this time he had been promoted to the post of second mate, and so was in a position to marry, although most folk were of opinion that both Effie and he were young enough. Tam, however,

was so much in earnest and so persuasive that he managed to overcome all their scruples, and Effie and he were duly married in the best room at Northend, on an October afternoon three weeks before he went back to sea.

The event made no outward difference in Effie Carmichael's life. She remained as she had been, the daughter of the house, only bound to it by a closer and a dearer tie. And so matters continued for another five years, during which the sailor husband paid several visits to his old home. In that space of time two children were born to them, which helped to reconcile Effie somewhat to her husband's long absence. But she never grew quite accustomed to being a sailor's wife. When the east wind tore across the dale in its most furious mood, she would lie awake all night thinking of her husband on the sea, and praying God to guard him from all perils.

I was settled in London before the catastrophe happened which caused a shadow to fall darkly over the happy home at Northend. After his last voyage, Tam Muirhead had changed his

ship for one which would take shorter voyages and bring him oftener into port. It was therefore thought wise that Effie should move with her two little ones to London, in order to make a home for him when he should come ashore. I heard of this, but, occupied as I was with my own concerns, I was never able to see Effie in her London home, and it was not until I heard of the catastrophe which had overtaken her that I sought her out.

Just when she was expecting her husband home from his five months' voyage, news came that her uncle and aunt had died suddenly within a few days of each other, which of course was a sad blow to her, seeing that they had acted the part of father and mother to her in her orphan estate. But a worse thing was yet to befall her. Her husband's vessel was overdue, and there came no news of it or of him. The weary weeks and months stole on, bringing no relief to the agony of suspense from which poor Effie suffered. There was no doubt in the minds of the owners that the vessel had been lost with all hands ; but Effie refused to accept this melan-

choly conclusion, and kept hoping on against hope through many a weary year. The death of her uncle had left her fairly well provided for, although it required careful management to make the interest of her capital cover all her expenses.

I saw a good deal of her at the time when she was arranging these affairs. I advised her strongly to return to Scotland; but, still clinging to the idea that her husband would come back, she decided to remain in London, in the little house at Brixton which Tam had so proudly set in order for her before he went away on his fatal voyage.

After that I lost sight of Effie—or Mrs. Muirhead, as I ought to call her—until one night after I was happily settled in my own house on Highgate Hill she called and asked to see me. I was much surprised, and rather reproached myself for not having called upon her for so long. Any fear, however, that she might be in trouble was dispelled by her appearance. I was greatly struck when I entered the room where she was. Never in her best days had Effie

Carmichael looked so sweet and bonnie. She had discarded the widow's bonnet, and wore a hat which made a singularly becoming frame to her sweet face.

'How are you, Mrs. Muirhead?' I said, shaking hands with her heartily. 'I feel the qualms of self-reproach when I think how long it is since I have seen you. But you look so well that I need hardly ask how you are.'

'I am very well, thank you, Mr. Lyall,' she said, feeling some slight shyness of me, although in the old days we had been David and Effie to each other. 'You look very well yourself; how is Mrs. Lyall?'

'She is very well, and hopes to have the pleasure of seeing you in a few minutes. How are the boys?'

'The boys are quite well, thank you, Mr. Lyall. I hope you will excuse me intruding upon you here, but there was something I wanted to ask your advice upon, something I couldn't write, and I didn't know any one else to go to. I felt sure you would help me for auld lang syne.'

'Indeed, and that I will, Effie,' I replied, with fervour. 'Sit down and tell me what I can do for you.'

She took the chair I set for her, and then I saw that a strange shamefacedness seemed to overwhelm her. Her sweet face flushed, and it seemed as if her eyes could not meet mine.

'You remember how long it is since I was left a widow, Mr. Lyall,' she said at length.

'I could not give the exact date, of course,' I answered, 'but it must be getting on for five years.'

'It will be six in November since the *Octoroon* sailed on her last voyage. That's a long time, isn't it, David?'

'Indeed it is,' I answered, and some understanding of her meaning began to dawn upon me.

'I came to ask you,' she said, a little hurriedly, 'and yet I don't know how I am to put it into words, and I have no one else I can ask—do you think I dare marry again?'

'I am sure you could,' I answered, without a moment's hesitation. 'The *Octoroon* has never

been heard of; it is impossible that any could have survived for so long. You are contemplating a second marriage, then?'

