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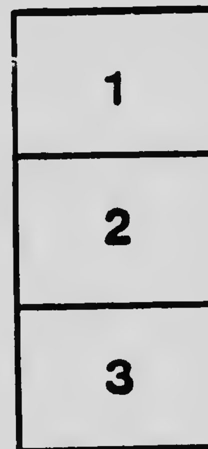

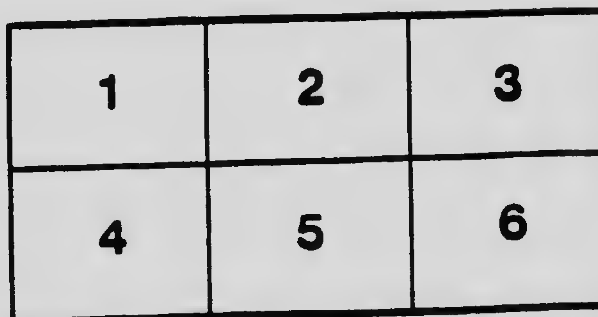

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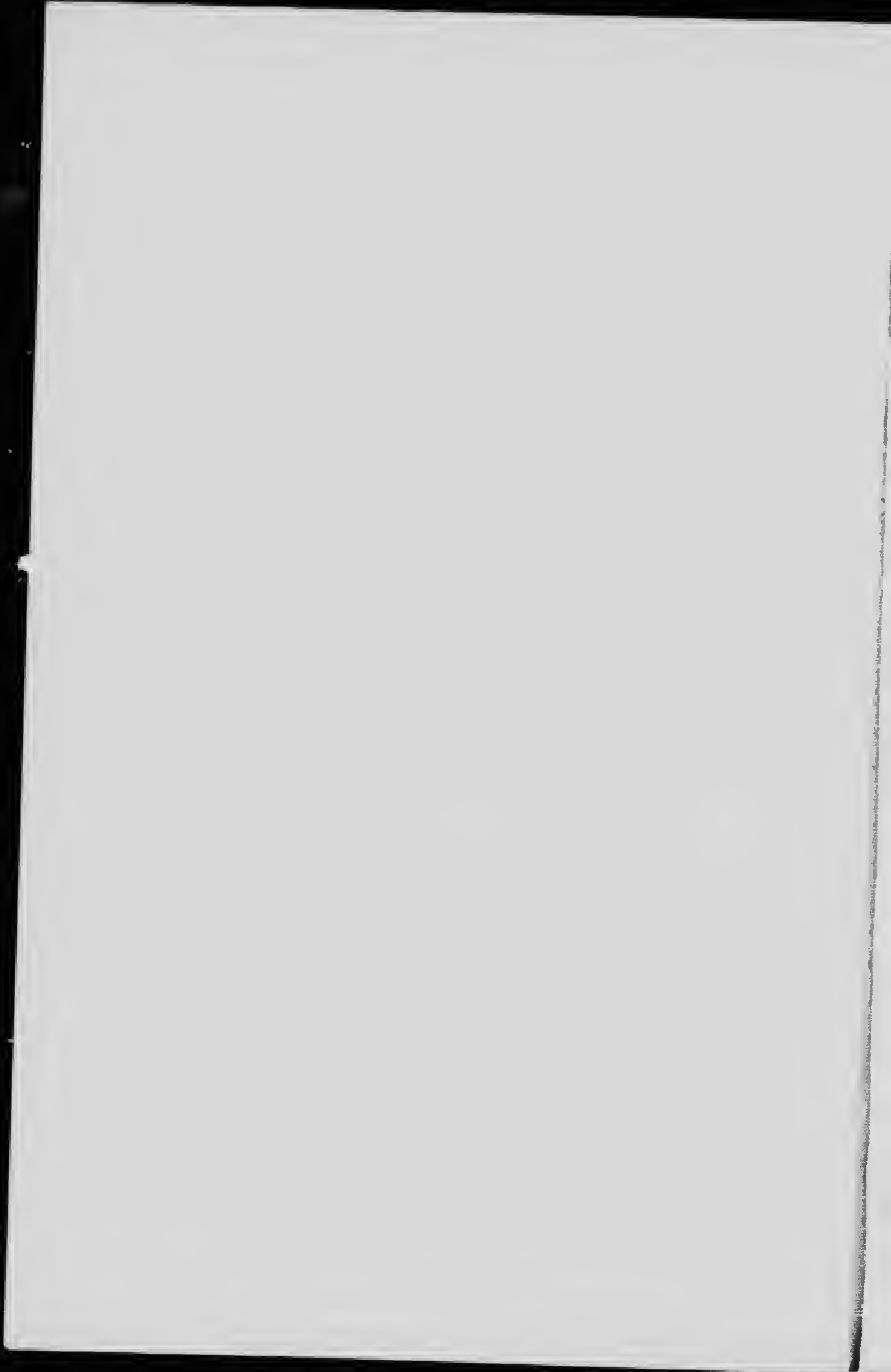

PROFIT AND LOSS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GOD'S PRISONER
RISING FORTUNES
OUR LADY OF DELIVERANCE
A PRINCESS OF VASCOVY
JOHN OF GERISAU
UNDER THE IRON FLAIL
BONDMAN FREE
MR. JOSEPH SCORER
BARBE OF GRAND BAYOU
A WEAVER OF WEBS
HEARTS IN EXILE
THE GATE OF THE DESERT
WHITE FIRE
GIANT CIRCUMSTANCE

PROFIT AND LOSS

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

AUTHOR OF "THE GATE OF THE DESERT," ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN PHOTOGRAVURE BY
HAROLD COPPING

WILLIAM BRIGGS
TORONTO

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TO

THE BEST GIFT OF MY LIFE

MY WIFE

IN ALL AFFECTION I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK

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Profit ?—Loss ?
Who shall declare this good—that ill ?—
When good and ill so intertwine
But to fulfil the vast design
Of an Omniscient Will ?—
When seeming gain but turns to loss,—
When earthly treasure proves but dross,—
And what seemed loss but turns again
To high, eternal gain ?

Wisest the man who does his best,
And leaves the rest
To Him who counts not deeds alone,
But sees the root, the flower, the fruit,
And calls them one.

PROFIT AND LOSS

CHAPTER I

THE PRICE OF A MAN

To get back to the very beginning would be a work of extreme difficulty. In these times we judge a man as we find him, and make small allowance for remote causes and hidden factors. We do not, indeed, as a rule trouble to ask why a man is what he is, unless he is a criminal lunatic or a very wealthy man. In the former case we hark back to the last lunatic in the family and say "heredity," and are satisfied. In the latter case we ask how he made his money, with a charitable suspicion that it may probably be as well not to enquire too closely into his first few steps up the slippery ladder.

Most men doubtless carry in themselves some of the faults of their forbears; some few even retain some of their virtues. As a faithful observer, I am bound to say that I think the virtues flourish most visibly in the female branches of most families. Possibly that is because I am only a man, and woman, *quâ* woman, as the pedants say, is to every man more or less of a sealed book, and therefore a delightful mystery endowable with all the excellences.

And again, the battle of life, as fought now-a-days, is mostly a somewhat ignoble strife, not, as a rule, calculated to call into action the nobler attributes of a man. And so these are kept in the rear, like the ambulance wagons, and only put in an appearance when absolutely needed. When the fight is going all our own way the baggage is left behind. When the

check comes and we fall back, wounded maybe, then the wagons and the saving virtues come into operation.

All this is *àpropos* of the fact that George Barty, cashier in Frazer, Rae, and Burney's bank in Lombard street, sat stabbing the blotting pad, inside his little partition one afternoon, with vicious jabs of his pen, as though it represented his worst enemy, say himself. The blots he made, and stared gloomily at, were about the colour of the future which faced him. The holes might represent possible loopholes of escape. They were black round the edges and shady underneath.

"What a fool I've been!" he said to himself. It is a very fortunate man, or a still greater fool, who has never had to say the same at least once in his lifetime.

In the old times the Bartys of Cheshire had ruffled it with the best, and won and lost money, lands, and houses over the green cloth with the imperturbable equanimity and selfishness of the times. But the end was ruin. George's grandfather lost the last stick, stone, and guinea the family possessed, and then blew his brains out—blew a hole in his head, at all events, large enough to let the life out—a service to his family which came too late to be of any practical advantage to them, and Cheshire knew the Bartys no more.

His son, father of the man whom we have seen jabbing holes in his blotting pad and calling himself by his right name, came to London, and having constantly before him so vivid an illustration of the futility of backing himself against chance, lived a quiet and abstemious life as clerk, and finally head cashier, in Frazer, Rae, and Burney's bank. His son, the present man, had been admitted to a stool in the bank before his father died, leaving a good record of faithful

service which helped the boy along. At thirty he was cashier. He had been married five years, and his wife, Margaret Irvine, of Largs, if she came of no particular family and brought him no dowry, possessed very considerable natural endowments which more than compensated for all deficiencies in those other matters.

He had, at the time when he was perforating his blotting pad, one daughter Margaret, aged three, and one son George, aged two. His salary was £300 a year, and that, in the hands of such a wife, meant as bright and comfortable a home as any man could possibly have.

If only he could have been content with it, and the slow sure prospect ahead. But the blood of the old Bartys was in him.

Next door to him at Highbury lived for a time one James Craven, a young stockbroker, just begun business on his own account after the usual bareheaded servitude with a big firm in Throgmorton Street, where he had learned many things, and among others to look first after himself. He was a very decent fellow, however, and he did his best to keep Barty out of it.

They travelled to the city together every morning, and sometimes smoked a pipe together of an evening.

"Take my advice, old man, and keep clear of it all. You outsiders are no use except to be gobbled up." If he said it once he said it dozens of times.

But Barty, living in an atmosphere of money, could no more keep clear of it than a cat in a dairy could keep clear of cream. Within six months of starting business on his own account, Craven had done the immense disservice to his fellows of making for himself a fortune by a series of audaciously happy flukes—

strokes, he called them—in stocks. Six months before, he was running bare-headed about Throgmorton Street with the rest, and was curtly ordered about by his employers by his surname. Now he drove down occasionally in his brougham, just to take a look at the old place and to see how the other bare-headed young men were getting along, and to afford them the opportunity of seeing for themselves how he had got on. The rest of his time he spent yachting and travelling and generally enjoying himself. And if the old firm met him and suggested an investment, he invariably replied with a laugh that he was "not on." If there was one thing he had learned it was when not to be on. Having picked his chestnuts out of the fire he had no slightest intention of throwing them back there. But then, you see, he had been on the Stock Exchange himself.

Along with a great many others, George Barty believed he had as much brains as Jim Craven. It would pay the gentlemen of the Stock Exchange to permit a young man like that to make a snug little fortune every few years, out of the outsiders of course, just as ground-bait for the rest.

That fortunate youth's good fortune ruined hundreds who believed, like Barty, that they had as much brains as he had. I know nothing about their brains or his. What I do know is that the Stock Exchange men were a great deal the better off for their belief, and they themselves a great deal worse off. They had the experience and the others had their money—in some cases. In others, Barty's to wit among many more, the Stock Exchange men had their money only in the sense of having won it. When it came to the gathering in of the fleeces, the lambs—curious offspring of bulls and bears—had nothing to offer

beyond a few straggly hairs, which went but a very small way towards satisfying the demands of the ravening ones.

Craven was somewhere at the other side of the globe, or he might have given his old friend a helping hand, in spite of the fact that his advice had been consistently ignored. But he was not available, and facts are facts, and figures are brutal things when they are against you—especially on the Stock Exchange, which is an institution based on prompt settlements, quick returns, each man for himself, and death to the defaulter. It was a crooked enough business when straightened out. The figures showed a balance against George Barty of something over £900, and the simple fact was that he had no means of paying it. What savings he had had, and the little his father had left him, had been used in playing the game. His present assets were himself, his wife, his two children, and his furniture; and his creditors desired none of these things. They wanted cash. No wonder he looked worn and haggard, and called himself by his right name at last.

Bankruptcy gibbered up at him out of every hole he jabbed in his blotting pad. It meant the loss of his place and probably the impossibility of getting another. It meant——

A rap on the counter recalled him to his work—a cheque for £950, payable to bearer, drawn by Lady Sarah Gwynne—presenter, a young man with a prominent nose and beady black eyes. Barty wondered vaguely if Lady Sarah had been getting into the hands of the Hebrews.

Just then the front door swung wide again to admit young Frazer Burney, the son of the house. Barty got the impression of a slight start on his part as his eye

fell on the presenter of Lady Sarah's cheque. He put two and two together, as he thought, and wished he also had a wealthy spinster god-mother to help him out of his holes, though young Burney's were not the same kind of holes as his own, more after the fashion of his ancestors' of Cheshire.

He scored out Lady Sarah's signature and asked the young man with the nose how he would take it. The young man winked and replied, with great good humour, that he didn't care a twopenny rap how he took it so long as he got it, and Barty paid him as short as he could make it.

Two days later, as luck would have it, Lady Sarah, being about to start for the Riviera, sent to the bank for her pass-book, which she was in the habit of conscientiously looking over once a year or so. Then followed a hasty visit from herself and an interview with Mr Burney in his private room, which left the old man staring with a much disturbed face at that £950 cheque. For Lady Sarah disowned it *in toto*, and with considerable warmth, and when Lady Sarah got excited her tongue played like a snake's.

Finally he sent for George Barty, into whose hands the cheque had come in the first place, and asked him if he had any recollection of the party who received the money. Barty remembered the young man perfectly, his nose, his eyes and his manner. When he had withdrawn, John Burney sat down at his desk and gloomily eyed the £950 cheque again. He went heavily for the rest of the day, and young Frazer Burney, from his distant place in the bank, regarded him with sulky apprehension.

His father barely spoke to him during dinner, and confined the few remarks he had to make to Julia Cleeve, his ward, the only other member of the Burney household,

Julia received his remarks either with a vacant stare or an ill-timed giggle. She was a big, stout girl, with no pretensions to good looks, and still less to brains, but she had a very large fortune and so was a person of consideration.

When Julia had giggled herself out of the room, John Burney drank two glasses of port and bade his son follow him to his study—a room with double doors, where the most private transactions were possible.

Arrived there and the doors locked, he drew from his pocket the £950 cheque which purported to have been drawn by Lady Sarah Gwynne, laid it on the table, and said, in a voice which was to his face as an icicle to Vesuvius in full blast,—

"What do you know about that?"

Frazer Burney knitted his jaw still tighter and looked stonily at the toes of his shiny shoes.

"You fool! You utter, idiotic fool!" stormed Vesuvius, still in a whisper, but red hot lava this time. "Blasting your own future and risking mine. My God! Why was I ever cursed with such a thing for a son?"

"I'm sorry——"

"Sorry!!!"—and Vesuvius choked, and came nearer to apoplexy than he had ever been in his life, at the disparity between the apology and the offence.

"I had to pay or be posted," growled the young man, while the elder was still wrestling with his air tubes, "and I knew you wouldn't."

"And—you thought you'd force my hand in this way!"

That was so obvious that the young man did not deem it necessary to reply.

"Very well," said Mr. Burney. "You know the penalty, I presume. Ten years across seas will be about the size of it. You will be thirty-three when

you come out and will have to work for your living."

The young man looked rather startled.

"Thought I'd pay and say no more about it, did you?" said his father, with a grating laugh. "Well, you're mistaken. It's too late. This breaks me as well as you, you fool! My only chance of pulling through was Julia's money. Even she can't marry a—convict. Lady Sarah will cut you out of her will the moment she hears of it. She's very angry about this matter, and vows if I don't follow it up she will—for the bank's sake. Oh, you've cooked the goose nicely all round, you idiot! When you come out you can go to stone-breaking on the roads. It's about all you're good for."

"How the deuce should I know——?" began his son.

"You're old enough to know how to keep out of jail."

"Well, if it comes to that, you're old enough to know how to keep out of bankruptcy——"

"Ay, that comes well from you—" and the old man fell silent and very thoughtful, and the young one watched him furtively out of the corners of his eyes. It was a long time before the old man spoke, and then it was to say musingly—"He might. There's no telling,"—which, having apparently reference to nothing that had gone before, caused the young man to wonder hopefully if the old one's mind had given way.

"Now, listen to me," said John Burney, after another long muse. "It would serve you right to let you suffer all the consequences of your folly. But that means my suffering too. . . . On the understanding that you marry Julia at once, and put her money into my charge, I will do my best to get you out of this hole."

"Julia's a fool—and not even a pretty one."

"Well, there'll be a pair of you and probably more to follow. But I never heard that she was a forger, and she's got the money."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you may go to—your own place. You know what you have to expect."

"How'll you do it?"

"Barty is in trouble too—financially. He's not such a fool as to forge or steal. I saw it by his face and made my own enquiries. He's got a wife and a couple of children. If he goes smash it'll be bad for them all round. He couldn't get another place, readily, if at all. I shall offer him £5,000 to take this"—nodding at the cheque—"on himself."——

"He won't do it."

"He may—for £5,000. It's a big price to pay, but it's nothing compared with the alternative. . . . . In his place I'm inclined to think I would. The other means starvation for them all. He'd find it difficult to get a place. This will give his wife and children a certain income till he comes out, and then he will have £5,000 to start on in Australia. He'll probably die a millionaire—if he keeps straight."

"Well, . . . if you can bring him to it, I agree," said the young man sulkily at last.

"We'll put it into writing. I'm taking risks and I intend to keep the whip hand."

The following evening George Barty sat in the chair young Frazer Burney had occupied the night before, and waited for something the head of the firm had told him he wished to say to him. Mr. Burney sat in his own arm chair and did not find it easy to begin. He had been in many a strange transaction and driven

many a hard bargain, but he had never bought a man's honour before—that is to say, not in this open and cold-blooded way.

"Barty," he began, "I'm sorry to hear you're in difficulties——"

Barty had expected that. On the whole it was almost a relief to face the matter in this blunt fashion. It had to come sooner or later, and the sooner it was faced the sooner it would be over. What might lie beyond he could not say, and was sick of trying to think.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly. "It's true. I've been a fool."

"Expected to make a fortune, I suppose?"

"Well, I hoped so."

"And instead—you've ruined yourself."

"I'm afraid so, unless you——"

"And your wife and children?"

"That's the part that hurts. For myself I would not care——"

"If you mean that," struck in the old man, like the stroke of an axe, "I've got something to say to you. But first I require your word of honour that no word of what I say shall pass your lips to any human being —not even your wife."

"I promise," said Barty, with a look of fresh interest.

"It is perhaps of no great moment, for my word would always weigh more than yours. Still, I have your promise, and I will rely on it. There has been a forgery committed at the bank. No"—in answer to a quick look from Barty—"I am not going into any particulars. But there is the fact—a forgery has been committed, and for reasons of my own I want it covered up. In the position in which matters are, that can only be done by some one other than the actual offender assuming the responsibility and suffer-

ing the penalty. I am prepared to pay £5,000 for the sacrifice, and will pledge myself to do everything in my power in mitigation of penalty."

He had been looking steadily into the fire, and he spoke slowly and distinctly. Barty had never taken his eyes off his face. When he had done speaking, a silence fell, and both men sat looking steadily into the grate. Both were thinking deeply. The one passing the pros and cons of the strange proposition in rapid review. The other pondering his next words. It was he who spoke first. Barty was already in Australia, a free man with £5,000 at his disposal and fortune ahead of him.

"In your present circumstances," said the banker, "you would have very great difficulty in getting another position. In fact I doubt if you would get one. Meanwhile your wife and children must suffer. That state of suffering might be prolonged for a very long time. In the other case the suffering would be your own. It would be severe, no doubt, but there would be a definite term. Five years probably, reducible by good behaviour. Then a free future with capital enough to make a good start in a new country. There is the smirch, of course, but—I have reckoned for that in the price."

The effect on his wife—on himself, innocent of the crime, but guilty of possibly a greater in selling himself for a price—but then it was only himself who would suffer. Was it ?—He knew better. Anyway, by the sale he purchased comfort for the wife and children. Would she care for comfort at such a price ? He doubted it. If he could only have discussed it with her and taken her into his confidence. But that was barred. And, besides, he did not need to consult her to know what her answer would be. If he went, he

went as a guilty man in her eyes. Perhaps, in the future years, he could recover the lost place. Thoughts thronged in on him. He could not deal with them all.

"I must have a day to think it over," he said at last. "Is there no middle way? Suppose I assume the responsibility and disappear?"

"No. It must be final. You might crop up, you might be caught. If you pay the price the matter is wiped out. I pay your price and *that* is wiped out. What is your deficiency on the gamble?"

"Nine hundred."

"I will clear that off too so that the £5,000 will be clear. How long do you want to think it over?"

"Till to-morrow."

"It is now nine o'clock. I must know before midnight. If I am not in a position to-morrow morning to tell the—the person interested in the matter of the forgery that I have got to the bottom of it, it will be in the hands of the police, and then it will be too late. I know all I am asking, but the price is a big one, and your position is about as bad as it can be. No bank would take you."

Barty knew it. Had he not been facing the position, night after night, when he should have been sleeping, for many nights past—till he was so sick of himself and the world in general that, if only he could have seen Margaret and the children provided for in some miraculous way, he would have welcomed an endless sleep as the very greatest boon that could come to him?

He was sick to death of it all. His future had of late been akin to that of the wretch in the condemned cell—a daily-contracting horizon, a horror to go through, and then—blank. If he had carried an insurance of £5,000, under any policy that would not

have been invalidated by self-destruction, he would hardly have hesitated. To secure Meg and the children, the sacrifice of himself would have seemed a small one. Give him all the credit you can, and pray God you never have to face a like situation.

In his thoughts he had been ready to sacrifice his life at any moment if only he could secure their future by so doing. And here he was offered all he wanted for them, plus his life, minus only his honour.

Some men—very well, let us say most men—you yourself, for instance—would doubtless have sacrificed anything sooner than honour. This was a very ordinary kind of man. He is not the man we shall have chiefly to deal with. But this was the beginning of things so far as we are concerned, and it is necessary that you should understand him. He was as unobtrusively selfish as most men are. Not militantly so, but life hitherto had been too fairly smooth and comfortable for him to have lost all thought of self in his thought for others. That comes through tribulation. It takes the grinding of the mills and the blast of the furnace to purge the dross out of a man. Without doubt he believed he was doing a not ignoble thing in thus sacrificing himself for the material welfare of those dependent on him. Quite as surely at bottom was the thought of himself, after it was all over, a free man in Australia with £5,000 behind him and fortune in front.

The incongruous recollection of a picture he had once seen, in which the Devil was depicted playing a game of chess for a man's soul, came into his mind. Mr. Burney, with his red face and comfortable figure, was about as little like the Devil in the picture as well could be, but that was the rôle he was playing, and he played it well. He was playing for

high stakes, and George Barty's soul was not within the range of his practical consideration. He had no use for it.

"You will have the consciousness within you of your own innocence," he said quietly, "and I will keep an eye on your wife and children, nominally for your father's sake. We had a very high esteem for him. With £5,000 in a country like Australia your chances will be great. You will probably make a fortune. You can send for them the moment you are free——" and so on, and so on.

"How do you propose to pay?" jerked out Barty.

"The money is here. On your signing me a letter which I will dictate, it is yours"

"Give me an hour," said Barty.

"Certainly. There are cigars. Here is brandy, soda. Help yourself. I will see that you are not disturbed."

During the hour he spent by himself in Mr. Burney's study, George Barty's thoughts were occupied wholly with the question of ways and means. The other question was already fully decided in his own mind. All he had to do was to see how the compact was to be carried out in such a way as to secure Meg and the children while he was in retirement. And rack his brains as he might, and did, he could not see how the matter was to be secured to his mind, without the admission of some outsider who should act for him on behalf of his family.

At the end of the hour Mr. Burney quietly entered the room.

"Well?" he asked.

"I am prepared to accept your offer, on condition that I may explain the whole matter to one man who will act for me in my absence. You must see that, under the circumstances, it will be impossible for me to arrange things properly myself."

"Then I'm afraid that ends it. . . . Disclosure to a third party involves risk all round. . . . It is an absolutely illegal thing I have proposed, as you know. . . . That means risk to myself also." . . . And after a long pause—"Who is your man?"

"John Sinclair, the accountant."

Burney nodded and relapsed into thoughtfulness.

"How do you know him?" he asked presently.

"We were at school together. His father and mine were close friends. I would trust him with my soul."

"He will do his best to dissuade you."

"I have decided, subject to his knowing."

Mr. Burney pondered long, with indrawn lips and knitted brows. He would have liked it all his own way, but he saw that that was impossible. He knew too that Barty was perfectly right from his own point of view. He would have done the same himself in like circumstances. And he did not know any other man to whom he could turn. It was introducing an element of risk, as he had said. But there was little to be gained in this world without risk.

"I have the highest respect for Sinclair," he said at last. "And he has done a good deal of work for us. When will you see him?"

"As soon as I have the money."

"I will go with you."

"That would perhaps be as well. Now—the paper you wished signed."

"Here is paper—ink. Write as I dictate . . . " and Barty wrote: "Lest suspicion should fall on any innocent person, I, George Barty, do hereby accept sole responsibility in connection with the forging and uttering of a cheque for £950 purporting to be drawn by Lady Sarah Gwynne upon her own account, and I am prepared to accept the penalty therefor."

"That all?" asked Barty, as Mr. Burney stopped.

"That is all. I don't think I could have put it more delicately. Stay—don't sign it yet. If you open that top drawer you will find £6,000 in notes. You will help yourself to them after signing the letter. It is better I should not be here."

Barty smiled—a twisted smile, and Burney left the room.

He came in again in five minutes, and Barty handed him the letter signed. "And now for Sinclair," he said, and the two men left the house together.

John Sinclair lived in Hampstead. They took a cab and drove there at once, and neither spoke during the journey. It was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached his house, and there were lights in the upper windows.

"See if he is alone," said Mr. Burney, and Barty went up by himself and rang the bell. After an interval Sinclair answered it himself.

"Why, Barty, what brings you here in the dead o' night?" he asked. "Come away in."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes. I should have been in bed in another ten minutes."

"I want a talk with you."

"All right! Come in."

"One moment," and he went back to the cab for Mr. Burney.

"Why, what's wrong?" said Sinclair, as they came in together, and he looked from one to the other in great surprise.

"Barty wants to consult you—as a friend," said Mr. Burney. "It is against my wishes that he has come. I hold a watching brief."

They sat down in Sinclair's private den at the back

of the house. The table was strewn with papers. He had been hard at work when they came in.

"I've been losing money on the Stock Exchange," said Barty, without further preliminaries, "and I'm so deeply involved that there is no way out. It means absolute ruin, of course, both present and future. No bank on earth will employ a cashier who has come to grief over stocks and shares, and quite right too."

"How much?" asked Sinclair quietly. He was probably the quietest man in the city of London and one of the cleverest. He never lost his temper or his head. Once you knew him you trusted him implicitly. Business men consulted him on all sorts of matters, and he knew as much commercial law as most lawyers. He was not a wealthy man. Perhaps he was too honest. He was a widower, with no children of his own, but many hundreds in the East End. A man who spent himself freely for those whose lines had fallen in unpleasant places.

"Close on £1,000," said Barty.

Sinclair nodded. There was more behind, he knew.

Barty laid on the table his bundle of notes, and said to Burney, "Show him the other."

"It is understood that this matter is between us three, Mr. Sinclair?" said the banker.

"I should hardly have thought Mr. Burney needed to ask me that," said Sinclair.

"Of course not. I know. But this is somewhat out of the common," and, with evident reluctance, he drew out the letter Barty had signed and laid it on top of the notes.

Sinclair read it through carefully. Both men watched his face. Not a muscle of it moved. He seemed a very long time reading the few lines. He was reading much between them.

"You haven't come to ask my opinion on this?" he said at last.

"No," said Barty, "I want you to invest that money for my wife and children. After squaring up there'll be about £5,000."

"I . . . see. . . . Does Mrs. Barty know?"

"Of course not. She must not know."

"Have you fully considered what you are doing?"

"Fully. Last night—any night in the last fortnight—if anyone had offered me £5,000 to jump into the river I'd have jumped at the chance. This offers me larger chances."

Sinclair shook his head. "I'm not so sure of that," he said, and added presently, "This is suicide as much as the other—perhaps more so." . . . And again, presently, and very slowly and distinctly—"There is that killeth soul *and* body."

"You will do what I want?" asked Barty.

"Will anything I can say induce you to reconsider——?"

"Nothing. It's a chance—my only chance. I've taken it."

"It is not too late to——"

"I'm past all that, Sinclair. Even if you offered to clear me, which I couldn't let you do, I've lost my position and have no chance of another. All I want now is to get through with the thing as quickly as possible."

"You consult me only as a friend, and as to the investment of the money on behalf of your wife and family."

"Exactly. There is the money. Do your best for them. I leave everything absolutely in your hands."

"I will do my best for them."

"You cannot act for the bank in this matter, Sinclair, you understand—" began Mr. Burney.

"No, I could not act for the bank, Mr. Burney." He had acted for the bank in many delicate matters before.

And as a matter of fact, after that night, he declined any further business from Burneys, and thereafter the banker went always in a certain and quite unnecessary fear of him. He would have heaped business upon him, but Sinclair always had his hands so full that he could not undertake it.

CHAPTER II

TO HIS CREDIT

THE trial of George Barty was a simple walk over for the prosecution. Prisoner pleaded guilty and was sentenced to ten years across seas. He was permitted a final interview with his wife, and sailed for West Australia in the very last batch of convicts ever sent out there.

How Margaret Barty lived through that awful time she never knew. Perhaps it was her sense of duty to the helpless children that carried her through. The shock and the disgrace came near to killing her. Had she been quite alone she would have welcomed death as the kindest of friends.

Barty, in their last interview, begged her to think of him as kindly as she could. He had made such provision as he could for her and the children. The time would pass, and he would make a new home for them all beyond seas, and they would start life again. He bore the interview much better than she did. But his last sight of her unconscious face, as the warder carried her away, tortured him for many a day.

Two days later, the very day he left England, their third child was born, little Joan, a frail mite whom nurse and doctor condemned to early death, but who lived in spite of them.

Mr. Burney of the bank was very kind to them during these dark days. John Sinclair kinder still in his quiet, helpful ways. Mrs. Barty decided that there was more humanity in the world than she had been inclined to give it credit for.

Sinclair's task was the more difficult in its delicacy. His heart ached for her. In a very few words he could have changed the face of her grief and altered all the complexion of her sorrow, but his lips were sealed. When she was sufficiently recovered to discuss business matters, he told her he held money in trust for her from her husband. Margaret, believing as she could not fail to do, that this was the proceeds of her husband's crime, declared she would starve sooner than touch a penny of it. Sinclair wrote to Mr. Burney. Burney wrote to Margaret that in recognition of the services of George Barty the Elder, her husband's father, the bank insisted on paying to her the retiring allowance of £200 a year, to which he would have been entitled had he lived. There was no such system in vogue at Frazer, Rae, and Burney's, as a matter of fact, but she could not know that. He also sent her words of cheer, to the effect that many a man had recovered from a first stumble and come to fortune and an honourable name in spite of it, and he had good hopes of George Barty yet.

She was absolutely without means, and so she accepted the pension in all good faith. She had three children to keep, and one of them, little Joan, was crippled beyond redemption from her birth. Sweeter child than little Joan, both in face and disposition, never lived against doctor's dictum, but she never walked a step in her life and that was a very sore affliction to them all.

Margaret Barty recovered by degrees from the effects of the blow which, at the time, seemed to have shattered her life. She was a woman of rare spirit, but withal of so quiet and gentle a manner that, to the casual observer, the spirit itself might have seemed lacking—at this time at all events.

Her children were growing. They would soon need schooling. The lacks and gaps in Joan's life must be filled as adequately as love could fill them. For all these things money was needed. That is the trying thing about life. Love is the very greatest thing in it, but you cannot live on love alone. Sooner or later—and sooner as a rule—the sordid consideration will obtrude its ugly head. But if there is one thing life proves beyond all else, it is the fact that Love, plus just enough money, produces a larger and nobler life than all the money in the world can produce without it. The rich man is the man whose life is fullest of love, though he jingle nought but counted coppers in his pocket.

"I am going to work for my living, or at all events for extras for the children," said Margaret to John Sinclair.

"Yes? How? . . . There is that money——"

"Not a penny of it," she said vehemently. "If you speak of it again we shall quarrel again."

"It takes two to make a quarrel," said Sinclair, with his quiet smile.

"Oh, no, it doesn't. One is quite enough and generally one too many. But I don't want to quarrel. I want you to help me."

"I will do anything—except speak about that money. What is it you think of doing?"

"The thing I can do best in the world is to keep house," she said. "I have been thinking I might perhaps take in boarders. I think I can make things go further than most, and I believe I could make it pay—if I could get the boarders," she added reflectively.

He looked at her with his usual musing nod.

"That's a bit odd now," he said, and searched through some letters out of his pocket till he found the right one. "This is from an old friend of mine in

Glasgow. His son is coming down to Bart's. He begs me to see him suitably lodged. It would be a beginning."

"It's just what I want. Can you get me nine more?"

"They will come in due course. You will make this youngster so very comfortable that the others will all want to come too. You'll be turning them away before long."

"He shall have the nicest home in London," said Margaret.

"He is a very fortunate young man," said Sinclair, "and my mind is at rest on his account."

That was the beginning of "Barty's," a name which will set a pleasant chord vibrating in many a heart. "Barty's"—the sober, straight-windowed house in Wynyatt Square, up in the direction of the Pentonville Road and not far from the New River Head. A house which, for many a year afterwards, held more hopes, aspirations, youthful happiness, and the high delights of home than any house of its size in the whole of Great Britain. Some of those boys—many of them—for every man of them turned out well, it was impossible to do anything else in that atmosphere—many of them have swelling accounts with their bankers, roll to and fro in neat two-horse broughams, and have comfortable four-figure incomes, every penny of which they honestly earn. And many of them have additional well-earned incomes from poorer folk, on which their bankers would not advance them a brass farthing, and which is exempt even from the avidious claw of the Assessors of Income Tax, but which yet may not be without its value in the final casting of accounts. Some of them cover the country side, wet or shine, day and night, on cobby little horses, and some on

their own tireless feet—fully as prosperous these, in everything but pelf, as their two-horse brothers in town, and quite as happy. And some lie below the African veldt, and some in India and China—their work completed and their rest well won.

But, among the living, mention "Barty's" to any man who lived there, and you will see a novel light come into his eyes, and while he talks of those good old times he will shed ten years off his age. And one of the very first things he will ask will be—"And Joan?" and the chances are he will sigh softly. For every man of them in turn worshipped the ground she had never set foot on. For the combined science of Bart's and all the colleges in the world could not give her what she had not, and what she had was worth more than all the science in the world could give her. But we shall see more of her presently. We are dealing with beginnings still.

Margaret Barty, under John Sinclair's careful guidance, took the house in Wynyatt Square, and furnished it after her own ideas, with money he advanced her from her own funds, and every farthing of which she duly paid back. There was a small smoking-room from the first in No. 21. It was the room that was afterwards Joan's room, a room some of us will never forget while life lasts us. The billiard-room was in No. 22, and only came into use when the rising tide compelled Mrs. Barty to take the adjoining house and knock doors through the walls from one to the other.

Sinclair's friend's son, young James Macgregor, was the first boarder. He was shy, and full of learning, and with small power of expression. A week later Sinclair asked him if he was comfortable.

"Man!" he said, "I never was so comfortable

in all my life. Mrs. Barty 'minds me of my mother." His own mother had been dead ten years, and he was coming to see what he had missed.

In six months there were five of them. In the second year she took the next house, and with ten strenuous youths under her wing, in addition to her own brood, was completely and absolutely happy—in her work at all events.

She wrote as often as the regulations permitted to her husband, and received replies from him in due course. They did not tell her very much. Perhaps there was not very much to tell. Perhaps what there was to tell was better not told.

For no man, innocent though he might be of the actual crime for which he was suffering, and guilty only of the possibly equal crime of moral suicide, could live among such surroundings as George Barty lived in for close on four years, without suffering loss and contracting taint. At first, buoyed up by mixed feelings of self-sacrifice and hope for the future, he kept himself aloof from the degrading crew which surrounded him night and day. For that he suffered physical martyrdom beyond the bearing. Under stress of circumstance he yielded outwardly and became one of the rest, while still inwardly striving to maintain some feelings of self-respect. But the position was an impossible one. Bit by bit his natural angles wore off and he fitted himself to his environment. The callosities of his soul marked the ebbing tide of his better feelings and the extent of his fall. By slow degrees, and in the natural course of things, the weaker foundation of his self-sufficient platform gave way under the sapping of so vicious an atmosphere. Time came when he no longer, even in his own mind, looked upon himself as anything of

a self-sacrificing hero and martyr, but simply and wholly as a fool. With that, all his better nature weakened, and his thoughts and intentions for Margaret and the children grew less and less distinct. He was suffering for his folly. He was paying a bitter price. The future, when it came, would have a mighty backwardation to make up to him for the miseries of the present. To make up to *him*—he came in time almost to eliminate from that future those he had left behind, the patient waiters on his release, the equal sufferers from his fall.

His conduct as a prisoner was exemplary—that, of course, with a sole eye to the lightening of his load and the shortening of his term. But the time dragged wearily, and when, after close upon four years' service, a chance of relief offered, he jumped at it.

It came in this wise. Charles Desmond Gray, a young North Countryman of wealth and determination, fired by the failures of others, made up his mind to attempt once more the hitherto unaccomplished feat of crossing Australia from west to east. The Forrest Brothers had separately tried their fortunes that way, but the Great Desert had been too much for them, and the mystery of the interior still extended open invitation to death to imaginative explorers. That was quite enough for Charles Desmond. Here was something that no man had done. Nature's neck awaiting the heel of a Gray. Shoulder to shoulder with him in the enterprise was young Frank Bernardin, English by birth and breeding, by extraction Huguenot. He had no money but every other qualification, and as to money, Gray had more than enough. He laid his plans before the officials at Perth, satisfied them of the strength of his intentions and his powers to carry them out, and begged the loan of a couple of volunteer

convicts to act as servants to himself and Bernardin. There was no lack of volunteers. George Barty was one of the chosen, the other a man named Charles Lindsay, a quiet, self-contained man whose powers of aloofness from his surroundings had exceeded Barty's. He hailed from Edinburgh, where he had slain a man in hot blood and under circumstances which in France would probably have secured him an honourable acquittal. Barty had nominally six years still to serve, Lindsay but two.

With thirty horses, and provisions for six months, the expedition started, having as its stated first objective Lake Amadeus, a thousand miles to the east, and choosing Gregory's old route along the Gascoyne as the best way to get to it. The valiant four-and-thirty disappeared into the northern ranges and for six months nothing was heard of them.

Then one fine morning a gaunt wayfarer walked into the police camp on Cooper's Creek. He flung down a letter and a bundle on the table, told them his name was Lindsay, and devoured much food in silence while they looked at his papers. Then he staggered to a bunk and slept for forty-eight hours without turning. He was hungry again when he woke, and ready to answer their questions, but was obviously of a retiring disposition and slow of expression. The papers he brought told the story. The only questions the lieutenant needed to put to him were the final ones.

Briefly, the story was this. Up to Nicol Springs all had gone merrily. The great tramp across the desert tried them severely and cost them half their horses, but they won through eventually and struck the lake as intended on the 25th parallel. There they rested from their labours, and there Bernardin fell

sick, and died, and was buried. The three pushed on into the desert again, with the remembrance of their late experiences still heavy on them. Day after day they looked anxiously for signs of the further ranges and water, and each to-morrow disappointed them. Gray determined to strike south. When you attempt to cross a crowded street it is the greatest mistake in the world to lose your nerve and turn back in the middle. It is the same in the empty desert.

"I am going in," Gray had said, "where the 25th parallel cuts the coast on this side, and I'm going to keep right along it till I come out where it cuts the coast at the other side—unless I come out into a larger place still." He came out into the larger place still.

We know now that a few days more along the parallel would have carried them into safety. However, south they came, and so eventually to their deaths, all except this one gaunt survivor. After burying his companions one after the other, he started on again alone, with three scarecrows of horses whose throats he cut, as necessity arose, to relieve the shrivelling of his own. Eventually he struck the lower ranges—the Musgraves they are now—through which Giles came successfully a year or two later. Thence by the Alberga and the northern shore of Lake Eyre to Cooper's Creek, with the idea of getting through into New South Wales.

The letter he carried was from Charles Desmond, written in pencil as he lay dying in the desert, the bundle contained his journals. The leader's last effort had been for the benefit of the men who had walked hand in hand with him and death through so many weary days.

"They are brave men both," said the feeble scrawl, "and to Lindsay especially I am grateful beyond

words—a man among men. My last words beg due recognition for him." And below, lest this should seem in the nature of a slight on Barty's character, he had written in shaky letters, "Good men *both*," and the underlining of the last word he ever wrote trailed downwards and broke off short.

"Yes," said Lindsay, "that was like him. A fine man."

"And what will you do now, Lindsay?" asked the lieutenant.

"Go on through," was the reply, with a look of surprise at the question. "He wished it. I am Charles Desmond Gray's expedition now."

"I suppose so," nodded the lieutenant. And finally: "If you keep on by the Creek till you strike the Pans, then on to Fort Wills, it's a picnic."

So they fed him up, and when he was himself again they started him off on a fresh horse, with another letter in addition to the precious ones he brought, and all the provisions he could carry.

His arrival in due course at Sydney made a tremendous sensation, and the retiring modesty with which he bore his honours increased the favourable impression he made. The Home Government would have done much for him, but all they succeeded in doing was to cancel the short remaining balance of his term and set him free. The Governments of West Australia, South Australia, and New South Wales subscribed a purse of £5,000 and presented it to him with words that brought the blushes through his bearded cheeks. He had struck up a friendship with a fellow-countryman, a wealthy squatter in the back country, with whom he had stayed a week on his way down. He had promised to go back if he was

free to do so. He went, and so for the time being disappears from our story.

Sinclair broke the news to Margaret Barty, and she mourned for her husband more perhaps than he deserved. But the heroism of his death wiped out the sadder memories of his fall, and thenceforth she thought of him only as the father of her three children and the gallant explorer who had laid down his life in the service of his country.

CHAPTER III

BARTY'S

AND now, if you please, we take seventeen years at a jump, and begin our story.

Seventeen strenuous years for Margaret Barty, with happiness that widened and deepened with their passage as the full-flowing river widens to the sea.

I wonder in how many hearts the word "Barty's" will set sweet chords humming and conjure up pictures of delight?

For I doubt if there ever was such a home as Mrs. Barty made for the generations of raw colts to whom she devoted herself like many mothers rolled into one, during all these seventeen years.

She had not made much money at the business, but she had thriven on it exceedingly. Still the right side of fifty, her comely head was plentifully streaked with gray, but it was not with the burdens of those full, working years. That crushing blow of her early life had left her standing, if sorely stricken. The gray hairs began to come very early. But they became her wonderfully, and when at times she bemoaned them as an unnaturally early and visible sign of old age, and whimsically discussed the properties of hair restorers and such things, her children scolded her volubly for such unseemly conceit, and declared that there was no prettier hair in the whole of Great Britain, that it suited her style of beauty to a "T," and that she was the sweetest and dearest young old lady in the world. All of which was absolutely true.

She had not made much money, as I say, but she had made what all the money in the world cannot make, and what money—speaking broadly and generally—does not enter at all into the composition of. Tell me what bounds may be set to God's free air and sunshine, and I will tell you that Margaret Barry's quiet, unconscious influence was carried, by "the boys" who had passed under it, to places where sun and air found difficulty in penetrating, and everywhere it made for tenderness and sympathy, for purity and enlightenment. Raw-eyed Egyptians, and wild-eyed Arabs, and beady-eyed Hindoos, and slit-eyed Chinamen, were her debtors, and heavy-eyed dwellers in the caves and dens of great cities nearer home, and suffering children and sad-eyed women everywhere. She was, I think, one of the noblest and best women that ever trod earth. No, she had not made money, but she had made many a wild colt into a man, into a gentleman, into a Christian gentleman. And that, I take it, is the noblest position to which any man may ever hope to rise, and the noblest work to which any woman may set her heart. Would there were more like her! The world would be the better.

She never preached a word in her life. If the boys brought their troubles to her—as some of them would not have taken them to their own mothers—she would discuss them, gently and tenderly, and from her own high standpoint. She was a very wise woman, her sympathies were as wide as her wisdom, and no soul ever went away unhelped. But her influence was chiefly unconscious and distilled itself in golden silence.

In a very few words I can show her to you as I myself remember her at this time. She was tall, and straight, and very graceful and gracious in all her movements. The thought of bustle or hurry in connection

with Mrs. Barty was an absolute incongruity. The amount of work she got through and supervised was very great, yet she always seemed leisurely at ease. She was never idle because she was never happy unless she was doing something. When she sat down to rest she picked up her knitting. It soothed her, as the boys assured her their pipes soothed them. And assuredly I have known no more restful sight than the sight of Mrs. Barty's long shining needles slipping deftly in and out of the soft wool apparently at their own sweet will. She seemed simply to supervise them as she did her two busy houses, and the needles seemed to go on like the two houses, of their own accord.

Her face was calm, and sweet, and very beautiful, with the depth and serenity of the full flowing river settled in its courses after breaks and shallows and times of strife in narrow ways. One never tired of looking at it. And there was in it, at all times, so winning an invitation to equal confidence and frankness, that the shyest newcomer from northern wilds found himself opening his heart to her before he had known her twenty-four hours, and talking to her as he had probably never talked to anyone in his life before.

Her eyes were like stars. They were soft and brown, and the light that was within her shone through and set little soul-sparks in them. The latest confection of Joan's nimble fingers always topped the rippling gray hair which was brushed back from face and forehead like Marie Antoinette's. In the evenings she usually wore a dainty white shawl, draped loosely over her shoulders and generally on the point of falling off. At all times she looked, as Jack Fairfax used to say, like a duchess playing at house-keeping, only more so. A very sweet and noble lady, though she only kept a home for medical students, and

worked for her living and the well-being of the fortunate ones who came under her care.

During these seventeen years, since the news came of George Barty's death in the Australian desert, she had fought with quiet determination for her place in the world, and for the children left in her charge. The work had been hard, but she had won many prizes. If, from a pecuniary point of view, she was not much better off than when she started—well, it was not from a pecuniary point of view that she regarded things.

She had made a great many young fellows very comfortable and very happy, and done more for their future welfare than some of them had yet found out. She had given her three children first-rate educations, and fitted them, as far as that was possible, to fight their own fights with the world. She had paid her way and owed no man anything. And her name, and all that it represented, was a fragrance in many souls. It was also a strong tower of refuge for many anxious mothers, trusting their Benjamins to the doubtful companionship of their more sophisticated brethren for the first time, and with hearts full of doubt as to the possible results of the Egyptian climate on their health and morals. For the life of the medical student, beyond the walls of the hospital, is his own, and pitfalls abound.

"My dear," I overheard Lady Macgregor, stepmother of the original Jim, say to my mother, "get him into Mrs. Barty's and your mind may be at rest. She will take better care of him than you could yourself." And in reply to my mother's bristle of indignant surprise, "She knows infinitely more about these matters than you or I, or any of us, my dear. A woman in ten million, I assure you."

Meg, the eldest of the three children, was at this

time a well-grown girl of twenty-three, blessed with the best of health and immense vitality. Good-looking too, with the good looks of perfect health and a wholesome and active mind, though an artist might have found classic regularity wanting in her features. She had her mother's steadfast brown eyes with the glint in them, as they all had. And her face was always alight with an eager, good-humoured outlook on the various activities of life, which she was tasting for herself with an enjoyment which no occasional bitternesses could damp.

She had been earning her own living for five years past. She had entered as probationer at Bart's and won triumphantly through the earlier drudgeries with the smiling face of a stout heart. She had won the stripes, and passed her exams, gained her blue belt at the end of the three years, and her blue gown a year later, and was at the present moment the youngest sister in Bart's, and the cheeriest, brightest, and best nurse Bart's ever had.

While they were young, Mrs. Barty had found time amid all her other duties to teach the children herself. Then, as they grew beyond her powers, Meg had gone to a girls' school in the Pentonville Road, and when, in course of time, she became the biggest girl in the school, she stayed on for a while as pupil teacher. After a time she took a place as governess in a private family, and found it wearing even on a healthy constitution.

Then she had a spell of chaperoning an old lady possessed of a troublesome temper and chronic asthma, and found that still more wearing. And so she found her way at last to her appointed sphere at Bart's, and therewith much happiness, since she was exactly suited to the work and the work exactly suited her.

George was a strapping fellow, every inch of his five feet ten, full of health and spirits. All his school life, since he grew beyond his mother's reach, had been spent at University College School in Gower Street. He had matriculated somewhat late, owing to an extreme lack of appreciation of the beauties of mathematics and figures generally. He revelled in the classics, spoke and read French and German with facility, and had made heaps of friends. He had his mother's steady brown eyes, set deep under overhanging brows, which gave a look of rugged strength and fixity of purpose to his face. It was a very pleasant face, bright and eager, with a clean-cut pointed chin, and a trim little moustache to which he was not inattentive, and the brown eyes wrinkled at the sides and laughed very frequently before the firm mouth did. A youngster whom most men took to on sight. On the face of him a man to be trusted.

His training had combined public school with home life in a quite exceptional manner. For, after mixing all day with his fellows of the class-rooms and playing-grounds, he found himself at night in an atmosphere of home and the higher services, in which the keen, bright spirits of the men from Bart's let themselves loose, and discussed through their pipe-stems their work and their instructors—in a way which would have made those gentlemen's eyes open wide at times, if only they could have heard them—and all things else in the circumjacent heavens and earth and the waters below. They were always first-rate fellows at Mrs. Barty's—a matter of cause and effect. If they were not so when first they came, they very speedily worked up to the level of the rest and became of the family. The atmosphere of Nos. 21 and 22 Wynyatt Square was rare and bracing, and it was good to dwell in it.

Through his many friends George Barty would have found no difficulty in getting a foot on many ladders, none of which he had the least desire to climb. Young Goldie wanted him in the paternal bank along with himself. Sir Joseph liked the lad and offered him a stool. Young Julius Carbonnet wanted him in the big chemical works down at Bow, and the tincture of science in that business held more temptation for him than the realistic rawness of the figures that crawled about the bank stool. John Sinclair, his mother's faithful counsellor at all times, offered him a place in his office and would have delighted to advance him therein. But none of these things attracted him in the least. And as to the medical profession he got all he wanted of it at home.

The one thing that drew him was the most precarious thing of all—the will o' the wisp, literature.

There was a vagueness about this, an indefiniteness of work and resultant remuneration, which sent Margaret Barty flying to John Sinclair for advice, when George definitely, and with good-humoured defiance of the fates, announced his intention of becoming a literary man.

Of course she had known his leanings for long enough, but she had regarded them as a necessary phase in a young man's development, a phase through which most gifted young men had to pass before they settled down to the serious work of earning a livelihood. She had seen most of her boys through it in their time, as she had seen her own children through mumps and measles, and no great harm done. On the contrary, in some cases the results had been distinctly good, and had even tended to the ultimate advancement of the temporarily afflicted one in his profession. Had not Jim Macgregor—the very first boy who came under her care—written in that very house those papers on

Amnesia and Aphasia which brought him to the notice of Sir James Farquhar, the specialist on brain diseases in Harley street? And was not Jim Sir James's right hand man at the present moment, and well in the running for his shoes should they unfortunately become vacant? And was not Jack Fairfax making £200 a year as sub-editor of the *Scalpel*, with plenty of spare time on his hands for his own wider work with the pen which was to land him into fame and fortune?

Fleet street, in its larger significance, was an unknown country to Margaret Barty, and so she sought enlightenment and counsel where she never failed to find them. Sinclair reassured her to some extent, but could not wholly conceal his belief that the boy's future would have been more assured in his own office.

Of that she was fully aware, but she had the gift of wisdom. She saw that the boy's heart was set on this thing and that his whole bent was in that direction. So she put her own doubts and fears aside, saying to herself that, if it did not answer his expectations, there was always John Sinclair to fall back on, and bade him try the thing he could put his heart into. She held the strange belief that happiness in life depended less on pecuniary results than on congeniality of work. She herself had never made much money, but her chosen work had given her what money could not buy.

George's first year or two of literary life had not lacked disillusionments. He fared as most must fare who seek the Royal Road, which is yet no Primrose Path, but, on the contrary, is strewn with flints and briars, and beset with pitfalls perhaps more plentifully than most other paths of life. He was, however, more fitly circumstanced than many who adventure it,

inasmuch as he was not absolutely writing for his life, though as desirous as any of making a living.

His little back bedroom at 21 Wynyatt Square saw much hard work. If walls had mouths as well as ears what tales they could tell! Perhaps it is just as well they are dumb. For every wall of every house in all the world would have its own tale to tell, and passing strange some of those tales would be. Birth, childhood, love, heartbreak, marriage, births, heartbreaks, deaths—one room in one house could give you all that and more. Multiply it all by all the houses in the world and think of it for a moment.

George's room was no fancifully arranged study. There was little to distract the attention inside, and still less outside. The neighbouring chimney pots were indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, and against a darkening red spring or autumn sky assumed Doréesque poses which suggested nightmares and the infernal regions. He came to know them all by degrees, and got on quite familiar terms with some of the most peculiar specimens, and even went the length of tracing them to their own front doors with a view to finding out, if he could, if the dwellers within bore, in their persons and faces, any signs of relationship to the fantasies up above. For half one's time in writing is spent in looking out of window or into the fire—perhaps the correct proportion would be somewhat more than half—and a thin veil of curling blue smoke, whether from chimney-cowl or pipe, in no way impedes the vision.

But once George had got on familiar terms with his chimney-pots they distracted his thoughts no more than did his almost patternless wallpaper or his plain deal table, and his fancy had free rein and wandered far and wide.

He wrote and wrote, and re-wrote and wrote yet again, and cut down and trimmed, with a severity of self-criticism born of the strictures of Master Jack Fairfax, and quite unusual in one so young, and very becoming. But Jack, from the heights of his sub-editorship, played dictator with emphatic enjoyment, and, like many another unpleasant discipline, it was all to the good and in its season bore excellent fruit.

Fairfax was the most regular visitor Wynyatt Square knew. All the old boys dropped in at intervals, and at Christmas time, especially, the place was overrun with them. But it would have been a strange week that Jack Fairfax failed to put in an appearance there, and by the strangest coincidence it was generally on the night on which Meg flew in for an hour's chat. And when that happened the wheels spun merrily in Wynyatt Square. For her leisure was always limited, and she always had four times as much to tell, and twice as much to ask, as could possibly be got through in the time.

George and Jack always convoyed her back to the hospital in a whirlwind of merry chatter, and then Jack returned with George to Wynyatt Square and enjoyed himself dictatorially in the trimming of George's youthful exuberances in the matter of ink and paper, while Joan lay and listened and laughed, and drank it all in for future use on her own account.

Ah, Joan! We have said nothing about Joan, and I almost shrink from the attempt to describe her. Not from lack of love of the subject, but because my best must seem so exaggerated, and yet must fall so very far short of doing her justice.

Even honest Jack, with all his lofty subeditorial discrimination against adjectives, and superlatives, and tautological hyper-descriptiveness, would hesitate to

blue pencil anything I might say about Joan Barty, though it offended every canon of his art, and ran three adjectives to every noun and every one of them a double superlative.

Sweet Joan Barty! To some the simple words will be enough, and every man of them as he reads them, as may perchance happen, will stop and say in the core of his heart, "God bless her!"

For nobler, sweeter, truer, more beautiful girl than Joan never—Ah, me! I had almost said "trod earth," and Joan never set foot to earth from the day she was born.

In face and form, as she lay in that wonderful chair of hers, she was altogether lovely, with a loveliness to which words cannot approach, no matter how you chisel or coin them. Even Niel Felston's portrait of her in the Academy, the painting of which made his reputation and saved his soul, fails to do her justice. It is a wonderful piece of work, as how could it help being when the man who did it mixed his colours with his heart's blood, and used his soul as a mahl-stick, and lifted himself a little bit further out of hell with every stroke of his brush. Strong language, I know, and emblematic of course, but true every word of it.

There was always a crowd round Joan's portrait in the Academy, and everywhere you heard the questions—"Have you seen Aranea Felicissima? Do you believe she is real?" For it was one of those pictures that people talk about. And it was very curious to see them come hurrying through the turnstiles and make straight for Room No. III, with scarce a glance at anything else until they had seen the picture of the year. And I, knowing all—well, perhaps not all, but, say, some of that which lay behind it, used to delight to

mingle with the crowd and listen to their remarks for the purpose of carrying them home to Joan herself. And the steady challenge of the brown eyes to see if I was embroidering my story with fancies of my own, and the sparkling merriment that filled them when, *parole d'honneur!* I repeated exactly what I had heard, and the shy blush and look of gratification with which she listened, were my reward.

I stood there and heard the good folks say their various says.

"Wonderful!"—"How very lovely!"—this even from the ladies.

"Splendid bit of work!—Those eyes, mind you, are good, really good!"—that from the artists.

"By Jove, I say, don't you know, that *is* fine, don't you know,"—that from frivolous youths who found themselves unable to shake off the sight of Joan's eyes for many a day to come and were none the worse for that.

And from the general public—"A great creation!—a magnificent effort of the imagination!—a spiritualisation! No living girl ever was so beautiful,"—and so on, and so on.

Whereas the actual fact was that, in his picture, Felston had caught only a very little bit of Joan, and yet, in the eyes of the crowd, that little bit was sufficient to put her above the possibilities of humanity. I think he caught more of her than any other would have done, and for good reason—but you will come to that. For that portrait was not painted yet, and Niel Felston was still wandering among the flesh-pots and swine-troughs.

I have only dragged in the picture, as you have no doubt perceived, in an attempt to shirk the quite impossible task of trying to make you see Joan Barty as

some of us remember her. You are doubtless saying I was in love with her. Of course I was, and so was every man who ever lived under the same roof with her, and many more besides. And the love we all bore her was different from any other loves we ever experienced and—well, I cannot explain it. It was elevating, inspiring. So might be our other loves. But with Joan Barty our hopes had no remotest tinge of earthly aspiration—except for her happiness —for Joan could never hope to marry. Pity? No, there was no pity in our love for her. The very thought makes one smile. We came nearer to worshipping her, and if she had expressed a wish for—say, a mammoth skin from Patagonia or a bear skin from the Arctic regions, not one of us but would have done his best to get it for her, and would have considered himself more than repaid for his time and trouble by her delighted, "Oh, Jack"—or Tom, or Dick, or Harry, as the case might be—"How good of you!" and the radiant delight in her eyes.

Her face was a sweet oval. I have been told, by those who know more about such things than I do, that it was perfect in feature and proportion. Usually it was a trifle pale—naturally so, for she could not often venture out; but not unnaturally so, and the quick blood mounted readily. She had a wide white forehead, and slightly arched brows, and a wealth of nut brown hair. Her eyes were like her mother's, soft and brown, with a star in each like a radiant jewel. They held you like a glimpse of heaven. Were they pensive? Did they question? Were they full of latent merriment? Did they look right into your heart and challenge all that was best in you to come out and be of service? All these and very much more than I can attempt to tell.

I happened to be standing near Joan's picture in the Academy when Paul Desvigneaux came along in company with the President. Felston, in his less frivolous moments, had studied under Desvigneaux in Paris, and I was curious to hear what the master would say of his pupil's work.

"That is the finest thing we have here this year," said the President.

Old Desvigneaux looked at Joan for a very long time, and I was expecting him to burst out with a panegyric which would redound to the credit of M. Desvigneaux and his school, and that I think was what the President looked for also, to judge by the twinkle in his eye.

Instead, the old man said a very remarkable thing, a thing which I did not repeat to Joan. He said, in that deep growl of his, which used to make his pupils shrink into their shoes and cast about with the sides of their eyes for avenues of escape—

"It is magnificent! . . . The eyes are the eyes of the Christ. . . . Where the devil did the little Felston learn that trick? Not from me, that is certain."

No, the little Felston—who, by the way, stood six feet one in his stockings, while his old master barely topped five feet four, and was nearly as broad as he was high—had learnt more than M. Desvigneaux could ever teach him, and in a different school. He had some very great offers for that picture, and the Chantrey people were very anxious to get it. But he would not sell. It meant too much to him. He painted a replica for himself, which is not quite equal to the original, and the original hangs in Joan's room to this day.

I have given you some slight glimpse of her by way of introduction. The rest you can learn for yourselves.

She was the soul of the house, as her mother was the heart and the head of it.

Joan's room was in No. 21. When Mrs. Barty took the adjoining house she made two of the upstairs rooms into a billiard-room, which was also used as a smoking-room, and the original cosy little smoking-room in No. 21 became Joan's sitting-room, and, since Mrs. Barty spent most of her spare time there also, it became the life-centre of the household.

It was the brightest room I ever saw. When it was decided to make it Joan's room, Mrs. Barty set her loving heart and brain to work to adapt it to her requirements. When all was done, the original little smoking-room had become but the ante-chamber to a glass gallery as wide as the room itself, and running twenty-five feet out at the back over the yard, a very Palace of Delight to Joan and a treasure house for the gifts of her many friends.

The fish-pond and fountain were the gifts of Jim Macgregor, and he was always dropping in with some new and curious inhabitant for them. The aviary was fitted up and stocked by Lady Frances Fowler in gratitude to Mrs. Barty for her care of her son in a long and trying illness. It was Lady Frances also who had that wonderful chair made regardless of cost. And when Joan was gently laid in it for the first time, and shown how by a touch she could turn it into an easy chair with any desired elevation of the back, and with another touch could send it rolling noiselessly in any desired direction, the look on the girl's face brought tears into the dear old lady's eyes, and she was grateful to her boy who had planned it all out during his long convalescence up north.

Palms and creepers and choice plants found their way there from all quarters; and sketches and paintings

to brighten the walls of the little room in front, so that, at the time I remember it, it was, as I have said, a perfect treasure-house and a bower of delight.

And to it came everybody in the house or who came to it, as surely as the blood to the heart, and went away refreshed and uplifted. For the brightest thing in that bright room was Joan herself. And for every comer, from the housemaid who looked in to bid her good morning in passing, to the boys who came racing in from the hospital, or to Lady Frances herself who came every day when she was in town, Joan had a cheery word and a sparkle of the eye that made the blood run redder.

Just now and again, however, but only very rarely, the shadow of her loss would come upon her, and the brightness of that sweet nature would be veiled. It was inevitable that it should be so. Half-goddess she might be to "the boys," but she was no angel, but simple flesh and blood and subject to the infirmities thereof, and with a greater right to lowness of spirits than most. That they were at all other times so radiantly high was a cause of perennial wonder, and to her mother cause for deepest gratitude.

But I have only mentioned this because it bears upon one of Joan's characteristic methods of expression which no sojourner at "Barty's" will ever forget. Her brimming feelings had many vehicles—her voice, her eyes, her hands, her whole expression. She was always very much alive all over except—ah, well! except.—And she devised a plan by which at a glance you could tell when the rare dark mood was on her, and then you simply left her alone. She hated commiseration at all times, and at those times most of all.

The lower part of that wonderful chair of hers was always draped with an exquisitely worked coverlet

which Mrs. Barty called a "tidy" and Joan called an "Afghan." She delighted in delicate colours, and whenever "the boys" came across a piece of silk that filled their ideas of suitability, they would bring her home enough for an "Afghan," and her nimble fingers would transform it into a work of art, wrought with strange and beautiful devices, which seemed to have a meaning but which none could ever decipher. "If they don't mean something they ought to," said Niel Felston, after careful study, when he saw them, and I think that to Joan they did.

When the donor of any such piece possessed sufficient of an eye for colour to recognise it again, he felt himself specially honoured when he saw it in use, and Joan knew every gift and every giver and gave them all a turn.

Her soul delighted in tender pinks and greens, so delicate that they looked no more than the first flushings of spring in an apple orchard; in sweet pale blues like babies' eyes; in soft yellow gleams like winter sunbeams.

But when her dark hours came and she could not shake them off, her chair bore simply a small black velvet pall with a narrow white cross of hope in the centre. And then you did not speak to her but just went on as if she were not there.

How well I remember young Sandy MacTavish, the latest importation at the moment, infringing this rule. He had been there three months and had never seen or heard of the black "Afghan." At sight of it he began: "Why, Miss Joan, ye've gone into mourn——" and then he gasped from pressure on the air tubes, as Bob Macgregor's fingers twisted into his neck gear behind and dragged him away. And as they passed me Sandy was black in the face, and his eyes

hung to his head like marbles, and I heard Bob's fierce whisper in his ear—"See, now, ye gowk, if ever ye speak to her when that black spread's on I'll choke ye dead and fling ye out into the Square."

One other full-coloured cover appeared at times, and that was a vivid crimson, and meant that she was in a rampantly hilarious mood and ready for the wildest excitement they could indulge in—ready, in fact, "to paint the room red," as Jack Fairfax said. It came out oftener than the black, but still not very often. Her spirits were generally high and bright, just now and again she found herself above or below them, and every one knew at a glance where she was in the scale.

Within two years of the starting of her new venture, Mrs. Barty had ten young fellows under her wing, and more were always wanting to come. When, under pressure, and at the suggestion of John Sinclair, she took the adjoining house, and joined them by doors on each landing, the number of her guests rose to fifteen, beyond which she would not go. They were all and always good fellows, or speedily became so in that congenial home atmosphere. If we do not see very much of them, it is because, in order to get to the end of one's journey, one must stick to the high road and not wander away into the surrounding meadows however tempting they may be.

CHAPTER IV

KEY TO A LOCKED DOOR

GEORGE BARTY, as I have said, met with many disillusionments in his travels along the Royal Road. That was in the nature of things and all for his good. Humanity is quaintly garbed and wears as many coverings as an onion. It is only by stripping and peeling that one reaches the core and arrives at the truth of things, and the process is not without its drawbacks. It is difficult to avoid sniffing at times; and, pinch one's lips as one may, one's mouth will twist, and now and again the tears will come.

Whatever else he lacked, George had two good weapons in his armoury, offensive, and defensive—an enquiring disposition and a certain sense of humour. From his earliest years he had wanted to know.

We will not follow him that far back. The craving gave him many a bad quarter of an hour and many a fall, and shattered many a boyish idol. In one important matter it cut a gash into his life which was long of healing.

As a boy he had many times asked his mother about the father who was dead. Margaret had known that this must come sooner or later, and had had time to prepare for herself a series of defences behind which she might retreat in due order if unduly pushed.

For herself, do I say, the defences were prepared? For the children rather. For their sakes, the inner citadel which hid the terrible truth must be held at all hazards, since their penetrating it could only result in the bruising and blackening of their lives.

So all Master George's enquiries elicited nothing more than the practically self-evident fact that their father was dead. And, since none of them remembered him, it was also evident that he had died when they were all small children.

For a time, while they were still young, that sufficed. But with increasing years came increased questionings, and by slow degrees the mother was driven from defence to defence in her retreat towards the truth. It was no good telling them not to ask questions. What child ever stood before a forbidden door without an added craving for entrance?

So, by slow and perfectly natural degrees, with no offensive display of eagerness on the one side or of disinclination on the other, George arrived at the fact that his father had died in Australia, that he had been travelling there when he died.—Travelling? Well, yes—exploring.

That fired his imagination and for the time satisfied it. But he was a growing lad, eager for knowledge, and time came when, since the fount of information at home had apparently run dry, he sought it abroad, as boys inevitably will.

First he tried John Sinclair, the family friend in all cases of emergency. Sinclair and Margaret Barty had discussed this contingency, and were of one mind on the matter—to keep the actual facts buried in the lonely grave in the Australian desert if it were possible to do so. Sinclair fully agreed with the advisability, but expressed considerable doubts as to the possibility.

His own position was a difficult and trying one. He felt pretty certain in his own mind that George would, sooner or later, discover all that was to be found out about his father. The information might come to him in some unusually trying fashion. In a ten minutes'

conversation Sinclair himself could lighten the darkness of the discovery and flash a strange gleam of light through the cloud that had overhung Margaret Barty's life. But his tongue was tied by the promise exacted from him by Barty and John Burney that night long ago. If the Burneys had been dead, he would have considered himself free to make disclosure. But old Burney, now Sir John Burney, Bart., was still alive, though aged even beyond his years and worn with many troubles, and his son Frazer was still a comparatively young man.

George, then, went to Sinclair for information, and Sinclair, seeing his eagerness, sympathising with it, and knowing something of his determination, was strongly tempted to tell him the known facts, and so at once shut the door on his researches and protect him from possible unpleasant contingencies. But Margaret had thought better not, and so he held his peace and told him no more than his mother had done.

Thereupon George procured a ticket for the newspaper room at the British Museum, and, having arrived by deduction at an approximation of the date he wanted, began a steady search through the columns of the *Daily Telegraph* from the year 1868 onward. For, since Joan was born in 1868, their father must naturally have died subsequently.

That search for a single item of news amid distracting oceans of print is a peculiarly trying one. The eye runs off on a thousand interesting side tracks. To keep to the main line requires an immense effort of concentration. Every portion of every page must be scanned, except the advertisements, and the wear and tear on eyes and brain is great. The weary searcher becomes aware at times of past perfunctoriness, and is tormented with fears lest his much-sought item may be lurking

obscurely in some out-of-the-way corner which he has missed. And, if he be conscientiously keen on it, he will try back to make sure, and loathe those twice-read pages ten times more than all the rest.

It took George close on a month of very hard work before he found what he wanted, though his speed improved wonderfully with practice. And when his eyes had falteringly taken in the sense of what he found —a brief reference to the fate of the Charles Desmond Gray Expedition and the deaths of Gray, Bernardin, and the convict George Barty, as described by the survivor Lindsay—he sat for a long while with his head still in his hands, and those terrible words—" the convict George Barty "—burning into his brain as they had burnt through his tired eyes, and a feeling that the bottom had fallen out of his life.

" The convict George Barty "—yes, that explained everything—his mother's and Sinclair's reticence, the utter lack of definite knowledge that had always prevailed among them as children. " The convict George Barty."

It was a terrible blow. He could never feel himself the same again. They were tainted. His heart groaned within him. He must have passed the explanation during his search, but then he had been searching for the record of an honourable man and the police court news he had passed without a glance.

He had not the heart to search again. Besides, what good? One may delve for treasure but not for bones, and a man is not a convict unless he has been proved guilty of offence.

He had entered the building with his head well up, the son of an explorer. He crept out of it with his chin on his chest, looking out cautiously from under his brows to see if any one recognised him as the son

of "the convict, George Barty." He went straight to John Sinclair's office, and Sinclair knew at a glance what was coming.

"I have come from the British Museum," said George doggedly. "I have been looking through the newspapers——"

"I understand, my boy," said Sinclair gently. "I knew it must come, but we thought best to keep it from you as long as possible."

"I have only seen about his death. What was it?"

"He confessed to a forgery——" and George went white. He would sooner have had it manslaughter—in hot blood—without premeditation. He had been thinking of it as he came along.

"Since you have learned the fact, George, I counsel you to keep it to yourself. Say nothing about it at home. If possible, don't let your mother know that you know. You can understand how terribly she suffered. The wound is healed. Don't re-open it."

"No," said George humbly.

"And remember, whatever had gone before, your father died bravely, doing his duty. There is comfort in that."

"Yes."

"Don't brood over it, lad. Your mother is one of the noblest women God ever made, and there is a good deal of her in you. You will make your own life."

But it was a long time before he got over the shock, and the fact he never forgot. Perhaps it was not without its effect on his character. Perhaps it made him somewhat humbler than he might have been, and helped to soften his judgment of others. These things are not as a rule born in a man, but come with stripes.

He had a great liking for, and admiration of, Jack

Fairfax. They had been close friends while Jack was still an inmate of No. 21 Wynyatt Square, before he had definitely quitted the medical profession for the Elysian Fields, as typified by the sub-editorial chair of the *Scalpel*. And since then Jack had gently nurtured their friendship on his own account, and with a hopeful, and by no means disinterested, eye to future possibilities.

What a capital fellow her brother always is!—Unless of course he happens to be quite the reverse and doesn't desire you for a brother-in-law. In which case he is apt to be an unmitigated nuisance, and, but for fear of giving offence in other quarters, you would like to knock him on the head or hear of him being run over. If he is many years younger than his sister, he is almost inevitably a nuisance and possesses a faculty, out of all proportion to his size, of making you appear a fool. He sees through all your attempts at propitiation with half an eye, and accepts all your offerings as Danegelt, and with much the same consequences.

There was only a couple of years, however, between Jack Fairfax and George Barty, and they were the best of friends.

"It's just this way, dear Mrs. Barty," said Fairfax oracularly, when she consulted him, among others, as to George's desire for literature as his walk in life. "If it's in him he'll never be happy at anything else. And if it is really in him it's as good a profession as any other, and it will make him very happy. My advice is, let him try it."

So, when it was decided, he took the fledgling under his wing in an unofficial way, and became his guide and mentor in things literary, till such time as he should be able to stand alone and begin to walk.

"It's a tough business, my boy," he would say to

George, "and you've got to hang on by your teeth and never mind if one or two of them break. But I believe you've got it in you and time will show. You've got a fairly pretty fancy, and with practice you'll be able to describe a thing without using more than one adjective—"

"Fairly pretty fancy," laughed Joan.

"This is purely informal and for home consumption and not to be gauged in the usual way, and besides, it is subject to revision, and, anyhow, fairly's an adverb. However, as I was saying when Joan rudely interrupted me, you've got imagination, but you're very young yet, and of course, refreshingly green——"

"As 24 is to 22 so is the sub-editor of the *Scalpel* to X," broke in Joan once more.

"I think I will reserve the rest of my remarks for a more convenient season, when they will not be subject to ribald personal——"

"Two adjectives again! But do go on, Jack. Your remarks are so refreshingly——"

"I was going to advise a course of travel——"

"Ah!" from George, and a hungry gleam of the deep-set eyes.

He was still under the cloud of his recent discovery. His mother thought he was ill, but bodily he was as fit as a prize-fighter. This suggestion of Fairfax's set silver bells chiming inside him, though he saw little hope of falling in with it.

"Nothing like travel for expanding the young idea and knocking spots off the home-bred youth. Your atmosphere has been if anything too mildly salubrious, my boy, too rare. If you could be chucked into the outer darkness for six months or a year, it would do you all the good in the world—from a literary point of view—and the rougher time you had of it the better.

Your knowledge of men is limited; your acquaintance with women has been confined to angels——"

"Hear, hear! *Encore!*" from Joan.

"And all women are not angels and all men are not like——"

"*Me!*" sparkled the irrepressible one.

"—Not like those you have been accustomed to. You want to know all sorts before you can write about them, unless you are content to be a second-rater."

"It's a good idea," said George slowly, "but—"

"I'm advising George to spread his callow wings and knock about the world for six months or more, Mrs. Barty," said Jack, as the lady of the house came quietly in, with her white shawl on her shoulders and her knitting in her hands, and began to pick up stitches.

"Yes, Jack?" she said, looking at him luminously, but with a touch of vagueness in her tone.

"George has lived too long among angels, mother dear, like you and me and Jack," said Joan, "and Jack thinks a spell of outer darkness would do him good."

"It might," agreed Mrs. Barty, still doubtfully, "if it didn't do him harm. Where do you want him to go, Jack?"

"Anywhere—everywhere—wandering to and fro in the earth——"

"Like Satan," murmured Joan. "Poor old boy!"

"—On his own hook. It would do him a world of good, and fit him for his work."

She looked at George and saw his face brighter than she had seen it for many a day. "You would like it, George?"

"I would like it, of course, but——"

"I think we might manage it——" said Mrs. Barty thoughtfully.

"No," he said quickly, "if it can be done I'd like to do it myself. What I would like would be to tramp all over the continent with a knapsack and a stick. It wouldn't cost much. What do you say to a series of letters for the *Scalpel*, Jack?"

"Guaranteed not to contain any double-barrelled adjectives except in the case of Switzerland," said Joan.

"We're too technical," said Jack. "If you'd undertake to break a leg at every important hospital——"

"He's only got two!" indignantly from Joan.

"—Or undergo treatment of some kind, it might be interesting."

"Very," said George. "You're a ghoul, old man. You view life entirely from the point of view of the *Scalpel*."

"Just let me look round for a day or two," said Fairfax. "Perhaps we can hit on something. You're not very particular, I suppose."

"Not as long as it doesn't entail the sacrifice of my arms or legs, or a post-mortem at every hospital I come to."

Fairfax came bounding up the stairs to Joan's room the next afternoon and burst in with—"Where's George? I've got just the very thing for him."

"Oh, Jack, how good of you! He's in his room. No, don't go, please. I want to hear. Ring that bell and he'll come."

"Here you are, my boy!" cried Jack, flattening out a sheet of paper, as George came in with his hair rumpled up from writing. "Just the very thing, if you can get it. Travel all you want and make money at the same time."

"Too good to be true," said George, rising to the

bait like a trout to a Mayfly. "Let's see!" and read out the paragraph Jack had copied. "Wanted immediately, a gentleman of education and firm will"—"Ah, ha!" in a stentorian voice suggestive of will power to any required degree—"to travel with a youth mentally deficient but not violent, apply, by letter, X 22, Office of *Scalpel*."

"Their idea is to get a medical student, you see. But you can do the job just as well if they'll give it you."

"There'll be heaps of fellows jumping at it."

"Possibly, but you've got first chance. That won't appear till Thursday. I got out of the cashier where the answers are to be sent. It's the Burney boy, Sir John Burney, the banker in Lombard Street, you know. You've heard of them." George shook his head. "Well, his son married his cousin, for her money it was said. They have five children and they're all more or less wrong," and he tapped his forehead.

"How awful!" said Joan piteously.

"Horrible! Ghastly kind of home it must be. They live in the old gentleman's house in Kensington Palace Gardens, and he lives with them. Now, they're in a hurry for some reason or other. 'Wanted immediately,' you see. If you're game for the job, I suggest your going up at once and interviewing them."

"Will they like that, do you think? Maybe they would prefer to make their own selection from a number of applicants."

"'Wanted immediately'—it's a chance, my boy. If I were in your place I wouldn't miss it."

"I'll go."

"After dinner, my son. Get there about nine and you'll catch 'em in a fat, complacent mood. That is if you catch 'em at all. It's just a chance, of course. But if at first you don't succeed, try again. George,

my boy, I'm coming up to smoke a pipe in your den. Then we'll have a cup of tea with Joan, and then—"

"You're too busy to stop for dinner, I suppose," said Joan.

"Well, I don't know. I'd rather like to wait till George comes back with his news. You see I'm anxious he should get this thing. It's just exactly——"

"Tea will be ready in half-an-hour and the boys will be coming home, and I shouldn't be surprised if Meg dropped in," said Joan, with a smile.

"I'm inclined to think, you know," said Jack, as he sat on George's bed and loaded his pipe, "that the young man is no lamb and the post may be none too easy. But you're strong enough to tackle anything of the kind and you've nerve enough."

"I'll tackle a dozen of him if they'll give me the chance."

"Better take him one at a time," said Jack philosophically. "I didn't care to hint at anything of the kind before Joan, and if I were you I wouldn't say anything to your mother or Meg. It may not be so, of course. But the chances are he is epileptic, and you never know quite what they'll be up to. He may have been kicking up shindies in the house and they want to get him out of it as quickly as they can."

"How do you treat epileptics?"

"Chief thing is firmness. Fortiter and suaviter in proportions of two to one. That's why they never can be treated properly at home. They reverse the proportions, and the results are just what they would be if you reversed the proportions of any other prescription."

When they descended to Joan's room, at the end of their half-hour, they found Meg and Mrs. Barty both there. The mother's face was placid again. Joan

had told them of this wonderful chance for George, and her quick eye had noted signs of disturbance in her mother's face. She had hastened, out of her own limited knowledge, to reassure her and to cast a rosy hope over the matter.

But Margaret Barty had shrunk simply at thought of her boy coming in contact with the Burneys, lest he should learn more than she desired he should know. Her mind had discussed the possibilities, and she had come to the conclusion that it was hardly likely the banker would enter into the old matter, and, in any case, she had no plausible reason for objecting to George trying for the place. It was possible, she thought, that his name and connection with that other George Barty might bar him in their eyes. But Mr. Burney had been very kind at the time of the catastrophe, and possibly he might not let the father's fault stand in the son's way.

So her brow smoothed out, and Joan took credit to herself, and they all discussed the matter in apparently the best of spirits. Meg chattered away thirteen to the dozen, as usual, on hospital and other matters; wrestled valiantly with Jack anent an article of his in the last number of the *Scalpel*; enquired after every member of the family, and greeted them all in motherly fashion as they came in in twos and threes from their work; and sugared their tea, and laughed and joked over happenings in which some of them had participated during the last few days. And Joan enjoyed her super-abundant energy to the full, and Mrs. Barty beamed graciously upon them all, though at times their discussions ran somewhat beyond her range.

Presently James Macgregor came bounding up the stairs with a new kind of transparent fish for Joan's

pond, in a small round glass bowl. After duly admiring it and watching the light shine through its internal organization, Joan wheeled herself to the pond and consigned the new pet to the company of the older inhabitants. Macgregor went with her, to see how the others were getting on and discuss them with her in detail. The younger men regarded him with a touch of brotherly awe, as the small boys look up to the old boy when he re-visits the scenes of his youth. The room was full of life and spirits, and eyes sparkled, and faces laughed and glowed, and the joy of youth and hope was over it all.

Some of the boys tackled Fairfax about that article of his in the *Scalpel*, and Meg promptly took his side, cast all her former arguments to the winds, and between them they formed a solid square and turned their laughing enemies inside out.

Then George got hold of James Macgregor, gave him an idea of the quest he was about to start on, and absorbed all the information that great authority could afford him on the subject of epilepsy.

And Mrs. Barty knitted and smiled, and dropped in a word now and again, and thought how strange it would be if George got this place with the Burneys.

CHAPTER V

NARROW DOOR TO A WIDER WAY

GEORGE rang the bell of the big house in Kensington Palace Gardens, and the door was promptly opened by a solemn-faced man-servant, with the manners and dignity of a bishop.

"Can I see Sir John——?" began George.

"Step inside, please," and he was shown into a small waiting-room off the great gloomy hall.

He was somewhat astonished at the promptitude of his admission. It was almost as though he had been expected. He did not know that messengers from the bank arrived at all hours, when, as had happened that day, Sir John had not gone down to the City, and they were always admitted instantly. He was supposed to be one of them.

"I will tell Sir John you are here," said the aged bishop, and left him to himself.

"Follow me, please," and they were mounting the stairs to Sir John's study. They passed through double doors which closed silently behind him, and, unknown to himself, he was standing in the room where his father had sold his soul twenty years before.

A grim-faced old gentleman lay in a chair by the fire. He had white hair and one foot was tucked up on a rest.

"Well, what have you got? You're very late," he said in a querulous voice, and stretched out a thin white hand without turning round. It had been dawning on George that he was mistaken for some-one else.

"Pardon me, sir," he said. "I'm afraid I'm not the person you are expecting. I had no intention of——"

"What is it then? Who are you? What do you want? Come here where I can see you."

"I came in reply to an advertisement in this week's *Scalpel*."

"Oh, ah! I see. They thought you were from Lombard Street, I suppose. Sit down!" and he fixed a pair of keen restless old eyes on George, who felt as if a pair of gimlets was boring at him.

"You seem young for the post. Not that he's violent, mind you"—and the keen eyes gave a wavering snap which George translated in his own way—"but he needs a firm hand and plenty of will-power——"

"Epilepsy?" asked George.

"Well—yes"—reluctantly—"something of that kind. Do you know anything about it?"

"Enough, I think, to manage a patient such as you name in the advertisement. Home control is almost impossible——"

"Exactly. I see you understand the matter. Have you ever had charge of a case before?"

"No, sir, but I happen to have lived all my life in a medical atmosphere where such matters are discussed, and one picks up a good deal."

"You are not in the medical profession yourself?"

"No, I'm preparing for a literary life. As part of the preparation I am desirous of travelling. That is why I am here."

"I see. Education?"

"Graduate of London University. Honours in Classics."

"French and German?"

"I speak both fluently and read them as easily as English."

The old man nodded and bored away with his gimlets.

"References?" he asked suddenly.

"Any of my professors at the College. Or you could ask Mr. John Sinclair of 33 Old Broad Street. He has known me all my life."

"I know Sinclair," he said with another nod, "a cautious man, a very cautious man. How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"You seem fairly strong."

"I'm very fit," said George, with an inward smile. He felt pretty sure that the young man to be taken charge of was a handful, and as Fairfax had said, "no lamb."

"By the way, what is your name? I should have asked before."

"George Barty!" and the old man jumped in his chair so that his leg fell off the rest and his pale face flushed with pain.

"Permit me, sir," said George, and gently placed the bandaged foot on the rest again.

"Thanks! Thanks!" said the old man. "Damnable thing gout. Bad twinge. George Bartle, did you say?"

"Barty, sir. George Barty."

But the old man seemed to have forgotten him for the moment. He was staring into the fire and thinking of that other George Barty whom he had tempted to destruction in that very room, and George Barty's son sat and looked at him wonderingly.

"Will you oblige me by touching that bell," said Sir John, coming out of his reverie at last. And to the ancient who answered it, "Is Mr. Frazer in, Buckle?"

"Just gone out, Sir John."

"Tell Master Frazer I want him. . . . And see that he comes."

"Yes, Sir John."

And, presently, the inner door of green baize swung open, and a youth of eighteen or so stood just inside and looked vacantly at them.

He was tall, quite as tall as George himself, but slight of build and loosely put together. His head hung slightly forward which bowed his narrow shoulders. His hands hung down in a helpless way. His under jaw hung slack, which left his mouth slightly open. There was no sign of curiosity in his eyes. George thought he would have stood and looked just so if he had been turned with his face to the wall. He was not an encouraging sight, not a companion to hanker after. But through him and behind him, thanks to a vivid imagination, George saw towering snow-clad mountains, and smiling green valleys, and blue lakes, and the ripples on summer seas.

"Come here, sir," said the old man harshly, and the youth shambled forward and rested against the table.

"What were you doing when I sent for you?"

"Eating . . . pineapple."

"You're always eating, and much good it seems to do you. Where is your mother?"

"Table."

"Do you think you could manage to take a message to her?"

"Try."

"Then tell her that if it is not disturbing her too much I would be glad of a moment's conversation with her."

The young man erected himself from the table and turned and slouched out of the room.

"That is the boy," said Sir John. "What do you think of him?"

This was too large a question to answer off-hand. George contented himself with, "He needs a firm hand, I presume."

"That's it, and he doesn't get it and can't get it here. His mother spoils him."

"Two parts fortiter to one part suaviter is about the correct treatment," said George, remembering his lessons.

"Exactly! Think you could manage him?"

"Certainly. I'm willing to try anyway. You could at all events count on me doing my best."

"I am prepared to pay £100 a year and all travelling expenses. Would that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"When could you start?"

"This day week. Do you suggest any special route?"

"Anywhere you choose. Possibly, by observation, you might find out if any place seems to suit him better than another. If you can do him any permanent good I shall be under very great obligation to you. But I doubt it," and he ended with a sigh.

They sat waiting for Mrs. Burney, but she did not come. At last Sir John said again, "May I trouble you to touch the bell?"

"Buckle," to the ancient, "ask Mrs. Burney to favour me with a moment's conversation if she is at liberty now," and presently the green baize door swung back once more to admit Mrs. Burney.

George was startled at the size of her, not in height, but in breadth and general massiveness. Her bust was enormous and her costume displayed it so freely that he felt it an indecency even to look at her. Her face

was fat and shining with good-living. Her eyes were somewhat prominent and not over-intelligent. She was chewing something when she came in, with the slow mechanical motion of a ruminant. Her jaws ceased working for a moment as she looked at George, with about as much expression as a thoughtful cow might have had, and then they resumed their slow grind and never stopped it except when she was speaking.

"Julia, this gentleman is prepared to take charge of Frazer for a trip abroad. Can you have him got ready by this day week?"

"I suppose so. I suppose he must go," she said, after a pause during which she looked at George. Her voice was rather thick and there was a slight wheeze in it. "It's hard, but I suppose there's nothing else for it."

"With a firmer hand over him he may improve," said the old man, "and you know you spoil him to death."

"The poor boy," said the mother. "Have you got a very firm hand?" to George.

"I have, Madam," he said, with his eyes glued to the fluffy hair on her forehead so as to escape the pitfall below.

"But you will be kind to him?" she said, with a gleam that might be affection in the strained eyes.

"I will be just as kind to him as he will allow me to be, Madam, I assure you."

"He's a good boy and as quiet as a lamb, except just——"

"Did he give you my message, Julia?" broke in the old man.

"No, he gave me no message. He was in the middle of a pine when you sent for him. I suppose he forgot."

" You may consider it settled, Mr. Barty. Call here the evening before you start and we will have a little further talk, and I will have funds and so on all ready. You can be working out your route meanwhile. Put your references down on a sheet of paper there. I may ask after them. But I am satisfied in my own mind that you can do all we want. I judge men by their eyes. May I trouble you to touch that bell again. Thank you. Monday next then about this time," and George passed through the green baize door in charge of the solemn Buckle, and managed to descend the stairs and the steps with equable feet, and raced for a 'bus as soon as he reached the High Street, as though it were the last 'bus for Mont Blanc.

They were anxiously awaiting his news at home, and shared fully in his delight at the new wide prospect so suddenly opened before him.

" You think you can manage him ? " asked Fairfax, who had just got back from seeing Meg to the hospital.

" I'll manage him all right. I could lift him with one hand and break him with two. I'm awfully obliged to you, Jack, for getting me this chance."

" I'm inclined to think you'll have a pretty good time, my boy. If you need an assistant don't forget me. You didn't see Mr. Burney then ? "

" The boy's father ? No, he had gone out."

" Yes, he finds his diversions outside, I believe. It must be a horrible house to live in. There are four more children, I believe, all more or less off."

" How very awful ! " said Joan, with horrified eyes. " Why is it ? "

" I don't know. Probably the mother is a bit soft."

" She certainly doesn't look over intelligent," said George, " but I'm indebted to her all the same."

CHAPTER VI

THE APPOINTED WAY

As George lay back in his corner seat in the early afternoon train for Folkestone on the Tuesday following, it seemed to him that life had suddenly wakened up from a long sleep, and was stretching vigorously.

Frazer Burney sat in the seat opposite. His eyes were closed. He was apparently asleep. He had positively refused to leave the house till he had had his lunch. He had left the table for the carriage, and was now dozing happily in his corner. Frazer's happiest moments were when he was asleep. They were also the happiest times for those who had charge of him.

George had had his talk with Sir John the previous night. The old gentleman had made his own enquiries and satisfied himself of the young man's trustworthiness. He had behaved liberally in the matter of funds. He was generally looked upon as close-fisted, but he had not shown himself so on this occasion. Possibly he considered money of small account compared with the personal benefits to be derived from his grandson's deportation. George had never had a tenth of such an amount in his possession before.

His instructions were of the briefest. "Write once a week telling me where and how you are. Don't let him eat too much if you can help it. Two glasses of wine are as much as he can stand. More than that is apt to excite him. Go where you please, stop where

you please. Keep him to a simple level life with as few excitements as possible. If you can start his brain working you will have done a good job. He may have a bit of one somewhere about him. God knows, he's never shown much sign of it."

"I'll be hanged if I think he has any," said the boy's father, who had been detained against his will by his father for this interview, and was sitting on a chair with his hands in his pockets and his legs stuck out towards the fire. "Or any of them," he added savagely. "They do you credit, sir."

The old man made no reply. His face was very grim and set as he turned again to George. "I think you know all my wishes now, Mr. Barty. You will go to the "Continental" at Paris. When you need more money let me know. I trust all will go well with you both. Be here with your baggage at ten in the morning."

George had been there at ten, still somewhat subdued by this first parting from his mother and Joan. Meg and Fairfax he had said good-bye to the previous night.

But Master Frazer Burney, having just risen from breakfast, had flatly refused to budge till he had had his lunch, and short of tying him hand and foot and carrying him into the carriage, there was nothing for it but to wait. George wondered vaguely what would happen if, after lunch, he refused to go till he had had his dinner. The young man's action seemed to open up an endless vista of possibilities. The mountains and lakes began to recede somewhat from his view.

It was a dreary time of waiting in Sir John's study. The old gentleman's gout was worse, and this silly delay did not tend to the improvement of his temper. When his secretary came up from the bank, with some letters

which needed his immediate attention, he sent George to the drawing-room in charge of Buckle. George sat down and took a book out of a cabinet, the first that came to his hand. Before he had more than glanced at the title, he was surprised by Buckle's tiptoeing heavily to his side, after the manner of the mysterious villain on the darkened stage, and whispering behind his hand with his eyes turned on the door, "Take my advice, sir, and keep a tight hand on him. A tight hand, that's what he needs," and he gave a significant twist of the wrist to show how he would put on the screw if it were left to him.

"Thank you!" said George, and turned to his book.

Presently the door opened softly again, and a little girl came in two steps and stood looking at him, with the slackened mouth and vacant eyes of her brother. His heart gave a throb of pain. That which in the young man excited in him a feeling of combativeness, in the child excited only his tenderest pity.

"Won't you come and speak to me?" he asked, and held out his hand.

But the child made no response. She continued to gaze at him vacantly for a moment, then turned and went out of the room with dragging feet.

"My God!" he said to himself. "It is awful."

When Master Frazer had had his lunch—George having partaken of his own in the study—he got up and intimated his readiness to depart. Buckle got him into his travelling-coat and he marched out of the house without a word of farewell to his mother or grandfather.

"Good-bye, my dear boy!" his mother called after him from the top of the steps.

"Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye, good-bye," he

murmured to himself, as he stepped into the carriage, and without looking round.

He dropped into a corner, pulled up the window nearest him, and the carriage started. George's last view was of some children's faces gazing down with lack-lustre eyes from a top window which had iron bars across it, and of Mrs. Burney's massive figure on the top step, waving a pudgy white hand after them with a handkerchief in it.