'It has been offered to me, David,' she answered, a soft flush kindling anew in her cheek, 'by a man with whom I think I could be happy. I have been very lonely all these years, and now I feel sometimes that my boys would be the better of a firmer hand than mine.'

'Who is the gentleman?' I asked, with the keenest possible interest.

'He is the brother of the best friend I have had in London. He is an engineer in a big way of doing in Queen Victoria Street. Perhaps you know the name of his firm.'

When she mentioned it, I recognised it at once as one of the best known in the trade.

'I don't know what he has seen in me, David,' said poor Effie, with a mingling of humility and pride which was wholly winning. 'He is a rich man, and moves in society far above anything I have been used to. But he says if I will not marry him he will remain unmarried to his death. And I think,' she repeated, with an

indescribable tenderness in her voice, 'that I could be happy with him, because he is a good man, David, and a Christian, who serves his Maker in every action of his life.'

'If that be so, Effie,' I said heartily, 'I think the sooner you marry him the better, and I hope you will give my wife and me an invitation to the wedding.'

She smiled at that, but almost immediately the shadow crossed her face again.

'I should not wait any longer, because he has asked me many times during the last two years, only for the dread that is upon me sometimes for fear my husband should not be dead. Think what a terrible thing that would be for us all.'

'It would indeed, but nothing could be more unlikely, Mrs. Muirhead,' I said reassuringly. 'In fact, it is impossible after this lapse of time. So take my advice, and make yourself and that good man happy without delay.'

Then I took her to the drawing-room to Euphan, and, having explained the matter to her, got her to agree entirely. The result of all this was that the marriage took place within

three months, and the Walfords came to reside in an old-fashioned and picturesque house scarcely a stone's-throw from our own; and we were very friendly and neighbourly at all times, for John Walford was a man who commanded the respect and liking of all who came in contact with him.

There was no doubt about his affection for Effie, or of hers for him, and they were as happy as we were ourselves. I can say no more than that. In the course of the year a baby girl came to strengthen the bond between them, and I do not think you could have found in the whole of London a happier home than theirs.

Then a terrible thing happened, which has often risen up before me like a nightmare in my happiest moments, and of which I can scarcely write calmly even at this far-off date.

I had been kept late at the office one night, and was not making any haste to get home, my wife being on a visit to her father in Edinburgh. I had promised to look in for a smoke and a chat with John Walford before I went to bed, and I was just preparing to leave the house, when the

maid came to tell me that a man wished to see me.

'What does he look like?' I asked, perhaps just a trifle impatiently, for, since we had come to live at Highgate, we had been the prey of many needy Scotchmen, who had no shame in them, and who would take no rebuff.

'He looks like a sailor, sir,' the girl answered.

I had my lit cigar in my hand and my cap on my head when I went into my little study to interview the late caller. There was a very bright light in the room, and it fell full on the man's face, which I did not recognise, although there was something oddly familiar about it too.

'Don't you remember me, David?' he said, with a quizzical smile on his face, which brought home the whole awful truth to me. 'Tam Muirhead, who used to be at Northend.'

I gasped; my cigar fell from my mouth to the carpet, and I felt my face growing grey, and my tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of my mouth.

'You don't look very glad to see me,' he said. Well, perhaps that's not to be wondered at. I know I'm changed, but you won't wonder at that

when you have heard what I have gone through. I have been down at your office. I want to ask if you know anything about my wife. I have been at Brixton this afternoon, but I can't get any information about her at all. Has she gone back to Scotland?'

Even then I did not find my tongue. We stood regarding each other silently for a moment, I dumb with horror, he questioning, anxious, with a hungry and wistful look in his eyes which went to my heart.

'We all thought you were lost when the *Octoroon* went down,' I managed to falter at last. 'It's six years ago, lad; don't forget that.'

'Oh, I don't forget it,' he said gloomily. 'I see from your face that something has happened. Tell me it in a word. Is she married again?'

'Yes,' I groaned, 'she is.'

He put up his hand unsteadily and wiped the damp drops from his brow. I saw his mouth convulsively twitch, but he uttered no word, good or bad, nor did I for full five minutes.

'I can't blame her, I suppose,' he said at length. 'It is a long time, but somehow I thought she'd

keep true to my memory. I 'll sit down, David, if you don't mind, and hear what you have to tell me.'

I told him the truth in as few words as possible, embellishing nothing, but taking care to emphasise the great reluctance which Effie had felt at taking such a step. I felt it was the only crumb of comfort I could give the man, stricken to the earth as he was by such an awful blow.