Frazer slept all the way to Folkestone, to George's very great content. He had made up his mind to get the upper hand from the very start, and was on the look out for the first sign of opposition. With an Englishman's hatred of publicity he hoped that the struggle would come when they two were alone together. It would be unpleasant to have to lay down the law of their companionship with a crowd looking on. At Folkestone he woke Burney up, linked his arm in his own, and led him on board the steamer.

" We'll have dinner at Boulogne," he said. " Suppose we walk about a bit. You had a good sleep in the train. A walk will give you an appetite."

" Ah, dinner ! " said Burney, and turned and set off as though by much walking he could reach it the quicker. George whirled him round at the end of the deck, and the other seemed conscious, through the pressure of the strong arm within his own, of the stronger will that had made up its mind to guide him. He offered no objections and walked with the utmost docility wherever George chose to take him.

They had an excellent dinner in the buffet at Boulogne, and the novelties in the way of dishes and surroundings seemed to occupy young Burney's mind to the full. Afterwards he suffered himself to be led to a carriage, and fell asleep at once, and did not wake

till they were running in among the lights of Paris. George obtained a double-bedded room at the "Continental" and turned in early, tired with the journey and devoutly thankful that nothing untoward had happened so far.

He started up in the middle of the night to find his room-mate prowling uneasily about the room.

"Now then, Burney, what's the matter?" he cried. "Get into bed, man. You'll catch cold."

"Yes, yes. Cold, cold."

"Get into bed at once now," said George, jumping out, "and don't move again till I tell you," and he led him to his bed and tucked him up in it.

He suffered no further disturbance, and after breakfast they set off for a first glimpse of Paris, strolling first across the gardens to the river, with an appreciative glance, on George's part, up the Champs Elysées, and a preliminary look at the Tuileries.

It was an early spring morning and Paris was at its best. The gardens were full of children and white-capped bonnes; the sky was blue; the air crisp and clear, with a quaint flavour of wood smoke in it. The busy little steamers on the river skiffed merrily to and fro; the blue-bloused loungers on the quays were full of interest; the trim damsels hurrying along with parcels and boxes were merry of eye and voluble of lip. Everything was new and charming, and George decided that he was in for a very good time, and that foreign travel was the spice of life.

They rambled along and crossed a bridge, and came on Notre Dame. A garrulous old heathen took them round and pattered off his well-worn story, interspersed with comic asides which he had found provocative of laughter and additional tips from other Englishmen, and was rather hurt at the reception of

his efforts by these two. For Burney chewed the back of his cap the whole time, and gazed vacantly from the old man to the things he pointed out, and then back at the speaker, in such a way as stopped the flow of his talk more than once in sheer surprise; and George was absorbing the feeling of the place in such deep draughts that even the old chatterbox failed to come between him and it. So that when the old man looked at their departing backs, even the ample coin in his grimy hand could not prevent his saying—

"Well, mon Dieu, they are all more or less mad, these Englishmen, but those two are the maddest I have seen yet. But yes, mon Dieu!"

They strolled back across the bridge, and so at last, about mid-day, to the Palais Royal, where George had promised himself second breakfast in one of the many cafés of which he had heard the boys at home speak.

Their progress up the Colonnade was slow, however, for the little shops with their magnificent displays of imitation jewelry exercised an absolute fascination on Burney, and he had to be dragged onwards from one to another by main force. To pacify him, George took him into one of them and bought him one or two trifles on which his strange affections had centred, and so by degrees got him the length of what seemed the best of the cafés at the top of the quadrangle. They breakfasted there to their mutual satisfaction, novelty covering all deficiencies, and then strolled along to a café in the Rue Rivoli for coffee and a smoke. Burney seemed less vacuous when smoking than at any other time. George decided that it was the closing of his lips on the cigar that tended to the improvement in his appearance, and supposed the tobacco had probably a soothing effect on him.

When their smoke was finished, one of the great mixed emporiums opposite caught the wavering eye, and nothing would satisfy him but going through it. George was doubtful if they could do so without buying, but found that no objection was raised to their joining the in-going stream and wandering where they would. It was all new to him and he was greatly interested. He was mentally pigeon-holing all he saw for future use and for recapitulation to Joan, when he suffered sudden and rude awakening.

A tap on the arm brought him face to face with a frock-coated gentleman who courteously invited them to follow him. George believed they had been found out as unprofitable pilgrims and were to be quietly shown the door. He smiled and followed with his arm through Burney's. Their conductor, however, led them, not to the front door, but to an apartment at the back, and their progress was followed by knowing looks and winks from the employés behind the counters. When they entered, the door was immediately locked behind them. Another grave-faced man in a frock coat stood there waiting for them.

"Why, what's all this?" said George, in English first, in his astonishment, and then in French.

"I regret, monsieur, but I am unfortunately compelled to request that messieurs will have the kindness to empty their pockets——"

"Empty our pockets——? What do you mean? What the——?"

"Gently, monsieur, gently. If there is no occasion for it, so much the better. But—you see!"

The other had run his hand deftly into young Burney's pockets and was emptying the contents on to the table.

George caught his breath and sat down suddenly, deprived utterly of speech.

A little roll of pink ribbon, a dainty lace handkerchief, the trifles of jewelry he had bought that morning, and half-a-dozen more which he had not bought, a salt spoon stamped with the name of the café where they had breakfasted, two salt spoons marked Hotel Continental, a coffee spoon from the café opposite, two napoleons.

" Well—I'll be hanged ! " gasped George at last, and Burney giggled idiotically at sight of his plunder.

" Oblige me by emptying mine now," said George, after a moment's thought, and forthwith emptied them himself on to the table. There was nothing there but what was his own, and among them their passports.

" Kindly look at those," said George.

The officials shrugged, but consented to look. Their manner was a libel on passports in general, and cast a doubt on the veracity of these in particular.

" Eh bien ? " said the principal, when he had glanced at the essential points of the documents.

" This young man is the grandson of Sir John Burney, banker, of London," said George. " He is, as you can see for yourselves, mentally deficient. I was engaged by his grandfather, a week ago, to take him abroad for a tour. We started yesterday and arrived at the Hotel Continental last night. I have had no experience yet of his peculiarities. This is evidently one of them. Had I been informed of it, as I think I ought to have been, I should have been on my guard, as I shall be in future. Look at that collection. That ribbon and the handkerchief are probably yours——"

" Yes, he was seen to take them," said one of the frock coats.

" That salt spoon is from the café in the Palais

Royal where we breakfasted, the coffee spoon is from the café opposite where we had coffee, the other spoons are from our hotel, the two gold pieces he must have taken from my money in the night. I'm pretty sure he had none of his own. He's an absolute magpie, and I'm evidently going to have my hands full."

They were pretty good judges of human nature in that big shop, and they had had plenty of experience. It was a good thing for Frazer Burney that he was in George Barty's company, and that George Barty's looks and words carried with them the conviction of honesty.

The two officials conferred a moment and then the principal said quietly,

"Bien, monsieur. We believe what you say and the matter can end here. You will have a troublesome journey, I fear. It is obvious the young gentleman is not responsible for his actions."

"I must keep him out of temptation as far as I can. But if he's going to steal the spoons at every hotel we go to we're going to have a lively time, I'm afraid."

"If I might suggest," said the other courteously, "if I were in your place I would at each hotel inform the proprietor of your friend's proclivities. Otherwise, you understand——" and he condensed all the possibilities into a meaning shrug.

"Yes, I thank you. That is very good advice, I think, and I will act on it. How am I to return those wretched spoons to the cafés, and those things from the Palais Royal? It was the last shop on the left at the top. The Continental's I will take back myself, of course."

"We will see to that for you with pleasure."

"That is very good of you. Please give that to the

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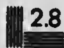
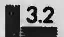
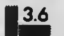
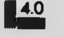
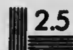

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messenger, and I am very sorry to have given you so much trouble."

They were shown out of the shop with the utmost courtesy, but George kept tight hold of one of Master Frazer's arms, and their original captor kept very close to the other, and the knowing looks of the shop girls, as they passed the long counters, set George's cheeks flaming with outraged honest red.

He said nothing as they walked along the street towards the Louvre and their hotel. But he was thinking deeply, and when they came to a shop filled with sticks, he went in and bought a tough flexible whangee cane. He almost laughed out at Burney's apprehensive side glances at it. It seemed as though he had had intimate personal relations with such an instrument before.

He took Burney up to their room and locked him in, and then went down to the office, handed over the spoons and explained the matter.

"It will probably happen again," he said, to the sympathetic young lady with the very black eyes in the bureau. "But I will undertake to return to you everything he takes and I can't do more."

When he returned to the bedroom, he found that his charge had undressed and gone to bed and was apparently sound asleep. But he was in no humour for nonsense. He hauled down the bed-clothes and planted a couple of stinging stripes on the recumbent figure. The young man should learn at once who was his master and what he thought of his late proceedings.

Burney gave a howl and bounded at him, with mowing jaw and something akin to animation in his eye. George caught him by the shoulders, and held him at arm's length, while he shook him and lectured him.

"Now, see here," he said. "I'm your master, and if you don't behave yourself I shall whip you. I don't want to do it, but I shall carry that cane always, and if you steal things, or misbehave, you'll feel it. Understand?"

Burney understood. The sting of a cane carries a certain amount of conviction to the meanest intelligence. The grip of George's strong hands, and his powerlessness against them, confirmed the lesson.

When he was released he dropped limply on to the bed.

"Dress yourself at once," said George. "We'll go for a drive."

Burney dressed, and they had a very enjoyable drive round the Bois and along the Boulevards before returning to dinner.

George kept an alert eye on the spoons, and manœuvred the salt cellar beyond his companion's reach whenever it drifted his way, and plumed himself on getting through the meal without the misappropriation of any of the hotel plate. Nevertheless, he found a coffee spoon in Frazer's pocket that night, and paid Frazer for it with a cut of the whangee.

"The poor young man!" said the black-eyed young lady of the bureau, when he returned the spoon next morning, and thereafter it seemed to George that the waiter at their special table kept a watchful eye on the young man also.

He decided to postpone his own more intimate researches into Parisian life and customs to a more convenient season, and after a stay of only two days, they took train again for the South and in due course arrived at Nice.

Everywhere, and at all times, Frazer Burney carried with him the peculiarities of his nature, and they were

always cropping up in all kinds of ways. George Barty's first trip abroad was not one of unalloyed delight. He had expected unpleasantnesses, and he had them in plenty. He found, however, considerable compensation in the novelty of his circumstances and in the scenes in which they were cast, and he would have put up with twice as much sooner than have missed these things.

That little whangee cane from Paris was the best purchase he ever made. It exercised a laughably deterrent influence on Master Burney, but even it could not eradicate his inborn propensities

Having impressed him with his powers, physical, mental, and moral, George did his very best to influence him in gentler ways. He tried his hardest to grapple with the freakish spirit that did duty in him for intelligence, and generally had to confess himself beaten. He talked to him soberly and earnestly. Frazer rewarded him with a moist grin. He watched over his bodily welfare, his eating and drinking and sleeping, as carefully as any physician or mother. And Frazer accepted his self-sacrifice with the equanimity of an altar stone. He led him through the lovely scenery of the Riviera and did his best to awaken him to some sense of its beauty. Frazer ate and drank and smoked, at hotel after hotel, but none of those other things appealed to him in the slightest. He passed among them with no more appreciation than he would have traversed a Whitechapel slum.

George wrote regularly once a week to Sir John, and many times a week to Joan and his mother and Meg. And in none of these letters did he detail the petty worries of his life. The home letters on the contr[illegible] overflowed with the joy of travel, and Joan especia[illegible]y rejoiced in them. She read and re-read them, and

read up the guide books bearing on their route, till she knew all they had seen as well almost as George knew it himself, and much more besides.

Friendliness with any of their many travelling companions was next to impossible. At times some elderly and lonely voyager would attempt to break the ice, and George was always ready to meet such half way. For in truth he found the constant companionship of a vacant mind a very considerable trial. It was only the fact that without the companionship all the redeeming circumstances must have vanished that reconciled him to it.

For he had come to learn men and women, and what one learns from the outside is at best misleading, and frequently tantalising. That voluminous travelling cloak and tempting veil may hide charms that would dazzle a Sultan. The flaps of that travelling cap may shield from stray draughts the wit and wisdom of a philosopher. It is impossible not to own that as a rule they do not. The veil is raised at last, and after one swift glance your disappointment turns its eyes elsewhere. The owner of the fore and aft cap opens his mouth, and you regret that he did not leave you your illusions.

But even those venturesome voyagers whose own loneliness led them to address the bright, eager-faced youth with the deep-set eyes which seemed to miss nothing that passed outside, relapsed gradually into silence, when the fact was thrust upon them that the vacuous individual opposite was part of his impedimenta.

George never condescended to explain. Burney and he were facts to be left severely alone, since no amount of explanation could palliate so painful a fact as his companion.

So, amid the thronging crowds of the gay southern

coast, they two passed alone. All that was known of them was that the one was the son of a man of wealth, and the other was in charge of him. They became known, I believe, as Beauty and the Beast—not that George had any claims to the one, except such as strength, intelligence, and straight-eyed honesty give to any man, but the appositeness of the other's title was patent to all.

By the old banker's suggestion, the name of Burney never appeared on any hotel register. George registered always as "George Barty and friend." There was no need to exhibit one's skeleton to the world with a label round its neck.

He had gradually organized their proceedings on his own lines. He had their meals served at a specially reserved table, and at times in their own room. Burney could, when he chose, behave with perfect propriety at table. The trouble was that George never could be sure of his doing so, and was kept on perpetual tenterhooks as to his next proceedings.

At the table d'hôte at Marseilles he had clawed at a pyramid of fruit surmounted by a pine-apple, the moment he had finished his soup, and brought the whole erection down in ruins in front of him. He regarded it with much amusement and an idiotic giggle, and reached a hasty hand for the pine. Black with disgust George marched him up to his room and ordered him dinnerless to bed, emphasizing in whangee—a language Burney never failed to appreciate—the reasons for this mortification and incarceration. Burney's stomach was the one thing he had personal regard for. He strongly resented this attack upon it. For the second time he showed his teeth at his master and flung himself upon him. But Barty overpowered him as easily as before. He was administering the usual

authoritative shake and lecture, when Burney suddenly collapsed in his hands and fell to the floor like a crumpled piece of paper. He lay there rigid, with his eyes turned up so that nothing showed but the whites, and a slight froth on his lips.

George was startled, but still found himself in two minds concerning him. He half suspected malingering. On the other hand it might be a genuine fit of epilepsy. He treated him on both counts—unloosed his collar, and dashed the big bath-sponge filled with water in his face. The suddenness with which his patient came to himself, and snarled up at him from the wet floor, tended to confirm his suspicions. He curtly ordered him to bed, locked him in the room and went out to a café, where he got dinner and had a pleasant chat and smoke with a young German who was awaiting the boat for Port Said.

He had no fears in leaving his charge alone in his room. If there was one thing Frazer Burney was not likely to do in cold blood, it was the doing of any smallest thing that would inflict pain or discomfort upon himself. George had very soon found out that the strongest feeling in him was an overpowering regard for his own bodily comfort. He was selfishness incarnate.

At Monaco, an untoward occurrence happened, for which George took blame to himself. He had a very great desire to see all that was to be seen. It was not in human nature—not in the nature, at all events, of one who had come abroad for the sole purpose of studying places and people at first hand—to be so close to Hades without penetrating within.

They ran over one day from Nice and ascended with the throng to the Casino.

It was all intensely interesting to Barty. Curiously,

perhaps, he had no slightest desire to join in the play. He had common sense enough to know that the very best thing that could happen, if he did so, was that he should lose heavily enough to sicken him of it, and he had no money to lose. He watched the various tables, and finally settled where the throng was greatest, and, to judge by the faces of the players, the play keenest—one of the roulette tables. Burney followed him docilely, gazed vacantly about, and showed little interest. He did not understand what was going on, and George was glad of it. He had felt some compunctions about bringing him.

By degrees George grew so fascinated with that unique exhibition of human nature at its worst, that he forgot his companion altogether.

The eager faces and straining eyes, the sparkle of triumph, the gray shadows of despair, the jostling, self-forgetful concentration of every faculty on the lined board; these burnt themselves indelibly on his memory. That withered little old lady, with so many rings on her claws that she could hardly crook them, had come in the railway carriage with them that morning. She was busily pricking a card with a pin, and occasionally pushed a five-franc piece about along the lines. The sparkling American girl who had just backed out of the throng, with the laughingly expressed, but none the less emphatically delivered, opinion that the whole thing was a fraud because she had lost ten five-franc pieces one after another, was from their hotel at Nice. So was the black-haired, dark-faced young fellow opposite. George had noticed him at table, and had been struck by his face and his keen black eyes. From the neatly-stacked piles of gold in front of him, and the calmly intent way in which he made his stakes, now scattering his pieces apparently

broadcast over the lines and squares, and again watching quietly without risking so much as a napoleon, he judged him to be an habitué. He could not himself understand his evolutions, but they seemed to be fairly successful. The young man's pile grew larger and larger. Some of the players nearest him began to watch him and follow his moves. The old lady with the pin and card shoved her five-franc piece about wherever he placed a napoleon within easy reach. But he paid no attention to anyone and never raised his eyes from the table. When the croupier deftly swept away his pieces he quietly replaced them from his neat piles. His mouth never moved by so much as a smile or a quiver, whichever happened. George studied him as a type and found him interesting.

He was photographing the whole scene in his brain for future use, when, in a moment, his mental camera and all its appurtenances were sent flying, by the sight of Master Frazer Burney's body and outstretched hand launching themselves across the table at the piles of gold in front of the dark-faced young man

But the dark-faced young man did not patronise the tables for the benefit of unlicensed thieves. His ly was over his gold in a second, and Burney received neatly-placed fist in his face, while those at his back laid rude hands on him and dragged him out like a sack, with kicks and blows and curses. Two tall lackeys in imposing uniforms took possession of him and hauled him away to the office. The crowd closed in round the tables, and the voice and shovel of the croupier poured oil on the troubled waters.

George followed the procession of three and reached the office simultaneously with them. He followed them inside, explained the situation, took the blame to himself for allowing his charge so much freedom, and

undertook to carry him away at once and not permit his return. His explanation was accepted. Burney was sponged into decency. The thin-faced young man's knuckles were of the boniest, and the would-be gold-grabber's nose and one eye had suffered. Then they were escorted to the station and told not to return.

George said nothing to his charge, beyond a remonstrance on the silliness of his behaviour. He felt that the greater blame attached to himself.

But this affair decided him to take his patient at once to a less exciting atmosphere, and they started that night for Genoa, and went on next day by Milan to Como.

In the quietude of the lovely lake he strove his hardest to grapple again with the problem of Frazer Burney's brain. At times he had hopes that some glimmer of sense was beginning to penetrate the thick darkness. Burney would listen to his homilies, and, if he happened to be smoking, would look almost reasonable. Then, at dinner time, he would quietly pocket all the spoons he could annex unobserved by George, and take the inevitable whangeeing with such black equanimity as comes of frequent chastisement.

George wondered sometimes that it never occurred to the clouded brain to set on him in the night and take toll for past discipline. He closed his eyes each night with this contingency confronting them, but he accepted it as inevitable, and felt no fears of coming out on top in any struggle that might be forced upon him.

His patient had felt the strength of his muscles, and had some dim idea of the will that for the present directed his life and carried him whithersoever it would. He probably stood in some awe of both, for, except in extremity, the beast in him had never tried to rend its

keeper. And, even at such times, the effort was spasmodic and momentary, and passed away as rapidly as it came. His memory and his will were alike feeble and embryonic.

From Como they passed by leisurely stages up the St. Gothard road to Andermatt. Thence George sent on the heavier baggage by Altdorf to Lucerne, packed a couple of knapsacks, purchased in Milan for this purpose, strapped one on to Burney's rounded, and much astonished, shoulders, which had never before suffered any burden greater than their necessary clothing, and the heavier on to his own. Then he watched, with interest and amusement, the effects of a spell of mild roughing on one whose way through life had been made smooth from the day on which he took his first belated step alone.

The result was surprising. As the lax muscles of the body began to toughen and knit up, under the strong air and plain faring and constant usage, the flaccid brain seemed to stiffen in sympathy. The vacant eye began to take notice. The lagging step assumed something not unremotely related to a spring. The large appetite satisfied itself to great advantage on mountain fare. He was too tired at night even to steal spoons, and besides they were coarse and unattractive. For Barty chose that there should be no make-believe in their roughing it, and their usual resting place at night was some village chalet, or at best some country hospice where their wants were attended to by rough-frocked priests whose provisioning was as simple as their habits.

George began to take credit to himself for having hit upon a great discovery in the treatment of mental diseases, overlooking in his interest in his own patient, the fact that sound mind and sound body have been

correlated from the times of the ancients. He laboured hard to nourish what he believed to be the sprouting of a higher intelligence in the darkened brain. He holds to this day that he succeeded, and that, even in spite of what followed.

They climbed the Furka, and descended the Rhone Valley as far as Visp. Then they retraced their steps and crossed the Grimsel, and so down the valley of the Aare to Meiringen. Then through the upland pine forests to Rosenlaui and over the Scheideck to Grindelwald, and over the Wengernalp to Lauterbrunnen, and thence to Saas-Mürrn, where that happened which changed the currents of more lives than one. And it was a very different Frazer Burney who arrived at Saas-Mürrn from the Frazer Burney who mumbled his good-byes to the carriage-cushions outside the house in Kensington Palace Gardens.

CHAPTER VII

FROM OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Do you know Saas-Mürrn? Not under that name, at any rate.

It is a tiny place perched aloft on a bleak shelf, a veritable eagle's nest. It has next to nothing, and yet, like a philosopher, possesses everything. It stands far above the world in general, and for many months in the year is cut off therefrom by snow and ice. It is a toil to get there, and when you have got there you wonder why you came. But live there for a week and you have no desire to go away again.

The few inhabitants of this unworldly spot are simple, open-faced, clear-eyed souls, absolutely in keeping with their environment. They could hardly be anything else. They live so very near heaven. The predatory ones, who get on in the world and make money, live in the valley below—necessarily. If they lived in Saas-Mürrn they could only get up in the world, and the things are quite different.

The principal assets of Saas-Mürrn—to talk the language of the plains—are an atmosphere of heavenly purity, and a view so sublime that it might strike sparks off the soul of an atheist, unless he were as blind outside as inside.

You can live there in exceeding comfort for five francs a day, something less *en pension*, and I believe a keen bargainer might compass a reduction even on that slender tariff.

George Barty and Frazer Burney found their way

G

up the steep foot-path among the pines and firs one August evening, and the very first person they saw there was Mary Lindsay. One of them never forgot that first sight of her.

She was standing on the extreme edge of the shelf which overlooks the valley—a slim dark figure, silhouetted against the rose-white higher slopes of the great mountain on the opposite side of the valley.

The valley itself was full of shadows. Saas-Mürrn by rights should have been so too, for the sun had sunk behind its own mountain top a good half-hour before. But the huge white-breasted pile in front still glowed golden rose, and, contrary to Nature, but greatly to the enjoyment of its inhabitants who rejoiced in a good hour's more daylight than their kinsfolk below, Saas-Mürrn's evening shadows pointed to the west. For the Saas-Mürrners have two sunsets every night, the natural one in the west, though not much of that is visible because of intervening giants, and a supplementary one from the great white mountain opposite.

The path from the valley winds for the last two miles through pine woods, still dense enough to ensure ample fires in Saas-Mürrn for many a year to come. The woods above are "Bann-wald," whose every twig is sacred to the protection of the village from stone slide and avalanche.

The girl stood looking out over the valley. It seemed as if a breath would blow her into it. The moment they issued from the wood path she came running towards them.

"Oh, Herr Doctor," she cried, in stumbling German, "I am so glad you are come," and then, seeing the surprise on George's face—"You are the doctor, are you not?" and her interlaced fingers twisted themselves more tightly still.

"No," said George in English, "I'm sorry I'm not the doctor. Can I go after him for you?"

"And you have not seen him on the road? I sent for him hours ago, and—and—I'm afraid——"

"It's a long pull up. Perhaps he's on his way. He might be out, you know, when your messenger got there. Can I be of any service to you till he comes? Is it an accident?"

"No, no. It's an old lady at the inn there. I'm afraid she's dying and I'm all alone with her," and the slim fingers whitened again in their anxiety.

Her face, even in its distress, was very charming—fresh, healthy complexion; cheek-bones just a trifle high; eyes beseechingly large at the moment and of a very deep blue, almost violet; hair brown, but hidden by a light shawl, for the second sunset at Saas-Mürrn has no warmth in it; mouth quivering apprehensively, probably somewhat large, but not any too large, decided our student of men and women; costume plain but beautifully fitted. A sweet, wholesome, graceful girl, Scotch he thought, but could not be sure.

"I will go back and see if I can meet him and hurry him up," said George, with a meditative glance at Burney, who had slipped his buckle and sat himself down on his knapsack. "I will just take my friend to the inn and tell them to give him something to eat." And at the word Fraser scrambled to his feet.

"It is very good of you," she began, withdrawing her anxious eyes for a moment from the darkening woods below, through which the doctor must come. "But I really don't see what you could do. Oh, I do wish he would come. It would be awful if she died. They might think——"

And just then two more figures came toiling up the

wood path and the girl sped away towards them. This was evidently the doctor, for after a word they all hurried on to the largest of the eight or ten wooden houses which compose the village, and went inside. The glow faded from the topmost pinnacle of the white mountain and left it grim and stark, and the air felt suddenly cold.

"We will go there, too," said George, and they followed slowly after the others.

The young lady and the doctor had disappeared by the time they reached the door. A pleasant-faced Swiss woman met them in the passage, and shook her head in reply to George's request for accommodation.

"There is an English lady upstairs," she said doubtfully. "She is ill, very ill——"

"I know. We met the young lady. Perhaps we can be of some service."

"Ach, so! If you know the lady. A room with two beds? Yes, we will manage it. Dinner will be in half-an-hour. One must eat all the same, and the mountain air gives one an appetite, nicht wahr?"

The room they were shown into, after a short interval of preparation, was the one immediately adjoining that occupied by the invalid. The house itself was solidly built, with wide projecting eaves and stone-weighted roof, but the partitions were immodestly thin. They could hear the murmur of subdued voices and the soft passage to and fro of footsteps. Once George caught the gentle swish of a gown against their wall. He wondered how the sick woman was faring, and what relation she was to the pleasant-faced girl.

When they went down to dinner, the doctor joined them almost immediately. He was an elderly man, sturdy of build and rugged of face. George asked him how the lady was.

He answered in German with a shake of the head, "I shall stop the night, but I doubt if she will see the morning."

"What is the matter?"

"She has been an invalid for many years, from what the young lady says. It is the final break-up."

"You have not been attending her then?"

"I never saw her till to-night. What is the matter with your friend?" said the old man, who had been regarding Burney with an observant eye.

"He is mentally deficient. He is in my charge."

"I understand. A troublesome charge at times, I should say."

"We have been tramping the mountains for three weeks. It has done him a world of good."

"The body has strengthened and the brain with it, to some extent, I suppose. But you will never cure him."

"I have been hoping the improvement might continue."

"You can't supply wits even by an operation. It is hopeless. I made the brain my special study for many years. It is a difficult subject. We really know very little about it. Have you studied medicine?"

They fell into interesting talk, Burney meanwhile eating with his usual appetite, the doctor watching him with a practised and interested eye.

"Is he sometimes violent?" he asked one time.

"No, I could not say that," George replied. "At first I had to correct him sharply for some unpleasant ways he had, and he tried to retaliate. But when he found it useless he gave up trying, and I have had no trouble with him lately."

"You will need to keep a sharp eye on him all the same."

"That is part of my business, of course."

When Burney had had his cigar, George saw him to bed, and then returned to the little salon for another pipe and some more talk with the doctor, whom he found very entertaining. The old gentleman had lived in the valley for many years, and, while his regular practice lay among the *châlets* scattered far and wide along the mountain sides, in the season he found plenty to do among the visitors from all ends of the earth. He talked well and found an appreciative listener.

Several times he went quietly upstairs, but had no better word to give of his patient.

"The light is flickering," he said, when he came down one time. "I will go up again presently and then I will stop there. The young lady seems much distressed. She is a countrywoman of yours. Perhaps you can be of service to her——"

"That is what I am here for," said George.

"I am glad. It is trying for the young, and all alone too."

And presently he went upstairs again and did not come down. George sat smoking for a time and then went quietly up to his room. There was no sound from the adjoining chamber, and he turned in and slept soundly.

He was up betimes, chiefly to see if the doctor's fears had been confirmed, partly in hopes of seeing the sun rise. Burney was still sleeping, so he locked the door and passed out of the house.

He was too late, however, for either the doctor or the sun. The sky and all the white peaks around were ablaze with the splendour of the new day, and on the edge of the cliff, where they first set eyes on her the previous night, the young lady was standing with her

back towards him looking out over the wonderful scene.

He approached her quietly. She heard him coming, but did not move.

"Good morning," he said quietly. "May I ask how things have gone?"

"She died about an hour ago," said the girl. "The doctor has just gone home." She seemed less upset than he would have expected, though her face looked tired and she had been weeping.

"I hope you will let me do anything I can," he said. "I am entirely at your service. My name is George Barty. I am travelling in charge of the young fellow you saw with me last night. He is an invalid also."

She had looked round at him when she spoke, and had then turned again to the flashing peaks in front.

"It is very good of you," she said simply, and he thought she was younger than he had supposed the night before. "I am so glad you happened to come. I am quite alone, and—I have never had anything of this kind to do before."

"Will you be taking her home?"

"I don't know what they will want done. I must telegraph, I suppose."

"Was she—what relation was she to you, may I ask?"

"To me? None at all. I was her companion, that was all. She was rather trying at times, but it was sad for her to die so far away from everyone. . . It is the first time I have seen any one die. But I don't think she suffered at all. She just sighed and went to sleep."

"That is as it should be, and as I believe it generally is, as a matter of fact. I have had no experience myself, but I was brought up in an atmosphere of

doctors and I have heard them talk about it. You are Scotch, are you not ?"

"My people are Scotch. I was born in Australia. My name is Mary Lindsay."

"You are a very long way from home, Miss Lindsay"

"What made you think I was Scotch ?"

"I judged by your face," he said, and enjoyed the opportunity of looking very straight at it again, under guise of justifying his opinion. "You see I'm by way of preparing for a literary life, and I'm cultivating my powers of observation. I wasn't very far wrong after all."

"What is the matter with your friend?"

"He is a rich man's son, but unfortunately he is poorly equipped mentally. I would sooner be a poor man with brains than have all the money in the world without them."

"Surely," she said.

"Now, how can I help you ? Do you know to whom to telegraph ?"

"I know her lawyer's address."

"What will you say ?" and he pulled out pencil and paper. "What was the old lady's name ?"

"Mrs. Cornwall Crest."

He wrote, and scored out. and re-wrote, while she watched him. Finally he said—

"How will this do ?—'Mrs. Crest died to-day. Wire full instructions. Mary Lindsay. Poste Restante, Brunnenthal.'—That will be the nearest telegraph station."

"That will do, I think, thank you."

"I will go down with it after breakfast. What is the name and address of the lawyer ?"

"Crowes, 199 Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"They may not answer at once," he said, as he

inserted the address. "It is probable they will have to consult the old lady's relatives, you know. Would it not be as well for me to send up a—an undertaker?"

"The doctor said he would attend to that," she said, with a little shiver. The necessary after proceedings are a terrible prolongation of the trying time to those who are left.

"You need rest," he said. "Try and take some breakfast, and then lie down and have a sleep. You'll feel twice as good after it."

She turned with him towards the house, and they found the table laid for early breakfast.

"I will run up and see to my charge," he said, and when he returned with Burney she was nibbling bread and sipping her coffee, with no appearance of appetite.

"Would you—mind my coming with you to Brunnenthal?" asked Miss Lindsay. "I shouldn't sleep if I stopped here. I think the walk would do me more good, and perhaps I would be able to sleep to-night."

"I shall be delighted, if you think it won't be too much for you. It's a good four miles there and equal to about eight back, you know."

"I can do it all right. I used to be a good walker—before I came to England."

So, after breakfast, they all three set off down the path among the pines, and George Barty and Mary Lindsay found themselves as much alone, to all intents and purposes, as if Burney had not been there. He trudged along in the rear and never ventured a remark. Lunch lay at the bottom of the mountain, Barty had told him, and that was sufficient to keep him steadily on the down-grade. Dinner would get him up again. When at times the others halted for a rest, or to admire some specially fine view of the opposite snow fields

or the winding valley, he drew up with them and sat down at once on the nearest rock or fallen tree, as was his way. But if George pointed out to him the things they were looking at, a nod and a grunt were his only reply.

"He must be rather a trial to you," said Miss Lindsay, one such time, when they had set out again.

"He's not a lively companion, but he's perfectly harmless. He's the debit item in the account. On the other side is—all this," with a great sweep of the arm, which comprehended the whole of Switzerland and Miss Mary Lindsay. "And it leaves a big balance on the right side. I was casting about how to see something of the world when this chance offered, and I jumped at it. What can you tell me about Australia?"

She could tell him plenty about Australia, and that led inevitably to telling about herself, and before they reached Brunnenthal they felt almost like old friends.

She told him how her father, a big squatter in the back country, had been ruined by a terrible drought—"not a single drop of rain for eighteen months, and the poor sheep died like flies. Then the banks came down on him, as they always do, and he had to begin life again. I was at school in Sydney. My mother died when I was four. I scarcely remember her. There were two younger ones at home and it seemed to me that I ought to strike out for myself, and not be a burden on my father when he was down. It had always been the dream of my life to come home, and when I heard that Mrs. Colonel Crest was wanting a companion for the voyage and afterwards, I jumped at my chance just as you did at yours. But she was a rather trying old lady. Colonel Crest was in the

Government Service in Sydney till he died, and she had heaps of relatives in England, but they very rarely came to see her, and it was horribly dull. We spent the winter at St. Leonard's, and she only went out twice the whole time, and then in a closed carriage."

"What was the matter with her?"

"Oh, she had chronic asthma and chronic bronchitis, and a chronically gloomy temperament. And now, poor old thing, she's gone, and I can't help feeling sorry for her, though she nearly worried my life out at times. Someone told her Saas-Mürrn was good for the lungs, and we came here three weeks ago. I felt sure she was worse than I had ever seen her, but she would not let me send for the doctor. She said she had been spending money all her life on doctors, and they'd never done her any good, and she knew more about herself than all of them put together. She had medicines of her own for each complaint, and I had to give them to her when the different attacks came on."

"Have you money, in case they send word to bury her here?"

"She always seemed to have plenty. I suppose I must look. What do you suppose it will cost?"

"I've no idea, but we can find out at Brunnenthal. You could add a word or two to the telegram if you wished."

"But I don't know what she has. I wish I'd thought of it before we started—" and she stopped, as though considering the idea of returning.

"I have heaps. We've been travelling for nothing lately. If you'll allow me I shall be glad to advance anything you may need. I'm sure there could be no objections from my people."

"It's very good of you. But I hope there'll be no need. I never thought of it," and she went on in

silence for a time, evidently pondering this new aspect of affairs and its possible effect upon herself.

"What will you do afterwards?"

"I don't know. I must try to get another place. Go to England, I suppose."

"Do you know anyone there?"

"Not a soul. But I've got nearly the whole of my year's salary in hand, and I can wait till something turns up. I think I would like a little holiday all by myself. When you're shut up, night and day, with a gloomy old lady for a year or so, it gets on your nerves."

"I should imagine it would."

In return for her frankness he told her much about himself, and so came round by degrees to telling her of his mother, and Joan, and Meg.

"What a delightful home you must have," she said, with a little sigh, and fell again to silence.

They arrived at Brunnenthal and went straight to the telegraph office, and then on to the hotel, where a capital breakfast was laid for them, greatly to Burney's contentment.

They waited till the last moment they could allow for the homeward scramble through the pine woods, but no reply came to the telegram. So they arranged for a messenger to bring it on when it arrived, and set off along the mountain road. Before they reached Saas-Mürrn their friendship was compacted firm and true, and, to Mary Lindsay especially, it was a somewhat novel sensation, while to George Barty it was equally delightful. He made friends readily enough and had many, but he had not met very many girls, and he did not think he had ever met one so beautiful, so frank, and so altogether charming as this one.

"Have you ever seen anything so beautiful as that?" she asked, as they stood in an opening of the woods to watch the alpine glow burning on the snowy peaks opposite.

"I have never even imagined anything so wonderful," he said. "It passes words. . . . It is transcendent." And while they still stood watching it in silence, he said quietly, "It makes me think of the Holy City . . . with the light that was like unto a stone most precious . . . and all around and below us are the voices of many waters."

"Yes," she said, with a quick glance at him.

"I would like to see it just once in a storm," he said presently. "Thunders, and lightnings, rain, hail, snow, and fiery vapours. It must pass thought."

"I like it best as it is," she said, and they turned and went up the path together.

CHAPTER VIII

BONDS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

THE next day passed without bringing any reply from London to Miss Lindsay's telegram. She began to grow anxious. Her mind, however, was at ease concerning funds. She had found a considerable sum of money in Mrs. Crest's trunks, and now her only wish was to make an end of the matter and feel herself free to go where she chose.

She sought George's advice and relied upon him in everything, and they were so much thrown together, and enjoyed the contact so greatly, that the sweet flower of their friendship blossomed into a plant of size whose roots struck deeper every hour.

When the next day came and still no answer, George said to her—

"We can't wait much longer. If there is no word to-day you must act on your own responsibility and have her buried in the graveyard at Brunnenthal."

She nodded soberly, and said, "We have done all we could."

"I think I will go down after breakfast. It is just possible there has been some failure in our arrangements for having the message sent up here. It may be waiting down below."

"I would enjoy the walk," said Mary.

It was during this second journey to Brunnenthal that George suggested that she should stay at No. 21 Wynyatt Square while seeking a new place.

"Oh, I would so like to," she said eagerly. "I was afraid to suggest it, but I would dearly like to

know your mother and sisters. I am so grateful to you, Mr. Barty. London must be a hideous place to live in alone. Are you quite sure they will not mind my coming to them?"

"Mind? They'll be simply delighted. Wait till you know them."

"That makes me happier than I can tell you," she said, and George, looking into her fair flushed face, saw that the violet eyes were abrim, and thought he had never seen so sweet a sight in his life. For sisterly beauty is ever somewhat discounted in brotherly eyes. And so they drew closer and closer together, although their acquaintanceship might be counted by hours.

There was no telegram at Brunnenthal, and George went at once to the old doctor and got his advice as to the interment. That settled, they had lunch at the hotel, and waited again, and then went back home.

More than once as they toiled upwards, with the sound of the many waters in their ears, they thought they heard other voices mingling with the mellifluous ones of Nature. It was only when they sat resting among the pines, watching the sunset glory, which never palled and only faded all too soon, that a man came striding up the path behind them waving the telegram in his hand.

"Thousand thunders," he cried, mopping his head with great show of weariness. "I have been shouting after you for an hour. It came just after you left."

George handed the telegram to Miss Lindsay and she tore it open. It was brief and business-like. "Please inter suitably. Forward or bring effects and death certificate, etc. Crowes."

"That is all right then, and the arrangements we have made are all in order." He gave the man the promised gratuity, and they went on their way.

It was a strange little funeral procession that travelled the well-known path next day. The coffin, bound securely on to a rude sledge with iron runners, bumped roughly over the uneven path and slid smoothly over the intermittent carpet of pine-needles; Mary with a wreath of late Alpine flowers in her hand; George, sober with the reflected soberness of his new friend; and Burney, whose appreciation of the better faring at the Brunnenthal hotel induced him to the frequent journey without a sign of objection.

The old doctor met them at the foot of the mountain path and went with them to the little cemetery. The Protestant pastor was in attendance and the last rites were duly administered. Mary deposited her wreath on the grave, and George arranged with the undertaker for a suitable stone.

Then the old doctor insisted on them going home with him, at which Frazer Burney looked somewhat blanker than usual. But his fears were groundless, as the old gentleman's housekeeper had provided an excellent repast to which they all did full justice.

"He is giving you no trouble yet?" the doctor asked George in German.

"None at all. I really think he's improving, you know."

"I should keep a close eye on him. Don't relax at all. If his brain is really strengthening you cannot tell in what curious way it might develop itself."

"I'll see to him," said George, and reckoned the old man's fears groundless.

It was when they were strolling through the village, later on, that they heard the sound of twanging music and found a band of strolling Italians entertaining the company on the verandah of the hotel.

"They are very clever, some of these fellows," said

the doctor. "Watch them for a minute or two. You don't get such entertainment up at Saas-Mürrn."

So they stood and watched, and had no thought of what was to come of it.

To the scraping of a peculiarly metallic mandoline—Mary Lindsay has hated the sound of a mandoline ever since—one of the party was doing some deft tricks with balls. He had half-a-dozen flying in the air at once. They seemed to dance and whirl at his volition. Then he dropped three of the balls and glittering knives took their place. Then the balls all disappeared and knives flashed about him like a halo.

Then, at a sign, the music stopped. One of the men produced a board about twice the width of a man's body and held it up with one end on the ground. Another of the party placed himself with his back to it and his face to the verandah. The board projected a foot above his head. The chief performer took his knives, and after a preliminary toss in the air, launched them one after the other, as quick as lightning and with scarce a pause between, and planted them quivering in the board, one just above the human target's head, apparently in his hair, one just outside each ear, and one on each side of his neck and within an inch of it.

It was horribly clever and seemed extremely dangerous.

"Oh, come away," cried Miss Lindsay. "I would not have stopped if I'd known what he was going to do. It is hateful."

"William Tell reduced to francs," laughed the doctor, and they went on their way.

That night, when Burney turned in and George searched his pockets as usual for treasure-trove, he was disappointed to find one of the doctor's silver spoons. This was a relapse on the part of his patient,

of which he had not been guilty for some considerable time. George had hoped he had cured him of the propensity, but it was evident that lack of inducement only had prevented him. At sight of it he half turned for the whangee. But Burney had apparently fallen asleep at once, and it seemed too bad to disturb him after his long walk. The spoon should be returned to the doctor next day and he would quite understand the matter. George slipped it into his pocket, and went downstairs for a smoke and a quiet talk with Mary Lindsay.

He laughingly showed her the spoon and told her how it came there, and they talked for an hour, and then Mary went up to bed. She had preferred not occupying the room in which Mrs. Crest died, and had one across the passage.

The moon was almost at the full. The snow fields across the valley gleamed and glittered like sheets of silver strewn with diamonds. If the moon could have glanced through the linen blind of the room in which George Barty and Frazer Burney lay, she would have seen a very strange sight.

Shortly after midnight Burney raised himself softly on his elbow and peered across at George's bed. He appeared to be listening to see if he was asleep, and at length seemed satisfied that it was so.

Then from under the bedclothes, where he had been lying on it, he drew out a knife, an ordinary metal-handled table knife such as they used at meals downstairs.

He wagged his jaw over this merrily. It was the very best joke he had ever had in his life.

He looked over at George again. The room was very light. He could see him quite plainly. He was sleeping soundly with his arms thrown wide,

Burney slipped noiselessly out of his bed and went across to the other bed on tip-toe. His face was no longer vacant. It worked with excitement. What thoughts were whirling in the poor muddled brain, God only knows. If George had opened his eyes the other would have been back in his bed in a trice, cuddling his plaything and chuckling at his cleverness.

But George slept soundly. A smile flickered over his lips. Perhaps he was dreaming of Mary Lindsay.

Then in a moment the temptation overcame the madman. The opportunity was too grand to be lost. He bent noiselessly over the sleeper and drove the knife at his throat.

Jab—jab—jab—three wild blows before Barty could struggle up and dash at his assailant. He knocked him to the floor in a tumbled heap and fell over him before he knew who he was. Burney scrambled to his feet and leaped at the door, tore it open, and went down the stairs in two great bounds, fumbled at the front door, and away out into the moonlight clad only in his sleeping suit.

Mary Lindsay heard the scuffle. She was a light sleeper and was used to being roused at all hours of the night.

She sprang out of bed, slipped into her dressing-gown, and opened her door, and peeped cautiously out.

The door opposite was wide open. The room was bright with the moonlight. She saw something lying on the floor.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked, and receiving no answer, stepped quickly across the passage into the room.

Then her shrieks awoke the household. The landlord and his wife came running up in scant costume, and found her bending over Barty who lay there covered with blood.

They got him on to the bed and the man examined his wounds. He sent his wife for bandages, and proceeded to bind them up and so to stop the waste. He had been a guide in his time and had his wits about him. And a fortunate thing it was for George Barty that it was so.

Providentially, the knife, being a table knife, had no particular point, only a fairly keen edge. The stabs had resulted in cuts, the most serious in the side of the neck, the others on top of the shoulder. As wounds they were not deadly, but the drainage had been considerable and blood is life.

When George opened his eyes they lighted waveringly on a lovely vision. He said, long afterwards, that he thought for the moment that he had died and that some new kind of tearful angel was hovering about him. An angel in a pink dressing-gown, hastily assumed and loose at the top, whence a slender white neck rose up among white ruffled frillery. An angel with touzled brown hair, and great violet eyes still distent with fear. A gracious, beautiful, terrified girl, shaken for the moment from her pedestal of maiden modesty and reserve, and careless even of the fact that her white feet were red with blood, since it was the blood of a friend and her only thought had been for him. Then the searing pain in neck and shoulder reminded him vaguely that some untoward thing had happened and assured him that he was alive. A feeling of delightful lassitude crept over him, stitched momentarily with sharp throbs in his wounds. He felt inclined to sleep in spite even of that hovering angel and the raw severances in his neck and shoulder. But there was something on his mind, something troubling him, something he should do. He suddenly remembered.

"Where is he?" he jerked out. "Is he all right?"

"Thousand fiends fly away with him," growled the landlord, hitching a bandage tighter still. "We are well quit of him."

"Find him, Groser, find him . . . my charge . . . I am responsible." Then he drifted out again into the outer darkness for a space, and either slept or fainted.

"You must find him, Herr Groser," said Mary, feeling what George's anxiety would be. "I will tend Mr. Barty. Have you stopped the bleeding?"

"I think it is stopped for the time, Fraulein. But he has lost a great deal. We must have the doctor."

"Find a messenger. I will send a note. Then go quick and look for the other. You must find him."

"Ah ja!—must!"—and the landlord went away grumbling anathemas on the fugitive, and stating that he for one had no liking for the mountains by night. There were things about, see you, that were not natural, and so on. But he went, and she found a sheet of paper in a leather case on the dressing table and a pencil, and scrawled a hasty note—"Come quickly, Herr Doctor. The madman has stabbed Mr. Barty. You will know what to bring. Come quickly."

The landlord came back more suitably dressed for the night air, took her note and presently she heard him outside rousing the neighbours. She heard him send off the first with her message and exhortations to speed, and a few minutes later the rest started in two bands, one up the mountain, the other down, in search of the runaway, and she sat watching and listening by George Barty's bedside.

Presently the motherly old landlady came in with a basin of warm water, and insisted on washing the cold little crimsoned feet, and then proceeded to mop up the blood from the floor.