'You 're not asking what became of me, David,' he said at length, with a kind of sickly smile. 'I 'll tell you as shortly as I can. We were wrecked off one of the remote South Sea Islands, and in some queer way or another the second mate and I were thrown up high and dry on the rocks. It would have been better for us if we had gone down with the rest. We found the island inhabited by a savage tribe, cannibals in fact, and we expected nothing less when they found us but that we should make a meal for them. However, they changed their minds about us and spared our lives. We have been on that island, David, living among those awful heathen, for five years. We got off in a French ship that

came to the island in distress, though it afterwards was able to continue its voyage. My mate died on board the Frenchman, and I only am alive to tell the tale.'

I listened to him with but a languid interest, my whole thoughts being with the home which was but a stone's-throw from my own door. Then I looked at the man who had it in his power to wreck that rare happiness. My soul was full of pity for him who had suffered so much and who had lost all. I saw him regarding me with a curious look in his eyes.

'Is she happy with the new man she has got?' he asked.

'Yes,' I answered, 'she is happier than most. He is a good man, and would make any woman happy.'

'And is he kind to the lads?' he asked then.

'Yes; they could not love him better, I believe, if he were their own father.'

'Are there any other children?'

'One, a baby girl, born four months ago.'

'And she's happy, you say?' He rose to his feet, and there was a look in his face which I

have never seen upon the face of mortal man before or since.

'Yes,' I answered sincerely. 'It would be a lie if I were to say anything else.'

'Then I'll go,' he said. 'I'll not even look upon her face, though you may believe I would fain have that poor satisfaction. You'll keep my secret, David; it will go down to the grave between you and me.'

I stood up, and my soul yearned over him. I could have cried out all that was in my heart, but something sealed my lips. I could only look at him steadfastly, but I think he understood that look.

'It's a bargain, David,' he said. 'Perhaps I'll write to you sometimes, perhaps I won't, but you'll never let her know of this night.'

He made towards the door as he spoke, and then I found my tongue.

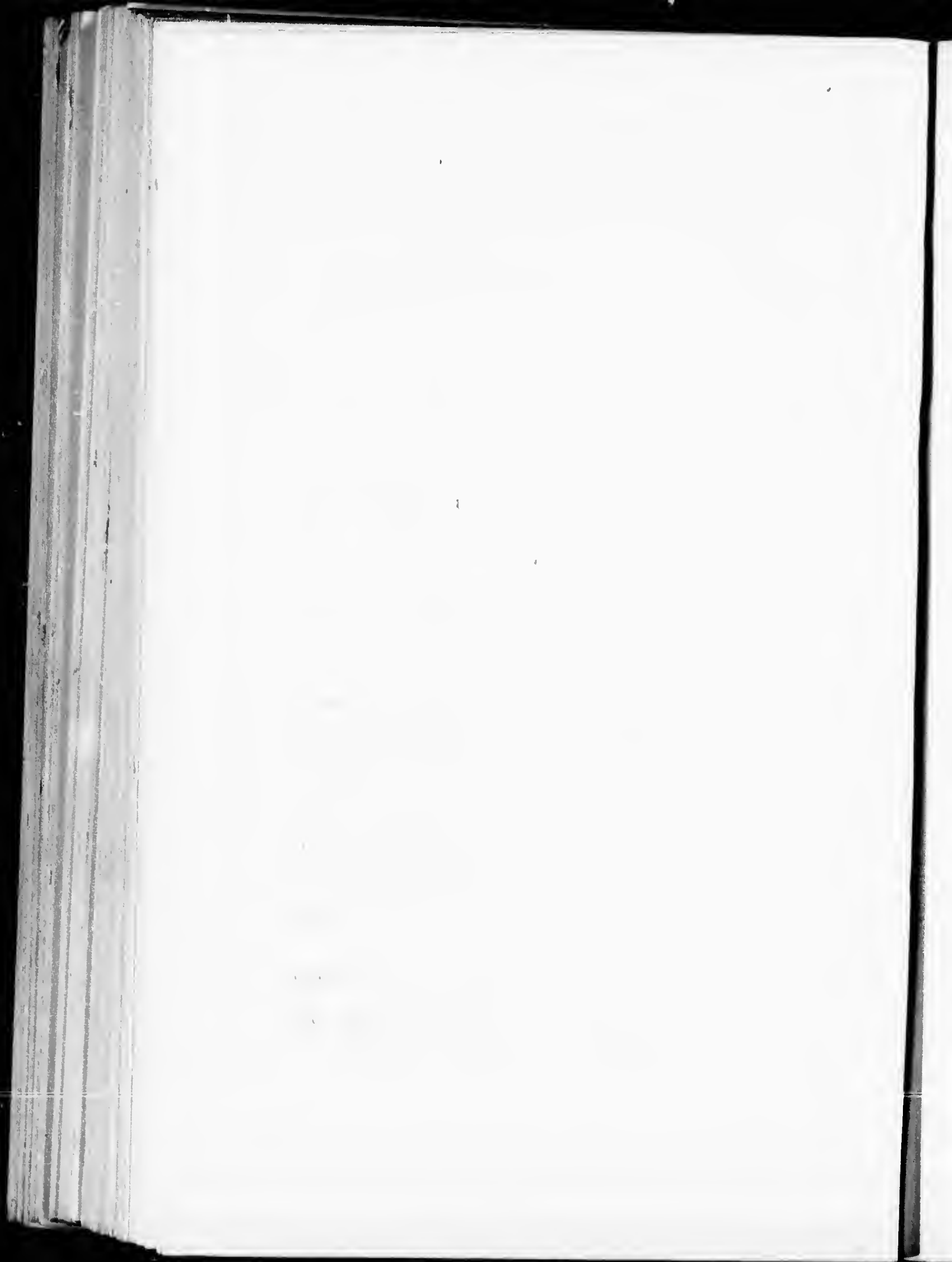
'But you can't go like that,' I cried sharply. 'What you propose to do is a great and noble deed, such as the world has seldom seen; but is it right that you should be wholly sacrificed—you who are innocent, and have suffered so much?'