"I never did like that other one," she said softly, "but he seemed quiet enough."

"Do you . . . think he will get better?" asked the girl, looking at the quiet figure on the bed. "Sometimes I can hardly hear him breathe."

The old woman came and looked down at him. "He is all right, my dear," she said soothingly. "It is that he has lost much blood. But now that it is stopped he will soon make it up. Do you go and dress yourself, the air is cold still. I will sit by him, and when you come back I will light a fire here. It will be more cheerful. And I will make some coffee for the Herr Doctor. He will come quick when he hears. He liked the young Herr. And he will be cold with the walk."

The merry crackling of the sticks in the fireplace opened George's eyes again. They jumped from the cause of the noise to Mary Lindsay, and hung there restfully.

"Have they found him?" he asked.

"They have not got back yet. They are all out after him."

That seemed to satisfy him. His eyes hung to her, till they slowly closed again and he lay quiet.

The new day was breaking through a strange dull transparent glare when the doctor arrived. He swallowed a cup of hot coffee and mounted at once to George's room.

"Ah, Fraulein," he said softly at sight of her. "I did not expect to be sent for on any such errand as this when we parted yesterday. But I am not greatly surprised. I told our friend to be on the alert. You never can be sure what a disturbed brain will be at."

He was carefully unwinding Herr Groser's rough bandages as he spoke. George's eyes opened at the handling.

"So!" said the doctor cheerfully. "How is it now, my friend? Didn't I tell you to keep your eyes open?" His long white fingers were tenderly at work, his eyes noting everything critically and clearly.

"I was sleeping," murmured George in self-justification.

"Yes, yes, one must sleep, of course. All the same . . . Will you be so good as to ask Mother Groser for some warm water, my dear?"—to Mary—"and we will have him comfortable in next to no time. And tell her"—he whispered after her—"we want some breakfast as soon as she can get it ready."

When the patient was strapped and bound up to the doctor's satisfaction, and greatly to his own increased comfort, the old man insisted on Mary coming down with him to get something to eat, while the landlady took her place upstairs.

"Yes," he said, as the girl stood for a moment looking out of the window of the little salon. "We are in for a storm. Hark!" and she heard a strange, wild moaning and roaring in the snowy hollows of the mountain opposite, like a menagerie of monsters suffering torture. "That is the 'Wilde Föhn.' We are comparatively sheltered here, but they will catch it down below. It's a bad look-out for the other if they haven't found him yet."

"Is Mr. Barty in any danger, doctor?" The other was of little account with her.

"If the knife had had a point he would probably be dead,"—at which she shivered—"as it is, they are only nasty cuts, and a few days' rest will see him on the road to recovery. He's in splendid condition and the cuts will heal well. But he must not move and he will need very careful nursing. He will probably be feverish and restless, but it will pass. Can you look after him?"

"Certainly, I will look after him. I must." She would not have been far wrong if she had said that she would rejoice in the service.

She had no appetite, but the old man forced her to eat. "You can't nurse unless you eat," he said, and, "Whew! hear the fiends howling outside!" as a whirling skirt of the storm bellowed round the house till it shuddered, and the roof rattled and creaked. "The men will take to cover till it is past. It is not good to be out on the mountains when this wind is blowing. They will never find him. He is done."

On the opposite slopes they could see the snow whirling under the lash of the gale. The valley between was filled with a thunderous roaring as of many waterfalls.

"They are mountain men,' he said again, thinking of the searchers, "or I wouldn't give a groschen for the lot of them. And my patients down below will have a chance of getting well on their own accounts for one day. Anyway it would be impossible to get about if I was down there."

They went upstairs again and found George sleeping quietly in spite of the tumult outside. Then the doctor insisted on Mary going to her own room and lying down. She persisted that she could not sleep, but the old man knew better and had his way.

"I'm not so mercenary as to want another patient on my hands, my dear, and you can have all the watching you want when I am gone," he said, and in spite of her anxiety, and the howling of the storm, and the tremors of the house, sleep came to her as soon as she lay down.

About mid-day George woke up again and asked at once if they had got Burney.

"Listen!" said the doctor. "There is a wild storm

on. The men will not return till it abates. But the chances are they will not find him. If he went up the mountain, as is most likely, it is certain. What do you want done ?"

George pondered the matter for a time in great depression of spirits. Then——

"If they come back without him I must let his people know at once——"

"We will prepare a telegram, if you like. Then I can send it off as soon as I know how they've gone on."

"Are these cuts serious ?"

"No. You lost a good deal of blood, and you may go light-headed for a time. There is nothing to fear, but you must keep still or you'll start them bleeding again, and we can't afford that."

"I see. Then please write out the telegram—'Frazer Burney, 175 Lombard street, London. Frazer disappeared. Can you come over ? Barty. Saas-Mürrn viâ Brunnenthal.'—They will want this part of the matter kept quiet, you understand, doctor."

"Of course. Their sorrow will be great enough as it is."

George was not so sure of that, but talking hurt his throat and he kept silence.

The storm raged till nightfall, and it was long after dark when the searchers came straggling in, tired out and starving with their long day's crouching in nooks and crannies, but with no news of the missing man.

"It is all up with him then," said the doctor to Mary, "and I will send off Herr Barty's telegram as soon as I get down in the morning."

He insisted on sitting up the second half of the night, and after giving her careful directions as to diet and treatment, and telling her to expect, and not to be frightened at, a certain amount of feverishness and

possibly light-headedness, started for home at the first glimmer of daylight.

Thus strangely—how very strangely, you will see—were these two young people thrown together, by circumstance or Providence, into the closest intimacy. And, if one should seek to trace to their primal causes the events which drew their lives to one common point from opposite ends of the world, it would be a fascinating study, but it would take a very large book to contain it all.

CHAPTER IX

TIGHTENING BONDS

FRAZER BURNEY SENIOR'S first thought, on receiving George Barty's telegram, was that to reach Brunnenthal he must pass through Paris. That is an unpleasant thing to say of a man, but it is a fact and it stands.

A day, and say a night, in Paris, appealed strongly to him. His opportunities were limited, for Sir John was master both at home and in the City, and, knowing his man, he held the rein with a tight hand. Business occasionally necessitated a run across to Paris, Frankfort, Berlin, but the occasions came all too seldom, and when they offered Mr. Burney took toll of them to the full. He returned, as a rule, somewhat tired out—travelling is wearisome when indulged in spasmodically—but always with the special business on which he had gone carried out to the letter. Any failure therein would have militated against future journeys. His father persisted in regarding him much as he had done in the wild days when he forged Lady Sarah Gwynne's name to that fateful cheque. Perhaps the old man was not very far wrong. He had learnt many a bitter lesson in his time, and he never kept a man in his employment who had stumbled once.

Mr. Frazer had risen, by effluxion of time, and special grace that could not be outwardly withheld, and by the use of his wife's fortune in the bank's affairs, to a junior partnership, which relieved him of many onerous duties and gave him an income.

But the senior partner never forgot how his criminal

stupidity had been within an ace of bringing the house about their ears, and he never forgave it. Paternal and filial feeling was an absolutely unknown quantity between them.

Thanks to Sir John's unremitting vigilance and labours during these twenty years—and the use of his daughter-in-law's money—the business had prospered greatly. "Burney's" was looked upon as one of the solidest private banks in the City. Mr. Frazer Burney was even looked upon by some as a good business man. Sir John was seriously contemplating the formation of the concern into a limited company, with the heads of departments as directors. Otherwise, he said to himself, Frazer would make ducks and drakes of it all when he was gone, and would ultimately find himself in the workhouse, or worse. Perhaps, in the night watches, when a man's short-comings set his soul on the grill and dance upon it with heels of fire, he took blame to himself for his son being what he was. Perhaps he thought, with bitter regret, that the chief fault had lain with himself from the beginning—that the association of a motherless boy with servants and inferiors is not best calculated to mould a character and make a man—that a father, given over heart and soul to the making and keeping of money, and with scarce a thought for his boy, is hardly fulfilling his fatherly obligations—that, even when the boy fell, and his own eyes were opened to the extent of his fall, different treatment might still have made a different man of him.

The banker's pillow was not one we need envy, and his life was desolate and empty, with an emptiness which all the gold in the world could not begin to fill.

His grandchildren might have filled the gap in his life. He had looked forward to their doing so. Unfortunately they were all afflicted similarly to their

elder brother. The curse of that loveless union was upon them all. The vacant faces and lack-lustre eyes and loose-strung forms were painful to him. He hated the sight of them, and they, for their part, feared him and kept out of his way.

Mrs. Frazer, Julia Cleeve that was, had become mountainously fleshly. Brains had never been her strong point, or she would never have consented to be married to that ill-conditioned youth, her cousin Frazer Burney. Her chief delight, even when she was a rich orphan at boarding-school, with more pocket-money than all the rest of the girls put together, had been the satisfaction of an extensive appetite. No restraint had been placed upon this by her return to her guardian's house. The old man had loved the table almost as well as she did. She saw little society, and when Frazer proposed to her, and Mr. Burney, as he was then, expressed a strong wish that they should marry, she made not the slightest objection. The marriage ensured at all events a continuance of the course of life she had grown accustomed to and was fully satisfied with.

The terrible condition of her children was painful to her. She devoted herself with increased fervour to the pleasures of the table. Her husband neglected her. She found consolation as before. Very light pastry and very light reading atoned for most of the ills of life with her. Surely the vacuous strain in the children came from that side.

After the pangs she could not but feel, as one after another they developed the family trait she saw but little of them. She wept weakly over them at times, and they regarded her tears with stolid lack of understanding. For the rest, she engaged an experienced nurse to watch over them by night, and a couple of

highly-paid non-residential governesses to take charge of them during the day—one off and one on, since so continuous a strain upon the nerves and feelings was too much for any one person—and having thus shelved her responsibilities, she devoted herself to her favourite pursuits with an easy mind and an insatiable appetite. Poor children! poor mother! With wealth beyond their enjoyment, and not a brain to speak of! And poor, miserable old man, with brain enough to perceive the horror of it all, and acumen enough to take to himself no small share of the blame.

Outside business hours, and within the bounds of his income, Mr. Frazer Burney enjoyed himself as he chose, and got more pleasure—such as it was—for his money than either of the others. Just as well, perhaps, that we should not follow him, lest our chronicle be placed upon the *Index Expurgatorius* at Smith's and Mudie's. He lived as men do live who hate their homes, despise their wives, and seek their consolations outside.

And so, when he read George Barty's telegram, the first thought in his mind was that he must go across at once. Yes, certainly, he must go across without a moment's loss of time, and he could take Paris on his way and spend at least a day and a night there.

Sir John was confined to the house again with the gout. Frazer took cab up to Kensington Palace Gardens at once, doubled the old man's suffering with the sudden shock of his announcement, and left by the afternoon train for Paris, and—incidentally, for Brunnenthal.

It was on the fourth day after the telegram was sent, and the fifth day after the accident, that he turned up at Saas-Mürrn.

Search parties had scoured the mountain sides each day, but no trace of Burney had been found.

George had had his feverish touch, and had fought

through it. He was sitting up in bed rejoicing in the ministrations of Mary Lindsay, and looking forward to being up and about, under certain restrictions, within a week, when Mr. Burney was announced.

He had wired the single word—"Coming"—in answer to George's telegram, and they had been expecting him any time this last two days, and had been not a little surprised at his non-appearance.

George had met him once before for a few minutes, and had passed judgment on him with youthful impetuosity, but Miss Lindsay had looked to see an anxious, heart-broken parent, and Mr. Burney proved something of a shock to her.

She happened to be sitting at second breakfast when he strolled up to the door and asked in English for Mr. George Barty. She started up and ran into the passage.

She found a well-dressed gentleman standing there talking English to Frau Groser, who understood nothing of what he said, except the single word "Barty," to which she replied with emphatic nods and deep "Ja-Ja's!" He looked young to be Frazer Burney's father, and she wondered, momentarily, how he could possibly have such a son.

He was not bad-looking. A pointed beard and carefully trimmed moustache concealed the defects of mouth and chin. His eyes settled on her face as soon as she appeared, and she thought he stared at her rather unpleasantly. She did not know that those shifty eyes never met a man's eyes straight, without an effort, and that it required the face of a pretty woman to steady them of their own accord. There was a hard look about the face, too, which she did not then understand, but it made her think, somewhat incongruously as it seemed to her, of the larrikins she had seen hanging about the streets of Sydney. And there was nothing

incongruous in her thought. A certain style of life prints its stamp on a man's face after a time, be he larrikin or banker's son or peer, and the stamp is sharp and clear and not to be mistaken for any other brand.

"Are you Mr. Burney?" she asked.

"That is my name," he replied, regarding her with much appreciation. "I'm glad some one speaks English in this outlandish place. Is Mr. Barty stopping here?

"Yes, he is here, Mr. Burney. If you will come in I will tell him you are here. We have been exp cting you."

There was an implication of surprise at the dilatoriness of his arrival, in her tone.

"I had some business in Paris which delayed me somewhat," he said, "or I should have been here a day earlier. What has been the trouble?"

His tone was much the same as if he were enquiring into the breakage of a window. And—business in Paris! when his son was missing! The limitations of her experience had spared her the meeting with a father such as this before. She was somewhat taken aback. Perhaps there was some mistake. Perhaps the father had been too prostrated to come and had sent some relative instead.

"Are you Mr. Frazer Burney's father?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm his father. What's become of him?"

"I'm afraid there is no hope. The men have been out each day. Will you sit down, please, and I will tell Mr. Barty you are here. He is anxious to see you, but the doctor said he was to be kept quiet."

"Why, what's wrong with Barty? Anything infectious?"

"I forgot—you do not know. Your—young Mr. Burney stabbed him before he——"

"Stabbed him! The deuce!"

She went upstairs and told George that there was a gentleman downstairs who said he was Mr. Burney, but she could hardly believe he was the missing man's father.

"Why?" asked George.

"He doesn't seem the least bit upset."

"I don't suppose he is. Please show him up, Miss Lindsay."

"Well, Barty, what's all this?" asked Mr. Frazer Burney, as he entered the room and Mary closed the door behind him. "That extremely good-looking girl was just telling me that infernal rascal of mine had stabbed you. What the deuce is the meaning of it all?"

George described all the circumstances fully and clearly, while Mr. Burney's eyes roved to and fro, from the bandages round his neck to the view outside, and apparently made an inventory of the room.

"I don't need to tell you how distressed I am about it," said George, "for really he seemed to me to be improving in every way, and I had hopes of bringing him back to you better than you had probably ever seen him. I am bound to say, however, that the doctor down at Brunnenthal several times told me to be on my guard. He had made a special study of the brain, and he warned me that there might be unexpected developments. But I don't see that I could have done anything more than I did. When I turned in he appeared to be sleeping soundly, and I was only awakened by the knife at my throat."

"Damn him!" said the father fervently. It was all the requiem poor Frazer Burney ever got. . . . "He can't possibly be alive, you say?"

"Not possibly. It is five days ago, and he had

nothing on but his sleeping suit. The men have been out every day and searched everywhere."

"I don't see what more can be done."

"We did everything we could think of. But I thought it right you should know at once."

"Of course, of course."

"It would be a satisfaction to me if you would call on the doctor down below at Brunnenthal. Anyone will show you where he lives. He saw your son several times."

"Quite so. You will understand we would like this part of the matter, I mean the stabbing and so on, kept quiet, Barty."

"Of course. I said as much to the doctor."

"You will be here for some time yet, I suppose."

"I am to get up next week, but there is risk of the cuts opening again if I move much, so I shall keep quiet."

"If they should happen to find him you might be so good as to—er—see to matters. Have him decently buried, you know, and so on."

"Certainly. I should do that in any case. But I doubt if they will ever find him, poor fellow! I'm afraid he's at the bottom of some crevasse or buried under the stones. There was a big storm here the night he went and the hillsides shift and fall."

Mr. Burney nodded. George would not have felt the least surprise if he had said, "It's probably just as well." Instead, he got up and said—

"You have plenty of money, you say. You can square up with the old man when you get home. There's no hurry about it."

"Very well."

"I must hurry back. I did not quite finish my business in Paris, and I really don't see that I can be of any use here."

"I'm afraid not."

"Who is that charming young lady who received me downstairs? Some relation of yours?"

"Miss Lindsay?" George replied, stiffly. "An old lady to whom she was acting as travelling companion died up here some days ago. Miss Lindsay is waiting to go home."

"Charming place this, Miss Lindsay," said Mr. Burney, as he sat eating his breakfast downstairs. He spoke as unconcernedly as though they were casual visitors at the hotel.

"It is very beautiful, but it has very sad associations for some of us."

"Ah, I heard you also had lost your travelling companion here. Rather odd the same thing should happen to both you and Barty. Quite a dumping ground for undesirables. Next time I want to get rid of anybody I shall bring them along to Saas-Mürrn. You are returning to England?"

"Probably. But I shall see Mr. Barty all right first. He was very kind to me when Mrs. Crest died, and the doctor says he needs careful nursing."

"Very good of you, I'm sure. Can I be of any service to you? Happy to see you as far as Paris, if you wish."

"Thanks! I am not ready to go yet," and as soon as she could, she got out of the room and left him to finish his meal and take his departure.

"Is he really the father?" she asked, when she came up to George after Mr. Burney had left.

"Oh, he's the father all right. I saw him for a few minutes the day I arranged with the old man."

"I don't like him," she said fervently.

"He is not exactly the kind of person one would hanker after as a friend."

"Think of his stopping in Paris to do some business——"

"He has gone back to finish it."

And Mr. Burney's business in Paris was of so pressing a nature that he had not even time to call upon the old doctor in Brunnenthal.

CHAPTER X

AN UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY

"I DON'T know how I'm ever to thank you for all your kindness, Miss Lindsay," George Barty said, as they sat on the edge of the precipice overlooking the valley, the first evening he was out.

"You began it," she said brightly, "and it's been sheer force of circumstances since."

"All the same, your being here has made all the difference in the world to me. Imagine what it would have been like with no one but old Frau Groser."

"Your mother and Joan shall thank me."

"That they shall and will."

"When ought we to start?"

"I don't feel quite fit to travel yet. But I don't want to keep you here if you feel that you ought to be moving on."

"I'm not in any hurry. I'm getting to love this place. I shall always think warmly of Saas-Mürrn, in spite of the trying times we've had."

"It's the loveliest place in the world," he said, with boyish enthusiasm. "I thought so when we came out of the woods that first night. I've been growing surer of it every day since."

"Which way shall we go when we do go?" said she presently. "We can go either by Geneva, or Lausanne, or Basle?"

"I wouldn't mind going by San Francisco," he said gaily, "if the funds would hold out." And the rosy gold on the white mountain opposite reflected itself on her cheeks in a faint accession of colour.

"Y[illegible] haven't seen a great deal of the Continent, have [illegible]?" he asked, after a thoughtful contemplation of th[illegible]ow-fields.

"[illegible], not much," she said, gently resentful of Mrs. Crest. "Not nearly as much as I wanted to see. We came along the Riviera, but we saw as little as we possibly could."

"Well, now," he said, after more consideration of the quivering splendours opposite, "What's to hinder us going home by way of Lucerne and Zurich and Constance, and down the Rhine?"

"Oh!" and the slim hands clasped up in a breathless ecstasy. "Could we? . . . Dare we?"

"I really don't see why not. You can't travel alone. It wouldn't be right to let you. It wouldn't be proper. I'm bound to see you home. Circumstances over which we had no control have thrown you on my hands——"

"Sorry!" she murmured, with a whimsical intonation.

"I'm not, and I don't believe you are. And I believe you are naturally of a truthful disposition. I don't know that I was ever so glad about anything before. I don't mean, of course, about your old lady, and poor Burney, but—well, there it is, you see. I've got to see you home, and if we like to make a trifling *détour* on our own account, I don't see who's going to say us nay. It's only a question of degree anyway. If G.B. may see M.L. home *viâ* Lausanne he may equally well see her home *viâ* Rhineland. Q.E.D.—Nicht wahr?"

"It would be heavenly," she said softly. "If you think——"

"I won't think at present. I only feel. You will please to remember I'm an invalid. And I feel it would be as you say, heavenly, and would probably complete my cure. Easy stages, you know, and restful pauses.

None of your thirty hours' on end business. A journey like that might be fatal, you know," he said tragically.

"It would be a pity to hinder the cure," she said. "What about Mrs. Crest's boxes? Those lawyers will be thinking I've stolen them."

"I've no doubt they'll take it out of somebody, if they're very much troubled in their minds. You could express them to England, but if they contain valuables they would be safer with us. Suppose you drop them a line saying you are bringing them by degrees. That will set their minds at rest."

"Yes, I had better do that. There's a lot of old-fashioned jewelry and a quantity of papers. Poor old thing!" she said, musingly. "It must be dreadful to be quite alone when one grows old. I think I would sooner die young."

"It is better to live young. No one needs grow old unless they choose. I never intend to get beyond twenty-seven myself."

"Why, what do you mean?" she said, looking round at him.

"Oh, I don't mean I'm going to die then—at least not if I can help it. Twenty-seven is a good medium youthful age. By that time the bloom of youth is not yet quite worn off, and yet one ought to have acquired a certain amount of sense, and some experience, and possibly even a little wisdom, though that is generally, and mistakenly, considered an attribute of old age. Too much wisdom tends to the production of bores, male and female, especially female, because as a rule they turn on the tap too freely."

"Solomon!" she murmured, with a smile.

"No, only experience so far. The rest will come."

A week later they bade regretful farewell to Saas-Mürrn, and started for home by the Primrose Path.

And it led them first through the dark pine woods below the village, with Mrs. Crest's boxes and their own slender baggage bound to the rude sledge which had carried Mrs. Crest herself to her home that other day—that other day long since at the very beginning of time—and so out into the smiling valley, where they said good-bye to their cheery old friend, the doctor.

"You will come again to see me some day?" he said, as he shook them lingeringly by the hand, as though loth to part with them. "Nicht wahr?"

"Auf wiedersehen!" said George.

"So!" said the old man, and stood looking after them till they were out of sight, and then turned away with a smile inside his beard, murmuring, "*It is good to be young. It is the very best thing in the world to be young.*"

The path led them down the valley to the lake, and a cheerful little steamer carried them to the head of it. There the invalid pleaded fatigue, and they rested for a day with the ceaseless roar of falling waters in their ears, and the placid blue above and below them, and the sunshine of perpetual youth and freedom in their hearts. Then, on the morrow, they gladdened the heart of the driver of the diligence by occupying his coupé, for the season was over and for days he had not had a soul to speak to except his horses. And the magnificences among which he creaked and climbed had become, through usage, but a common round to him, and snowy peaks which cleft the heavens and filled the souls of his passengers with rapture, were of smaller account to him than a new fallen stone in the roadway.

When the lumbering vehicle began to zigzag up the steeps, and the horses' sides went in and out like decrepit bellows, his passengers got down and walked and talked, and stood in rapt silences, accentuated by

the exhortations of the driver to his steeds below. And when even these stopped with the stoppage of the caravan athwart the road, it seemed as though they two stood all alone in a specially made earth under a new heaven.

"*It is good to be young. It is the very best thing in the world to be young.*"

And at times, where the winding road was unusually steep, or when they tried to shorten it by cutting from point to higher point above, the feeble invalid must needs take the firm warm hand of his nurse in his, to help her over the scored granite slabs, and the clinging clasp of it was new and delightful to him and made his own pulse run the faster

So, hand in hand, with wide eyes, and flushed faces, and hearts as far above the world as were their bodies, they two climbed the windings of the Primrose Path and found life very good.

"*It is good to be young. It is the very best thing in the world to be young.*"

But paths go up and paths go down, and even the Primrose Path has its windings, as we have seen and shall see.

They sat panting at last at the summit of the pass, and looked silently back and silently forward, over the ground they had trod and over the fair land of promise in front, over the near past and over the great future.

Then the rattling diligence caught them up into itself, and they went thundering down the rocky road like a whirlwind, to where another little white steamer lay waiting for them at the edge of another blue lake and bore them swiftly to the haunts of men.

They lodged themselves at a small hotel in the town not far from the post office. It was perhaps third-rate, but it suited their purses, and if they could have

found a cheaper one I doubt not they would have gone to it.

And then they began a close and intimate study of the lovely Vierwaldstätter See—from a geographical, geological, historical, ethnological, and pantological point of view, with anthological diversions, and as to the ethological question they simply did not trouble their souls.

They learned their lake between the lines, so to speak. After the second day they gave up their rooms at the hotel, as entailing useless expense of time and money in coming and going, and as somewhat of a fetter on the freedom of their flights. They deposited their baggage at the station, all except George's knapsack and the one Frazer Burney had used, and, thus lightly equipped, started out again after the unknown.

On the boats they were taken for a newly-married pair. At the out-of-the-way villages where they delighted to pitch their nightly camps, the correction of this very natural mistake always cost them some time, and caused their impromptu hosts much surprise and themselves much amusement.

George always informed them that he was an invalid travelling for his health, and that the young lady was his nurse. They received his explanations with decorous astonishment, as one more symptom of the strange customs which prevailed among the English-speaking peoples, but were invariably sorry to part with their guests. For George's spirits were as the sparkling wine of Asti, and Mary Lindsay's beauty was good to look upon.

What lovely nooks they discovered! What delightful villages hidden among the chestnuts and walnuts and beeches—tiny, out-of-the-world sanctuaries where the foot of the tourist rarely trod and the busy little steamers

never touched. Where the green lake stretched away to right and left; and the mountain giants sprawled before them with their feet in the water and their heads in the clouds; and beyond them, range after range of silent majesties lifted their calm white fronts to heaven.

A quiet sojourn in such a land is an education and an inspiration, and these two learned much.

They worked down Uri and came at last to Flüelen, and stayed at the little hotel there one night, because they liked the look of it so much.

The last boat was waiting at the pier for the arrival of the St. Gothard diligence, and started at last without it. The diligence came in half-an-hour after it had gone, to the immense gratification of Madame of the "Kreuz." There were no less than four passengers, a stout elderly lady, much annoyed at missing the boat, and three young ones, all palpably English before they opened their mouths. Madame welcomed them with sympathy in her face and joy in her secret heart, and presently they were at table in the little salon, where George Barty and Mary Lindsay were dallying with great enjoyment over their new-drawn Reuss trout and a small bottle of foaming Asti.

The stout lady was in a state of extreme disgust at having to stop the night there—

"And our rooms running on at the Schweitzerhof all the time. It is really too annoying. I wish now we had kept to the lake and not gone that round. I really don't think it was worth it, Helen."

"Oh, mother!—Grindelwald and Meiringen and the Grimsel——" from the eldest girl.

"Never say the word Grimsel to me again, Helen, I beg of you. It makes me shiver to think of it. We haven't had a decent meal since we left Lucerne, and I doubt if we'll get one here. I'm not going to unpack

anything to-night. You girls will have to manage with your——"

Mary's eyes snapped humorously at George to demonstrate their nationality and stop any revelations.

"Did you ever taste anything more delicious than these trout ?" he said. "This place is famous for them, you know. I suppose it's the snow water gives them their flavour."

"They are delightful," said Mary, with a twinkle.

"Helen, tell them we want some trout," said the stout lady, "and say we're starving. Where is the waiter, I wonder ? Perhaps they haven't one."

But Madame took it for granted that everybody who came to her house wanted trout, and Johann came in at the moment with a well-piled dish, and laid it before them with a ceremonious flourish and a murmured introduction—"Reuss trout !"

"Ask him what follows, Helen ?"

But Johann understood, and Helen's deprecating glances at George and Mary, were unnecessary.

"Shicken, und sallat, und mouton, und bastry. Madame trink wine ?" and he explained with much volubility that, the season being over and so few visitors coming, the regular table d'hôte was discontinued.

"Whatever is he talking about, Helen ? Tell him to bring us some of that sparkling wine."

"Si, si, vin d'Asti !" said Johann, with a flourish. "Sree—four bottel ?"

"Bless the man, no ! One—ein !"

"Bien, madame," and the little polyglot hurried away.

"So annoying to miss the boat," said the stout lady up the table to George and Mary, at whom the girls had been peeping appreciatively from under their eye-lashes.

"One of the horses went lame and we had to walk to the next post house. I think they might keep the boat when there is an accident like that, don't you think so?"

"They have a great many calls to make, you see," said George, "and it would make them very late in reaching Lucerne."

"And we don't get there at all," said the stout lady.

"It's almost worth stopping a night here just to taste the trout," he said. "They are famous the world over, you know."

The insular ice broken by means of the trout, they grew quite friendly, and after dinner the three girls monopolised Mary with an avidity born of three days close maternal supervision, and George was left to entertain mamma.

In five minutes, without opening his lips, he knew all he cared to know about them. Their name was Bayly. They lived in Hyde Park Gardens. Sir Peter had the gout and had gone to Buxton. They had waited till late in the season hoping he could have come with them. Their eldest boy was at Eton, and there were three younger children at home. Helen, the eldest girl, was to be presented next year, and so on.

Then, having given, she looked to receive in kind.

"Are you making a long stay here?"

"Only the night," replied George, feeling vaguely where this was going to end.

"Where do you make your headquarters? We are at the Schweizerhof. It is really *very* good, and all the best people stop there, I understand. Expensive, of course, but quite worth the money. I don't mind expense so long as I get value. The trouble is that in some of these out-of-the-way places they make you pay apparently for Switzerland having been created, for

any value you get out of your money. Did you say you were at the Schweizerhof too?"

"No. We are birds of passage, always on the wing."

"It is delightful when one is young. Sir Peter and I—he was only Mr. Bayly then and in a very different position, of course—we only went to the Isle of Wight for our honeymoon. But we knocked about for the whole fortnight, and, as I've said to him many a time since, I never enjoyed a fortnight so much in my life, and to my thinking there are not many places better than the island. Shanklin, Ventnor, Cowes, Freshwater! They take a good deal of beating, though we go down every year in the Spring. But when you've a family of seven it makes a difference in getting about."

"Yes," admitted George. "A family of seven must make quite a difference."

The young people were chattering away like old friends at the other end of the table, and merry ripples of laughter broke out now and again from the bright cluster.

"What a very sweet face your wife has," said Lady Bayly condescendingly. "She reminds me rather of Lady Mary Carlton. You may have seen her photographs in the shop windows. Quite one of the beauties——"

George had hesitated for just one second—not more. Was it worth while to undeceive her—a casual acquaintance, whose acquaintance they had not sought? It would be easier to let it go than to explain. There was no knowing how this bourgeoise grande dame might take it. She might say something that would make Miss Lindsay feel uncomfortable. Anything sooner than that.

But by nature he was the essence of truth. Evasion was repugnant to him. To pass the matter in silence felt

to himself like an admission of wrongdoing. If no wrong, why conceal it?

"Pardon me," he said. "You have fallen into a perhaps not unnatural error. Miss Lindsay is not my wife."

"Not? Oh, I beg your pardon. I quite took you for a newly-married couple." She seemed to stiffen slightly and the ears of her curiosity pricked visibly. She waited evidently for his further explanation, and he fervently wished her out on the lake or under it.

"Miss Lindsay has had the misfortune to lose her travelling companion, an old lady, who died in Saas-Mürrn about three weeks ago, and I am taking her home—to my mother," he added, as a palliative after thought.

"Ah, you are old friends then?' with a symptom of softening.

"Very good friends. Circumstances enabled us to be of service to one another. She was good enough to nurse me through a rather trying illness, and I am trying to repay her for her kindness."

"And you are quite recovered? What was it?"

"An accident up in the mountains." He wondered how much further my lady's inquisitiveness would carry her, and he desired, if possible, not to be rude to her.

"Very dangerous the mountains. I'm sure my heart has been in my mouth a dozen times in the last three days. Now, girls, you're all tired out"—if they were, their looks belied them. They would have liked to chatter with Mary for a couple of hours more—"and we must make an early start in the morning. I wonder"—to George—"if you know what time the first boat goes to Lucerne."

"Five o'clock, I believe," he said.

"Ah, that is rather early. Are you going by that boat?"

"Oh, no, we're going to walk along the Axenstrasse."

"I see. Well, we will wish you good-night now. We shall probably meet in the morning."

But none of the party had put in an appearance by the time George and Mary had finished their breakfast and shouldered their knapsacks and departed, although two boats had left the pier for Lucerne.

George was amused and a trifle annoyed. He construed their absence in his own way.

He had purposely said nothing about the matter to Mary the previous night, lest it should introduce a possibly quite unnecessary feeling of awkwardness into her intercourse with the new comers in the morning. He might be quite wrong, but he had got an impression of disapproval from her ladyship's manner last night. Her non-appearance in the morning tended to confirm it.

They walked along the wonderful road, which wound through solid rock, and clung to precipitous heights, and made them feel like swallows hanging under the eaves. Just by the big hotel they made their way down, among the mellowing golds and greens and russet-browns, to the little chapel by the lake side, and sat there while Mary got out her colours and made a rapid sketch of one of the loveliest views in the world.

It was a perfect jewel of a day—a jewel in a somewhat faded, old-fashioned setting, which only served to increase the brightness of its lustre. The sky was sapphire, the lake clouded emerald, deepening in colour towards where they sat. The air was crisp and sparkling. The little waves came bubbling musically up to the steps and broke at Mary's feet in chimes of silvery bells.

George sat smoking with his back against a fresco of

William Tell, and watched the pure beauty of the scene outside and the girlish figure on the steps. He never forgot them just as they looked that day.

How charming she was, all intent on her work and unconscious of his gaze!—at all events apparently so.—As a matter of fact, of course, she knew perfectly well that he was watching her, but she would not for one moment have permitted him to think it for any consideration whatever. The shapely head with its silken coils rose and fell in rhythmic absorption. The soft tendrils of hair about her neck reached out to his heart like tiny fingers and drew him like threads of steel encased in gold.

He was tempted to tell her all he felt, but he said to himself that it was too soon, too soon. She must know him better before he risked so much. And besides, and besides—she might think it was only because his eyes had opened suddenly to the somewhat advanced character of their companionship, and the unconventional style of their travelling. She might even think that he spoke only to save her feelings and the situation generally, and he would not have her think that for the world. She might—Good Heavens! it had never struck him in that light before—she might even think he had proposed this excursion and led her into an equivocal position for the very purpose of—no, he was quite sure she would not think that. He knew her too well already to think that of her.

And besides—would it be fair, even if she did feel towards him as he had begun to hope with all his heart that she did or would come to do—would it be fair to her to bind her, be it ever so lightly, by opening his heart to her when all his way was still to make, and his toe not yet even on the first rung of the ladder?

For he had got to dreaming dreams, and through them

all swam the sweet, bright face and the eloquent eyes of the owner of those delicate little wisps of curls. And whatever his future might be he could hardly conceive of it as worth the winning unless Mary Lindsay shared it with him.

"Has it begun to strike you, Miss Lindsay, that we are a highly reprehensible pair of young people?" he asked.

"No. Why?"

She took it for one of his didactic little outpourings which afforded her continual amusement, so went on with her work without turning her head.

"We are an offence to the proprieties," he said solemnly.

"Who says so?" and there came a faint flush on her face, but a ticklish point in her work demanded all her attention at the moment, and she bent over it intently.

"No one says so, but I've no doubt they think so."

"It doesn't disturb me in the least what people think, so long as I am satisfied with my own actions. . . . Was that unpleasant old woman disturbing your conscience last night? I thought she looked horrid."

"On the contrary, it was we who were disturbing her's, I imagine, or at all events her feelings of propriety —which probably amounts to much the same thing."

"Perhaps she didn't understand all the circumstances?"

"She did her very best to arrive at them, I can assure you. She did not say a word, but she managed to convey in some subtle way that we were going beyond the conventions and might prove snares and pitfalls to her tender brood."

"They were much nicer girls than might have been expected. But none of them will ever have such a

delightful time as we're having—not while she has charge of them, at all events. It's just that that makes it so delightful—the unconventionality and all that."

"Beware of Mrs. Grundy, my dear Miss Lindsay."

"Oh, bother Mrs. Grundy."

"Anathema maranatha!"

"Are you beginning to repent? We will go straight home if you like." She had half turned and was looking at him. The delicate flush was still on her face, and she was wholly and irresistibly charming.

"Where there is no feeling of offence there can be no true repentance. I never enjoyed anything so much in all my life before. But I saw from the manner of the unpleasant old woman, as you style Lady Bayly, that we may experience the same symptoms elsewhere, and I thought it only right to give you due warning."

"She doesn't trouble me. With those constantly before one"—and she nodded at the snowy peaks beyond—"it is difficult to come down to mean little paltry thoughts. They carry me up and up and up, right away above them. I would like to live among them all my life——"

"Cold!" murmured the incorrigible.

"People who are so happy as to live in a land like this, even if it is only for a time, ought to be big-souled and large-hearted—great minds and great bodies striving to live up to their surroundings and quite above the reach of little things."

"I assure you I feel larger in soul and body than ever I did in my life before."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of you."

"Well, I can't speak for Lady Bayly's soul, but if it bears any proportion to her body——"

"Suppose we agree to drop her and not let her trouble us."

"She doesn't trouble me any more than she does you. Lady B., a long farewell!"—and he kissed his hand to a passing steamer which very probably contained that embodiment of all the proprieties. "May your shadow grow less and your children revel in sunshine! May I see the sketch?"

"Do you know, I think that is uncommonly good," he said, when she handed it to him. "Have you never thought of it as a career?"

"Often, and longed for it with all my heart. But it was too uncertain. Perhaps some time, when I have saved enough to live on for a year or two, I shall dare it. One could get along on very little in some out-of-the-way corner among the mountains. It would be next door to heaven."

They climbed back to the rock road and strolled along, absorbing all its unfolding revelations, and discussing their hopes and aims—or some of them—and the chances of their partial realisation.

"I would sooner live with my ideals, on brown bread and milk and honey, up here among the clouds, than in the grandest house in London," said Mary conclusively.

"Yes. Grand houses sometimes hide skeleton lives." And he told her what he had seen of the Burney mansion and the vacant-eyed children at the barred window.

"That is very pitiful," she said. "Children's lives were meant to be happy. Oh, it is too terrible to think of. Who is to blame?"

"Ah, that is beyond me. I can only tell you what I saw. I have only seen the mother for a minute or two. She did not strike me as intellectual. They were

cousins, I believe, but that hardly seems sufficient to account for it. There must have been a defective strain on one side or the other, and it has come to a head in those poor youngsters."

They stopped that night at Brunnen, and next day bade farewell to the fair green lake, and took the river road through smiling Schwyz, then the rough rock road of Lowerz, and so to Arth. Thence they climbed by the old road to the top of the Rigi and prodigally passed one never-to-be-forgotten day and night there.

"I could spend my life here," said Mary, with a sigh of longing, as they sat watching the sun go down into a blazing fiery furnace behind Pilatus.

"Quite impracticable. You'd be frozen to death half the time. Why don't you try to paint it?"

But she only shook her head, and gazed and gazed with her soul in her eyes. "I can only sit and worship. It is of the heavens heavenly. Please don't speak again till it is all over."

So they sat in silence while the mists gathered and darkened in the valleys below, and drew filmy veils over the bright steel mirrors of the lakes, and came creeping up the hillsides, higher and higher—till all the world below was dark, and the shining peaks in front glowed and pulsed with living fires, radiant and beautiful beyond the telling—altar fires—Nature's evening sacrifice.

Mary Lindsay gazed enrapt till she saw the fires beginning to fade from off the lower peaks. Then she dropped her face into her hands and looked no more. But George sat silently watching, till the shadows had won the topmost pinnacle of the Jungfrau and all the world seemed to shiver and settle down into sleep.

"It is finished," he said softly at last.

"It was a sight for a lifetime. Did you watch them fade?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall have the richer remembrance. They will go on glowing in my mind for ever. Did you ever see anything so wonderful?"

"Never. It is the most glorious sight in all the world," and neither of them ever forgot it.

They were up before the sun and sought him anxiously. But he hid coyly behind thick white folds of mist, and when at last his pale face loomed dimly through, the glory of the dawn was past, and they found their rocky plateau an island round which the clouds hung and rolled like sheeted ghosts. So, after breakfast, they started down into the woolly wreaths along the eastern horsepaths, and found themselves at last among the brown wooden houses and rustling chestnut groves of Wäggis.

They reclaimed their heavier baggage at Lucerne and sent it on to Basle, and started out once more for the freedom of the lakes and mountains. And their hearts were light and their consciences clear, and grasping creditors were they of their time and money and so unique an opportunity, and greatly determined to wring from these the utmost they could yield in the way of enjoyment.

CHAPTER XI

A MEETING OF MOMENT

It would take too long to follow, in all minute delightful detail, that tour of tours, that ingenuous tilt against the proprieties.

They dallied one long day on lonely Zug, and another on busy Zurich. From there they struck up by by-roads and bridle paths into the Sentis and the little land of Appenzell, an old-world corner with a fragrance all its own. Where the women wear their waists too short and their skirts too full, and yet are so unconscious of it that their faces are always bright and merry; and the young bucks go about coatless, in scarlet waistcoats and white shirt sleeves, and leather caps, and consider their costumes incomplete without an umbrella tucked under one arm. Where a man thinks first of his cattle and then of his family, and allots to the former the larger share of the house room. A land where the merry Swiss boy jodels up aloft, not for coppers but from pure lightness of heart. A land of old beliefs and ancient customs, and for lovers of the picturesque a very casket of jewels, as someone else has truly said.

George could hardly get his companion along. She fell in love with something new at almost every step, and would probably have been there till this day if he had not captured her sketch book at times, and masterfully insisted on their seeking accommodation for the night.

Appenzell! Appenzell! The very sound of its name chimed happy bells in their hearts for many a day to come.

They took the Suabian Sea at old Roman Arbon, and sailed from there to Constance, and on to Schaffhausen, and thence by rail to Basle, recovered their baggage, sped through Baden to Heidelberg, and took boat at Mayence for the journey down the Rhine.

It seemed to George that his companion's spirits suffered slight eclipse during this part of their journey.

Perhaps it was that the full sweet days of delight were running out, as were the funds they considered they had the right to use, and that the work-a-day days drew every minute nearer. Perhaps it was the prospect of the new work she must set about seeking, and the possibilities of it not turning out much to her taste. Perhaps some little doubts as to the reception George's mother and sisters might give her.

He had talked to her about them so often that she seemed to know them already, and she thought she would like them. But would they like her, or would this unconventional tour of theirs have set them wondering what manner of girl she was, and possibly set them against her? Would she find them cool, and have to break through a thin ice of reserve? The past few weeks had been a pure delight and would always remain a precious memory. But the uncertain future cast a slight shadow on the present, the bright face was not quite as bright as it had been, and George's observant and specially interested eye was quick to detect it.

"I wonder if the Rhine comes up to your expectations?" he said, as they drew near to Cologne.

"I suppose it's abominable of me, but I'm afraid I must plead guilty. It doesn't quite, but I don't think the Rhine is to blame."

"It can't help it, poor thing! It has done its best But we are spoiled children of fortune. We drank our

best wine first—vin d'Asti, as you might say—and then took to Niersteiner. We wandered among God's altars and then came down the Rhine."

"Yes," she said, with longing retrospect, "Saas-Mürrn, Lucerne, Schwyz, that glorious sunset on the Rigi, and Appenzell! Appenzell! It's very name is music. We have been living life, and now we are going back to earn our livings. It is just a little dismal to think of, isn't it?"

"We shall earn them all the better for what we have seen, and the remembrance of it all will brighten all the darker days."

"Ah, yes, the darker days. I think I rather dread them. One never knows what the future may hold."

"Fortunately," he said, in the quiet way in which he always approached the deeper matters. The reverent side of him was very unobtrusive, but she had got a glimpse of it now and again, and it touched and charmed her greatly. "I remember my mother once saying to me, when I was unloading my troubles about the future on to her, 'My dear boy, don't worry about to-morrow. There may be no to-morrow. If there is, the hand that gives it will provide for it.' I have often thought of it as a very wise saying."

"I am sure I shall like your mother."

"You couldn't help it if you tried your hardest."

"But I am beginning to have my fears lest she should think I have passed the bounds in—in rambling about in this way."

"With me. Don't worry yourself, Miss Lindsay. My mother knows me and knows she can trust us. Very soon she will know you too, and she is very wise. She is the wisest and best and sweetest woman that ever lived."

"And Joan? How will she——?"

"Joan is an angel and never thinks an unpleasant thought of anyone—unless they are cruel to animals or little children."

His words brought her some comfort, but nevertheless the unknown future hung cloud-like on the horizon.

At Cologne they gravely debated whether their finances could stand the strain of a brief visit to Paris.

"We only spent one day there in passing," she said, "and it simply made me ache to leave it all behind. One doesn't feel quite educated till one has a nodding acquaintance with Paris."

He saw that she was keenly desirous of it, and determined to make it possible, even if he had to circumvent her in the price of the railway fares. He had more in hand than she, and there was not much that he would not have done for her if she would have permitted it. But he knew perfectly well that she would permit nothing of the kind, if she was aware of it. She left all payments to him during the day, as being better able to wrestle with the iniquities of a varied coinage, but insisted on squaring up with him every night, and she was down on him like a hammer when, once or twice, he endeavoured to reduce her half share, by omitting some trifling items of the day's expenses.

Fortunately her German was limited. Florins and francs she mixed up naturally, and as for marks and pfennigs and kreuzers and groschen, they were unknown quantities, relics of the catastrophe of Babel, and traps for the unwary.

They reached Paris in the evening after a long day's travelling. It was too late to seek such lodgings as George had in his mind's eye, so they went to the smallest hotel they could find near the station, and after dinner turned out for a stroll along the boulevards, as every minute was precious and not one must be wasted.

"What are they then, those two, François?" asked Madame of the hotel, who had striven in vain to puzzle out the relationship of her guests, of the frowzy little waiter who had attended them.

"Dame! Madame, they are English," shrugged François, by way of complete explanation.

"But no. Monsieur speaks too well for an Englishman," said Madame.

"But madame—mademoiselle—whatever she is, not so well. But it was English they were speaking at dinner without doubt."

"*Ah, ça,*" and madame retired to her ledger.

Next day they rambled round the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg till they lighted on a decent little hotel garni, found the prices acceptable to their slim purses, and forthwith engaged and paid for a couple of rooms for a week.

"*Comment donc, deux chambres?*" murmured the old concierge. "*Que ce sont drôles, ces Anglais!*" Still it was money in her pocket so she made no objections.

Lodging only was provided, meals they must look after themselves, and this absolute freedom was greatly to their taste. For this week Mary put away her doubts of the future and enjoyed the novel atmosphere to the full. It was late Autumn. The air was crisp and clear, and Paris was radiantly bright and beautiful. Each morning, indeed, when George knocked at her door and cried, "Good morning! All well?" and she issued forth, garbed for the day's adventure, with a smiling "Good morning" on her bright eager face, there was still a bloom of early mist in the streets. It seemed to hold all the varied odours of Paris in a strong solution of sweet wood smoke, and the sharp pleasant smell of it was like a mild intoxicant. It set their blood

spinning and their eyes and faces sparkling, and put springs to their feet.

Then away down the old boulevard to the little corner restaurant—white marble-topped tables, yellow-sanded floor, the most delicious milk-coffee they had ever tasted, and new twisted rolls, and golden butter of the most exquisite.

Then away through the brightening streets, busy with all the strange new bustle of the great city, they sought their education and enjoyment. Within certain limits they saw everything exceptionally worth seeing. They sped up and down the river in the merry little steamers, and got themselves entangled in the intricacies of omnibus "correspondances," and frequently cut the knot by walking, for they were most strenuous pedestrians and in fine condition.

They breakfasted where they happened to find themselves when they found themselves hungry, and every meal they took, no matter how slight it was, was a new enjoyment both in itself and still more in its surroundings.

Always for dinner, since they knew no better and were shy of taking undue risks, they sought the Palais Royal, and found infinite amusement and ample satisfaction among the odd little restaurants there. Once, indeed, they tried a Duval, but, though the faring was excellent, Mary decided that the atmosphere was not so truly Parisian as the others, so after that to the Palais Royal they always turned.

Then, after dinner, which was also rest after the labours of the day, they would seek a café on the boulevards and sip their coffees there, for the sake of watching Paris wake up and go drifting by to its pleasures and pursuits—high-class, low-class, and no class. There were café-concerts, too, off the Champs

Elysées, where they could sit and watch again for a modest fee; and—within limits—they saw all that was going on.

We are directly concerned, however, with only one of their adventures. They had gone up by boat to Suresnes, and had then walked back by the river road to St. Cloud. They picked out the restaurant that seemed to offer the best look out, and dallied over their meal and the view much longer than the size of their bill warranted. But business was slack and they were welcome to sit there all day if they chose.

The only other visitor while they were there was a dark-faced young man at a table in the farthest window. He seemed to be having an exceedingly good time all by himself, and yet he did not seem exuberantly happy. The waiters paid him much attention, his plates followed one another in quick succession, and he seemed to have a small bottle of wine to each course.

George mentally figured up the cost of his morning repast, and wondered at the income and digestion which could stand such large demands upon them. It seemed to him that he had seen the young man before somewhere, but he could not recall where. The dark, intent face, grave in spite of the bright sunshine and glittering river outside and the well-spread table in front of him—the tired black eyes which seemed to find no good in any of these things or in anything whatsoever;—the straight hard lines of lip and chin—George was certain he was pigeon-holed somewhere in his memory, and he cast back to find him.

The young man had been half way through his meal when they entered. Before they had finished he paid his bill and tossed his waiter a tip which ensured a triumphant exit, and sauntered out unobservant of his bows.

They followed presently and took the road up to the Château, and mused there over the ruins of fallen greatness.

"It is very pitiful," said Mary.

"Very typical. It was from here the Emperor started on the red road to Sedan."

"I always feel sorry for him in spite of all there might be against him. Such a hurling down is very terrible to think of."

"And the other Napoleon passed much of his time here, when he was not harrying the world outside."

"He has always been beyond my comprehension. I never could understand why he was permitted to be."

"Perhaps he was only an instrument, a means to an end."

"And poor Marie Antoinette! What strange things these old stones could tell——"

"Sermons in stones, and good in everything," he quoted.

"The sermons and the stones are generally very apparent. The good is not always so easy to see."

"At the time perhaps. It takes large eyes and proper perspective to see the meanings of things. And it is generally easier to see the benefit of misfortunes to others than to ourselves."

She had turned her back on the ruin and stood looking towards the city.

"To think," she said musingly, "that all their eyes have looked at it looking just like that. I wonder if I could sketch it with that bloom on it?" and she sat down on a fallen piece of the palace and got out her book and little tin case.

George got her water from a basin, and then lit his pipe and strolled to and fro, looking at the view and at her. Extending his tramp one time, he came to

the cross terrace and found it occupied by the young man who had breakfasted at their restaurant.

He was pacing slowly along with his head bent down in deep thought, his hands behind his back, and an unlighted cigarette between his lips.

He looked up at sight of George, and his brows met in annoyance at the disturbance of his solitude. Then he approached, raised his hat slightly, and requested a light. George handed him his box, and suddenly recollected where they had met before.

What infinitesimal things may alter the complexion of a man's life! The dark-faced young man had come out with an empty match-box!

As he handed back the matches, and turned away with another lift of the hat and a word of thanks, George, with his usual desire to know, said pleasantly, in English:

"I think we have met before."

The other looked at him quietly for a moment, found the honest face and steady eyes pleasant to look upon, hesitated, and said:

"I do not remember. It is possible."

"At Monte Carlo, some months ago."

"I was there certainly——"

"When I saw you you seemed to be in a fair way to break the bank."

"I did," he said quietly, and then with a short laugh, "And then it broke me." They had turned and were strolling back along the side terrace.

"I suppose it is difficult to stop at the right time," said George.

"If you play for the purpose of possibly making money, and have any common sense, it should not be difficult to stop. If you play for the sake of the

play, why—you go on. In that case the end is inevitable, of course. But you have the play."

"And the loss, I presume."

"Of course. That, as I say, is inevitable. You reckon upon it."

"You play simply for the excitement?"

"Exactly. It is in the blood, I suppose. Most men have at least one weakness. That is one of mine—one of many."

"I shouldn't have judged you to have many weaknesses, from the look of you," said George, fixing his eyes steadily on the keen dark face.

"Just a bundle of 'em," said the other, with his short laugh. "When you interrupted me I was just considering whether it was worth keeping the knot tied any longer."

"How do you mean?"

The dark-faced young man remained silent for a moment, then said, "Suppose I asked you to lend me £10 what would you say?"

"Well,—I should probably say that the request was a trifle thin on so short an acquaintance."

"Exactly. It's just about as thin as the line between life and death, and that's about the position."

He ran his hand into his pocket and produced a half-franc piece.

"That," he said, as he spun it into the air and caught it, "is the last coin I have—I won't say in the world—but available for some time to come. Now—you understand?"

"Well, I can't say I understand very clearly," said George, thinking of the young man's sumptuous breakfast and the large gratuity to the waiter.

"Supposing you had only half a franc in your pocket, and no bank account to fall back upon, what

would you do? No doubt it's difficult to imagine it in your own case. But it would interest me to know what a commonsense man *would* do."

"Well, I suppose I would try to earn some"——

"And live on the half franc meanwhile?"

"No, I would raise enough to live on meanwhile in some way or other."

"And suppose you didn't feel it worth while to go to all that trouble? Suppose you knew from past experience that when you had earned money you would simply pour it out on the roulette table, or fling it away in some still less reputable fashion? Suppose you knew yourself to be a good-for-nothing, with expensive tastes and nothing to feed them on? Suppose——"

"Well, if I supposed all that I should be inclined to suppose myself a considerable fool, and——"

"Exactly! *Le voilà!*" and he laid his hand on his heart, and raised his hat with an exaggeration of French politeness. "And having got that far you would probably consider the advisability of dropping the useless husk and setting the foolish spirit free, where it could at all events do no harm in the world."

George had thought at first that his companion was amusing himself at his expense. But his ideas changed as he stood and watched the other's dark face working with controlled excitement.

"Do you mean all this?" he asked.

"Every word of it. See, I will tell you—though why on earth I'm talking to you in this way, I don't quite know." He stopped as though to consider the point, and gazed at George's face intently. "Something in your face, I think, led me into it."

"I did not ask your confidence——" began George.

"And you would sooner not have it," said the other quickly.

"On the contrary. I'm immensely interested, since you assure me it is all genuine. If I could be of any service——"

"I don't know that you can be, or that anyone could be. The position is exactly as I have stated it, and, as far as I see, it is hopeless and not worth continuing. My blood runs to Chance, and worse, as other men's runs to home, wife, children and such things. It is in me. It was born in me, and I've often been tempted to let it out on the grass and end it My name is Niel Felston. My father was that James N. Felston who ruined himself and everybody he came in contact with by his big financial schemes. He blew his brains out in the end and left me alone—I was seventeen then—at Eton. I am not blaming him," he added quickly. "He was in his way a good father to me——"

"And your mother?" asked George.

"Died when I was a child. I scarcely remember her."

"It makes an awful difference in one's life."

"I suppose so," said the other, with a quick glance at him. "When his affairs were straightened out there was a small sum left that had been my mother's. It was invested for me by his lawyers and brings me in about £300 a year——"

"And you talk of——"

"It has been the curse of my life. Just enough to be idle on, not enough to live on, as I was brought up. I had a taste for painting, and came across here to follow it up and enjoy myself, before I knew what was in me. I stuck to the painting from the love of it. I also enjoyed myself, student fashion. I suppose there is hardly a folly that I have not committed. But, in spite of that, the painting and the £300 a year might have pulled me through, but for the

dominating folly of all. My father was a gambler on the largest scale. It's in me just the same, only it doesn't run to finance, which is all the better for other people. I ruin only myself. I can paint, and I can even sell at times, which is quite a different matter. Whenever the funds mount up I go off to Monte Carlo and enjoy myself there, and come back ruined. I won over 200,000 francs there this year, and lost it all and every franc I had besides. The Establishment paid my fare back here. It's the third time they've done it. We're on the friendliest possible terms. They know me, you see, and they know quite well that as long as I've any money it's sure to come to them sooner or later. I was three months at Monte Carlo this year, lived like a prince, and came home a pauper just a week ago. I managed to raise a few francs on some small things that happened to be far enough advanced to sell. I came here this morning, with thirty francs in my pocket, to have one more good breakfast before loosing the cords. If I'd had a match, and you hadn't appeared, I should probably have been lying by this time among the trees there, done with it all. So, you see, you are to some extent responsible for me still being here."

"I'm glad I came at the right moment then," said George. "It's never too late to mend."

"It's proverbial, and on the face of it absurd. There are some things past mending and the only thing possible is to end them."

"Nothing ends," said George gravely. "There is no end."

"Ah, now, there you hit me between joints. How do you know?"

"It's a big question. But to answer it comprehensively I would say because I'm a rational human

being. Nothing in Nature comes to an end, least of all man who is made on the higher plane. I'm not much of a hand at argument on such matters. What one feels most deeply is the most difficult to put into words."

"But you believe it all?"

"Absolutely, or life would be a sorry thing."

"It is, in my opinion."

"You've hardly given it fair chance, if you will permit me to say so."

"That's possible."

In their many turns they had come again to the crossing of the terraces. George glanced over to where Mary had been sitting, and found her no longer there.

"Shall we walk this way?" he said. "I left a young lady sketching here and she seems to have moved. Perhaps she is looking for me."

"Your sister?"

"No—a friend only," and he briefly explained the circumstances of their friendship.

They found Miss Lindsay a little further on, struggling with a fresh attempt at the view in front.

"I was afraid you'd got lost, Miss Lindsay," said George. "How goes the sketch? Miss Lindsay—Mr. Felston. Mr. Felston and I met down south. A match introduced us to one another again a few minutes ago."

Mary bowed and Felston raised his hat.

"It's beyond me," she said. "I can't get the bloom on the peach. It runs into fog."

"May I see?" asked Felston. "I dabble a bit in colours myself."

She handed him the book at once, and he looked critically at the unfinished sketch.

"It is very good, if you will allow me to say so, all

except the atmosphere, and that is always difficult at this distance and on such a day. Permit me!" and he sat down on a stone alongside and picked up her brushes and paint box, and Mary sat leaning forward with her hands clasped on her knees and watched him.

He mixed some colours and held the brush suspended over the page for a moment, then turned to the next one.

"It is a pity to spoil that," he said. "It is all your own work and very good work. You want a reminder of that"—with a nod at Paris—"just as it is?"

"Yes," she said, "just as it is, just as all the people who used to live here used to see it from these windows."

He worked rapidly and they watched him with interest, Mary from the artist's point of view of causes and effects, George from several still wider points of view.

Felston was absorbed in his work and did not speak. He was tight strung, but his hand and eye had lost none of their cunning. Possibly he found it a relief to concentrate his thoughts on something outside himself. Mary's eyes followed every stroke and every rapid dab among the paints. George strolled quietly up and down the terrace pondering his new acquaintance, and coming back to look over his shoulder at every turn. He believed every word Felston had told him. The question was, how could he assist him as he felt a strong desire to do.

"It is not quite to my mind," Felston was saying, as he came back on his beat one time. "I am more at home in oils, but it gives an impression of the view——"

"It is delicious," said Mary. And to George also

it seemed an exceedingly clever bit of work, rapid and impressionistic, but wonderfully true and suggestive.

"I shall prize it greatly," said Mary. "Will you please sign and date it? Then when you become famous——"

Felston glanced at George and laughed as he inserted his name and the date.

"Which way were you thinking of returning?" he asked. "Whereabouts do you want to get to?"

"We are at a small hotel garni in the Rue Michelette, number 17," said George.

"That's odd," said Felston, with his short laugh, as he looked at George. "I have lived at No. 16 for the last eight years. We can all go together—that is, if you don't mind."

"We shall be very glad of your company. We are pilgrims and strangers and find our way about with difficulty at times, and sometimes don't find it at all."

"We are always getting lost," said Mary. "It adds zest to one's rambles."

"Which way did you come?"

"Boat to Suresnes, then walked back along the river."

"Then, if I may suggest, we will walk through the park and take the boat at Sèvres. Have you seen the porcelain works? No? Then"—glancing at his watch—"we'll have time to do that too before they close!"

In the capacity of host, doing the honours to novel guests, his spirits rose considerably. George asked himself if it was possible that this was the same young man who had confessed to the idea of making away with himself an hour ago. He weighed him carefully as they went along, and came to the

conclusion that his present high spirits were as genuine as the other ones had been. It was a style of temperament he had had little acquaintance with, and his interest in Felston deepened still more.

"You dine out, of course," said Felston, as they crossed the Pont Royal after quitting the boat. "Where do you generally go?"

"Palais Royal," said George.

"Oh, pfui! I can show you better than that."

"If you dine on the same scale as you breakfast we'd sooner not," said George.

"Ah!" he said, "that was an occasion. The last time I breakfasted there, there were twenty-five of us. It was the day I started for Monte Carlo. To-day I was renewing old memories and saying farewell."

"You are leaving Paris?" asked Mary.

"I was thinking of it, but I may not. I have not quite decided yet."

"It must be delightful to be able to live where you choose," she said. "I found a dozen places in Switzerland where I would like to live if I could earn my living with my brush."

"A year's study here would give you much of what you lack," he said, "and practice would do the rest. But it is not an easy matter to earn one's living by the brush nowadays. The big men make big money, the beginners starve."

"The year's study is out of the question anyway," said Mary. "Sometime perhaps I may manage it. It will be something to look forward to and work for."

"It must be a great thing to have something to look forward to," he said quietly.

When they came to the door of No. 16 he said, with an evident desire to further their acquaintance, "Won't you come up for a minute or two, and

then I'll show you where to dine in the Quartier ?" and they followed him up the rambling old staircase to the top of the house.

It was a large room, with two big north windows and little besides but a bed in an alcove, a plain deal table, and a couple of cane easy chairs, which creaked when you sat down in them and went on complaining at intervals for quite three minutes after you had risen. There were a couple of easels, one large and one small, and a number of canvases propped against the wall all in an unfinished state.

"This is the starving stage, you see, Miss Lindsay," said Felston cheerfully. "Bare walls and bare boards. The rugs and draperies come later, or not at all, as the case may be. I'll be back in three minutes if you don't mind taking charge of the establishment. You can criticise all my efforts to your heart's content." They heard him run lightly down the stairs, and George thought he could guess where he had gone and on what errand.

"He must be very clever," said Mary, as they looked at canvas after canvas. And clever undoubtedly they were. "But why does he leave them half finished ?"

"Constitutional laziness, perhaps. Art students are a harum scarum lot as a rule. I suppose it is the absolute freedom that gives them too many opportunities."

Mary had stopped before a large canvas and was examining it intently. It was a very beautiful piece of work, but like the rest, unfinished. A youth in the garb of an Eastern shepherd had come strolling along a bare road, his sheep straggling behind. He had come to a parting of the ways, and at the dividing point sat two maidens, one dark, the other fair. The dark one, a

most bewitching beauty, with laughing eyes and merry lips, her face and full voluptuous figure all aglow with enticement, had half risen, whereby her rich outer robes had fallen to the ground. Her hand was stretched to draw the shepherd into her path. The path ran broad and bright, with sunshine and flowers, and presently dipped over a smooth round knoll. In the distance along it other beautiful girls were walking with linked arms. The farthest distance was dark, as though behind the smooth round hill the sunlight faded.

The other girl at the parting of the ways was clothed in soft, white, clinging robes. She sat with her hands folded in her lap, and you knew that she would only look quietly at the youth and in no way constrain him. His choice must be his own. In the picture, as they saw it then, however, the white girl had no face. There was a great confusion of paint where the face should have been, as though more than one abortive attempt had been made on it and wrathfully scraped out. The path by her side was narrow and stony. There were thorns and briars in it. It trended upwards and hinted at climbing. There were flowers in it too, here and there among the thorns, and the far distance glowed with soft light. The young shepherd stood leaning on his crook undecided which path to take. His back was towards you and so his face was not seen. The muscles in his brown shoulders and legs were finely wrought, and he was a picture of hillside grace and indecision. His sheep were clumped at his heels with their mild eyes fixed on him, ready to follow wherever he led.

That is the merest outline of the idea of the painting. Some of you have seen it since. Some of you know whose face in due time took its place on the white girl's shoulders.

" A very obvious moral," said George, " and I should say a very fine piece of work, if only it was finished."

" Why *does* he leave everything half done ? " said Mary, with a touch of irritation.

" Well, you see," said Felston behind them, " in that case there was a very good reason. I can't find a face to suit me. I've been looking for one for a year past. I've tried a round dozen, but they none of them came up to my ideas. I want the most beautiful face in the world "—he looked critically at Mary for a moment, and then added—" she'll turn up some time probably, then I'll finish it off. It's about the best bit of work I've done. Shall we go along to dinner now ? "

He took them to a tiny shop lower down the street, where an old lady presided gracefully over a small stock of tobacco, cigars, and cigarettes, and also sold stamps. They had passed the place dozens of times. George had even bought stamps and tobacco there, and had been much impressed with the old lady's manner, which was as gracious when he bought a twopence-halfpenny stamp as when he invested in a two-ounce packet of tobacco. She was a very charming old lady, with white hair done up in little curls plastered to the side of her head, and a clean-cut white face which seemed to enjoy smiling.

" Ah, M. Felston ! But it is long since we have seen you," she cried, at sight of them.

" The wandering sheep has returned to the fold, my dear Madame Buvard. We breakfasted this morning at L'Espaliers at St. Cloud——"

" Ah, *Mon Dieu!* L'Espaliers ! Then without doubt you paid for it."

" Oh, yes, we paid for it without doubt, and through the nose as usual. So we've come to you to

rehabilitate our pockets and our digestions. I have been telling my friends"—Madame bowed charmingly to George and Mary—"you give the best dinner in all Paris for the money. But candidly, Madame, when I bring you two new customers it seems to me you should let me dine free—or make a reduction on the three——"

"But—my dear——" began the old lady helplessly, and then caught the twinkle in his eye, and added with an assumption of irascibility, "Go away, farceur. You are always up to your jokes. Pay me one quarter of what you pay L'Espalier, and I will retire at the end of the year."

"And where would we dine then? No, no, dear Madame, we can't spare you yet. Half the boys would die if you deserted them."

A customer coming in for a stamp, Madame wreathed herself in fresh smiles, and Felston led the way round the counter, and down a passage, to a long room with a table all down the centre. It was set to accommodate about thirty diners.

"Jour, Marie," he nodded, to a very pleasant-faced, white-capped girl who was finishing the table arrangements.

"Ah, M. Felston! And I feared you were dead."

"Not yet, *ma petite.* Almost at times."

"Why, what have you been doing all this time?"

"Wandering to and fro seeking something to devour."

"Poor thing! Did you catch her?" said Marie with a twinkle.

"No."

"*Mon Dieu!* but you must be hungry. I will get the soup," and she hurried away.

"We are early, so we'll take the fire," said Felston,

and seated himself at the head of the table, with Mary on his left and George on his right. The room was plainly furnished, but guiltless of mirrors, and half-a-dozen chintz-covered sofas round the walls, and a cheerful wood fire on the big open hearth, gave it a unique air of homeliness and comfort.

"This is quite the nicest dining-place we've seen yet," said Mary, looking round with great content. "And the old lady is delightful."

"She is a dear old thing and very good to the boys. About thirty of them dine here every night, and they all swear by Madame Buvard. Some of them would not be here but for her. She's fed some of them for weeks, when they've been on the ramp and run through their allowances too soon. But she's never lost a sou by it,—on the contrary. Her husband was a colonel under MacMahon at Sedan, and was killed there. There's only one thing she hates and that's a German. I remember once a Bavarian student came in with the others. Madame flatly refused to serve anyone with anything till he left. He never came again. She keeps that picture,"—with a jerk of the head towards the fireplace,—"to fan the flames of her hatred,"—a large black and white, depicting France, ragged, wounded, half-naked, sitting crouched by a table, one bare arm round a shrinking child, the other holding in its nerveless fingers the pen of capitulation;—leaning across the table towards her, Bismarck like a bloodhound, Von Moltke like a wolf, others of the conquerors behind, all hard and keen and bitter as death.

"Horrible!" said Mary. "It's enough to take away one's appetite."

"Not when you've dined here once," said Felston. "The only thing that will take it away then is

Madame's fare. We pay three francs, have five dishes, all always excellent and fitted like a Chinese puzzle, and the wine is unusual. I don't know how she does it. But she is an extremely clever old lady, and she arranges everything herself. She thinks out her menus as she sits in the shop. I've an idea she must have been 'grande dame' in her time, probably had a big house in the country and draws on her recollections."

Marie came bustling in with the soup, and chattered occasionally throughout the dinner with Felston, giving him scraps of news of his acquaintances.

Mary said she had not enjoyed a meal so much since she left home. And when Felston translated this for Marie's benefit, that smiling young person smiled more than ever and immediately went and told Madame.

Other young men came dropping in in twos and threes before they had finished, with a nod and a word of greeting to Felston, who seemed to be a favourite, and a covert stare at Mary Lindsay's bright face.

"Shall we walk along to the boulevard for coffee?" said Felston.

"Can't we stay here?" asked Mary.

"We could, and I've no doubt they'd be glad to have you stop. But, on the other hand, after dinner they get noisy, and a lady is something of a restraint on their freedom,"—and she jumped up at once.

"Mademoiselle is charmed with your hospitality, Madame," Felston told the old lady, as George and he both tried to pay for the three of them.

"Mademoiselle is too kind," beamed the old lady. "She will be very welcome again."

"She wanted to stop here, but I wouldn't let her."

"The good boys do get a little lively at times,"

said Madame Buvard, "but they are not wicked—at least not here.—Now whose money am I to take, or shall I take both?" she laughed at the two would-be payers.

"Mine, Madame, assuredly, or perhaps we shall never come again," said George. "We are already under great obligations to M. Felston for bringing us to so delightful a place."

"It is well said," said Madame, and pushed Felston's money back at him. "Keep it, mon gars. No doubt you can find a use for it," and they strolled away across the bridge towards the boulevard.

When George had seen Mary safely up to her room that night, and heard the door locked, he and Felston returned to the studio. They managed to kindle a fire on the cold hearth, and Felston heaped on sawn logs till it was roaring in the chimney. Then they lighted pipe and cigarette, and sat in the creaking wicker chairs and talked.

"Well, has the bad fit gone?" asked George.

"For the time being, yes, thanks to you and Miss Lindsay. She is very charming."

"What are your ideas?"

"I'll pick things up again and have another try. But I'm afraid it's only a postponement of the evil day."

"I don't see why it should be. If you're strong enough to pick things up I don't see why you need be weak enough to drop them again."

"I'm very loose-strung inside. You can't understand it. The things that draw me like ropes probably wouldn't deflect your compass a single point."

"What would you say to London for a change?"

"I detest London, especially in winter. No, I'll try here. If I fail I can always end it.'

"No, you can't, as I told you at St. Cloud."

"Ah, yes, I forgot. Well, that's all the more reason for tackling the matter in earnest."

"The question is—can you do that here? I suppose there must be people in Paris who work in real earnest. But they're not very evident on the face of things—except the waiters. Paris strikes me as the incarnation of frivolity and worse, and not at all the place for an inwardly loose-strung young man to work in real earnest. It's just a city of temptation,—the broad path," he said, with a nod towards the big picture, "and no lack of Delilahs to drag one down it."

"Delilahs lose their charm—except as models, and they don't keep 'em long even then. I doubt if I could paint a stroke in London. It gives me blue devils simply to look at people's faces in the streets."

"There are people and people. You can find mud anywhere."

But he could not induce him to the change of environment.

"My dear fellow," said Felston finally, "if you'd lived here for ten years you would understand. Paris works into your blood and becomes a necessary part of your life. Any other place is exile."

"Exile is sometimes beneficial."

"But torture all the same. As well die of Paris as of London."

"How will you manage?"

"I'll scrape along somehow till I manage to sell something. At Christmas there's £75 due to me, and good old Madame Buvard won't let me actually starve."

"Will you let me lend you that ten pounds we spoke of?"

"I didn't mean that, you know—"

"I know you didn't, but I mean this. I would like to help if you'll let me."

"It would possibly save my self-respect some knocks, but—. Any stipulations?" he asked presently.

"Certainly not. When I trust a man I trust him fully."

"It's more than good of you, Barty, but—I don't know. I tell you candidly I am not sure of myself. If the spirit seizes me I may kick over the traces at any minute."

"I'll take the risk."

"Very well," said Felston, after some consideration, "I'll accept it and we will see what comes of it. If I pull through, it'll be one to your credit. If I don't, you'll have lost ten pounds."

They talked on of many things. George told him his own ideas for the future, and Felston told him much of his past.

"I'm very glad you went out without matches this morning," said George, as they parted on the doorstep of No. 17.

"I'm half inclined never to carry a match again," said Felston.

CHAPTER XII

HOME, SWEET HOME

"How dismal London looks after Paris and the rest," sighed Mary Lindsay, with a little shiver, as their cab made its halting progression along Fleet Street towards Wynyatt Square.

It was muggy above and liquid mud below. The lights of the shops gleamed coldly on the greasy pavements and mackintoshed policemen and the hurrying crowds on the side walks, and Mary's spirits were as low as the barometer.

"It's different," said George, "but somehow it feels more genuine. There's a glamour about Paris, but it's all sham and outward show, and one has a feeling of hollowness about it. As if it might all collapse if you poked it with your finger. It's a mighty good thing one comes to see the good points in the place one has to live in."

But if the streets, and Wynyatt Square, and even the outside of No. 21 looked uninspiring in that dismal weather, all remembrance of them fled when the door flew open to George's lively knock, and Mrs. Barty stood there with the halo of home streaming out past her, and gave them hearty welcome.

"Come away in, my dear, I am very glad to see you," she said to Mary, and kissed the girl with such motherly warmth as was quite past her remembrance and almost beyond her knowledge. "We feel as if we all knew you like an old friend. Joan is waiting most anxiously for you. Let us go up to her at once."

And while George saw to the unloading of the cab, Mrs. Barty led Mary up to Joan.

Mary Lindsay never forgot that first sight of Joan Barty's sweet face,—the eloquent brown eyes shining like stars, the pure loveliness of the girl, the slim white hands stretched out towards her in eager welcome as to a dear friend, and, perhaps more than all, some subtle indication through it all that Joan's own anticipations respecting herself were amply satisfied.

"It is so good to see you home at last, dear," said Joan. "We have heard so much about you from George's letters, but I wanted you yourself."

"We have been rather selfish, I'm afraid," said Mary, when they had kissed and settled down. "But it was such a chance of seeing what one might never have the chance of seeing again, and oh, it *has* been so delightful."

"You did just right not to miss it," said Joan. "I've followed you everywhere on the map and in the guide books, but I want to hear it all again from yourself. When we've had tea we'll talk right on for a week."

George came up the stairs four at a time and burst in.

"Joan!"

"Dear old boy!"

No more, but it brought the tears close up to Mary Lindsay's eyes and made them very bright. Never in all her life had she tasted so sweet a draught of home, and her heart was very full.

High tea was set in Joan's room. She vowed that she dared not let them out of her sight yet, lest they should whisk away again on some fresh enterprise. Just as they were sitting down to it Meg came beaming in from the hospital, with Jack Fairfax in attendance.

"I happened to be passing the Hospital when strangely enough, the door opened and a young lady came flying out and nearly knocked me down"—explained Jack.

"Curious!" said George. "I believe it's happened before."

"I believe they do that, you know, when they're short of subjects—patients, I mean—in the casualty ward."

"That's how you used to do when you were there, I suppose," said Meg.

"Oh no, it's only the pretty nurses who do it. They want their beds to look ornamental, you know, so they peep through the gates till an unusually good-looking man comes along. Then they fly out in a hurry on pretence of business, knock him down, break his leg, and it's, 'Hi, there! quick! casualty Ward!' and there you are!"

"Just you wait till we get you there, sir, and we'll make you sit up, or lie down, behave yourself, at all events, and teach you not to libel your own nest. Think of a Barty boy saying such things of Bart's. He's not really bad, you know, Miss Lindsay, but he's a scribbler and given to romancing. Do you know, you two," she said, looking comprehensively at Mary and George,—"you made one very grave mistake in rambling about all over Europe in that way."

"And what was that?" asked George.

"You ought to have taken an elderly chaperone to look after you,—a person of staid and steady character—ME!"

"And left Bart's high and dry on the rocks! We had too much consideration for Babylon, my child. Think what might have happened if we'd deprived it of one of its brightest ornaments and soundest pillars."

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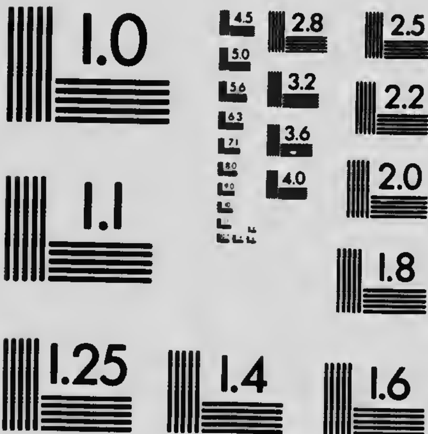

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"Paris!" retorted Meg. "Flim-flam! You never even gave me a thought."

"We even spoke about you," said George. "I did my very best to prepare Miss Lindsay for this meeting, lest you should astonish her out of her senses."

"Wait till *you* break your leg," said Meg. "Tell me, Miss Lindsay, has he behaved well,—up to the Barty standard?"

"He couldn't have behaved better," said Mary. "I am under such a load of obligation to him that I don't see how I'm ever to pay it off."

But Meg, with elder-sisterly eyes, thought it not unlikely that a way might discover itself sooner or later.

The "boys" forebore to intrude on the family gathering, but later on they came dropping in to pay their usual court to Mistress Joan, and to give George jovial welcome home, and to greet the visitor. Mary Lindsay had never seen so much high spirits and hearty goodwill collected in so small a space before. They were an unusually pleasant set of lads at that time,—may I not say it,—*moi qui vous parle*, as Felston would have said,—and there was no end to their jokes and laughter. Sister Lazarus—which was Meg's incongruous official title for the time being, that being the name of the ward she had charge of, and which the boys insisted on feminising into Lazarette—scolded them, laughed with them, talked to them like a small edition of her mother, and was a match for any number of the best of them. Now and again, however, she dropped into quiet, serious discussion with one or another on Hospital matters. And Mrs. Barty sat quietly knitting, with the star-shine in her eyes, enjoying them all, and not least of all the evident interest and enjoyment of the bright-faced girl who sat so quietly by her side.

She and Mary had a quiet little talk now and again in their backwater, which drew them still closer.

"I am so very glad you decided to come to us," said Mrs. Barty, one time. "You and Joan will be great friends, I know."

"Oh, I can't tell you how I feel," said Mary impulsively. "It is home, and friends, and more, oh, ever so much more! My own mother died when I was four. But it was different. This is so delightfully homey."

"How lovely Joan is!" she broke out softly another time. "George said she was beautiful, but I never imagined her like that. It is not just that her face is lovely. She seems to radiate loveliness somehow—"

"Yes," said Mrs. Barty, with her quiet smile, "I think that is just it. It is not all beautiful hearts that have beautiful faces. When you get them together you get a face that is out of the common. But—'The good is always beautiful. The beautiful is good,'" she quoted softly.

"Dear old Whittier," said Mary. "But I'm not sure that it's always quite true. Paris is very beautiful, but—"

"Whittier's perception of beauty goes a long way below the surface. I doubt if he would think Paris beautiful at all. He must be a beautiful old man himself, but I don't know that he is very good looking."

"It does one good just to sit and look at her," said Mary, following Joan with her eyes, as she passed slowly into the further room with Bob Macgregor's hand on her chair. He had just come in with a small plant in a pot and they were discussing it earnestly as they went. "How they all seem to like her!"

"They are the nicest boys we ever had. If they could spoil her they would. They are all very good to her."

"They can't help it, I expect, and don't want to. She must be quite an education to them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Barty, with a quick pleased look at her. "I think she is."

CHAPTER XIII

GROPING FOR THE LADDER

It was decided for her that Mary should take at least a fortnight's rest before beginning to look seriously for another place. Meanwhile they were all to keep their eyes and ears open, and if anything likely offered it was to be carefully looked into.

George went up to Kensington Palace Gardens the day after his return. He found Sir John with his leg propped up just as he had left him, and looking as though he had never moved an inch since the last time they met.

He gave the old gentleman a full account of his stewardship, and handed over the balance of the sum entrusted to him for expenses. The old man was much affected when he began to give him the details of his grandson's death, of which Mr. Burney had told him little but the bare facts.

"Stay," he said, "his mother might like to hear also. She was very much troubled about it—more than I ever saw her before."

He squeezed the bulb of an electric bell which hung to the arm of his chair, and when the solemn-faced butler appeared, asked him if Mrs. Burney was in the house.

"She is at luncheon, Sir John."

"Tell her that Mr. Barty is with me, Buckle," and they sat and waited for her.

It was some time before she appeared, however, and George took himself to task for lack of charity in thinking that the details of her son's death seemed to

be of less consideration to her than her luncheon. When she did come at last, she carried a handkerchief in one hand against contingencies, and her voluminous person scented the whole room. In the other hand she had some sweetmeats which she slipped into her mouth from time to time, in most ingenuous fashion, and munched contemplatively at intervals.

"I thought you might like to hear about poor Frazer, Julia," said Sir John. "Mr. Barty only reached home yesterday, and has come at once to tell us about him."

Mrs. Burney had sunk into the first chair she reached. She bowed to George, and slipped a sweetmeat into her mouth, and waited for him to begin.

He told them all that had taken place, softening the final unfortunate happenings as much as possible, and enlarging on the improvement he believed he had noticed in his charge towards the end.

Mrs. Burney shook her head dismally at times, and sniffed, and used her handkerchief, and ate sweetmeats, but she had nothing to say and asked no questions till he had finished. Then she asked—

"And he was never found?"

"He was never found. The villagers searched high and low for a week, and never came on a trace of him. The chances are that he fell into some crevasse and the end would be quick."

"It is very horrible," said the mother with a shiver. "I'm quite sure you did your best for him, Mr. Barty," and she dusted out the hand that had held the sweetmeats, with her handkerchief. "I'm sure we're very much obliged to you—and for coming and telling us all about it so nicely. Good morning!" and she got up and went out, George thought to get some more sweetmeats.

"My son said something about his having stabbed you, Mr. Barty," said the old man. "What was that?"

George told him the plain facts, and Sir John only nodded. He was not apparently much surprised.

"May I count upon you keeping the whole matter to yourself as much as possible, Mr. Barty?" he asked.

"I should naturally do so," said George. The old gentleman showed himself more generous than his people in Lombard Street would have given him credit for. He insisted on paying all the expenses of George's extended tour, and upon his accepting a whole year's salary. "And not a penny too much for the anxiety and suffering you have had," said he. "Not a word, please, I insist upon it."

Perhaps he looked upon it in the light of a check upon any possible garrulity on George's part. From that point of view it was unnecessary, but George had no compunctions in accepting the money, which indeed had been thoroughly well earned.

He went down the street a richer man than he had ever been before, both in cash and experience. And a by no means unpleasurable part of the experience was the feeling that he was in the unique position of having eaten his cake and still possessing it. And it was poor Frazer Burney who paid for it all.

That same day he accompanied Mary and the late Mrs. Colonel Crest's trunks to the solicitors in Lincoln's Inn. The gentleman who had Mrs. Crest's affairs in hand was disposed to complain of the delay. George promptly headed him off, requested a receipt for the trunks, and the balance due to Miss Lindsay, gave her address at No. 21 Wynyatt Square, in case she should be needed for any reason whatever, and brought her triumphantly home again.

The next obvious thing to do was to get his foot on the first rung of that lofty ladder whose base rests somewhere among the sloughs of despond and the grimy purlieus of Fleet Street and the Strand, and whose top reaches up among the stars.

It is a beautiful ladder for those who are fortunate enough to find it. And fortune here, as in most other cases, means dogged perseverance and endurance, and the power of hanging on by teeth and toe nails, till the footing is secure, and the mounting becomes, not easier, but somewhat less precarious. The lower rungs are difficult indeed of accomplishment, but let him who has mastered them and got his head above the mists below, beware of slackening his grip for a moment, lest, treading a slippery rung, he find himself stepping down instead of up. For the atmosphere above the crowded first rungs is rare and heady, and at times a climber becomes so inflated with it that his head swells prodigiously, and he lets go with his hands, and forgets his feet, and tries a flight on that swollen balloon of a head, and ends disastrously.

Some indeed leap half way up the ladder at a bound, but their holding is uncertain, for strength is born of struggle and endurance, and the steady climber leaves them behind at length. And some are content to sit all their days on the lowest rungs in the mist. And some have tales of cruel clutchings and venomous stabs from below and alongside, and even of trampled fingers and kicks from above. And others have happier memories of unexpected hands slipped under tired shoulders helping them up the weary rungs. And few are quite without their visions of fair forms that beckon them ever on and up, and to some these are a sufficient reward for all the labour and the strife.

George's addition to the postal revenue at this time

became quite an item at St. Martin's-le-Grand. Master Jack Fairfax enjoyed himself like a very Herod over George's innocents, and when he reluctantly and finally released them one by one from knife and shears, Joan copied them all out again in her very best copperplate. Then George made them up into nice neat parcels, and, after training his guns with circumspection and much shrewd advice from Fairfax, he fired them off here, there, and everywhere, at journals, magazines, and publishers, and prayed devoutly that some might reach the bull's-eye.

In due and natural course the return broadside came, and no shot failed to reach its mark then. For a time every refusal felt like a blow, and the postman's knock set his heart jumping in spite of himself and the "Pshaw! it's only some more come back," with which he braced himself to meet each fresh disappointment.

Of course he always had the lurking expectation of good news—Heart always has, no matter how sternly Head forbids foolish hope. But it is a pretty one-sided game when one man fires at twenty and misses every one, and the twenty all fire back and every shot goes straight to the mark.

"It's all right my child," Master Fairfax would say, as he looked over the spent shells, with the matter-of-fact geniality of the adviser discussing the case which is life or death to his client. "I had it just the same. It's running its natural course. If the turn came too soon it might fly to your head and be dangerous. Put 'em all into fresh wrappers and we'll fire them off again. If at first you don't succeed, you know—well, neither does the next man, as a rule. We'll get there all right. Look at me!" For Master Jack was looking proudly down on the world from

the lofty eminence of one whose first serial was running in a standard journal, and he could afford to smile at the dreary waits which had attended his first efforts.

"The stuff's all right, George, and good stuff finds its way in time. Readers and sub-editors—with exceptions, of course,—are awful asses and all that, full of conceit and badly bought MSS., and empty of judgment, and so on and so on—at all events we're apt to think them so—but, all the same, they find out the good stuff in time, and they're always on the look-out for it. But new stuff doesn't get much attention to begin with."

"How is one to make a start if they won't look at it?" snorted George.

"You'll see we'll find an opening some where before long. And that one'll lead to others, and that to more, and so we'll go on——"

"If they'd only read them," dolefully from George.

"Oh, they do, my dear—sometimes—a page or two. Then they get tired. Don't I know it? Even if one does strike a good thing at the end of two dozen rotters, you're so sick of 'em all that you're apt to chuck it away with the rest. There's a good deal of luck about it. I've read a thing when I was tired or done up, or wanting my lunch, or pining for a smoke, and thought it drivelling rot, and picked it up again when I was fresh, or full and happy, and found it capital stuff."

"Humph!" from George. "The juice of a man's brain sacrificed to the cravings of a sub-editor's stomach. Abominable! What is literature coming to?"

"Coming our way in time, old man. Just bide your time and get on with the writing. It's practice, at all events."

Joan heartened him too. She wrote a straight up and down hand as clear almost as print. She copied

and re-copied indefatigably for him, and even went the length of suggesting improvements at times, which is a risky thing to do and needs much delicacy. Trample on a writer's corns and feelings generally, as much as you consider good for him and amusing to yourself, but beware how you try to improve his precious words.

Joan's perceptions, however, in matters of style and balance were delicately true. A sentence that limped instead of tripping smoothly was a physical annoyance to her. A disproportion of space to value troubled her sense of fitness. George reaped the benefit, and so incidentally did she herself. Their discussions on such points had the effect of the burnishing brush on their intellectual silver and gold, and tended to the heightening of the lustre.

Joan and Mrs. Barty read aloud everything he wrote, the one holding the rough original, the other the fair copy, so that nothing should be missed out and no errors should have crept in. As a rule they were enthusiastic in their appreciation. If only they had been those stern arbiters of fate, editors or sub-editors, George's fortune would have been assured. As it was, while appreciating their appreciation, he accepted it at its proper value, and slacked none of his attempts on the less sympathetic world outside.

There was one matter that puzzled Joan considerably, and it was not till long afterwards that she understood the meaning of it. George from the very first declined to use his own rightful name in connection with his work. He wrote under a pen name, and Joan, with an immense belief in his future, and keen on the family honour, could not understand why or see any sense in it.

"But why Guy Bertie, George? Why not George Barty?"

"I prefer it so, my child," said George, with an assumption of lightness which was not in him.

"But why? You're not ashamed of your own name, are you?"

"I've done nothing to be ashamed of yet, my dear."

"And you never will. So why not use it?"

"You must let a tender plant have its little sensitivenesses. I have thought a good deal about it, dear, and I think it is best so." For even the simple writing of his own name brought to his mind the horror of those words he had come upon at the British Museum —"The convict, George Barty." They had bitten into his soul and he would never forget them.

Their mother was not present when that matter was discussed. When Joan broached the subject later on, Margaret Barty understood in a moment that George had learned all about his father, and she wondered how and when.

"It is a matter for George to decide himself," she said quietly, "and I have no doubt he is doing what he thinks best. Many writers use pen-names until they get known, don't they?"

"Ye—s," admitted Joan, somewhat grudgingly. And presently added, "It will never quite feel as if it all belonged to us, and I was so looking forward to it all."

And there was a sigh in the mother's heart though her face was placid over her knitting, and perhaps the stars in her down-cast eyes were a little dimmed at the thought that her boy had reason to prefer another name to his own.

What a glorious December day that was which brought him his first gleam of hope! It was raining,

snowing, and sleeting all at once. Wynyatt Square looked like a small slab of Siberia, and the atmosphere outside was so thick that George could not distinguish even his favourite chimney pots through the mirk.

It was the afternoon post and he ran down for the letters. He had got into the way of doing this since the greater portion of the delivery was always for himself, and he objected to the way in which the housemaid used to come thumping at his door, a quarter of an hour after the postman had gone, with " Some more of your parcels, Master George ! " in a matter-of-fact tone, as though it was the right and proper thing for them to come streaming back in that way, and only what was to be expected. It saved him pins and needles of impatience and a certain amount of self-respect, to go down for them himself, and it saved Sarah's legs and time, and she had ample occupation for both and was glad enough to leave the matter to him. As he neared Joan's door on the way up again he would hear——

" Any treasure, George ? "

" Only deaders, dear."

" Cheer up, old boy. There's a good time coming," and perhaps he would go in and have a few minutes chat with her, and then away up to his work again, a trifle depressed, but determined, through his set teeth, to get there all the same, in spite of the h'm—h'm—h'm's who hadn't the acumen to discover jewels when they were thrust under their very noses.

But this beautiful December afternoon brought him a letter, in addition to three returned manuscripts. He tore open the letter.

" 45A Binyon's Court, Fleet St., E.C.

" Dear Sir,— " *December* 15, 18—.

" I have read the story you sent me, and think with a few alterations I could make use of same. If

you will call here at your early convenience I shall be glad to go into the matter with you, and no doubt we can arrange satisfactory terms.

"Yours truly,

"ANDREW JOHNSON."

"Guy Bertie, Esq."

He rushed up the stairs with this to Joan's room.

"Ah! Something good at last by your feet," she cried, as he burst in.

"Hurrah! I knew we should get there at last, old boy. Which is it?" when she had hastily read the letter.

"Don't know," he panted. "Such a lot of them—go and see," and away to his room to find out which story had eventually found its way to Mr. Andrew Johnson of 45A Binyon's Court. When he got down again, five stairs at a time, his mother was gloating over that precious letter also. Joan would hardly let it out of her hands.

"It's 'One of Three.' You know, Joan, the Swiss story."

"It's one of the best. I do hope he'll take it. I wonder what alterations he wants. What does he publish?"

"Haven't an idea. I wonder if it's too late to go and see him to-day?" and he seemed inclined to start out then and there.

"I wouldn't go to-day if I were you," said Mrs. Barty. "Too eager a seller makes a bad market."

"And Jack will be here to-night," said Joan. "He'll be sure to know all about Mr. Johnson."

"Ye—es," said George, "I've an idea.—However it will perhaps be as well to wait."

Jack, when he eventually came in with Meg, whom he had, he said, overtaken between the hospital

and Wynyatt Square, proved somewhat of a wet blanket.

"Johnson. Binyon's Court! Why, how on earth? —— I never put you on to Johnson, did I?"

"I've an idea it's one I sent on myself. Got his name from the Directory. What does he do?"

"Old soaker, publishes some half-penny rag novelettes or something of that kind. Not what we want at all. Just throwing yourself away, my boy. The price wouldn't be worth having, and the credit would be minus *x*. It pays to strike high and keep in the best class things."

"Trouble is to get into 'em," said George gloomily.

"My dear boy, you must keep your pecker up. It's as much a part of your stock in trade as imagination and expression."

"And you really wouldn't follow this chance up, Jack?" asked Joan mournfully.

"I wouldn't—except as a bit of experience. Go and see old Johnson by all means. Hear all he's got to say, get your MS. back, and say you'll consider it. Then stick him in a pigeon-hole for future use."

And when George found his way to Binyon's Court next day, and was ushered into the presence of Mr. Andrew Johnson, he decided that Jack was quite right, and that, judging from the aspect of Mr. Johnson himself, Mr. Johnson's publications were probably not quite what he would have desired his work to appear in.