Yes, it is right,' he answered. 'Whatever will spare her and make her happy is right in my eyes. So good-bye to you. You have promised that you will keep my secret to the grave.'

So saying, he passed out of my sight, and I was powerless to stay his going. From that day to this I have never set eyes upon the face of Tam Muirhead, nor has he ever written, as he said he might do. I have kept his secret to this day, not even telling my own wife, and it is only because all whom it might concern are removed by death or other circumstances from any communication with me, that I dare to set it down.

XVI

A HOUSE DIVIDED



A HOUSE DIVIDED

ONE night when I got home to my own house on Highgate Hill, I found my wife looking out for me with more than ordinary anxiety.

'Aren't you late, David?' she asked. 'I seem to have been watching for you so long.'

'Not more than ten minutes, Euphan,' I answered, as I lifted her bright face to mine. 'What has happened to-day to worry or vex you? You look as if all the cares of the nation rested on your shoulders.'

'There is somebody here, David,' she said mysteriously, with her finger on her lip. 'I have quite a little story to tell you. Just come in here, until you hear it all.'

'Hadn't we better go upstairs?' I suggested mildly. 'I want to get the grime washed off, and you can easily talk to me while I dress.'

She moved at once towards the staircase, and I followed her obediently.

'Who is the visitor, Euphan?' I asked. 'Is it anybody to whom I shall have to be particularly civil? because I don't think I feel inclined that way.'

'Now don't talk nonsense, David,' said Euphan reprovingly, and with that we came to my dressing-room and shut the door. Then Euphan, leaning against the wall, her sweet face very grave and earnest, asked me a question.

'Do you remember Peggy Maxwell who went out to India to marry Alec Rutherford?'

'Yes,' I answered readily enough. 'I remember Peggy quite well. A spoiled and petted monkey she was,' I added, perhaps with some unnecessary force.

'Well, she's here, in this house, David, in the spare bedroom, at this very moment.'

I paused in my hasty toilet and looked at her in amazement.

'What does she want?' I asked, man-like. 'It can't be more than a year since she went out to Assam. I remember hearing of the fuss there was about it.'

'It is fifteen months only,' said Euphan. 'It is quite a little tragedy. She has run away.'

'Run away,' I repeated blankly. 'Run away from Alec, you mean. Why, he was one of the decentest chaps I ever knew, and a sight too good for Peggy Maxwell.'

'That may be, but she's run away right enough, and taken all that frightful journey by herself. Aren't you sorry for her?'

'That depends,' I said cautiously. 'I think, upon consideration, that I am more sorry for Alec. But tell me all about it.'

'I don't think I can do that yet, David, for I don't quite know all about it myself,' said Euphan. 'I have only gathered from her that she was very miserable and homesick, and that somehow they did not manage to hit it off.'