He passed through a big, dirty, open warehouse down below, with a mob of dirty men and boys clamouring on one side of a counter for the attentions of a number of other dirty men on the inner side, who rushed to and from laden shelves at the back, and slammed bundles of flimsy literature on the

counter with uncouth cries, and exacted money and wrangled over it furiously, and were apparently doing a large business with all the noise they could possibly make. He stood for some time behind the assertive crowd, and saw that he might stand there all day unless he exacted attention. So he passed along behind the mob till he came to the counter flap, raised it and passed inside, and grabbed by the arm the first man he could catch. He shook himself free and passed on. George caught another.

"Mr. Johnson—appointment," he shouted in his ear.

The man tried to free himself, found it was no use, dragged him into a corner, swung open a door, and stumbled in front of him up a mouldy, ill-smelling staircase. He pushed open another door, shoved George inside without a word, and hurled himself downstairs again.

The room George found himself in was small and stuffy. It was divided by an ink-spattered counter, across which leaned a big fleshy man, with a red face and several chins, and a general unwashed, unshaven, one-collar-a-week look about him. He was leaning over the counter talking to two little old men who looked round at George as he came in. Mr. Johnson was in his shirt sleeves as though it were midsummer, and the shirt sleeves were not clean, and were rolled back over a pair of massive, grimy arms. For still greater freedom in wrestling with literary problems and literary people, George supposed.

His manner was aggressive and over-bearing, but would have carried more weight if he had been cleaner. He seemed quite ready, even anxious to throw something or somebody downstairs or out of window, if only they would give him the chance.

"—A bit brisker in the action," he was saying,

in a deep growl, when George was pushed through the door by the man from below, "and stick to the highest circles, dooks and duchesses and such like. There's Purcell running a story with a princess in it, and it's hitting us, hitting us hard, I tell you. Couldn't you manage a couple of princesses? May as well go one better than old Purcell while we're at it——"

"C-can we manage a couple of princesses, eh?" asked one of the little men, and turned a quizzical little round face on the other.

"I guess they're as easy to handle as the others. Easier, because folks don't know so much about 'em,' said the other little man.

"And see you get the atmosphere right," said Mr. Johnson, "and preserve it throughout. There's a great deal in atmosphere, and remember the action.—brisker, brisk as you can make it."

"W—within reason——" said the first little man.

"Hang reason!" said Mr. Johnson. "Hot and strong's the word for this kind of weather—hot and strong as you can make it. What'll you call it?"

"W—what'll we call it, Eb?" asked the first little man.

The second little man scraped his neck under his jaw reflectively with his first finger.

"Suppose we see how it shapes first," he said at last.

"But—hang it! I want a big ad. of it in this week's number. Call it—let's see—call it—The Something of Prince—what'll you call him—the Prince?"

"Prince Prassline," said the second little man.

"Prassline, Prassline—too like Vaseline," said Mr. Johnson.

"Say Praxaline."

"Praxaline, that'll do. The—the—what'll we say —of Prince Praxaline?"

"Disappearance, Degradation, Degeneration, Determination, Deprivation, Disintegration. Abduction, Abnegation, Abom—no, that won't do! Absolution, Evolution, Devolution——"

"M—mystery!" said the first little man emphatically. "P—plenty of breadth in mystery. All the others tie you up."

"That's so," said the second.

"Mystery's all right," said Mr. Johnson. "The Mystery of Prince Praxaline. That's all right. Let me have first three chapters by Monday certain, and remember—action brisker and keep the atmosphere. Now, sir," to George, as the two little men moved towards the door. "What can I do for you?"

"I came in reply to this letter about a story I sent you."

The two little men went out, and he heard them stumbling slowly down the mouldy staircase.

"Oh, ah—Mr. Bertie?"

"Yes."

"I see. Well now, let's see," and he turned to a table behind, and rooted up George's MS. "With a little trimming here and there, and a few alterations, I could use it all right if we come to terms. What would be your idea of terms now?"

"What do you usually pay?"

"Well, that depends of course on the—er—author's standing. It's about 7,000 words, I reckon," he said, turning over the pages.

"7,534."

"Call it seven and a half. Say ten shillings a thousand. That'd be three pound fifteen. How would that do?"

"It doesn't seem much," said George, very red in the face.

"Prices go up as you get known, of course. I can get all the stuff I want for ten bob a thousand, and more—any amount."

"As good as that?"

"As good as I need, anyhow. Well, what d'you say, Mr. Bertie?" and he turned to feel among the other piles of manuscripts on the table behind, as if to show that his time was of importance.

"What are the alterations you suggest?" asked George.

"Well, I want you to spring 'em all up three or four steps. Make 'em into dooks and duchesses, or at all events lords and ladies. My people like an atmosphere a bit above 'em, you see, and one has to play up to 'em, and it costs nothing anyhow. And then I thought p'r'aps you could spice it up a bit towards the end. It's strong, I'll own, but it's restrained—a bit too restrained, to my thinking. You leave too much to the imagination. My people want the imagining all done for 'em. They're smart enough at catching on to a thing, but they want it all set out in plain black and white. Why, you don't even say out plain that they marry——"

"I thought it was obvious."

"Exactly! To me and you it's obvious enough, but my people like it said, and if you could work in a few lines about her dress at the wedding, and old shoes and rice and so on—you understand."

"I see. Suppose I take it home and look over it again," said George.

"That'd be as well, perhaps. And when you've just touched it up a bit, bring it in and your cash is ready for you. No waiting for twelve months with me, Mr. Bertie."

"That's an advantage," said George quietly.

"Bring it any time you like. I'm always here."

"Thanks. Good-day!" and his fingers were slipping squeamishly along the steamy wall of the dark staircase to prevent himself falling headlong over his stumbling feet into the maelstrom below.

CHAPTER XIV

PAR NOBILE FRATRUM

As George passed down the court he saw at the Fleet Street end, the two little old men he had seen upstairs with Mr. Johnson. As he drew near, one of them turned and saw him, and nudged the other.

"Well, how did you get on with the big man?" asked one of them with a smile, and they both looked up at him with their heads on one side like a pair of robins.

They were so very much alike—little round clean-shaven faces, little round bodies, soft crush hats, Inverness capes, boots, ties, and collars, all exactly the same—that he could not tell one from the other.

There was nothing at all objectionable in the way the question was asked. Rather it gave George the impression of a fatherly interest in an obviously new beginner.

"Not very well," he answered, smiling back at the expectant little faces.

"Ah?" they said simultaneously, and waited for him to continue.

"I should say Mr. Johnson is the kind of man that wants all he can get for as little as he can give," he said, in answer to their look.

"Th-that's him," chirped one.

"Bull's-eye first shot," said the other.

"W-will you come and have a-a——"

"A cup of coffee?" chipped in the other.

"Or anything else you like b-better," said the first, breathless and red in the face. "W-we thought we'd like to have a-a——"

"A little chat with you," said Number Two.

They looked so good-natured and so expectant, and their little ambush had evidently been so carefully prepared while they waited for him, that he could not find in his heart to disappoint them. Besides, the meeting promised to be amusing, and everything made for experience.

"I'll join you with pleasure. Where shall we go?"

"Q-Quill's!—just across the road," said Number One, and they dived together under the noses of a pair of 'bus horses, narrowly escaped annihilation on the off-side as they came up, and perched on the opposite kerb with their eyes and heads straining round in search of him. With their flapping wings and little jerking legs they looked so like a couple of big sparrows hopping about among the traffic, that George could not restrain a smile. He was greatly relieved when he saw them safely landed.

"D-Dangerous place!" said Number One, as George issued from the rapids and joined them.

"You'll be getting run over some time, if you don't take care," said George.

"U-Used to it all our lives."

They dived down a court and he followed them and bumped violently into five different men with sacks on their backs, and bundles of books and magazines under their arms. They all had bent heads, and pencils in their mouths, and large pocket-books in their hands, the earnest consultation of which was the cause of their running into one another and everyone else they met. There was a ceaseless stream of these men in and out. They rarely spoke to one

another and never to their victims, but from the continual movements of their lips they seemed to be muttering objurgations or prayers or incantations, or possibly it was only the names of books and papers they were hunting down. But there was an absorbed intensity of manner about them which set them above their fellows of the pavement outside, and imparted to them a kind of uncanny dignity. They carried the produce of many brains in their sacks and under their arms, and seemed conscious of it. As George bumped against them one after another, and was bumped into by the incoming stream behind, they seemed to him like so many Pilgrim Christians seeking a promised land; and, again, when he looked into their anxious eyes, he thought they looked like Wandering Jews condemned to seek for ever books that were out of print, books that had never been printed, books that had never been written, or books whose titles had forever slipped their memories.

When he had safely accomplished the passage, he found himself in a small square, two adjacent sides of which were occupied by a publisher's warehouse, which reminded him of Mr. Andrew Johnson's in its extreme busy-ness, but seemed to have less of the menagerie about it. The third side consisted of a public house, and the fourth was the bare back of a tall building. The winter light was fading already, though it was only mid-afternoon. The patch of sky up above was hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding roofs. But the lighted windows round its three sides made the little square as bright as Fleet Street outside, and, except for the continuous tramp of feet between the black mouth of the court and the open door of the publishing house, with an occasional divergence to the other open door opposite, it was very quiet.

His new friends went straight across to a door between two of the bright windows, and ran blithely up a staircase. On the third story was a door, on which was painted in big black letters, "Quills Club," and underneath that, in smaller letters, "Private."

The Quills Club did not seem to be exactly what one would call an aristocratic institution. As a matter of fact, the display of any tendency in that direction would have promptly terminated its existence. Its entrance fee was nil and its subscription small, and its membership might fairly be described as inclusive subject to approval. If, as happened occasionally, a newcomer obtained admission under false pretence of good fellowship which proved, under tribulation, to lie all on the surface and not even to be skin deep; if he could not stand perpetual plain speaking, and the most outspoken criticism, and occasional hard cracks, which, whether deserved or not, he was expected to take good humouredly; then the Quills —or the Porcupines, as the members chose to call themselves—were apt to present their points at him, the atmosphere became uncongenial and unsuited to his peculiarities of health and temperament, and he speedily took himself off.

There was no liveried menial on the doorstep to whistle up cabs for the Porcupines. No buttoned pages to swing back heavy plate-glass doors. No heavy hall-porter to give you paternal welcome with one eye, while with the other he ran through the letters from the pigeon-hole marked with your patronymic initial, and handed you over three palpable requests for payment at your earliest convenience, while at the same time he informed you that the Duke of Belgravia had been enquiring for you and was at the present moment in the smoking-room with Captain Hawke.

No ticker in the hall clicking off the latest prices, results, and news. No branching palms and Turkey carpets. Nothing of all these West End superfluities at the Quills. Just a comfortable meeting-place for genial souls, sick for the moment of pens and ink, and paper and print, and the rumble and grind of the presses, and desirous only of food, and drink, and smoke, and much talk. The talk might, and indeed generally did begin, in growls and grumbles at outside powers and the world in general, but always came up by degrees to the Quills' level, and later on soared on the curling clouds to heights of hilarity, or, as the case might be, into strenuous discussions on matters with which the slow-moving world outside would not concern itself for days to come.

The furnishings were plain and comfortable to shabbiness. If they followed no regular scheme, and had palpably been recruited from here, there, and everywhere—salvage from the wrecks of other clubs, flotsam and jetsam of the auction rooms,—they had at all events the mellowing influence of time on their side, and especially in their seats and backs. If the leather of couch and chair was frayed and worn, the seats at all events were soft; marble-topped tables save washing bills; cork carpet collects less dust than Turkey; curtains only hold smoke and are easily dispensed with; and if windows are not plate glass and not too clean at that, why, you don't see much of them by gas-light.

Kerrison, of the publishing house down below, was president of the Quills at this time, and that for several sufficient reasons. In the first place, he had started the club himself and furnished it, and he was the owner of the building it occupied and occasionally paid rent for.

He was a big, jovial fellow, a bachelor, living in the rooms above, and delighting in the society of the younger spirits of the craft of which he was a lowly, but by no means unimportant, member.

Kerrison's name was, in its way, a power throughout the land, among the smaller booksellers and newsagents whose orders were not large enough to go to the big publishing houses direct. All they had to do was to tick off their weekly requirements on Kerrison's great broadsheets. Then he collected all the stuff, and shipped it to them in huge bundles tied up in the posters which were supposed to do duty thereafter on their show-boards, but were generally too fatigued with their travels to do more than drop quietly into the waste paper bags. And his carts were unloading in bulk and loading again in detail, at the mouth of the court, all day long and all night long too. Kerrison's doors, in fact, were never shut except on Sundays, and they were open before dawn on Monday morning. In his bedroom up above he could hear the ceaseless bustle below, and now and again he dropped down, at unearthly hours and in unbecoming dishabille, to see if everybody was wide awake and doing his duty. It was commonly believed that the public-house belonged to him also, although another name appeared over the door, and that, between the publishing and the public, Kerrison made a very good thing of it. It is certain that the work of hunting up stray scraps of literature and carrying them about in sacks is extremely dry work, and that hosts of runners and little news-agents, who might just as well have gone elsewhere, showed a partiality for dealing at Kerrison's, which might or might not be influenced by the invitation of the open door on the other side of the little square. To give them the benefit of the doubt, however, to

which every free Briton is entitled, Kerrison's business was well-organised, all orders were promptly filled, and the treatment accorded customers was as courteous and business-like as the nature of it permitted.

The Porcupines enjoyed many benefits from the proximity of his business. On the one hand their tables were supplied free of charge with all the ephemeral literature of the day and week, which afterwards went back to the publishing offices as "returns." And on the other hand the tavern was ready, at any hour of the day or night, to supply their other tables with any delicacy in season and within reason, so long as the demand did not go much beyond chops and steaks, and kidneys, and ham and eggs, and cheese and celery, and such like hardy perennials; and liquid refreshments were available in still greater variety.

The room George's new friends led him into was a long one, with windows at each end and two fireplaces, evidently two rooms knocked into one. It ran through the building from front to back. The back windows gave onto one of the courts of the Temple and were much lighter than the front ones. There was no one else in the room, and the little men appropriated a table near the farther fire, and one of them rapped on it with a penny.

A girl of fifteen or so came out of a side room.

"S-Send your father, Pollie, I want some whisky and I don't like sending little girls for it."

The girl smiled, and a tall thin man, with stooping shoulders and a voluminous white apron, came out of the room and approached them, saying to each in turn, "'Day, Mr. Chubb! 'Day, Mr. Chubb!"

"'Day, Pook!" they said together.

"W-What will you take, Mr.——?"

"Barty is my name, George Barty. I'll take a cup of coffee, thanks."

"Eb?"

"Usual," said Number Two to the thin man who stood eyeing them mournfully. "Small Scotch for me, Pook, in a big glass. Big soda for Mr. Chubb, and a cup of coffee."

The thin man eyed them searchingly for a moment, as though trying to impress upon his mind which was which, and then nodded and went away. As soon as he had gone they quietly changed places without a word and as if moved by a common idea. George laughed internally at their odd little ways and the corners of his deep-set eyes wrinkled up.

"W-What are you laughing at?" asked the one nearest the fire, with a smile all over his own face.

"I'm afraid Mr. Pook will get you mixed," said George.

"I f-felt a draught over there. Eb's young, he can stand it. D-do you mind if we ask you a question, Mr. B-Barty?"

"Not at all. What is it?"

He felt pretty sure it would be as to the nature of his dealings with Mr. Johnson. He expected it would eventually lead up to a warning against that gentleman. Possibly, he thought, they feared him as a poacher on their own preserves.

"Well, it's this, Mr. Barty," said the other. "You're a young man from the country, come up to London to make a name and fortune by literature."

George's wrinkles meshed themselves hilariously. He nodded.

"In the park and at the theatre you've seen the prettiest girl you ever set eyes on. You've fallen

madly in love with her. You can't sleep, and you can't eat, and you can't work——"

"How *did* you know?" gasped George, holding himself with a tight hand.

"Th-The question is, w-what are you g-going to do about it?" said the other brother quickly, and they both eyed him eagerly.

"Ah!" said George, "that's the question! What *am* I going to do about it?"

"Th-That's it!" and they both wriggled anxiously in their chairs, and never took their eyes off his face. He felt as he imagined a patient on the operation table must feel.

"It's an important matter, you know," said George. "At present I'm tramping the streets half the night, can't eat, can't sleep——"

"Ex-Exactly!" and they gave another anticipatory wriggle.

"Well," he said, with a gravity which his eyes belied. "I've naturally thought a good deal about it. And I've decided to write a book, a regular thumper that will set everybody talking, and I shall dedicate it to *her*."—He thought he noticed signs of disappointment in the eager little eyes. So he went on: "Then I shall write another book, a finer one still, and dedicate that to her, and then another, and another, each one better than the last, till there are ten of them. By that time her eyes are opened and she knows. *She* seeks an introduction. We meet, and—"

"And how old are you by this time?" asked the second brother uneasily.

"Ah, that's the difficulty. By the time we meet, she has been ten years married and has five children. She is stout, and a duchess, and the duke

is a bad lot, and she longs for the sympathy of a soul above horses and baccarat——"

The two little men looked at one another, and the second one shook his head.

"The Duchess is all right, but she mustn't get stout, and two children are ample. She marries at seventeen, and we can break the Duke's neck when she's twenty-four, still young and beautiful, and you can marry her. I think we might make something of that, Chris, if we keep it down to their level. The Duke might pitch into you"—he said, with a meditative eye on George,—"and you knock him into pulp with your fists——"

"Easily," said George; "he's stout and puffy. and out of condition. I tap the ducal claret on Epsom Downs——"

"Capital!" said Number Two. "Description of race—His Grace and the Duchess going down by road—and coming back—he drunk and cursing her and you and everything else. That's all right!"

"W-We've done the Derby a good many times——"

"It's always a safe card. When you're in doubt run the Derby."

"I know. B-But——"

"It'll do all right, Chris. The whole thing's a bit above 'em, but the Derby'll get home. We'll cut the Duke's head open and send him home bathed in blood with a cloth round it. That'll fetch 'em."

Here the thin man in the apron appeared with a tray. He put down the coffee before George with an air of clearing decks for action. Then he looked doubtfully at the other two and finally put down the big glass, in which the whisky hid sportively, before the little man near the fire.

"Th-That's not mine, Pook. I ordered s-soda!"

"Ah!" said Pook soberly. "P'raps you wouldn't mind helpin' yourselves. I never can tell who's which," and he pushed the soda and whisky and the two glasses into the middle of the table and departed.

The little men laughed enjoyably. Chris, who had claimed the soda, emptied half of the whisky into the other glass, and the other one shot the cork of the soda bottle and filled the glasses side by side in constantly diminishing libations, the final ones being slow single drops.

"Folks say we're very much alike," said Eb. "I can't see it myself. Chris there is as different from me as chalk is from cheese, and why they should go mixing us up beats me."

He said it challengingly, and George replied, as he was expected to.

"You're just as like as two peas. Twins?"

"Bless me, no! Christopher is older than me, ever so much older——"

"Wo—One minute," said the other.

"Puts on airs, at times, and tries to boss me on the strength of that odd minute, don't you know," said the other, with a laugh that sounded at least forty years younger than himself. "He was in such a hurry to give first cry that he tripped over his tongue and he's been tumbling over it ever since."

"G-Gives me more time to th-think," said Christopher. "Your health, Mr. B-Barty!" and he took a pull at his glass, and the other brother nodded and did the same.

"Thanks. Yours!" said George. "You haven't told me your names yet."

"S-So we haven't. Ch-Chubb—Christopher," pointing to himself. "Ebenezer," pointing to his brother.

"Been long in London, Mr. Barty?" asked Ebenezer.

"Not very long, comparatively speaking. Twenty years or so."

"You should know your way about."

"Some parts. Fleet Street's not the easiest place to find one's way in."

"Th-That's so. It's a m-maelstrom and a q-quicksand and lots of snags," said Christopher.

"How did you get to Johnson?" asked the other.

"By a mere fluke. I sent out some stories on chance, got the names from a directory, and he asked me to call."

The little man nodded again and gazed at him inquisitively, with evident desire for more.

Christopher pulled out a little pipe from a leather case, an unusually handsome little pipe, richly coloured meerschaum, amber and silver. Ebenezer did the same.

"Smoke, Mr. Barty?" asked the latter. "Try some of this," and handed him a rubber pouch. George filled and lighted up. They were both watching him without seeming to, like little dogs waiting for a deserved pat on the head.

"That's delicious," he said. "I never tasted anything quite so good. Own growing?"

"Own mixture anyway," said Eb. "It's the one thing that big brother of mine gives me a free hand in, our one extravagance."

"Aw-Almost!" said the elder, with a smile.

"Well, yes—almost," said Eb thoughtfully. Later on George learned what their other extravagances were.

"Th-Think you'll come to terms with Johnson?" asked the elder.

"No, I don't expect ever to see him again."

"How's that?"

"He wanted me to chop my story to pieces, make

all the people into dukes and duchesses, drag in some wedding dresses, and take ten shillings a thousand words."

"It's not bad pay if you can do enough," said Eb, puffing slowly, and getting every drachm of enjoyment there was in the tobacco.

"But I couldn't. That story took me over a week to get right, nearer two perhaps. And it's a ripping good story."

"Then don't give it to Johnson. It's like casting pearls before—you know," he nodded. "Johnson's things are for servant girls and shop girls and such like. Good stuff's simply thrown away on them. Pity it should be, but it is, and it's no good discussing it. What Johnson wants is rubbish, and pretty high-spiced rubbish too. I don't mean dirt, mind you——"

"The Mystery of Prince Praxaline," said George.

"That's it. The Mystery of Prince Praxaline. One hundred thousand words—thirty-three chapters and an epilogue. About a month's steady work. Perhaps a bit more as we've got others on hand. Fifty pounds! oh, it's not bad pay. Can we get along on £600 a year, Mr. Chubb?"

"We-We've managed on a good deal less in our time, Eb."

"Ay, we have that," Eb, thoughtful again.

"The trouble is," said presently, "if you begin writing that kind of stuff you keep on writing it, and it's no good you trying to write anything else. It grows on you and kills the better work you might have done. One learns one or two things in thirty years, in Fleet Street. We learned how little a day two men can live on when they have to, eh, Chris?"

Chris nodded and smoked on comfortably.

"B-Better join the Quills, Mr. Barty," he said presently. "Th-They're a good sort, and mostly good fellows. There's some among 'em can give you a helping hand."

"That's a good idea," said George. "What's the fee?"

"Pound a year, no entrance. Glad to propose you, and Chris will second. It's always a handy place to drop into, and quiet—in the daytime. It wakens up at night a bit. But every man that comes is in the publishing or printing, 'cept Bob Cato, and he's advertising. But he's a bit of a genius in his way, is Bob, and puts more brains into his work than most—if only he wouldn't muddle it up other ways. But advertising's a dreadfully dry business, I believe."

"W-Will you let me see your story, Mr. Barty?" said Chris. "W-We might get it into somebody's hands at once. S-Sooner you make a start the better."

"Certainly," said George, and hauled out his story and handed it across to the elder brother, who put his feet on the fender and began to read it at once.

"W-Why Bertie?" he asked.

"I preferred it. Innate modesty. You might keep it to yourself."

"C-Certainly. It's an advantage sometimes."

Other men began to drop in, in ones and twos, and George noticed that most of them had a cheery nod for his new friends. The elder was too busy to pay them any attention, but the younger labelled them one by one for George's benefit.

"You see the gloomy-looking man there in the corner? That's Joyce of the *Jester*, sub-editor, a decent chap. He'll brighten up when he's had something to eat.

Does most of the jokes off his own bat they say. The man he's growling to is K[illegible] of Winans, the printers. They do the *Jester*, so he and Joyce always begin with a scrap whenever they meet. Just let off a bit of steam, you know, they're good friends enough at bottom. The little chap with the light hair at the next table is Jermyn of the *Courier*; does their books and literary tittle-tattle. Writes books himself and doesn't let any one forget it. Smart, but too light for the post. Uses it as a climbing-pole."

"Who's the dark man just come in?" asked George.

"Ah, that's John Baird. We don't often see him now—too busy. He was manager with Pilkins and Sharman, the big wholesale publishers. Had some row with them and left, and started a paper on his own account—tough business starting a paper. It's telling on Baird—a good fellow, and works mighty hard."

George eyed the man who had started a paper on his own account with much curiosity and a little awe. He was a tall, good-looking fellow of, he judged, thirty-five or forty. His hair was dark, but showing signs of frost about the ears. He looked energetic, but at present tired. He called for coffee and lit his pipe, and exchanged a word or two with the man next to him.

"What's the paper he's started?" asked George.

"*Round Table.*"

George knew it and looked at its proprietor with fresh interest. It was one of the papers he had sent a story to and it had not yet come back. It was not yet a deader, and while there was life there was always hope.

"If you'll excuse me for a minute or two I want a word with Baird," said his companion, and went across

and received, as George saw, a warm grip from the dark man.

Christopher Chubb turned just at the moment.

"Hello, wh-where's my l-little brother gone?"

"He's talking to Mr. Baird over there."

"B-Baird! The v-very man I want. D-Don't often see him here now. Come along and I'll introduce you to him. He's a g-good fellow."

"How are you, J-John?" to the proprietor of the *Round Table*. "I want to introduce a y-young friend to you. Y-You're always on the look out for new b-blood, I know. Mr. Barty—Mr. Baird. P-Put that in your pocket, John, and read it yourself, or g-get the wife to," and he handed him George's story.

"How have you managed to make two such good friends, Mr. Barty?" said Baird. "Brother Eb was whispering Barty in one ear, and here comes Brother Chris singing it into the other. And somehow—it seems to me—" he was turning the leaves of the MS. casually as he spoke, and then raised and looked at it more closely. Then he smiled.

"I remember. I think you settle a dispute for me, Mr. Barty. I've had another story from you, isn't that so?"

"Yes; I sent you one by post."

"My wife said the handwriting was a woman's. I said it was a man's. It was a good story, too, but as a story it might be either man's work or woman's, as women write nowadays."

George's heart was thumping and the colour was in his face.

"The story is mine but the handwriting is my sister's. So you are both right," he said, and Baird laughed.

"It's about the nicest kind of writing I've come

across for a long time past. I wish everybody wrote as well. It's almost as easy to read as print. I'll be very glad to look over this one as well and then I'll let you know about them both. I should tell you at once, though, that I can't afford to pay very much yet. Later on—well, we'll see."

"Why, I'd be delighted to——," began George, very red indeed.

"To let me have it for nothing for the *Round Table.* That wouldn't be fair. We're beginners like yourself and it's uphill work at first all round. But we pay what we can, and we'll pay more as soon as we're able to."

"Chris," said the younger brother, "there's Kettler just come in. We'd better have a few words with him about that new story he wants," and they slipped off to the newcomer.

"How do you come to know them?" asked Baird.

"They were good enough to speak to me," said George, and explained how he had met the brothers at Johnson's.

"They're the best-hearted little fellows in the world," said Baird through his smoke. "I doubt if anyone will ever know all the good they do, and the helping hands they hold out to all sorts of people. They write the trashiest penny novelette stuff by the ream—just seem to turn on the tap and out it flows—but some people want it, and they make quite a fair income. They've been going to begin saving for the last ten years so as to retire. Chris, that's the elder, is crazy to have a garden of his own. Eb, the other one, wants to keep poultry. But they give away so much that I doubt if they'll ever manage it. I'm not sure if they ever go to church, but they're the finest pair of practical little Christians I ever met. Possibly you

thought their advice about Johnson was suggested by self-interest, Mr. Barty——"

"Oh, no, I'd finished with Johnson before they spoke to me."

"Well, that's all right. But they're quite right. It couldn't possibly pay you in any shape or form to have your stuff in any of Johnson's rags. What on earth was he going to do with it?"

"Well, he wanted me to adapt it to his requirements. Make all the people dukes and duchesses, and that kind of thing."

"Bring it down to his level, in fact. It is so easy to drop, and so hard to come up again. You can't reach too high. I doubt if a man ever plucks his top branch—this side the grave anyhow—but the higher you reach the higher you'll get—if you climb steadily and don't fall. Where were you educated?" he asked suddenly.

"University College School."

"Under Eve? A very good fellow. And since?"

"I've been on the Continent for some months lately, rambling round in Switzerland, and the Riviera, and down the Rhine."

"Lucky boy! That's all to the good. Do you know anyone in the literary line?"

"Only Jack Fairfax of the *Scalpel*."

"I know him slightly. He'll make his mark, I think. That thing of his in *The Week* is really good. How do you come to know him?"

And before he knew it George found himself telling everything—well, almost everything—of the little there was to tell about himself, as freely as if he had known John Baird half his life.

John Sinclair's name cropped up.

"I know him," said Baird. "He has been good

enough to advise me in several little matters. Lawsuits are hateful, but one cannot escape at times. Sinclair is the very finest man I know for commercial law though he's not a lawyer. I always feel towards him as a rich old maid does towards her doctor, better as soon as I set eyes on him. Yes, he's a good man to know. Are you thinking of joining the Quills ?"

" Our friends the Chubbs were advising me to."

" It's pleasant to have a place to drop into out of Fleet Street, and you rub shoulders with a great variety of men here in a friendly way. It has its advantages and you're the kind that will make friends quickly, I should say. I've not had time lately to come much myself, and I've distinctly missed it——"

" Hello, Mr. Baird ! It's a treat to see you here. Up to your eyes in work, I suppose, and no time for play. It's a deuce of a business starting a new paper nowadays. How do you find things ?"

" We're getting on, but it's uphill work, as you say. How do you like the paper ?"

" The stuff you give is first-rate. Paper and print might be better——"

" Yes, we're not as well served there as I would like."

" How's circulation ?"

" Improving—slowly."

" Ads. ?"

" Very difficult, yet. Cato keeps our spirits up, however, and says they'll come all right."

" Never heard of an ad. man who didn't. But Cato's about as cute as they make 'em, and he ought to be able to pull it off. Old friend of yours, isn't he ?'

" We've known one another a long time. I'm satisfied he's doing his best."

" I'm not at all sure, you know," said the other confidentially, " that the stuff you give isn't just a bit too

good. Folks nowadays seem crazy for scraps, and the scrappier the better. It's wonderful how some things go. Look at that new thing, *Dewdrops*. 200,000 a week, and practically every word of it filched from other papers."

"I'd sooner sweep a crossing than steal other men's brains," said Baird quietly.

"Yes, I know. But, all the same, it's those folks make the money."

"Dirty money. I'd sooner be without it."

"It'll be a question soon if honesty's the best policy nowadays or not."

"It depends entirely on your standard of success. If you want money by hook or crook it's possible you may get it quickest by swindling, if you don't happen to land in the Old Bailey. If you've happened to preserve a bit of old-fashioned belief in the advantages of a clean conscience, why, then you're apt to doubt if dirty money is worth the getting."

"Quite so, quite so. It's a matter for each man to decide for himself."

"And occasionally for the law to decide for him. By the way, Kerrison, Mr. Barty here would like to join us. Put him through all right, will you? Christopher and Ebenezer Chubb brought him in."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Barty. No one will say nay to a man introduced by Mr. Baird and Brothers Chubb. I'll just take your name and address to enter on the roll, and you can come in any time you want."

He was a big, good-humoured looking man, was smoking an excellent cigar, and seemed on the best of terms with himself and the rest of the world. He inscribed George's name and address on the back of an envelope, nodded cheerfully, and strolled away to talk to someone else.

"He's perfectly right," said Baird, puffing thoughtfully. "The race gets hotter every day, and it does seem as though the india-rubber consciences had the best chance. Commercial morality is on the downgrade, Mr. Barty."

"That's a bad look out."

"A very bad look out, and it's not easy to see where we're getting to. The moral fibre of the community at large is flabbier than it was twenty years ago. Men do now without wincing what they looked askance at then."

"And what's the remedy?"

"Hard to say. Adversity, perhaps—catastrophe to individuals and the nation at large. Prosperity is a hothouse where ill weeds mature."

"And yet we all hope for it and strive for it."

"But if we don't get it cleanly it's worse than useless."

Here the brothers came smiling back.

"W-Well? Got to know one another?" asked Christopher.

"We've made a beginning," said Baird.

"I s-saw you introducing Mr. Barty to Kerrison. Has he d-decided to join?"

"Yes, he's put my name down. I'm very much obliged to you both for bringing me here. It was uncommonly good of you."

"N-Not at all. L-Liked the look of you. D-Don't as a rule like the look of people. B-Better inside than out."

They insisted on introducing him to two or three other men—Sennit of the *Globe*, Dukes of the *News*, Gibbs of the *Telegraph*, and others.

When he groped homewards through the fog, he was in such exceedingly high spirits that he came near to singing with glee, and the folks who ran into him detected it in his voice as he apologised, and imagined he had been enjoying himself in quite a different way.

CHAPTER XV

FIRST RUNGS

George banged the door of No. 21 on the fog and sped up the stairs to Joan's room on air clouds. He found his mother and Mary Lindsay there also, as he expected, Mary with her hat and cloak on as if she was only just in. They all looked up hopefully. Happy the man who has three such pairs of eyes to welcome his coming. Their faces were full of questions. Joan voiced them.

"Good news? Mary thought you'd got lost in the fog, as she nearly did. Mother was getting anxious. I was the only hopeful soul in the house. Now tell us all about it, right from the beginning. You've been eating bread and salt with Mr. Johnson and making up to him."

"No, Jack was right. Johnson's no use, but I've found a bit of the end of the ladder, I do believe, and I've made such heaps of new friends that I can hardly remember all their names," and he sat down and told them all that had happened as far as he could recall it.

"What dear little men!" said Joan, "but I like John Baird best. That strikes me as a good afternoon's work, old boy!"

"Good? It strikes me as the best afternoon's work I've ever done. And how did you get on, Mary?" They all called her Mary. Neither Joan nor his mother, who knew every tone of his voice, failed to detect the softer inflection which came into it when

he spoke to her, and neither found any fault with it, for they had come to love the girl for her own sake.

"Where do you think it is?" she asked, smiling across at him, but with a certain gravity behind the smile.

"No idea!" and then—he seemed to see it in her face—"not the Burney children?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" and his under jaw shot out with an expression of chagrin. "But you're not really thinking of taking it?"

"Yes, I am. We've talked it all out, your mother and Joan and I, and we've come to the conclusion that it's worth trying at all events."

"It'll be a very trying post, I should say, if they're as bad as their big brother. And I'm afraid they are."

"They're all quite small yet, but no doubt they'll be somewhat difficult. But the terms are unusually good."

"They should be. How much?"

"£100 a year. Day work only, one day off and one day on, and I can live here. They have special trained nurses for the night."

George nodded slowly. The terms were certainly unusual. He knew the work was unusual too. But the idea of Mary being able to remain a member of their circle made up for much.

"You can always leave if you don't like it," he said at last.

"Yes, I'm afraid they're used to that. I shall try and stick to it. I feel very sorry for those children."

"I don't suppose they understand their lack," said George. "Frazer was always perfectly happy so long as he had enough to eat and drink and smoke. Who did you see?"

" It was a governesses' agency the advertisement took me to. They asked some questions and sent me on to Kensington Palace Gardens. It was Mrs. Burney I saw."

" Was she eating sweetmeats ? "

" She was quietly chewing something all the time. I thought perhaps she'd caught the American trick of chewing-gum. There was a really nice American girl at the hotel at Nice, when I was there, and she chewed away from morning till night. It used to make my jaws feel tired just to look at her."

" And what did you think of Mrs. Burney ? "

" I would hardly venture an opinion yet. She did not strike me as intellectual."

" You're diplomatically safe there. She is not intellectual. It's a question with me if she's even reasonably intelligent."

" Well, from what she said, I judge I shan't have much to do with her, and anyway it's not catching. Almost the only question she asked was whether I could come at once."

" I'm not absolutely sure that it's not catching. It's certainly horribly depressing. One was quite enough for me. I can hardly imagine what four at once would be like."

" Four Frazers would have been impossible. Four little children are different," said Joan.

" Mary will just see how she gets on with them," said Mrs. Barty softly, over her knitting needles ; and then, with a quiet smile at the girl, " We'll all watch her carefully, and if we see any signs of infection she needn't go any more. If you should succeed in softening their darkness, my dear, it will make you very happy."

" Yes, indeed," said Mary earnestly.

"Did you see the children?" asked George.

"Yes, she took me up to the schoolroom right at the top of the house, and left me there with them and the other governess. She was older than I am. The first thing she said, when Mrs. Burney had gone was, "How soon do you start?" and I said I would come to-morrow, and she said, "Thank God!" She's had them every day for a fortnight, and that must be killing. I stopped all afternoon and had a cup of tea with them, and she is to be there to-morrow to break me in."

"She was just telling us what the children were like when you came in. Do go on, Mary," said Joan.

"The eldest is a girl, Evelyn," said Mary, looking at George. "She's twelve. Then come two boys, Gordon and Lancelot, ten and eight. The youngest is Gwendoline. She is five, I think. They are very pitiful. They looked up vacantly when their mother and I came in, and stared at me all the time, but really I couldn't tell if they comprehended me. They never took their eyes off me till Miss Graylie told them to go on with their work. Then they turned s[illegible] to what they were doing and went on with it. She says they have to be told everything they have to do. Their minds are useless. But they seem to do what they are told, so that's one good thing."

"What can you possibly teach them?" said Joan.

"It's more a question of amusing them, or at all events keeping them occupied and out of mischief. Miss Graylie said they would sit for hours sometimes doing nothing but look at the wall if she would let them, but it gets on her nerves."

"It would drive me crazy," said Joan.

"So she does her best to keep them busy. And at other times they are so restless they can't settle to anything."

"And what work can they do?" asked Joan.

"They were doing Kindergarten things when we went in, with beads and chips, and the smallest girl had letter blocks."

"Can they read?"

"No, none of them."

"How awful!"

"Do you have to take them out?" asked George.

"Yes, each day if possible, either walking or driving, but walking from preference as it does them more good."

"That will be the most trying part of the business."

"Miss Graylie says they're quite quiet and docile when they're out. They are rather frightened and do just what they are told."

Well, I'm bound to say I don't envy you, Mary," said George. "They've got decidedly the better bargain."

"Being able to live here will keep my spirits up to normal. I am very well satisfied with my day's work."

But he shook his head doubtfully. "We'll keep an eye on you, as mother says, and the moment we see signs of dumps, out you come," he said.

"Every woman is entitled to a headache now and again, or a fit of dumps," laughed Mary, as she got up to go to her room. "If I feel very bad I'll do my best to hide it."

The hopes which his introduction to John Baird had kindled in him, drove George to his work with renewed energy. The pleasure of writing for the very work's sake is great, but appreciation from the outside is a wonderful fillip. To George's healthy young mind the foot of the ladder of fame rested securely on the *Round Table*. He could almost feel his toe on the bottom rung, and already in imagination saw himself skipping up the steep incline two steps at a time.

Jack Fairfax's characteristic comments on the whole matter, when he came in a night or two later, were also encouraging.

"Baird is a first-rate chap," he said, "and he'll deserve all the success he can make of the *Round Table*. He works like a horse, they say, and so does his wife. They turn out a capital paper, and it's bound to catch on if they can only hang on long enough. Baird himself knows all the ins and outs of publishing, and he's coming out well as editor too. Perhaps that's Mrs. Baird, or both of them together. She writes, I believe. The little Chubb men I don't know, but I've heard of them and everybody seems to like them. I think I'll join your club, too, old man. Nothing like mixing with your fellows. The study of mankind, you know, and all that kind of thing."

"All right, meet me there any day and I'll introduce you to Kerrison, and any of the other fellows that I know," said George, with the mature air of an old club man opening his own particular pasture to a fledgling.

It was a full week, however, before the much-hoped-for letter from Baird arrived, and Mary Lindsay had by that time settled down into the narrow routine of her new and well-paid, but by no means comfortable, duties. She was, however, filled with a fine energy and compassion, and night and day her thoughts were given to her poor innocents, who had everything that money could buy, except only the one thing without which all the money in the world was less than nothing.

"Every time I see them," she said, very soberly, to Mrs. Barty and Joan, after her second day there, "I thank God for giving me the use of my brains."

Baird's letter simply stated that the writer would be glad to have a chat with George any evening, after

seven, except Tuesdays, at the office of the *Round Table* in the Strand.

George had been up again at the Quills two or three times, and had met the brothers Chubb and some of his other new acquaintances, but Baird had not been there since.

It was a Thursday evening when the letter arrived. He clapped on his hat and coat, gave them the word in Joan's room, and sped away through the mud to lay hands on his ladder.

He knew the office. He had inspected it from the outside the day after he made Baird's acquaintance. He climbed the stairs which were dark and uneven, so that his foot never seemed to come down quite where he had expected it to do. Coming to a door he tapped on it, and being bidden to enter, did so, and stood observant.

A stained wood partition and counter held him at bay, but at sight of him, John Baird gave a welcoming "Hello! Hello! Come away in!" and flung up the flap and drew him in by the hand he was shaking.

"Extreme eagerness in matters literary always implies youth. Time will come, perhaps, when you will have editors running after you."

"Happy day!" laughed George.

"Nell, this is George Barty. Barty—my wife, the guesser of half the conundrum you set us."

"Good handwriting is such a treat," said Mrs. Baird, as she also shook him warmly by the hand, "and one gets so sick of bad. If ever I get into Parliament I shall bring in an Act for the compulsory use of typewriters."

"Invent a new one first that won't cost above five pounds," said Baird, "and make them all buy that one and we shall do well."

He went through the counter and shot the bolt of the door, and then drew a curtain along a rod hung up near the ceiling, and so shut out of sight the more work-a-day portion of the office.

"We use this as parlour-workshop after hours," said Mrs. Baird. "It's a great advantage living over your work and not having to waste time going to and fro. Take that chair, Mr. Barty, and draw up to the fire."

"So long as you like your work," ventured George.

"Of course," she said brightly. "But everybody ought to do the work they like best. That's the work they can do best."

"What a very queer world it would be if they did," laughed her husband, drawing up another basket chair and filling his pipe. "Won't you light up, Barty? Fortunately my wife likes smoke. Theoretically you're right, my dear, but practically it's impossible. Quite half the world is doing work what it hates, and believes it could do the other half's ever so much better if it only had the chance."

"I suppose so. That's what makes people look so unhappy. I'm glad we've found our right groove anyway, John."

"We are among the fortunate ones. And here's another. Isn't that so, Barty?"

"I'd sooner make a little living by my pen than a very big one any other way. The work itself is a delight."

"That's right," said Mrs. Baird, with an emphatic nod. "That way good work comes. Will you have a cup of coffee, Mr. Barty?"

There was a small kettle singing on one flat side-hob of the little old-fashioned grate, in which lumps of

wood were burning with many-coloured flames, and a coffee-pot on the other. She slipped out of her chair on to her knees to tidy up the hearth with deft touches of a small brush, tapping, and patting, and smoothing, and apparently tickling the fire as though it were a dear old friend whose comfort she was seeing to.

Very sweet and graceful she looked, half kneeling, half sitting, and now and again holding up the little brush as a screen against the too ardent response of the old grate, while she turned to speak to one or other of the two men. Her face was not exactly pretty, George thought, and then, as the coloured flames leaped merrily and lit it up, he thought he was wrong, and that she was very pretty indeed. Anyway she had large dark thoughtful eyes, and her face was full of quick expression. She looked clever and he remembered that Fairfax said she wrote. She looked, too, as if she had been hard at work all day. Her hair had fluffed loose in places, as if she had not too much time to devote to it, but some how it did not detract from the pleasant look of her. She wore linen over-sleeves up to her elbows which contributed to her workmanlike aspect. Altogether he decided that he liked her very much.

"We must have a kitten, John," she said suddenly.

"What is home without a kitten?" laughed Baird.

"Exactly! It's only half a home. The grate's all right, and the kettle just fits, and you're all right, but the finishing touch is a-wanting."

"We'll put an advertisement in the paper.—"Any person with a stray kitten to dispose of can hear of something to its advantage by communicating with the editor. Payment not so much an object as a comfortable home." Cato will insert it for you at half

rates. If the owner requires payment promise her a bound volume of the *Round Table*, and say you'll call the kitten King Arthur."

"Or Guinevere, as the case might be," said Mrs. Baird, "and Launcelot would be more appropriate than Arthur."

They chatted over their coffee—of the Quills, and the Chubbs, and various writers, and then Mrs. Baird cleared away the cups, and said:

"Now, John, Mr. Barty is on pins and needles about his stories. So the sooner you get on to them the better. And, by the way, is it Bertie pronounced Bartie, or is Bertie only a pen-name?"

"I wish to write as Bertie," said George, "but I foresee that I may have to work as Barty. If you will keep the Bertie to yourselves for the present I would be much obliged."

"Most young writers are greedy of personal fame," smiled Mrs. Baird. "It is refreshing to come across a modest one."

Baird got up and went to one of two roller-top desks near the window, and came back with George's two stories in his hand.

"You must know, Barty, that my wife, is chief literary adviser here. If she were not listening, and likely to strike for a rise in her salary because of it, I would say that I consider her discrimination in literary matters is uncommonly sound and true. I attend mostly to the business side, but the literary department we combine on. Now we have both of us read these two stories of yours, and we are agreed that they are good—for a new beginner, remarkably good. But you can make them better yet. They are so free from the faults one usually finds in new work that I'm inclined to think you've had someone blue-pencilling them already. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, Jack Fairfax was good enough to go over them and rip out all the best adjectives and so on. He seemed to enjoy it," at which Mrs. Baird laughed out.

"Well, now," said Baird, "if you will take our advice, you will take them home, and put everything else on one side, and just devote a whole week to them. Condense, revise, re-write. The stories, as stories, are original and good. The style you can improve on, mostly in the way of sharper cutting. Where one word will express it, don't use two, even though they sound nice. You may just as well start on a high level as a lower one. Let us have them back when you think you've got them right, and if we think so too, we'll use them. As to payment I can't offer you more than one pound a thousand. Later on, when we get into smoother water, rates will improve, as I told you the other night. At present times are a trifle rough with us, and we've got to cut our coat according to the cloth at our disposal."

"I can't tell you how much obliged I am to you both," said George gratefully. "I'll cut and polish them to the very last letter, and if you still find them not up to the mark, I'll do it over and over again till they're right. I'm open to everything you can tell me."

Baird turned over the leaves. "My wife has been picking at them with that vicious little pencil of hers by way of indicating points open to improvement. I hinted that she was taking liberties, but she said that if you were what I said you were you would take no offence at it——"

"Offence! I can't thank you enough, Mrs. Baird," said George, turning to her. "It's more than good of you."

"I hate touching another person's work as a rule," she said, "some folks are so very unpleasant about

it. But I felt as if you would take it in good part——"

"I should think so, indeed."

"You know Switzerland?" she asked.

"I spent some time there this autumn—" and, by degrees, he found himself telling them some of the experiences of that unique journey he and Mary Lindsay had taken together, and little Mrs. Baird seemed to derive great enjoyment from his account of the adventure.

"We're going to live in Switzerland some time," she said wistfully.

"Or in the Channel Islands——" said her husband.

"Or Scilly——' from Mrs. Baird.

"Or on the Clyde——" from Baird.

"I'd like to make a heap of money," she said, gazing into the fire, "and travel all over the world and then ——"

"Meanwhile the trouble is to make both ends meet," said Baird, with a smile which remained in George's memory.