'Have you ever felt that way since you came to Highgate, Euphan?' I asked. 'Have you ever wanted to run away?'

Euphan did not reply to me in words, but effectually put a stop to my teasing.

'Now you must be serious, David; I command you,' she said, in her most peremptory voice,

which for a person of Euphan's habitually gentle manner is very peremptory indeed.

'I believe that poor Peggy has made a mistake, and she feels herself very much aggrieved; and, after all, she is very lonely and miserable, and we must befriend her as much as possible.'

'Oh yes,' I said; 'I have no objection to that, only I hope she won't ask my opinion and advice, Euphan, for I am afraid I am entirely on Alec's side. What was the row about, anyhow?'

'Well, I think she felt the whole life out there very trying, David, and you know how she has been brought up, indulged in every whim. She knew nothing about making the best of things, and perhaps Alec did not take just the right way with her. You know how plain and blunt-spoken he is, and somehow they seemed to drift apart.'

'Still, in most married lives it takes a good deal of drifting to bring matters to such a crisis,' I said. 'Did anything special happen to make her take such a serious step?'

'If anything special did happen, she has not told me, David; only I can see that they have

not been getting on well for a long time. She has her mind made up on two points—one is that she will not go back to India, and the other that her people at home are not to be told of the step she has taken.'

'I am not sure but what it is our duty, Euphan, to let her people at home know what has happened. What does she propose to do?'

'To get something to do in London, I believe. She has spoken already of becoming a secretary or a daily governess. You know she is very accomplished, and so pretty, that I am sure people will do anything for her.'

'I don't think that good looks in a governess are always considered a qualification,' I observed discouragingly. 'In a secretary they may be a distinct advantage, especially if the employer be of the male persuasion.'

At this Euphan looked distinctly indignant.

'I am disappointed in you, David, and I don't think I can talk any more to you.'

When I saw that she was so much concerned, I laid aside my unbecoming levity, and tried to discuss seriously the position and prospects of

Peggy Maxwell, otherwise Mrs. Alec Rutherford. I did not see her that night. She did not come down to dinner. My private opinion was that she was not in a hurry to meet me. She breakfasted in her own room next morning, and I did not see her until the following evening.

She was in the drawing-room alone when I entered it, and I could do nothing but shake hands with her cordially and say I was glad to see her. She had been the prettiest girl in the Dale, and had lost none of her looks. She was certainly a most attractive and winning figure, although there was a peevish and discontented look on her face which at times detracted from its beauty.

'Mrs. Lyall has been so kind to me,' she said falteringly. 'I shall never forget it.'

'My wife is kind to everybody,' I answered rather lamely, 'and of course we are very glad to have you here. At the same time, I don't forget that your husband was a chum of mine, and that whatever your differences may have been, he deserves some consideration at my hands. I cabled to Gartacherra to-day.'

She flushed at that, a hot flush of anger and indignation, but I saw that she feared to speak a word.

'It was quite unnecessary,' she said at length, with a certain lofty unconcern. 'It is a matter of no moment to Alec Rutherford what becomes of me.'

'That may be,' I said coolly, 'but he is your husband, and he has certain rights, which even you cannot set aside. But don't let 's fall out about it, Peggy. We 'll have a good talk over it after dinner, and see what conclusion we can come to. Two heads are better than one; and although you and Euphan have laid yours together, there are times when a mere man may happen to make a useful suggestion.'

This disarmed her, and she did not say another word; but I saw her regarding me queerly from time to time during the progress of dinner. I knew that she was wondering how far I was likely to befriend her, or whether I had gone entirely over to the enemy's side.

The talk we had after dinner was not very satisfactorv. Mrs. Rutherford was in a highly

wrought nervous condition, almost bordering on hysteria, and the account she gave of the differences which had led up to the present rather desperate state of affairs was a trifle incoherent. So far as I could gather, the record was one of absolute trifles, some of them so infinitesimal that I wondered she could bear to mention them. I obtained a new insight that night into the feminine mind, and as I looked at the fair, calm face of my Euphan, I thanked God as I never had yet done, that my wife was a woman of common-sense and sound judgment. I am certain that women of Peggy Maxwell's type drive many men to destruction.

Now though Alec Rutherford was as fine a chap as ever breathed, he was a trifle dour, I knew, and, once estranged, would be hard to win again. Therefore as I listened, and thought of the humiliation and public shame his wife had brought on him, by running back to England during one of his temporary business absences, I felt distinctly dubious as to the result. She was very determined, so far as I could gather from that and subsequent talks I had with her.

There was not a single tender or relenting thought in her heart, and I saw that the best and wisest course would be to allow her to have her wilful way. She stayed with us for a week or two, and then, having been successful in obtaining occupation as a daily governess, she removed to the old rooms that I had occupied in the house of Mrs. Syme at Canonbury, and there began her solitary life. In the course of three months I heard from Alec, and the letter filled me with a kind of dismay. The few remarks he made about his wife were very curt and cool. They might have been written by a man with a heart as hard as the nether millstone towards her.

I showed it to Euphan, and I saw that she felt it a good deal.

'One would never think, reading that letter,' she said, as she indignantly threw it on the table, 'that they had ever been husband and wife, or cared for each other at all. O David, is there nothing we can do to show that unhappy pair what they are doing?'

'No, there is nothing,' I answered. 'There are some of the affairs of life which may justify a

little friendly interference, now and again, but affairs matrimonial, never. Leave them alone, Euphan, that 's my advice to you.'

'But, David, what is poor Peggy to do? She can't go on all her days living at Mrs. Syme's and teaching for her living? It will kill her, and she's only twenty-six. Besides, I know she's miserable already.'

'She has two courses open to her, Euphan. She can either go to her own people, or back to her husband. I have no doubt he will take her back if she cares to ask him.'

'She'll never do that, David; she's got too much pride,' cried Euphan.

'Oh, well then, her pride must just support her,' I answered. 'Don't you make yourself miserable about it, my dear; it isn't worth your or anybody's while.' But though I spoke thus callously to Euphan, I was often troubled in mind about the unfortunate difference between that young pair, who had everything that the world could give, but through some strange twist in their natures, seemed unable to live at peace with one another.

One afternoon when I came home an hour or two earlier than usual, I found Euphan writing as if for dear life at the desk in my study. As I peeped in at the door, I saw something in her face which I could not quite make out. I thought I had never seen her look so sweet and winsome. There was a soft and indescribable tenderness on every feature which moved me strangely. I almost felt as if I were intruding, and would have slipped away had she not caught sight of me.

'Come in, David,' she said, stretching out her hand to me with her loveliest smile. 'Only you must not stay long, because I have a letter to write, a most important letter, which must catch the Indian mail. You know it leaves to-night at six o'clock.'

'Oh,' I said, as I put my arm about her. 'Has Peggy capitulated?'

She put her hand on my lips, and laying her soft cheek to mine, whispered something in my ear.

'God help her, poor thing!' I said fervently enough. 'You are wise to write. I will not ask

what you say to him Euphan, but make it strong, and as eloquent as you can.'

So I left her to finish her letter. She did not show it to me, nor did I ask to see it. But years after, on the verandah of an Indian bungalow, Alec Rutherford took that letter from his pocket-book and gave it to me to read, handling it tenderly and reverently as if it had been a sacred thing.

That was in the month of August, just after we had come back from our holiday in the North.

One night in October, as we sat together by our happy hearth, I reading to Euphan from the pages of the first book Wardrop had given to the world, there came a great loud ringing at the bell. We both looked at each other, expecting we knew not what, and somehow neither of us felt in the least surprised when Alec Rutherford walked in. I rose up and gripped him by the hand silently, but he turned from me to Euphan, and I shall never forget the look upon his face.

'May God bless you!' he said in that blunt, direct way which I remembered so well, and

which many misunderstood. 'Now will you take me to Peggy?'

I did not offer to accompany them, but sat brooding upon the mercies of my life, and asking what I had done to be blessed as I was in my home and wife.

About ten o'clock Euphan returned in the carriage alone. I heard the wheels on the avenue, and was at the open door to receive her. I saw that she was overwrought, and the moment we were within the house she threw herself sobbing on my breast.

'It is all right, David,' she was able to tell me at last. 'I don't think they will ever misunderstand each other again.'

The firstborn son of Alec and Peggy Rutherford saw the light under a foggy London sky in one of honest Jean Syme's upper rooms, and six weeks later Euphan and I saw the family off at Southampton, bound for Calcutta. So far as I am aware, Peggy Maxwell's own folk never knew of her escapade, or dreamed that she had lived seven months in London, solitary save for us. She has been in London many a time since then, but that

time is never mentioned between us. There are some things, after all, which are best forgotten; and the one aim of Alec Rutherford and Peggy his wife has been to bury that old estrangement which so nearly made shipwreck of their lives.

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