He could not quite translate it, but it seemed to him to be compounded of quiet hopefulness, steady determination, and something not far removed from sadness and weariness. It was a smile very typical of John Baird at that time. By degrees George came to associate it with him and always thought of him smiling in just that way. First steps are proverbially difficult ones, and the first steps of a small newspaper proprietor are strewn with peculiar thorns. Baird was fighting his battle with set teeth and it showed in his smile.

There was a sound of light feet on the wooden stairs and a tap on the door.

"Robert Cato," said Mrs. Baird, as Baird went to open the door.

"How do, John? 'Evening, Mrs. Baird!" said the newcomer, as he came briskly in, and nodded to George as though he thought he must know him also. "Saw your light, so knew you were in."

He was tall and slim, and very alert and active in his movements. His face, clean-shaven and rather thin, with prominent northern cheekbones, was shrewd and full of intelligence. His eyes were keen and quick, with a touch of predatoriness in them, George thought. He had a very engaging smile which lit up his face constantly. In fact he rarely spoke without smiling. It was part of his stock in trade, essentially a part of himself and genuine enough. But it was quite different from John Baird's sober smile, which came up from the depths, while Cato's was of the surface. It seemed to George that Cato's pleasant mobile mouth would go on smiling in just that same engaging way even under defeat, while the alert brain behind the watchful eyes was revolving new plans, and that, if the defeat were final, he would retire in the best possible order under cover of his smile.

And he was not far wrong. Robert Cato was the cleverest advertising canvasser in London at that time. A free lance, because his methods were his own, and he would submit to no control even for the sake of a certain salary. He had served his time in the offices of several of the best advertising firms, his quick intelligence had assimilated all he had learned, and his all-round knowledge of advertising matters was unequalled. He made a very good income, and as a rule spent it all as quickly as he made it. In actual age he was perhaps three or four years older than Barty. In knowledge of the world, and the men one met there, he was twice George's age and something more.

George was struck by the fastidious neatness of his

costume. He found that this was as much a part of his stock-in-trade as his pleasant smile and engaging manner. Summer and winter Bob Cato always wore a tasteful flower in his buttonhole, and the tan kids he carried in or on his hands were perennially fresh and striking. Whether business was good with him or bad, his outward appearance at all times betokened prosperity, and the cigars he carried, and smoked, and was generous with, carried conviction in their flavour.

"Well, Bob? Any plunder?" asked Baird quietly. "You know Mr. Barty, I think. Quills both of you, aren't you?"

"Ah," said Cato, with another pleasant nod at George, "I've been rather neglecting the Quills lately."

"Been too busy making money, or spending it, Bob?" asked Mrs. Baird.

"Bit of both," he smiled in reply.

"Got anything for us?"

"It'll come soon. Bound to come. I can smell *Round Table* ads. in the air. But it's a dickens of a job getting 'em right on to the lines. You're putting out a capital paper, John. Keep it up and we'll get the ads. all right in time."

"While there's life there's hope," said Baird, with his own quiet, tired smile. "This any good?" lifting a slip of paper from his desk and handing it to Cato.

"Who brought this in?" asked Cato, with a depreciatory curl of the lip.

"Fellow named Woodman."

"I know him. Red beard, looks as if he drank too much."

"That's the man. I've seen him about Fleet Street for a long time."

"Paid him?"

"No. Told him to come back to-morrow, as I made it a rule to verify all orders brought in by outside canvassers."

Cato nodded. "Stick to that, my boy. You won't see him again. It's a stumer. I'm rather surprised he should try it on you. He's a pretty hard case, but I didn't know he'd got down to the swindle pure and simple."

"What an abominable thing to do!" said Mrs. Baird hotly. "Here have I been exulting in the thought of a whole half page being let for the next six months, and it turns out nothing but a fraud."

"Might have been worse," smiled Cato. "Some folks would have paid him his commission on the nail. New papers especially seem to think that the taking of the most ordinary precautions is a sign of weakness, and so the stumer flourishes. New papers are always in such a deuce of a hurry to get on."

"It's generally a case of getting on or getting off," said Baird.

"Well, you know, advertisers are business men, and they want to make sure a paper has come to stop before they go into it."

"They can easily make it a certainty by going into it."

"Quite so, but that's not their end of the business, you see. But I've got close on another page for next week——"

"Good boy!" said Mrs. Baird.

"That makes three pages inside, and the covers are not so bad. If you'll keep the paper up to its present level, I'll undertake to have six inside pages filled all the time, within the next six months."

"Do your best for us, my boy," said Baird quietly. "We want all we can get." No one but himself

and his wife knew how desperately hard it was to keep a brave front to the world, when every week the paper still showed a deficit, and would continue to do so until the revenue from advertisements was at least twice as much as it was then.

"You're not in the advertising line, Mr. Barty?" asked Cato, with his engaging smile.

"No, I'm for being a writer if I can manage it."

"Much the pleasantest end of the stick, I can assure you. Sometimes I think I was meant for that end myself, but unkind fate drove me into advertising, and advertising I shall be to the end of the chapter now, I suppose."

"You put as much brains into it as some people do into their writing, Bob. That big ad. of Gray's in the *News* was yours, wasn't it?" asked Mrs. Baird.

"Yes, that was mine. Startler, isn't it? They gave me £50 for it and the placing of all the ads."

"You make heaps more money than you would by writing," said Mrs. Baird.

"And spend it ever so much quicker too," said her husband.

"It does run away," said Cato cheerfully. "But you see that's how it is in the advertising business. It comes in lumps—sometimes—and you have to spend a good deal to keep the pot boiling."

"How do you mean?" asked Mrs. Baird.

"Oh, heaps of ways. You have to keep on good terms with people who can help, and it all costs money. Gray's manager and his wife were dining with me at Krasnopolsky's last night. Then we went to the Gaiety. It cost me five pounds. To-morrow night I've got to feed another man. Oh, it soon goes I can assure you."

"It's a good thing for your wife that you're not married, Bob," said Mrs. Baird.

"A good thing for Mrs. Bob. Perhaps not so good a thing for Mr. Bob," said Baird.

"Best as it is," said Cato. "An advertising man belongs to his business."

CHAPTER XVI

HELPING HANDS

George Barty's lot could hardly have been cast among more propitious surroundings for the bringing out of the very best that was in him. And, at the outset of a young man's career, environment is a factor of consequence.

An atmosphere more congenial to the cultivation of the truest literary spirit than that of the shabby little office-of-all-work of the *Round Table*, it would have been difficult to find. It was an atmosphere of unremitting hard work, but withal of work in which the labourer found extreme delight, and a sure reward, apart from any profit which might some time accrue. They rejoiced in their work simply for its own sake. Mrs. Baird, perhaps to a greater extent than her husband, for to him fell, naturally, the coarser contact with the matter-of-fact world outside—the world of printers, and paper-makers, wholesale agents, and so on. And broad as were his shoulders, both bodily and spiritual, it often needed all their solidity to carry his burden and the necessarily cheerful face at one and the same time.

To George, in his extreme innocence, the position of proprietor of a paper was an elevation with a halo. He came in time to learn that halos conceal many a thorn, and to realise the fact that, in the beginning, the proprietor of a paper must win his way, inch by inch, and step by step, with the sweat of his brain and brow, just as any other man must, who begins at the

bottom and has no long purse to dip into. He came, indeed, at last, to believe the newspaper man's lot the harder. For his work, if he undertakes both the management and the editing, as John Baird did, is never done.

It was too much for any man, and, but for his wife's unfailing help, Baird never could have come through it. As it was it took much out of him. On the other hand it also put much into him. Hard work kills no man, worry kills many. It was not till he began to worry that the work began to tell upon him.

The Bairds knew exactly what they wanted, and that was to turn out the very best paper they could compass within the means at their disposal. As a simple necessity of business they kept in closest possible touch with matters literary, and Mrs. Baird, especially, was possessed of a clear critical faculty and a divination for sound work which amounted to an instinct.

She came of a scholarly family. Her father was a north country vicar, who, in his lonely parsonage among the hills, devoted all the time that could be spared from the care of his wide-spread parish, to high thought and graceful expression in paper and print. His erudition had won him high esteem but little emolument. Life at the parsonage had been of the very simplest and plainest, and yet of the fullest and widest. In all her father's work Ellen had been his untiring and devoted assistant, an omnivorous devourer of books —a book up there *was* a book, and so to be read, no matter what it was about—and a scribbler before her hair was up. Then her father died—her mother had died when she was a girl of ten—and she went out governessing. In London she and John Baird came together, and they had been married five years when George Barty first met them.

John Baird himself had been for many years manager to a large firm of wholesale publishers, in receipt of a good income, and had he been content to occupy the position of an honoured subordinate, might have gone on so to the end of the chapter. But that business could offer him no higher position. The partners both had sons coming forward, and after due consideration, and much consultation with his wife, they determined to try their fortunes on their own account, and to put the best years of their life into work for themselves rather than for outsiders. The fight itself would have its own delights. If they won, the reward would be all their own. If they lost, they could but begin again. They clearly foresaw the risks, but, at the worst, Baird could go back to wholesale publishing. He was a man of standing in the trade and many would be glad of his services.

He had a couple of thousand pounds laid by, and on this he started the *Round Table*. With fair luck, and all the brains and work he and Ellen would put into it, he considered he ought to pull through on that. Six months after he started, however, a spell of bad trade struck the country; business generally was slack; advertisers pulled in their nervous horns; even the big journals suffered; among the smaller the mortality was large; newcomers were like lambs born out of season. Baird grew somewhat apprehensive as to what the future might hold for them.

It was only a question of hanging on, he knew. His practised hand told him that his little journal was making its way, slowly but surely, in public estimation. If advertising had been normal he would have turned the corner by this time. But advertising was far from normal, the corner was not yet turned, every week's issue depleted the slim exchequer still more,

and John Baird's quiet smile barely hid the anxiety that was in him.

Between John and Ellen Baird, and sister Joan, and would-be-brother Jack Fairfax, George stood a fair chance of being licked into shape, and little chance of being spoiled. With all a beginner's appreciation of his own work, he was possessed of large commonsense and a keen desire to turn that work out in the very best possible shape. He accepted all their criticisms with high good humour and turned them to profitable account.

Jack slashed away at redundancy of any kind, with a special eye to adjectives. Joan's critical ear would pass nothing which did not flow smooth and clean when she read it aloud. Ellen Baird insisted on the use of the one and only word which expressed his thought exactly, made him invest five shillings in a second-hand Roget's Thesaurus, and drove him to the diligent study thereof whenever he got into a corner. As their friendship grew, she criticised his work with a freedom and perspicacity which made him her debtor for life, and went a long way towards making him what he became.

Between these various millstones his work was ground fine, and the result of his tribulation was a clean-cut, forcible style which was somewhat remarkable in so young a writer. But then, not many beginners have advantages such as these. And fewer still, perhaps, would have had the sense to make such good use of them.

He worked away at those two stories for the *Round Table* till even Mrs. Baird could find no flaws in them. The day the first one appeared was a white-stone day in Wynyatt Square. Joan and Mary and George himself knew it almost off by heart, but, from the number

of times they read it over again in print, you would have thought they had never set eyes on it before, and that it was the most wonderful story ever printed. And so it was to them, and it looked altogether new and different in print, and they each tried to look at it from the point of view of those thousands of other readers who were only now admitted to this high privilege. And they wondered how this and that point would strike them, and how it would strike them as a whole, and whether those little finely-shaded touches would be missed, and finally, when he knew every letter of it, George began to wonder whether after all it was as good as he had been thinking it.

He was somewhat reassured, however, when the boys read it and expressed their approval. And when Jack Fairfax came in with Meg, and said it really didn't read half badly, thanks to the dressing-down he had given it, his spirits rose again.

So Guy Bertie's little bark was fairly launched on the stormy waters, and he looked forward to the future voyaging with all the eagerness of youth and inexperience.

He stopped the indiscriminate flight of his fledglings, and gathered them all into their nest, and tackled them one by one, and wrought at them, and re-wrought, in the light of his later knowledge, till they hardly knew themselves, and he hardly recognised them for what they had been, though he knew them only too well.

Each story, as he finished it off to the best of his powers, he passed on to Joan, who read it to Mary and Mrs. Barty; and then on to Jack Fairfax, who played Roman father to it; then, after further corrections, when he approved of them, he carried it to Mrs. Baird and begged her to read it when she had time.

"I'm not asking you to take it for the *Round Table*,

Mrs. Baird," he would say. "But if you would just run your eye over it, when you've got absolutely nothing else to do, and dig your pencil in where you don't like it, I would be so grateful."

And Mrs. Baird would laughingly pile the MSS. up on the already well-tenanted top slab of her desk, and when that very rare time came when she had a few minutes to spare, she would look over one of the stories and pencil a note in the margin now and again. And more than once she said to her husband, "This is uncommonly good, John. I think we ought to have it," and some they kept, to George's great content. But often Baird would quietly say, "We can't afford to pile up too much MS., Nell, and besides it's hardly fair to Barty. The wider market he finds outside the better for him," and she would reluctantly let it go, with a word or two of commendation scribbled on a scrap of paper inside, which commendatory scraps George Barty treasured as things of price.

The office of the *Round Table* did not know many leisured moments, but the Bairds had taken to the boy and they liked both him and his work. Time came when he was able to repay them, in part, for the helping hand they had held out to him at a time when judicious criticism and a word of commendation were of infinite service.

He stuck to his work so religiously that he found little time for visiting the Quills Club. Once or twice, however, as he sped to or from the office of the *Round Table*, he bumped his way through the stream of intent-faced men and bulging sacks flowing in and out of Kerrison's, and dashed up the stairs to see if any of his friends were in. And each time he found Christopher and Ebenezer Chubb, sitting at the marble-topped table nearest to the back window, busily writing.

That is to say, Chris did the writing while Eb sat and watched, and interjected a word here and there, and carefully read the finished sheets as his brother pushed them over to him. A murmur or a grunt passed between them at times and sufficed to convey their ideas. It was Eb's duty to devise thrilling situations in unceasing continuity, and while Chris elaborated each scene in a page of neatly written MS., Eb was busily scheming out the next. Every page had at least one thrill in it, and at times the little men gurgled amusedly over the inventions of their active little brains. But whenever George broke in on them, they pushed their work aside and drew out their pipes as an indication of their readiness for a chat. It was generally mid-afternoon when George called there, and they had the rooms to themselves, for the Quills only woke up towards evening when the work of the day was over.

"You're q-quite a stranger, Mr. Barty," said Christopher, the first time George found them there.

"I'm working over all my stuff," said George. "Bringing it up to top notch."

"Ah-ha! Mrs. B-Baird's standard!" said Chris. "Sh-She's the cleverest little woman I know. If you can satisfy her, you'll do."

"She's been most awfully kind to me and so has Mr. Baird. I can't thank you enough for introducing me to them."

"Sh-Shade better than Johnson!" said Chris, with a gurgle.

"Oh, Johnson!" with much scorn. "How's Prince Praxaline getting on?"

"Dandy!" said Eb. "Most extraordinary young man ever I came across. Doesn't know who he is yet ——"

"N-Neither do we. W-What on earth *are* we going to do with him, Eb?"

"Hanged if I know. He's a mystery with a vengeance. I can't see through him."

"Have to k-kill him, I guess," said Chris contemplatively. "R-Read your story in *Round Table*, Mr. Barty. K-Kind of thing I'd have liked to write myself if I hadn't to w-write for a living. How's the *Round Table* going? Haven't seen B-Baird for weeks. Was looking w-worried last time I saw him."

"He's got too much to do," said George. "They're at it early and late up there."

"L-Lots of worry in a new paper. 'Specially when you do it all yourself. But John Baird's a man. He'll pull it off if it's to be pulled off."

"The paper's going all right. It's the advertisements that bother him."

"Ads. are the very deuce when they don't come——"

"And some papers have heaps without any circulation at all," said Eb. "There's old Bownes. I don't believe he prints a hundred copies more than he needs to send round to his advertisers, and yet his rag's full to overflowing, and good ads. too."

"How's it done?" asked George, with interest.

"Dear knows. Lying, I suppose."

"But that kind of thing can't go on for ever."

"Been going on as long as I can remember, and shows no signs of giving out," said Eb.

"It sounds rascally," said George.

"It is," said Eb. "Queer business, advertising!"

"B-Big a mystery as P-Prince Praxaline," said Chris. "Be k-killed some time."

CHAPTER XVII

HANDS ROUND

THE next time George ran up to the office of the *Round Table*, he found Mrs. Baird busily working against time on the proof slips of that week's issue. Her face was pinched into an intent little frown as her pen dashed in marginal alterations, and there was a tired look in her eyes as she looked up at George, and nodded.

He flung down his hat, rooted up a pen, and said:

"I'm going to help. Hand me a batch, please!"

"Do you know how?"

"I've been grinding it up from those pen people's slip."

"Here you are. Don't let any literals slip. They cause me acute physical pain."

"I won't let anything slip," and, beyond an occasional brief question and answer, silence reigned for a good hour.

He pushed over his slips as they were finished and she ran her eyes over them, critically at first, and with hidden gleams of amusement at the amateurish style of some of his corrections. But the corrections were all there, and indicated beyond even the obtuseness of a compositor to mistake, and she was well satisfied.

She heaved a sigh of relief when the last slip was done, and the grimy small boy who had been waiting for it and cultivating a taste for literature on his own account with a damaged copy of the *Boys of England*, sped down stairs three at a time.

"Now we'll have a cup of tea," she said. "I've been longing for it for half-an-hour, but I determined it should not be till all those proofs were done. I'm very much obliged to you for your help."

"It's been a pleasure," said George. "I shall come every week."

"That would be expecting quite too much of you."

"Not a bit. I owe you and Mr. Baird more than I can tell you. Where is the master?"

"I expected him back before this. He's out trying to get in some accounts that ought to have been paid a month ago. It's hard to get advertisements, and sometimes it's harder still to get them paid for, and if you're too pressing they don't like it."

"Advertisements seem a beastly nuisance," said George.

"Unfortunately we can't do without them. Here's John now," and she poured out a third cup, as the door opened and Baird came in looking tired and beat.

"Hello?" he said, with his usual quiet smile, as he saw George. "What's this?"

"New assistant sub-editor, sir," and George stood up meekly and touched an imaginary forelock.

"He insisted on stopping and correcting proofs," said Mrs. Baird. "Now he's reaping his reward."

"Rather a harnessing of Pegasus, isn't it?" said Baird, as he sipped his tea with relish.

"Not a bit. Pegasus was in debt. He wants to work some of it off," said George.

"Well, that's all right," said Baird. "We can stand it if he can. That is, if he lets none of the little fishes slip through."

"Not a fish. I appeal to the pilot's wife."

"And the pilot's wife says you're above reproach," said Mrs. Baird, with a twinkle.

"Oh, I've no doubt your printers will smile at my

corrections, but I'll guarantee every one beautifully done according to the pen people's slip."

"They were quite too beautiful. My only fear is that the comps will be so overcome that they'll do nothing but stand and admire them. But you'll soon get down to hieroglyphs like the rest of us."

"And you've got right through?" asked Baird, looking round.

"Last slip went down a quarter of an hour ago," said Mrs. Baird triumphantly.

"Why, it's as good as a half-holiday," and he pulled out his pipe and began filling it. "Smoke, Sub, and enjoy my well-earned rest," and he threw his pouch across to George.

"Chubb mixture!" said George, as he smelt it.

"Right! And the very best mixture I know. They send me in a pound about every second week. They put it on the ground that I deserve it and can't possibly find out where to get it or make it up myself. But I've an idea they think I can't afford such a luxury out of my own pocket. Or else they're both in love with Nell," and he smiled across at her through his soothing cloud.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised," said Mrs. Baird. "I've been in love with them ever since I knew them. I was afraid you'd find it out sometime."

"Brazen woman!" said her husband. "But they're a pair of little golden hearts, if there's not very much of them to look at."

"You'll let me come and help again?" asked George, when he was leaving. "I've enjoyed it ever so much, and it's all experience, you know."

"He'll be putting you into a story next, Nell," said Baird. "I expect he's making a minute study of the peculiarities of your character, and——"

"Well, he might do worse," laughed Mrs. Baird. "Come and welcome, Mr. Barty. I shall be glad of your help—that is if you're sure it's not interfering with your own work."

"Not a bit. It's relaxation. I enjoy it."

"One man's poison another man's meat," smiled Baird. "If I find any ghastly mistakes in this week's issue I shall know who let them through."

"That's a nice boy," he said to his wife, as George sped down the stairs.

"As nice a boy as ever I met," said Mrs. Baird. "There is something about those deep-set eyes of his, with the smiles in the corners, that makes you like to look at them."

George meanwhile was tramping away westward, with a masterful stride and a face made up of thought and anticipation; thought, for a new story he was turning over in his mind; anticipation, which was realised when he reached Kensington Palace Gardens just in time to catch Mary Lindsay as she turned out of the Burney house.

From the matter-of-fact style of their greeting you might have argued that their meeting was an understood thing. And so it was. Every night Mary found George waiting to escort her home, and her eyes lighted up at sight of him, just as his did at sight of her. And the long walk through the busy streets, which might have proved a weariness alone, became, in company, a delight to look forward to all day. And, in truth, as George very well knew, anything that could lighten the burden of such work as hers was very welcome to her.

At times those terrible children got on her nerves, and George could tell it by the first glance at her face. And at such times he would simply wheel

and walk by her side, and they would go sometimes a full mile before a word passed between them. Then by degrees, with the exercise, and the sight of the shops, and the sane faces of the passers-by, and the feeling of protection in the quiet companion by her side, her spirits would get over their depression, and before they reached home she was almost herself again. At other times she was like a schoolgirl just released from her tasks, and chattered gaily all the way, and stopped to look into the shop-windows, and not seldom insisted on going inside to buy some trifle for Joan, just to show that, in their own enjoyment, they had not forgotten her.

This happened to be one of her dark days. It was not till they were walking down Holborn that they spoke. Then George said quietly.

"Been having a bad time?"

"Yes," she said, "horrible!"

"What was it?" as she relapsed into silence. "Do you good to talk it over."

"We were out for a walk to-day and the youngest girl, Gwen, was walking in front. She stumbled and fell. They never seem to know where they're going, you know. Evelyn, the eldest, was behind and she walked right over little Gwen as though she had been a worm or a heap of stones. It was not as if she had tumbled over her. She just put her foot on her and tramped on without the slightest concern, and never even looked back. There was something so distressing in it, so—so inhuman, that it gave me quite a turn. Gwen wasn't hurt. I just picked her up and we went on. But I could have cried at thought of the other. It is very terrible. Except for eating, they don't seem to have a human feeling among them."

"They're a ghastly lot. What possible use can they be?"

"What would you do?"

"I don't know. At the present moment I'm inclined to favour the ancients' plan of quietly putting an end to such as early as possible."

"I feel like that sometimes. Just think of these four growing up to be men and women in body, and —absolutely nothing in anything else. It is horrible! horrible! horrible!"

"Well, thank God we've got brains and hearts, if we haven't got any money," said George fervently. "Have you ever seen Mr. Burney yet?"

"It's odd you should ask that. We met him as we came in from our walk to-day. He was just going into the house, and he stood aside for us to pass, and looked at his children as though they were a menagerie. He stared at me as if he thought he ought to know me, and raised his hat. It is the first time I have seen him since Saas-Mürrn, and in the light of Saas-Mürrn he is hateful."

"And Mrs. Burney never troubles you?"

"Never. She comes in now and again when we're at lunch, and looks at us and sighs, and she's always chewing something. The children never take the slightest notice of her, even when she goes round and strokes their hair. She sometimes asks if we're all right, and when I say yes, she sighs again and goes out."

"And the old man?"

"I've never seen him since the first day, and then only for a minute. When he's got the gout he stops in his study, and the children are never allowed near it."

"It's not exactly a lively house."

"It's deadly, and the worst of it is the thought of those poor children's future."

"They may improve as they grow older. I really

thought I was getting young Frazer's brain into better shape."

"I never saw any signs of it, and, as it turned out, it didn't look very like it, did it?"

"You never saw him as he was when I first took him. He certainly didn't turn out well, but I'm not at all sure that what happened wasn't the result of a sprouting intelligence."

He told her how he had been helping Mrs. Baird through her proofs.

"When are you going to bring them to Wynyatt Square? We're all aching to see them. Do you know what would please Joan more than anything else in the world, George?"

"No, what?"

"Get Mrs. Baird, or Mr. Baird, or whoever has the say in the matter, to let her do some little bit of the paper for them. "Answers to Correspondents," or anything. I am sure she could do it, and whatever she did she would do better than most."

"That's an idea," said George thoughtfully. "But, you know, they're having a tough time, and they don't dare to spend a penny on outside work if they can do it themselves. And they haven't any "Answers to Correspondents" as far as I remember."

"Then they ought to have. It's the funniest part of most papers. And Joan doesn't want any pay. It would do her a heap of good."

"I'll get them to come round as soon as I can, and Joan can suggest it. But they never seem to have a moment to spare."

"Sundays? They can't work all Sundays too."

"I've no doubt they get breathing space on Sundays, and I've an idea Mrs. Baird generally gives me half-an-hour. By Monday, as a rule, she's got something to say to me about my stuff."

"Have you any news from Mr. Felston yet?" she asked.

"Not a word. It's six weeks since he wrote last. He said he was working hard at two or three things and intended to stick at them till they were finished. He's too busy to write probably."

But the very next day he received a letter from Niel Felston, and it made a break in the smooth flow of his life and sent him hot-foot in pursuit of the writer.

Felston wrote—

"My dear Barty,—The fool is turned again to his folly and the beast to his wallowing in the mire. Never waste your time on a fool again. It is unprofitable labour.

"My pictures turned up trumps. A Chicago man saw them at Florio's and paid the price. With 25,000 francs in hand, the green cloth fever came upon me hot and strong. I am off to Monte Carlo, and before I go I owe you a grateful good-bye. You are a man. I am a fool. We are not likely to meet again. I shall break the bank. Then in the natural course of things the bank will break me, and this time I shall go out. It is in my blood and there is no hope for me. Better dead. Just forget that you ever knew a fool called

NIEL FELSTON.

Once more good-bye, and God bless you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER THE FOOL

Two hours later George was grinding along in a third-class carriage to Folkestone, on his way to Monte Carlo. Felston had a couple of days start of him, and much might happen in two days at a place like Monte Carlo. He was full of anxiety concerning his friend, but hoped still to arrive before anything untoward happened.

He had to wait four hours in Paris, and so had time to run across to Felston's lodgings in the Rue Michelette. But the door was locked, and all that the concierge could tell him was that M. Felston was away.

All that night, and all the next day, he was jogging to the South. It was after two o'clock on the following morning when he dropped out of the train at Monaco, and stretched his legs with a sigh of relief, and said to himself that twenty-seven hours on end in a French third-class is a foretaste of purgatory.

He went to a hotel he had picked out of Bradshaw because it claimed to charge reasonable prices, and turned into bed a very tired young man indeed. In the morning, he spent the time till the Casino opened, in going the round of the other hotels and searching their registers for the name of Felston. But, either he had not yet arrived, or he had not entered his name, or—he had registered under an assumed name, which was by no means improbable.

With that idea in his mind, he examined all the registers with minutest care. There was a Mr. Noel Foster on the register of the Grand, who had arrived

three days before. He even fancied the writing resembled Felston's. He enquired about Mr. Noel Foster. But he was no longer there. He had stayed one night only and gone away next day. There might be nothing in it, and he went up to the Casino.

He wandered about there all the afternoon and evening, but saw no sign of Felston. He made enquiries at the office. They knew nothing of anyone even remotely resembling his friend, and his evident anxiety produced nothing more than shrugs and polite disclaimers.

Out in the gardens he engaged in conversation with various guardians of the peace and moralities of Hades, and by devious ways led up to the question whether there had been any unpleasant happenings in the neighbourhood of late. But not only had there been none such of late, the officials had never in the whole course of their existence heard of anything of the kind. The Establishment was eminently well conducted, you understand, and it was quite impossible to conceive of anything unpleasant in connection with it. People, of course, sometimes lost money, they believed. Some doubtless lost more than they could afford. But the Establishment was very generous. In such cases even, there was no occasion for anything unpleasant to occur —here. What might happen elsewhere, well, parbleu, that was no concern of theirs.

Another whole day he spent about the town and Casino, asking, watching, waiting, but learning nothing, and growing more anxious with each hour that passed. He wandered about the rooms, hoping every minute to catch sight of the keen dark face he was aching to see. Only when play was over and the lights were turned out, did he turn reluctantly and go down the slope towards the town.

As he sauntered along, puzzling his brains as to what could have become of his friend, and loth to turn in to another night of lonely anxiety—for fears show bolder head in the dark and within four walls than they do outside—a girl flitted past, eyeing him intently. She turned and came back, and passed him again with her eyes still fixed on him. Then he heard at his side a whispered : " Pardon, M'sieur ! ——"

He walked on without reply.

" Are you the Englishman who is in search of a friend ? " said the girl. And at that he turned quickly.

" I am seeking a friend, Ma'm'selle, yes. Do you know anything of him ? "

He looked at her for the first time. A girl of the people, evidently, with a dark shawl draped over her head and held under her chin, for the night wind had a chill in it.

" What can M'sieur give for the information ? "

The question surprised him, but it sounded like business.

" I am not rich, but if you find my friend for me I will give you twenty-five francs," he said.

" It is not a fortune, M'sieur," and a row of white teeth gleamed in the shadow of the shawl.

" No, it is not a fortune, but then I haven't got a fortune."

" *Eh bien !* It is not for myself, but I was told to get what I could. There is an Englishman at the Metropole. He is wounded. He shot himself. The Establishment had him taken there to avoid a scandal, you understand. He may be M'sieur's friend."

" I am very much obliged to you, M'am'selle. It is more than likely it is the man I want. Here is—permit me ! " and he held out an English sovereign.

" You do not know yet if it is he," she said, evidently unused to sharp bargaining.

" You have done your part, and I will take my chance. Can you tell me how to get to him? They are sure to deny him to me."

" He is being nursed by the Sisters," said the girl thoughtfully, " and one goes in each morning to relieve the one who has been there all night. If M'sieur could follow her closely, and, perhaps, say that he was an English doctor, he might manage it."

" I thank you, Ma'm'selle. The idea is a good one."

" If there is trouble, M'sieur will not say where he got the information. That would only make trouble for others."

" I will be very careful, and I thank you again, Ma'm'selle."

She flitted away, and he went back to his hotel with a spark of hope inside him.

He was out on the front very early next morning, and strolled up and down with a sharp eye for the black robes and white coif of a Sister. He went up the slope towards the Casino grounds so that she could not escape him.

He saw her coming at last, like a slow black beetle in the white sunshine. He leaned over the railing and looked at the water till she passed. Then he turned and followed close behind her.

The Sister passed into the grounds and up the steps into the hotel. The hall porter bowed to her and she went straight on up the staircase. He looked at George and came forward.

" M'sieur desires——"

" I am with M'am'selle," whispered George. " I have come to take him away."

" Ah, then——" and he left the road free.

Up three flights of stairs—Mademoiselle's faith evidently did not include lifts—down a long passage to the back of the house, and the Sister stopped at a door and knocked gently. George stood just behind her. Her abstraction from worldly affairs, and her close-fitting headgear, had permitted her no hint of his presence.

The door opened quietly and, as she stepped inside, he followed her. The Sister who had admitted them stared at George, and at sight of him the other one uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I have come to see my friend," he said, in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could assume. "How is he this morning, Mademoiselle?"

He walked towards the bed to see if it actually was Felston. It took him a full minute to decide the question. He could only see a nose in profile against the pillow. The rest was all surgical bandages. "How is he going on?" he whispered again.

"He had a quiet night. He will waken soon," murmured the Sister.

"I will wait till he wakens," said George, and sat down by the bedside. "Has he his senses, Mademoiselle?"

"He was feverish yesterday, M'sieur. But it was diminishing. He may have his senses when he wakes up, the poor young man. *Tiens!* he is stirring now."

The bandaged head moved slightly and with evident pain. Then the heavy eyes opened and looked wearily out on the world they had hoped to leave behind them. They rested on George, and wandered off to the black-robed Sisters, and round as much of the room as he could see, and finally settled on George again, but whether he actually knew him or not, George could not tell. Then they closed again, and he lay for

a full hour so absolutely still that, if George had not seen him move before, he would have doubted if he were still alive.

The night Sister had departed with a meek obeisance. The other sat in a corner quietly passing her beads through her fingers to the soundless movement of her lips.

Presently Felston moved again slightly, and the Sister dropped beads and prayers and stood by the bedside with a cooling drink. She placed the cup to his lips and he sipped eagerly, and then opened his eyes again and lay looking at George.

"Do you know me, old man? I've come to look after you," asked George gently.

"Sorry!" murmured the wounded man. "No good!" both of which sayings were capable of various interpretations.

"We'll see about that," said George, adopting his own. "You've just got to get better as quick as you can, and then I'll take you home."

"Stupid fool!" murmured Felston, and closed his eyes and said nothing more.

It was evidently going to be a tedious business. Where the patient has no desire for life, recovery must necessarily be slow.

It was impossible to question Felston as to what had happened. The Sister, whom he did question in whispers, knew nothing. They had been called in to tend the sick man, that was all. The wound was a gun-shot, she understood, but how it came about she had not been informed. There is nothing on this earth so innocently ignorant as a Sister when she knows what is expected of her.

Without any practical experience of such matters, George had a general idea of how the authorities

across the way might be expected to act. When he went down to breakfast he secured a room on the same corridor as Felston's, and after breakfast had his portmanteau transferred from his own hotel. As soon as the Casino opened he went across to the office to interview the officials. He asked for the director, and after a short delay was shown to his room.

"You will be glad to hear that I have at last found my friend, Monsieur," began George.

"Ah?" said the official, and eyed him intently.

"Yes, he is lying wounded in Room 244 at the Metropole, conveyed there by your orders."

"Ah!" said the official once more, and then with a shrug, "I understood that was an Italian, not an Englishman."

"He is an English artist, by name Niel Felston. He is also the latest victim of this hell of yours."

"Monsieur has not come here for the purpose of discussing ethical questions, I presume?"

"No, I've come to learn what you're going to do about the matter," said George bluntly.

"In what——?" began the official, and then, with a quick change of manner,—"Ah, bah! why cavil? We understand one another, Monsieur. It is a misfortune. The actual blame of M. Felston's accident is, of course, not ours. Still we are always prepared in such cases to do what we can. We shall of course pay the expenses of M. Felston's illness and his fare home. Monsieur is also an artist?" he asked, following out some train of thought of his own.

"No, I am a writer——"

"Ah! a writer,"—with an almost imperceptible blink of the eyes,—"*Bien!* If Monsieur cares to stay and attend his friend till he is able to travel, we shall

consider ourselves under obligations to him. I will procure him a room at the Metropole——"

"I moved there this morning," said George. "I don't like accepting anything from you, but I can't leave Felston like this, and——"

"The obligation will be entirely ours," said the director suavely. "I consider it great good fortune that Monsieur happened to come to Monaco just at this time."

"I started from London the moment I heard my friend was coming here, on purpose to get him away," said George. "But I arrived too late."

"The misfortune! However, we will do our best to make Monsieur comfortable during his stay. How is M. Felston to-day?" and he stood up.

"The Sister told me he had had a good night and he recognised me this morning."

"That is good. With careful nursing, and the best of medical attention, he will soon be all right again. And—truly—I hope he will never return here."

"He will never return if I can prevent it," said George, and went his way with a mind relieved. For, to a limited purse, a stay of many days at the most expensive hotel in the place had presented obvious difficulties. As to his writing, he could do that as well in Felston's room as he could at home, and it would be odd, he thought, if he could not, during his stay, pick up enough impressions of Monte Carlo to last him a life time.

He wrote home—to Joan, but he knew the letter would be common property—telling just how things were, and saying that he should stop there till Felston could travel, and then he intended, if they saw no objection to it, to bring him straight to Wynyatt Square to complete his cure.

"He is better. He asked for you," whispered the Sister, when he quietly entered Felston's room. "Just now he is sleeping."

"And the doctor? Has he been?"

"He has been gone half an hour. He says he is going on all right. The chief thing is to keep him quiet."

He looked quiet enough lying there, as though, indeed, but very little removed from the quietness that is past all disturbance, and in that state he lay most of the day.

It was some days before he was able to speak more than a whispered word or two at a time, and a full week before George would allow him to discuss matters.

Then, barring the weakness, and the bandages over a nasty wound in the side of his head, he was very like the Niel Felston of St. Cloud and Paris.

"Wasted time," he murmured to George one day. "Should just have burned my letter and let me go."

"Not a bit of it, my boy. You're meant for better things."

"Past redemption!"

"Never! You've work to do in the world yet."

"If that fool of a gendarme hadn't run in and knocked up my arm I wouldn't be troubling you."

"If I knew him I'd give him a medal. He saved a man's life."

"A fool's."

"Yesterday's fool—to-morrow's wise man."

Bit by bit George learned what had happened. Felston had gone straight to the tables the night he arrived, but from the first the luck was against him. He lost steadily and found the continuous run of bad fortune lacking even in excitement. With the persistent hope of the thoroughbred gambler, however, he went

on, increasing his stakes for the turn of the tide, till at last he found his pockets empty. Then he strolled out into the gardens to end the game. There was no difficulty. He always carried a revolver at Monte Carlo. But he had been watched. As his finger pressed the trigger, an official in plain clothes dashed at him from the shadows, and the result was a ghastly wound and a painful coming back to life, instead of the eternal silence he had sought.

George said little to him about it. He intended to act this time, and he was nothing of a preacher.

He spent a good deal of time in the Rooms, watching the play and the players. He walked steadily all about the little town and its surroundings, and yet spent much of his day with Felston, chatting when the invalid was in the humour for it, scribbling his rough notes and maintaining inflexible silence when quiet was desirable.

He saw much during that visit that he was never able to forget. The sight of the bedevilment in the faces poring over the green cloth fascinated him. He saw many a tragedy in embryo and no single redeeming sight.

One day towards the end of the time, his eye fell on a familiar face. Thin, fresh-coloured, smilingly intent, with eyes that never wandered from the board, a choice flower in the well-cut coat below—Master Robert Cato, as large as life and very much alive. He was laying napoleons on the cross-lines here and there, and watching the results with much curiosity and no little gratification. The fates were evidently kind, baiting the trap doubtless for his ultimate fall, and George watched with interest for the result. His play seemed to be entirely haphazard, and yet he always seemed to win. The neat piles of gold in front of him grew steadily higher. George waited for the inevitable

reversal. Suddenly, to his surprise, Cato swept the gold into his pocket, and rose and pushed through the crowd, and came face to face with himself.

"Why, hello, Barty! What are you doing in this disreputable place?"

"Watching you. You seemed to be having a good time."

"Rattling! I just ran over for a holiday, and I've been finding out that it's possible to make a bit at the same time. Not always you can do the two things at once."

"Will you take a word of advice?"

"Perhaps—if it suits me. I can guess what it is. Come and have some coffee. I want a smoke after that bit of excitement!"

"You've done pretty well, haven't you?" asked George, when they had got their coffee and cigars under way.

"Fairly, for a beginner. Haven't quite got the hang of things yet. Strikes me as all straight and above board, but decidedly chancy. Things happened to come my way to-night."

"Well, if you're not an absolute fool you'll clear out with what you've got. By the time you get the hang of things you'll be cleared out yourself."

"Personal experience?"

"No, I don't play. But I've seen enough of it. The end is inevitable."

"Not inevitable, but the chances are against one in the long run, of course. I'll think about it."

"How's advertising?"

"Duller than a ditch. Going to pick up soon. I thought I'd make a bit of hay before the sun began to shine."

"And the Bairds? Seen them lately?"

"Few days before I slid out."

"How's the *Round Table* going on?"

"It'll be a fine property some day—if they can hang on long enough. But it's a deuce of a job hanging on."

"Got them any advertisements yet?"

"A few. Not many, but every blessed one that was gettable. I like Baird, and Mrs. Baird especially. She's a little jewel of a woman, one of the very best. I'd do anything for them. But I can't make people advertise when they're not in the humour for it. They're bad enough when they are. When they're not, it's a dog's job. What are you doing here yourself? Picking up local colour?"

"Partly. I came to nurse a sick friend.—He tried to blow his brains out after losing all his money."

"Well, I should never go that length, anyhow. Wouldn't care to expose my limitations to the public gaze.—I've an idea, you know, that with a little study I could get the pull of the black and the red—break the bank perhaps," and he threw a humorously provocative look at the quiet face opposite.

"My friend has broken the bank either two or three times, and has always gone home without a penny in his pockets."

"What a fool!"

"Of course. And that's just the kind of fool you'll be too. If you want to try it, then take my advice. Lock up half what you've won in your portmanteau and express it through to London. Buy a return ticket——"

"Got it."

"Pay your hotel bill——"

"They make me do it every morning."

"And have your little flutter with what you have left. It'll be an experience, as Bismarck says, and as you

don't lack common sense you'll probably never try it again."

"I'll think about it," said Cato, with a twinkle. "It's certainly livelier work than getting ads."

They chatted for a while, and then George had to go back to the sick room. He looked out anxiously for Cato next day, but saw no more of him, and so was left in doubt as to whether common sense had prevailed, or whether he had been cleaned out and had crept away to avoid being laughed at.

It was during those long slow times of Niel Felston's convalescence that the root idea of his first book came to George. How the seed was sown it would be hard to say. Possibly it was the spontaneous offspring of the atmosphere of the cosmopolite Babel in which he was living. Possibly the chance sight of a face at the tables, so suggestive as to carry in it all the possibilities. Wherever it came from, there it was, and it germinated slowly and finally took root and sprouted tentative paper leaves.

While Felston was groping slowly back to the life he had hoped to be done with, George, sitting by his bedside, or taking his walks abroad, was slowly feeling his way into a new world of his own creation,—the widest world a man may live in,—peopling it with the creatures of his imagination, and watching them work out their parts with the most absorbing interest. Guiding them, chiding them, wrestling with them at times, when they were perverse and would go counter to his first crude ideas, he was at all times overlord and creator, and he found himself vastly entertained by them all.

When at last Felston was in condition and humour for talk, George launched the outlines of his story at him as one means of keeping his mind off himself. And Felston, sick to death of all his own concerns, fell into his

friend's humour, and debated with him abstruse points of his hypothetic cases and characters, and dropped many a suggestive word, and shed many a light on the complexities of his own nature, none of which were wasted by his hearer. It was good for both of them. It lifted Felston out of his sick room, and it helped to give George his first book.

Meanwhile they were experiencing the very best of treatment at the Metropole. If they had been paying one hundred francs a day it could not have been better, and might not have been so good. They were the guests of the Administration. On the whole George had to acknowledge to himself that he had enjoyed his holiday.

Nevertheless, when he and Niel Felston got out of their cab at the door of No. 21 Wynyatt Square, one wild February evening, and went up the steps to the warm welcome which awaited them within, he said to himself and then aloud to his mother, that there was no place in the world equal to home.

Margaret Barty greeted her visitor with a warmth of quiet motherliness which gave Felston an entirely new sensation. He had never known a mother and he had never had a home—a home such as this one at any rate, and though he was very quiet, and said very little, he confessed to himself that it was good to be there.

CHAPTER XIX

YESTERDAY'S FOOL

THE coming of Niel Felston to Wynyatt Square bore fruit in several ways.

He was very quiet at first. He was not yet quite strong, and the atmosphere was so strange and rare that it took him some time to become accustomed to it. Lowland lungs find the air of the mountain top bracing and quickening, indeed, but not entirely free from discomfort to begin with. It is the same in higher matters.

There are natures, of course, so vitiated by the atmospheres they have lived in that the air of heaven itself would be distasteful to them.

Niel Felston's was not one of these. He had lived among the flesh-pots and wallowed among the swine-troughs, but, like the prodigal of old, he did not quite forget that life held better things.

The transmutation of his lead and copper into the silver and gold of life might have been a tedious process and subject to many a lapse, however, but for one thing. He met Joan Barty. And Joan made him what he came to be—a man, and a very great artist. Here was a young man possessed of the highest artistic faculties, which hitherto he had put to no high use, but which, nevertheless, by their very possession had kept him from being an absolutely unconditional wallower in the mire. Without a single social tie he had for years lived a life of extremest license, dissipating his time, his energies, his art—for what?

For merest pastime, for momentary excitement—for less than nothing, if you had driven him into a corner and induced him to confess. And here he was brought suddenly into close personal relationship with the fairest and sweetest girl he had ever seen.

When George dragged him into Joan's room that first night, with a joyous "Here we are, old girl!" and bent over her chair and kissed her, Felston, as he stood and watched them, experienced another draught of novel sensations. Before he had time to diagnose them, beyond the strange fact that something that had hitherto been lacking to him was suddenly supplied in superabundant measure, Joan's hand was stretched to him in the heartiest of welcomes. The radiance of her great brown eyes wrought strangely upon him. They stirred the deep places of his soul, but they carried with them into the depths such assurance of peace and hope as his life had never known before.

"I am so very glad to see you both safe home," she said. "I have been wearying for days for this minute."

"I am very glad to be here," said Felston, with his eyes fixed steadfastly on her face. He had found there what he had been searching for for a long time past.

"Will you let me paint you?" he asked impulsively, as though he feared she might escape him unless he got her promise at once

"Surely!" she laughed. "If you wish to. I shall at all events sit still. That is the one thing I am good at."

"One of the many things, old girl," said George.

Here Mary Lindsay came tripping upstairs with the glow of the wind in her face and eyes, just come in from her work. She also greeted the travellers

joyously—George with a warm grip, Felston with the welcome of an old friend.

"It feels like old times in Paris," she said. "How is dear old Madame Buvard? You could not stop a day there without seeing her, surely?"

"She is *desolée* at the loss of her *bon garçon*," said George, "and she enquired affectionately after the charming *demoiselle*."

"She is a dear old thing. When I go to live in Paris I shall dine there every day."

"We will hope Madame will survive——"

"What, my dining with her? She will make much of me, and give me a corner to myself before the wild boys come in, and keep all the tit-bits for me. It is one of the dreams of my life. When I have saved enough I shall go across and have a year at the schools. Six francs a day, and—liberty!" and she flung out her arms and tossed away the shackles in joyous anticipation.

"Ah!" said George, and looked as if he could have said more.

Later on, Sister Lazarus and Jack Fairfax came in together, exuberant as ever having, as usual, encountered one another quite by accident on the way, and after supper they all gathered in Joan's room again.

Mrs. Barty sat quietly looking on at them all with eyes that shone like soft stars, her white shawl dropping off her shoulders, and her shining needles running thoughtfully in and out of her wool to the tune of her thoughts, while her ball meandered about the floor and dodged cunningly round people's feet, and twisted itself inextricably round their legs.

Joan and Mary and George and Meg and Jack

rattled away as usual, describing, disputing, and enjoying themselves greatly in their own way. And Niel Felston, sitting soberly among them, as one come back from the gates of death and still strange to this strange new life found it good to be there.

He was very silent. They drew him into their chatter by direct appeal now and then, and more than once Mrs. Barty spoke a soft smiling word or two to him. But it was all very strange to him. He was up among the mountain tops and his lungs were not yet accustomed to the rare sweetness of the atmosphere. But his eyes returned constantly to Joan's sweet, mobile face, which just now was never two minutes the same, and he said to himself that it was the face he had sought, and that it was the most beautiful face in the world.

"You must not judge us by to-night, Mr. Felston," said Joan, as he was bidding her good-night. "We are not always as bad as this."

"I have never seen so many happy people in my life before," he said quietly, "and this is the first taste I ever had of home."

Next morning he went over to his lawyers, wheedled out of them a portion of his next quarter's allowance, and purchased a supply of painting materials. Such of his own belongings as he had not disposed of, he and George had packed up the day they spent in Paris, and they were coming across by goods train. But he could make a start with what he had bought, and there was a novel hunger for work on him. That was the first result of his meeting with Joan.

All night, till he fell asleep towards dawn, he had seen her sweet face dancing elusively before his eyes. It changed so rapidly and constantly that, in the morning, he had no idea which of his mental pictures was

most like the real Joan, and he was eager for the sight of her again.

When she was ready to receive visitors he went in with brushes, paints, and canvases, and had roughed out half-a-dozen rapid sketches of her almost before she knew he had begun. That was only to feel his way, however. Out of the many, he knew that there would finally evolve the one he wanted, and then, he said to himself, he would paint such a picture as would make the world wonder.

"You are in a hurry to begin," was her smiling greeting.

"For once," was his reply.

At first he felt tongue-tied in her presence. As though anything he might say must sound coarse and unfitted for her hearing. But as his brush got to work he began to feel more confidence.

No one could long resist Joan. By degrees she got him to talk. He could talk well enough when he chose, and he soon found himself talking his best. Her face and eyes were an inspiration. They evoked the very best that was in him, both of lip and brush, and before long both were hard at work and on their mettle.

Bit by bit, she drew the better side out of the old soiled self he had grown so used to and so weary of. Before that first day was ended he found himself talking to her in a way that surprised himself but was no surprise to her. For she had grown up among young men, and there was that in her which drew out all that was best in them, and made them long to please and serve her. If anyone had told Niel Felston, two days before, that within forty-eight hours he would be talking to a girl whose acquaintance he had not then made, in the way he was talking to this girl, he would have scoffed at the idea. But then this was Joan

Barty, and at that time he had never seen, much less imagined her.

During the afternoon, Mrs. Barty joined them with her knitting. Then George came in, and Mary Lindsay. In the evening, the boys, who had kept away the night before, came flocking in from the hospital and fraternised with Felston. They were a fine set, full of animal spirits, bubbling with jokes, a trifle medical in their allusions, perhaps, but that was inevitable, for all their hearts were in their chosen work. They were all greatly taken with Felston's sketches, rough as they were, and every man of them commissioned a finished portrait of Joan on the spot. All which commissions Felston laughingly accepted, to be fulfilled at his leisure. And as he watched Joan, the sparkling centre of her little court, her fingers busy with the silken threads of her work, her eyes, face, and lips all flashing in eager intercourse with those about her, the first glimmering suggestions came into his mind which resulted at last in the "Aranea Felicissima," the picture which made him famous.

Next day he made more sketches of her, and late that same day his things arrived from Paris. He excused himself while he unpacked them, and after a time came back to her room with a large easel, on which he placed for her inspection that unfinished picture of the Shepherd at the Parting of the Ways, which George and Mary had seen in his studio.

He pointed to the unfinished head of her who sat at the opening of the Narrow Way, and said, "I'm going to put you there. It's been waiting like that for two years—for you."

Joan sat looking at the picture for a long time in silence, and with a face of the deepest absorption, seeing everything, feeling it all to the full.

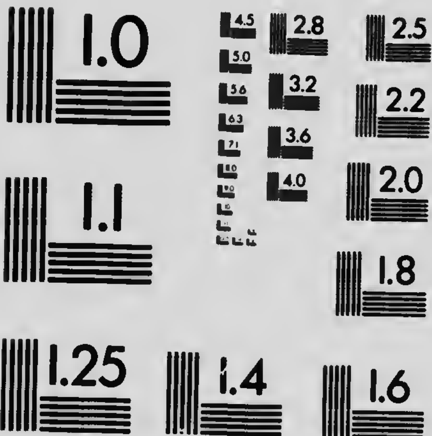
"It is very wonderful," she said at last.

"It's far and away the best thing I ever did, but I was afraid it was never going to be finished," said Felston.

But to Joan the wonder was that one who could produce so lofty a conception could also have allowed himself to wallow in the mire.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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CHAPTER XX

MIRACLES, MY MASTERS !

George spent one day getting his own small affairs into order, and in making Niel Felston feel at home in the house, and the following day he ran up to see his friends of the *Round Table.*

It was press day, and Mrs. Baird was as usual up to her eyes in proofs. After a word or two of greeting he found a pen, annexed a handful of slips, and set to work on them.

It was not till the boy had scampered away with the last sheets, and Mrs. Baird and he were enjoying the reward of merit, that he had time to think that she was not looking well. It seemed to him that her face was paler than usual and her spirits less buoyant. There was, somehow, an anxious look about her, though he could not definitely, and without consideration and closer observation, have said whether it was her eyes or her lips that conveyed the impression. She lost some of it, for the moment, in the discussion of his travels and her well-earned cup of tea. Felston's affairs he kept to himself, but gave her animated descriptions of much that he had seen and done. Then she produced some of the stories he had sent her before he left town, and they were busy on them when Baird came in.

"So the wanderer has returned," he said, with an attempt at jovial greeting.

"Just in time to help with the proofs," said George. "I can't imagine how Mrs. Baird has got along without me."

"Oh, we managed somehow, but I'm quite sure she's been glad of your help to-day, and I'm glad too, for I couldn't get back any sooner. Do you know," he said, as he filled his pipe, "I get more physical enjoyment out of this cup of tea, and this pipe, and this half-hour's holiday, than I do out of anything else that ever I get."

"It's very jolly," said George. "Mrs. Baird's tea is the best I ever tasted—except my mother's, and we tell her she's the best tea-maker in London."

"That's right, my boy. Always stick up for your own!" said Mrs. Baird.

"I've an idea, you know, that it's not just a question of the kind of tea and the amount you put in, and the kind of pot you use, and the water being just right, and all that——"

"I'm with you. You're quite right," said Baird, with a knowing nod.

"Everything depends on the personality of the person who makes it. If she's the right kind of person, full of kindly thoughts and goodnesses, then the tea tastes like a blessing——"

"Oh, wise young scribe! There's a great deal more in it than most folks would believe. I've known it for a fact for several years. You don't generally find it out till you're married, unless you lived in lodgings while you were making up to her."

"Dear me! You seem to have had wide experience, my man," said Mrs. Baird, smiling across at him.

"Not having tasted Mrs. Barty's tea," continued Baird, "I consider yours the very best in the world,

my dear. And Barty is right. It's the best because you make it. I doubt if I should consider even Mrs. Barty's equal to it."

"Well, now," said George, jumping at the opening, "suppose you come and try it? They're all aching to know you. They say I've got Baird on the brain. Shall we say next Sunday?"

Baird hesitated, and then said, "It's very good of you. I'm sure Nell would like to come—if nothing turns up in the meantime to stop us."

"That's understood then, and now I'll run away," and he sped down the stairs and turned westwards, and his face was graver than usual.

When John and Ellen Baird heard the door slam downstairs, they looked at one another; and George, if he had been there, would have been surprised at the gravity of their faces. Mrs. Baird looked an anxious question at her husband. He silently shook his head and she sat down quietly, with her hands clasped so tightly in her lap that the knuckles showed like little knobs of polished marble. She gazed into the fire for a minute while her lip recovered itself, and then said quietly, "We have done our best, dear, and the battle is against us. I shall be rather glad when it is all over. You are suffering more than is right."

"It is very bitter," said Baird, and his face was haggard, now that the quiet smile had fallen from it. "To have success within sight, as I truly believe, and to lose it for so little! And we have worked so hard, Nell."

"You have worked harder and borne more than any man has a right to bear, John.—Yes, I shall be glad when it is done wi' ' There was a little jewel on her eyelash, but he did not see it, and her voice was steady. He was gazing into the fire with exceeding

bitterness, and the spirit of revolt was strong in him, the stronger that he would allow no sign of it to show, and a bottled force is stronger than a free one.

"I saw Mr. Grimple himself and did my best with him," he said, after a time. "He was pleasant enough but I could not move him. He puts it on to his other partners, of course, just as they would put it on to him if I had tackled one of them. And from his point of view I suppose he's right. The account *is* too large, and it increases with each number they print, in spite of all my efforts. As a last chance I offered him a share in the paper for an extension of credit. He said they had been bitten too often by trying that. They were printers, not publishers, and the two lines were so distinct nowadays that they had decided, long since, to stick to their own business and not mix themselves up with any more papers. He likes the paper. Thinks it ought to have succeeded, and in ordinary times would have done so. Says, if anything, we have made it too good. For a highly religious man," he said, with a touch of the bitterness that was in him coming out in spite of himself, "he strikes one as lacking in charity. But business and charity have not much in common nowadays—It is very, very hard, Nell."

"We have done our very best, dear, and we have nothing to reproach ourselves with. But it is hard to lose all for so little."

"A couple of hundred pounds would be a God-send to us," said Baird. "But I don't know where to lay my hands on it—I really don't know if we're justified in bringing out this next number. Their bill is due the day after to-morrow. I told Grimple I expected to meet it. But I don't see how I'm going to."

"Kestevens?" she gasped, with a little shiver at this sudden close approximation of calamity.

"Put me off again till next week. They promised it faithfully for to-day and I counted on it. I did everything I could with them, short of licking their boots or mopping them about their office. But they said flatly that they had the greatest difficulty in getting money out of their clients and they were very short themselves. There's no doubt things have been very bad. They say they see signs of improvement. It's sure to come just when we've gone to pieces."

"Is there no one we could get a little help from, just till the tide turns?"

He shook his head. "I have racked my brains for him. Any I think of that would do it, haven't got the means. And those that could I'd sooner drown than ask."

"Bob is no use, I suppose?"

"Bob's said to be off on a grand burst. Besides he never lays anything by. I haven't seen him for a week. He's in Paris, I believe."

"Supposing we stopped—after to-morrow, would we have enough to square up all round?"

"Just about, if all the advertisers paid up. But collections in full are difficult when a paper has gone to the wall. They raise questions and wriggle out when they can. We can prove every copy of the circulation we've charged for, however, and I doubt if many others could."

"Well, we'll publish to-morrow, and hope still," she said stoutly.

But he only shook his head despondently, and sat gazing into the fire.

"I feel done up," he said. "It's tiring work struggling for one's life. I'll have a bit of a rest and then I'll tackle those accounts."

"Leave them for to-night, dear. You've done quite enough for one day."

"Done my best but done no good," he said wearily, and lay back in his chair, looking worn and grey.

He was more tired and worn out than he knew. He had been out all day and had been too sick at heart to eat anything at noon. He was faint from hunger, and fainter still from anxiety and worry. Presently he fell asleep where he sat, and Mrs. Baird flitted quietly about the room setting things to rights, and then sat down at her husband's desk and got out the ledger, and began copying out the monthly accounts on to the invoice forms.

It was a shabby little room—with plain deal shelves round the walls, divided into small compartments for back numbers of the paper. They used it as both editorial and publishing office, and at night as sitting room. On publishing days one of Kerrison's night-duty men came in for the day, and did the rough work of supplying such of the smaller newsagents as preferred drawing their supplies from the office direct.

A shabby little room, with two paste pots and a pile of addressed wrappers on the bit of counter that ran behind the partition, where Kerrison's man would lurk to-morrow busily folding up *Round Tables* for the post, and popping round to the counter whenever he was wanted, to give out papers and take in returns and cash.

A shabby little room—with a round metal clock on the mantelpiece alongside some stout business-like books—directories and dictionaries, and some piles of manuscript waiting to be read.

A shabby little room,—with Despair in a worn-out sleep in one chair, and despairing Hope knitting her white brows over serried rows of figures at the desk below the standard lamp, whose excess of light was

kept from the writer's eyes by a newspaper extension of the ordinary green shade.

As shabby a little room of all work as you could have found, yet beautified by the faith and hope and love of those who dwelt there.

A shabby little room—waiting to be glorified. For there are miracles in these days, my masters, as there were in the days of old.

Mrs. Baird glanced up from her work now and again, but was satisfied to let her husband sleep on. It might result in wakefulness in the night. She knew how often he lay awake, trying to make ends meet and things fit. But Nature was taking a needed rest, and he would be in better spirits, perhaps, when he woke up.

Presently she got up and prepared their frugal supper —eggs fried in a pan that came out of a cupboard under the counter, delicious crusty rolls from the dairy round the corner, fresh butter, two big cups of chocolate. Her husband stirred in his chair as she was going to wake him.

"Hello! I've been asleep," he said, blinking at things. "Supper? And I'm about ready for it."

There was not very much speech [illegible] them as they ate. All had been said, and [illegible] of talking would lighten the gloom.

"I'll just run up and have a wash, [illegible] Baird, when he had finished, "and then I'll knock off these accounts. If I get them posted to-night it's just possible I can collect two or three the day after to-morrow. There won't be enough for the bill, but we'll get all we can and I'll take it to Grimple, though I'm afraid it'll be no use. He's a hard-faced Christian and a good man of business."

"I've done some of the accounts," said Mrs Baird.

"You shouldn't have troubled, dear. I'll see to

the rest. I'll feel as fresh as a daisy after a wash," and he went up the narrow staircase to the room above.

The sound of his tread on the uncarpeted stairs, the touch of his elbow on the bare close walls, the loneliness of the careless humming traffic outside the front door, the darkness, the narrowness, the meagreness of it all came heavily upon him as he went. All these things had been less than nothing while hope burned brightly in the future. They had been things to be looked back upon with a smile when the better times should come. The remembrance of the narrow beginnings would but lend zest to the wider times. But now!—Hope was dead, and the future was as narrow and dark as the staircase.

He heaved a great sigh as he entered the bedroom, and his face was grey and despondent. He felt suddenly old. He had never quite lost hope before. His anxieties of late, indeed, had been endless, and always increasing, but always he had believed in the possibility of pulling through,—if not intact, still with a large enough share in the paper to repay him ultimately for all their labours.

For months past his anxieties had been deepening week by week. But he had had large faith in himself and the future, and had gone about with a cheerful face to the world, though often the inner man had set teeth and all he could do to keep the lips from pinching.

A new paper has two certain facts to face from the day of its birth—that every day, and every week, and every month, it must spend a certain amount of money. The amount may vary, but the expenditure may not stop. When it does, the paper stops. And this account is a known quantity. At times the

harassed proprietor knows it only too well, and if he would forget it he is never allowed to. The other certain fact is, that for a very long time he will not know, within a very wide margin, what return he may expect from his outlay.

His expenditure is large and computable. His income is uncertain. If he has a bottomless purse, he sleeps at night and smiles in the day-time. If his means are limited, he may smile by day but he lies awake at night, and does impossible sums on the black ceiling, and strains his brain in the effort to make 2 + 2 = 5, or worse still, 2 + x = 4; x being an absolutely unknown and possibly a minus quantity.

When the long-continued evil times forced on John Baird the painful anticipation of a pinch, he went straight to his printers and paper-makers, and showed them just how matters stood, and what the prospects were. His own personal character stood him in good stead and they gave him longer credit, drawing bills upon him instead of taking his monthly cheque. This relieved the pressure for a time and gave him a new lease of life. But the times continued bad. The advertisements, which should have bridged the chasm between outlay and income were still difficult to get, and he found it increasingly difficult to meet his obligations as they became due.

As long as he could, he kept his growing anxieties from his wife. She was working manfully. If the paper proved a success, he said, it would be chiefly due to her, and it was enough for one of them to bear the burden of financial worry, since sharing it would only make two anxious people where one was one too many. But she saw it in his face, where others saw only what they considered the signs of hard work

and perhaps an undue eagerness for success, and his quiet restlessness in the night told her its own tale. She cheered him with her own hopefulness. That and her own unremitting labour were all she had to give, and she gave them without stint.

As long as he had a little money of his own in the bank to fall back on, it was all right. When that was exhausted, each month was a toilsome ascent till the bills were paid, and no sooner were they paid than the next month's began to loom large before him, and so the strain was incessant. Some of the country agents began to take longer credit because of the general slackness of trade, and John Baird foresaw that sooner or later, unless things took a turn, the time would come when he would be unable to pay his bills and the little ship would sink under his feet.

And now, it seemed to him that that time had come. He could feel the planks giving beneath him, and his heart sickened suddenly.

Hope was dead in him. He saw his life narrow down again to the old round of sub-service for others' interests—a wage-earner, with all the risks and limitations attendant thereon—a servant again where he had been a master. He had no foolishly distorted views concerning the appreciation of honest service; but better far to be master, even though he were himself his only servant, than ruler of a hundred servants for another, and servitude is the more galling, no matter how light the chains, when one has once been free.

It was very bitter, after all their travail, and how desperately hard they had worked none would ever know;—early and late, with scarcely a break, and the denial of every luxury save that of work and their hopes of the future.

And now it must all go for naught. And all for the sake of a miserable few hundred pounds. For the paper had found a place for itself at once, and its circulation had been slowly and surely increasing from the very first number. With some money to advertise it, and an influx of advertisements to turn the weekly loss into a profit, it would be a property worth having. Without these it was a dead dog.

With his wife's consent he had raised money on his life policy. It soon went. He had approached two or three likely men, with a view to selling them a share in the paper for such a price as would give him funds enough to make what was left worth having. But the times were not good, and newspaper enterprises were at a discount, and he had met with no encouragement.

Cato had presumably done his best among the advertising people, and was still full of prophecies of good times coming. Baird would have given all the prophecies for half-a-dozen good-sized orders. He found himself doubtful at times of the genuineness of Bob's endeavours. Cato, he said to himself, was an elusive creature at best. He would try getting advertisements himself. But everywhere Bob had been before him. Everywhere they thought well of the paper, and were only waiting for things to take a turn to give it a trial. Everywhere they congratulated him on having so good a representative as Bob Cato. And Bob, when he heard of his friend's visits, only smiled, and was satisfied that he should have learnt for himself the actual state of matters.

John Baird stood with the unstruck match in his hand before he lit the gas, and thought of all these things in the dark, and the exceeding bitterness of it all came over him again like a wave and beat him

down. Unconsciously almost, he fell on his knees by the bedside, with no words, but in his heart a great passionate cry for help in this time of need, a cry which, if its vehemence could have been transformed into dynamic force, would have torn the roof off the house and gone pealing up to the sky with a sound that would have appalled the great city.

But there was no sound in the room save the hard breathing of the tortured man. If there are miracles in these days there are tortures too, tortures beside which rack and thumb-screw are comparatively trivial, since mental agony is greater far than any bodily pain.

He wrestled there with the close bitter past, and the bitter dark future. But he felt broken to the ground, and it was all summed up in that unuttered cry for "Help!" in the near black present. He wanted help now—now—now! A little help, such a very little help, from a hand that was full and never closed to the cry of the needy.

His head sank down against the bed-quilt and he knelt with no idea of the passage of time—with only one thought in him—that he was in bitter extremity and he wanted help.

The door opened softly and his wife came in. She caught her breath at the darkness and struck a hasty match.

She saw him kneeling there, and with a cry of alarm she ran to him, and fell on her knees by his side with her arm round his neck.

"Oh, my dear, what is it?" she cried, with fear in her heart, fear lest he should be ill—fear—ah, she scarce knew what! For she too was worn down with the long anxiety.

Her coming drew him back to earthly things. He

put his arm round her, and drew her to him, and she broke into weeping, tears of relief from her fears for him, and of relief to herself.

"I broke down," he whispered. "I was praying for help. Help me, Nell! Perhaps He will hear us together."

By their very natures these two held their deepest thoughts very sacred and rarely showed them even to one another. That each possessed them they knew, but utterance was contrary to their natures. It is often so. And it is at once natural and unnatural. Natural, surely, that the holy of holies should be hidden from sight and not profaned with speech. And yet, surely, unnatural that the sharer of one's heart and life should not be admitted to every corner of the kingdom. That the discussion of the highest matters, which are as much actual facts as bread and butter, and of infinitely more importance, should so often be suppressed by feelings of shy reserve, and by fears of misconception and the universal dread of the smirch of hypocrisy, is surely one of the strange facts of life. We take it for granted—except, of course, where it is obviously out of the question—that others besides ourselves have these higher thoughts and deeper springs of life, but we do not talk about them.

But prayer is sometimes its own answer. As John Baird knelt there, with his arm round his wife and her arm tight round his neck, he knew that the loss of his paper, and the breaking down of his life's hopes, were not the greatest possible losses he could suffer. That tremulous little frame inside his arm, and the faithful, gracious heart that beat in it, made worldly loss and the crumbling of earthly hopes seem suddenly small and insignificant.

And she? The wreckage of their hopes seemed less than nothing to her since he was still himself and hers. For as she stepped into the dark room, and saw and heard nothing, and then as she saw him kneeling there, a great pang of fear had sent her heart into her throat.

They were still kneeling in the close communion of silence, when they heard rapid footsteps on the stairs below and a knock on the office door.

Mrs. Baird kissed him softly, and said, "I will go," and rose and left the room.

When she got downstairs Bob Cato was sitting in the chair before the fire, with a big cigar in his mouth and a radiant flower in his coat, his shiny hat and new tan gloves lay on the counter, and there was a rakish air all over him.

There was a smile on his face as usual, and a twinkle in his eye.

"Why, Bob!" said Mrs. Baird. "Where have you sprung from? John was just telling me you were in Paris, dissipating."

"Ah!—libellous, but scarcely actionable. Where is he? I want to talk to him."

"Have you got something for us?" she asked anxiously.

"Fetch the master, if he's not in bed, and I'll tell you."

Cato's quick glance swept Baird's face, as he came in and greeted him soberly with, "Well, Bob, what brings you here at this time of night? Something good?"

"Something so good that I couldn't rest till I'd passed it on to you. You remember I told you of a man I hoped to get on for a ripping good order——"

"I have heard of that man several times—and under several names——"

"You old Doubting Thomas! You don't deserve me to lose my beauty sleep for you in this fashion. I've got him, my boy! Got him as tight as a gaffed salmon and no wriggling out. Page and half a page alternate weeks—six months order——"

"Where's the order?" asked Baird.

"Thomas! Thomas!" cried Cato, with a shout of laughter.

"It's almost too good to be true," said Mrs. Baird, tremulously. "It *is* true, Bob? You're not——"

"No, I'm not, and you know I wouldn't," said Bob. "But that's not all. Here, I'll talk to you, Mrs. Baird. You don't look at me as though I were a penny balloon, as that distraught worser half of yours does. I insisted on cash down. He's a comparatively new man and a good deal of a fool. I'm to get the order and £200 to-morrow! How's that?"

"Oh, Bob!" cried Mrs. Baird, and looked at her husband, and he looked back at her, and it seemed to the observant Cato that there was something strange about both their eyes.

"Well?" he said joyously. "Will it do?"

But Baird's head was in his hand and Mrs. Baird was sobbing visibly.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said the exuberant Bob. "I'm sorry——"

"Do you know what we were doing when you came in, Bob?" said Baird, very quietly.

"Kissing one another from the looks of you," said Bob jovially.

"We were on our knees upstairs breaking our hearts over the idea of having to shut up shop. And now——"

"Then I'm d— er— hanged glad I came in," said Bob, and jumped up and gave each of their hands a hasty wring and fled.

Baird drew his trembling little wife into his arms and then he broke down.

Don't tell me that miracles are out of date. Though perhaps it is not often they are so visibly apparent as this one was. And, for a heavenly messenger, surely Bob Cato, with his new tan kids, and his button-hole, and his big cigar, and his quite unnecessary expletives, was about as unlikely a specimen as could have been chosen. But this thing happened, and happened very much as I have told it.

And there was still more to come.

While John and Ellen Baird were wrestling with misfortune upstairs there in the dark, the dawn was breaking for them, and the black clouds were turning themselves slowly to show their silver linings.

Cato came round in the morning with the signed order from his "Pet Fool," as he affectionately called his new advertiser, and with ten crisp twenty-pound bank notes.

"Wanted to bluff me with a crossed cheque," he said, "but I gave him a cigar and made him alter the cheque and send his own clerk to cash it. I knew old Thomas there," with a twinkling nod at Baird, "would have had no rest till he knew that cheque had passed the clearing-house. Here's the copy. I'll call at Grimple's as I pass and give them directions as to setting. P.F. is pleased to consider that I know something about such matters. I've an idea things are going to mend, do you know. I can feel it in the air," and off he went.

After banking that precious £200, Baird stopped in that morning to finish off his accounts. He was just about through when a knock came on the door, and the Brothers Chubb entered, their rosy little faces puckered up with smiles, and their little eyes glancing round like robins' on a strange window-sill,

"How are you, Mrs. B-Baird?" said Christopher, as they both shot out their hands to her. "N-Not seen you for ages."

"I've grown a good deal since we met. But I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Chubb. Why don't you come in and have a cup of tea sometimes?"

"B-Been too busy to d-drink tea. Running teams of princes and dukes. Needed whisky. T-Takes us all our time to keep 'em straight. We've come on business. C-Can you give us five minutes, John?" to Baird, who was chatting with Brother Eb.

"Fifty, if you want them. Sit down and fire away."

"How's the p-paper going?"

"Going well, but ads. still come slowly. Had a slice of good fortune this morning. Cato brought us a £200 order and the cash for it."

"Good b-boy, Bob! Th-Thought he was off on a skite—P-Paris, or M-Monte Carlo, or some other c-congenial place."

"Well, he's turned up again all right, and very much right side up. A couple more pages and we turn the corner."

"Circulation increasing?"

"It's gone up slowly from the third number. With a little advertising I believe I could make it jump, but——"

"Th-That's it," said Chris. "N-Never met a man that didn't think well of it. Only wants to be better known. S-Some of 'em—in the trade, I mean—s-say it's too good for the money. But you know best about that. Now, Eb, you talk a bit. I'm p-p-pumped."

"We were wondering, John, if you'd be willing to let us have a small share in the concern. You see we make a fair income, but Chris there has no idea of saving. Never could keep a penny in his pocket since

I was a baby. What he does with the money *I* don't know, and when I try to find out he bullies me frightfully"—and Christopher's smiling face was a sight for gods and men.—"So it seemed to us if we could have something to put some of it into, why, you see it would be there, and we'd know it was there, and it would be a solid satisfaction. We've talked over various things, and we believe the *Round Table* will prove a good property. And we want to catch it on the hop before it gets too big. Don't make any mistake. We don't want to run any dukes or duchesses into it. Want nothing to do with it but get hold of a share of it as a provision for our old age. Gad! I dream of the workhouse every night of my life, and it's making me grow old before my time, and I'm losing flesh——"

"C-Can stand it," said Chris, with a delighted gurgle. "Th-Think better if you're thinner!"

"Well, there it is, John. We've faith in the paper, and in you and Mrs. Baird, and we think if we get it now, if you're willing, maybe it'll be a good thing for us in the end. Chris there wants to go down into Kent to find a cottage with a garden, on the strength of it, and grow pumpkins——"

"And h-he was up at Leadenhall Market looking at C-Cochin China hens yesterday," bubbled Chris.

"Well, I like to look at 'em and it don't do 'em any harm. You wait till you taste my eggs warm from the nest."

"S-Sooner have spring chicken and p-peas."

"Not my chickens. I ain't going to kill 'em. They'll be beauties, too good for any man to eat."

"S-swop you my peas for y-your chickens," and so they prattled on, while Baird, after a glance at his wife, thought rapidly.

It meant deliverance from all the anxieties that had been wearing them both to the ground, and it meant success to the paper.

"What's put you two up to this?" he asked.

"J-Just what he's been telling you," said Chris. "We're booming just now. F-Four serials running—regular slashers—making thirty pounds a week—and Eb there, he lets it dribble away, spite of all I can do. And we mayn't b-boom for ever. The f-fount may run dry, you know, and we w-want to make provision. W-What'll you take for say a fifth share?"

"You'd better see the books before we decide that," said Baird.

"Sooner have your word, John. B-Books always give me a headache, and f-f-figures were an invention of the d-devil. M-My idea of future punishment is d-doing p-perpetual sums that never c-come right, and a b-beautiful garden just outside the bars where I can't get at it."

"Circulation is sound and increasing," said Baird. "Ads. are, I think, going to improve. Some money spent on advertising will bring advertisements in. What do you say to £400 for one-fifth share?"

"We say y-yes!" said Chris. "And w-we'll consider it one of the b-best deals in our lives. W-Will you let us give you £200 this week and £100 each month for the next two months?"

"That will do perfectly well. We'll make things jump now," and he jumped up himself, with new light in his face, new strength tingling through every vein.

"I s-shall go down into K-Kent to-morrow," said Brother Chris, with much determination.

"I wonder if those Cochin Chinas are sold yet?" said Brother Eb.

CHAPTER XXI

A PULLER OF STRINGS

It was not till some considerable time afterwards that the Bairds came to know how these things came about. Enough for them at the moment that the troubles that had seemed like to crush them were past and over, and that Hope once more shone in the shabby little office.

When George Barty strode away to meet Mary Lindsay that night, the faces of his friends went with him and filled him with uneasiness. His observant eyes had not failed to detect the trouble beneath their pleasant welcome. He could guess the cause. The question was how to help.

"What's the matter?" asked Mary, as soon as she saw him.

He told her. "I'd give anything to help them," he said, "but I expect the only thing they need is money to keep the paper going, and the little I have would be no use."

"Can't you find anybody that could help?"

"I've been racking my brains ever since I left them, and I can't think of anybody."

She saw he was in no mood for talking, and they walked home almost in silence.

They found Joan in a state of sparkling excitement over Niel Felston. A new element had been introduced into her life, and she was delighting in it.

Felston had evidently been making good use of his time. He had made half-a-score of rough preliminary sketches of her, trying, as he explained, to find out which

was her real self, "She has as many expressions as a kaleidoscope," he said, "and she is never two minutes the same. I expect I'll have to make about a hundred and fifty before I've really got her. But I'll peg away at it if it takes the rest of my natural life. And once I've got her just right—then, you'll see something."

They were delighted with the sketches, and still more with the change in Felston himself. The artist was all alive in him and on its mettle. All that was best in him had come to the top once more.

"That's all right," said George to himself. "Joan will do wonders for him, and he'll be an immense treat to her. I'm uncommonly glad he came."

After dinner he went out to the Quills Club, to learn the latest news and scandals of the publishing world.

It was in his mind, if he saw the Chubbs, to sound them as to the Bairds and their affairs, and to learn if they could suggest any means of being of service to them.

Neither of the cheerful little brothers was there, however, and he had to content himself with one or other of the men whose acquaintance he had made, and hearing their bits of news, and listening to their growls. There was no one there who could be of any use to his friends, and he began to think of going, when the door opened and Bob Cato came airily in, and his appearance was greeted with a shout by the lighter spirits.

"Well, Bob, out again?" cried one.

"Fourteen days it must have been," from another.

"We'd have managed the forty shillings among us if you'd come to us, old man."

"Seems to have suited him. Looks as fresh as his button-hole."

"Do they let you wear gloves, Bob?" asked another anxiously.

Cato nodded smilingly round, and before he could

answer, the waiter from below appeared in the doorway, with a tray full of jingling glasses and a couple of big bottles of champagne, which evoked another shout from the unruly ones.

Without a word Cato twitched up his cuffs, twisted off the wires with a practised hand, and sent the corks flying. He filled the glasses with tender care, waved his hand round the assembly, for the waiter to distribute them, and when all were supplied, rose smilingly, and said :

" Gentlemen, a toast ! I give you Mr. Robert Cato ! Congratulations on his safe return ! Success to his future labours ! "

When they had settled down again, they gathered round while he spun them fanciful descriptions of his doings. George, hidden away in a corner, listened with amusement.

" And did you succeed in breaking the bank, Bob ? " asked one.

" Well, you see, I'm unfortunately possessed of an unusually tender nature. Some of you may have noticed it "—expressions of dissent from his hearers—" I couldn't bear to think of quite breaking it all up. I went a certain length, brought it to its knees, so to speak, but when I saw it shivering in its shoes, I let up and went away so as to give it a chance. Besides, a good angel appeared to me and solemnly assured me that, if I went on, the bank would mop me all over the place and leave nothing but fragments to be sent home——"

" Why, didn't you bring her home with you, Bob ? You'd find her useful here too."

" Ah, why ? " and Master Bob assumed a look of tender and melancholy reminiscence. "So I went on into Italy—Rome, Naples, and so on—and up through the lakes—Como, and that kind of thing—into Switzerland, and so

home again, and I'm bound to say I'm very glad to see you all looking so well and happy. How's business ?"

But they had nothing good to say of business, and presently they split up into their own groups again.

It was only then that Cato caught sight of George in his corner. He came over at once with a twinkle in his eye and sat down beside him.

"And so the good angel was listening to it all ?" he said softly.

"You took my advice then ? I was a bit anxious when I saw nothing of you next day. I looked all round the gardens in a friendly way, to see if you were lying about under a bush anywhere."

"Awfully good of you. I was in the train for Genoa. My good luck was a surprise to me, and I'd never any intention of going back when I got up from that table. I'd an idea that I'd lose it all if I went one step further."

"Quite likely. Have you seen the Bairds yet ?"

"Only got back this afternoon. Seen no one except my landlady, who welcomed me with open arms which I avoided. She is one hundred and fifty and very fat. She was thin and emaciated when I first went to her."

"Can you think of any way of helping the Bairds, Cato ?"

"Why, what's wrong with them ?" he asked quickly.

"Well, I've perhaps no right to say anything. But I was there this afternoon, helping Mrs. Baird with her proofs, and I could feel trouble in the air. They keep cheerful faces before me, but I'm inclined to think things are getting awkward for them. Now don't you know anyone who could help ? They're such thoroughly nice folks that it seems a shame

they should have to go under just for the sake of a little help."

"Nicest folks I know," said Bob thoughtfully, "and they deserve better luck than they've had. And things are going to brighten, I know. I'll see what I can do, Barty. Don't go talking of it to other folks."

"You're the only man I've spoken to, and I spoke to you because I knew you were friendly with them."

Cato seemed more than usually thoughtful after that. He sat smoking in silence for a time, and then got up and nodded to George, and went out.

In spite of his last words, and very doubtful if anything would come of his efforts, George determined still to speak to the Chubbs if he could run across them. He had never learned their address, so was dependent on chance for finding them.

With that end in view he climbed the Quills stairs again next day about noon, and found himself in luck. Brother Christopher was sitting at the table nearest to the back window, nibbling the top of a pen-holder, with a gloomy face.

It brightened up, however, at sight of George.

"Why, what's up, Mr. Chubb? And where is Brother Eb? Nothing wrong with him, I hope?"

"Yes, there is. He's off the r-rails."

"How's that?"

"Well," he said, getting out his pipe and filling it slowly. "It's like this. We've got f-four stories running, all chock full of p-princes and princesses, and dukes and duchesses, and so on, nothing under a c-countess, and we've got a bit tangled up among 'em all. Eb says P-Prince Prax is engaged to Princess Zephyre, and I know he isn't. She's got g-golden hair [illegible] he's fair himself, and it stands to reason it

isn't her he's engaged to. . . . Of course, now I come to think of it," he said, with a chagrined protrusion of the little round chin, "she's got eyes like b-black velvet. That might make a difference. P-Prax's eyes are blue. G-Gad! I'm not sure but he's right after all, and we almost got to words about it! He's g-gone out to get some back copies to look it up. If I'm wrong I'll never hear the end of it. Well, well!"—with a doleful shake of the head—"I did th-think I could run a d-dozen royalties without getting 'em mixed. It was the g-golden hair set me wrong. I forgot about her eyes. Wonder if I could alter 'em before Eb g-gets back," and he began a hasty scramble through a mass of manuscript.

"No—I g-guess it's in the last number and it's printed. W-What are you laughing at?"

"Your royalties seem troublesome."

"They're the v-very mischief, but I thought I had 'em all in hand. Here's Eb now. G-Going to j-jump on me like a load of bricks. I can see it in his eye. It's all right, Eb Chubb! Y-You don't need to look like a warhorse snorting for the fray. Princess Zephyre it was. I forgot her b-black eyes."

"You cave?" said Brother Eb, waving his bundle of papers threateningly.

"Oh, I c-cave. Smoke a p-pipe and speak to Mr. Barty!"

"He's getting on in years," said Eb to George, as he sat down and filled his pipe, "and four screamers at once are a bit of a strain. If he hadn't me to keep him in order I'll be hanged if I know what would become of him. And what have you been doing with yourself all this time, Mr. Barty? Began to think you'd given the Quills the cold go-by."

"I had to go abroad to nurse a sick friend. Have either of you seen John Baird lately?"

"S-Saw him about ten days ago," said Christopher. "Th-Thought he was looking tired. Anything wrong with him?"

"Well, I don't know"—and he told them his fears about their friends. "I was wondering if you could suggest anything, or if you knew of anyone who could be of any use in the matter. If I had any money I'd put it behind John Baird sooner than any man I know. Trouble is I haven't any worth speaking of."

Brother Chris nodded. "John B-Baird's about the best man I know. S-S-Straight as a die and works like a d-dynamo."

"They've had it tough, I'll be bound," said Eb. "Could hardly have chosen a worse time for starting a paper if he'd picked it himself. And it's as good a little sheet as is printed. How's it going, do you know, Mr. Party?"

"Circulation's good, I know, and going up all the time. It's the ads. that have been the trouble."

"Ads. are a nuisance!" said Christopher, "And C-Cato's been away, too, hasn't he?"

"Yes, I ran across him at Monte Carlo."

"B-Breaking the B-bank, I suppose."

"Getting on that way. But he took pity on it and stopped before it cleaned him out."

"If B-Baird would sell a sh-share in the paper, I've an idea I know a m-man who would b-buy," and the elder brother looked across at the younger.

"You mean——?" began Eb.

"Y-Yes, that's the man. W-We'll just work off this stint, Eb, and then w-we'll g-go and see him."

"That's good of you," said George. "I'll cut away and leave you to untangle the princes and princesses."

"N-Nice boy!" said Brother Christopher, as George leaped down the stairs four at a time.

CHAPTER XXII

OPENING WAYS

WHEN George sped up the stairs, a day or two later, to remind the Bairds of their engagement for Sunday, he saw at once that some good thing had befallen them. The anxious strain was gone from their faces. They were themselves once more.

They had not forgotten and were coming in on Sunday. Then Mrs. Baird told him their good news and he rejoiced with them, saying no word which might lead them to imagine he had noticed their trouble or had had any hand in lightening it.

That visit of theirs was productive of several important results.

They fell in love with Joan, of course, and when, in the course of a pleasant talk with Mrs. Baird, she somewhat shyly stated how much she would like to do something for the paper, simply by way of occupation, Ellen Baird jumped at the idea, and at once set them all discussing a new department to be under Joan's control.

Mary Lindsay stuck up stoutly for a page of correspondence, and John Baird confessed that the only reason they hadn't had one was the time it required to do it properly, and which they had not had at their disposal.

"Properly done it would be a help to the paper, but it wants doing very well indeed."

"I believe I could do it," said Joan, corruscating at the idea.

"I'm sure you could," said Mrs. Baird. "You will enter into it with more feeling than we work-a-day people possibly could. I believe you'll make it the most-liked part of the paper."

"I'll do my very best if you'll let me try."

"You shall," said Mrs. Baird.

"How shall we start it? We must have a beginning, and we can't answer letters till we get them."

"We'll put in an announcement next week," said Mrs. Baird, "and meanwhile everyone here present will please send in some query to Miss Joan Barty not later than to-morrow night, for her to flesh her maiden pen upon. Don't ask silly questions now"—to George—"such as how to make your hair grow or not to grow. Ask something that will admit of an answer that will interest other people. If you'll deal with them, Joan dear, and send your work on to me, I'll go carefully over it for a time or two, till I see how you shape. And I'll tell you exactly what I think of it. I'm a terribly outspoken person when I've got a pencil over somebody else's work, as your brother knows."

"You are," said George meekly, "but it's all for our good, and the strokes of a friend are welcome."

John Baird and Mrs. Barty were having a quiet Scotch chat in a corner, and becoming very good friends. She was endeavouring, in her quiet way, to get an idea from him as to whether her boy was ever likely to do any good with his writing, which still seemed to her a somewhat reckless method of making a living. And Baird took pleasure in assuring her that George was shaping uncommonly well, and that if he had patience and perseverance enough there was no reason why he should not succeed.

"He seems to enjoy his work," said Mrs. Barty

quietly, "and I think he has plenty of perseverance. Patience comes later in life as a rule."

"He will need all he's got and all you can help him to," said Baird. "It is the terrible trial of waiting, waiting, waiting, that nips seventy-five per cent. of young writers in the bud. The ones who learn to wait patiently without losing heart are the ones who eventually succeed. It is a good thing, almost a necessary thing, to have some regular work at the same time. And that reminds me—Barty!" to George, who came across to them at once, "How would you like a post as regular assistant sub-editor for a time. It would widen your experience and give you many an eye-opener."

"If it would leave me any time for my own work I'd be delighted."

"Brinsley of the *Comet* was asking me the other day if I knew of any decent young fellow to help his sub, Foxley. I don't quite know how you'd get on with Foxley," and he looked thoughtfully at George, as though doubtful about giving his own opinion,—"but I've an idea you could hold your own all right."

"I've generally managed to. What's wrong with Foxley?"

"I don't say there's anything wrong with him. As a whole he doesn't altogether commend himself to me. Possibly it's only antipathy."

"Is he 'Souls of Fire' Foxley?'

"Same man. Read it?"

"Yes, I read it, because everybody else seemed reading it."

"Like it?"

"It struck me as showy, but rather shallow. What on earth has given it such a boom? I see they're advertising the fiftieth thousand."

"It appeals to a certain class of readers, and it has been very well engineered. Adhem and Pough are very clever people. They've got hold of a book that for some reason or other has hit a public taste, and they're running it for all it's worth and a good deal more. What the ultimate effect will be on Foxley it's hard to say. If there was genuine strength in the book, all right, but I cannot see it. One examines very critically into a success like that, to get at the why and the wherefore for one's own future use. I can see no adequate reason in the book itself why it should sell fifty thousand any more than half-a-dozen others I could name to you."

"I wish some one would boom me a bit."

"Worst thing that could happen to you, my boy. Just go on quietly, and put out the very best that is in you. It'll carry you farther in the long run. The men whose names are household words have all had to climb, and I suppose none but themselves know just how hard and long the climb may have been. The man who climbs a ladder has more to stand on than the man who goes up on a rocket or in a balloon. Foxley, I imagine, is a bit heady with his success, and probably doesn't attend to business as strictly as he should. But I can understand Brinsley not wanting to part with him at the moment. What do you say? Shall I see Brinsley and suggest your name?"

"I'll try it like a shot, if you'll be so good. I'd like to study Foxley anyhow."

"I've an idea he studies us all, you know," said Baird, with a quiet smile to Mrs. Barty, as George went back to the younger folks. "I was telling Nell the other day that he would be putting her into a book before long."

"He feels under very great obligations to you and Mrs. Baird, I know," said Mrs. Barty. "I don't think he would do anything you wouldn't like."

"No, I know he wouldn't. He's the kind of boy one trusts on sight. I think it's those deep eyes of his, with the smiles in the corners, that carry conviction."

So there was another seed sowed in that Sunday afternoon cup of tea. And there was still another.

Felston's sketches of Joan, finished and unfinished, were lying about her room, and in one corner stood the picture of the Shepherd. Mrs. Baird had stood looking at it for a very long time, with Joan in her chair beside her. They were still discussing it and the sketches, when Felston himself, who had been out for a stroll, came in, and Mrs. Baird asked him at once if he was sending his picture to the Academy.

"I really hadn't thought anything at all about it," he said. "Is there time?"

"Closing day is next Friday. Send it. I think it would get in. If it does it will certainly do you good."

"It's worth thinking of."

"Don't think. You've done that in the picture. Finish it and send it in," said Mrs. Baird energetically.

"All right! If you'll give me a full sitting tomorrow,"—looking at Joan—"and another the next day, I think I could manage it. I'm beginning to get a faint idea of what your face looks like sometimes. She's a most elusive young lady," he said to Mrs. Baird. "She has about as many changes of expression as there are minutes to the hour. As soon as I've caught one that I think is just what I want, it's gone and there is another still more so. Oh, it's trying, I can tell you. I think I shall buy a camera and snapshot

her for a couple of weeks on end and then blend all the results. That would be the way to fix her."

"You sketch almost as quickly as a camera. Here," she said, shooting her chair off to a corner and reaching for pencil and paper, "show Mrs. Baird. Sketch mother and Mr. Baird in the corner there!" And Felston, picking up a flat book for a slab, laughingly complied.

"Time me!" he said, and Joan pulled out her watch.

"Ready?" she cried. "Then go!"

His pencil flashed about the paper, and his eyes shot up under his brows as he glanced over it at his unconscious models. Joan watched him with eager interest, and Mrs. Baird saw the little picture grow under her eyes in the most marvellous fashion. Every stroke told and not one seemed wasted. Under Joan's inspiration he was on his mettle.

"How's that?" he said, with a final twirl of the pencil.

"Three minutes and forty-five seconds," said Joan. "Please let me see!"

"It is wonderful," said Mrs. Baird, holding the sketch down to her. "I never could draw a line, but I have the capacity of enjoyment. You have a very wonderful gift, Mr. Felston. You ought to go far."

At which saying Niel fell silent, thinking how very far he had gone and by what pitiful paths, and how nearly he had passed the line which can never be re-passed.

"Look here, John!" said Mrs. Baird, crossing over with the sketch in her hand. "What do you think of that? Three and a half minutes!"

"That strikes me as very remarkable," said Baird,

when he had examined the sketch. "Do you recognise yourself as the Duchess of Cheshire, Mrs. Barty? I'm inclined to think it flatters me somewhat."

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Baird. "You only say so to make me deny it. Now," she said, looking intently at him, "Does that suggest anything to you, my man?"

"Let me see?" he said, looking carefully at the sketch again. "Is it Queen Elizabeth and Walter Raleigh—or——?"

"No, it's the *Round Table* I'm thinking of."

"Ah,—Arthur, Guinevere,——"

"Don't be silly, John. I'm talking business."

"On the Sabbath? However——"

"See if you can't induce Mr. Felston to do some sketches for us every week. Work like that would give the paper a standing. It's impressively clever, even to people who know nothing about drawing."

Baird went over to Niel, who was sitting by Joan, and Mrs. Baird took his seat by Mrs. Barty and talked George to her.

"What do you say to doing us some sketches each week for the *Round Table*, Mr. Felston? I've been thinking of something of the kind for some time past, but I wanted something quite out of the general ruck. I think you can give it me."

"I'm willing," said Felston, and with a laugh to Joan, "I'm going to have my hands full, I can see."

"Blessed is the man that hath his hands full of work," said Baird. "That way lies happiness."

"Why, you could do a dozen in an hour," said Joan, sparkling.

"Ah!" smiled Niel. "What is your idea of subjects, Mr. Baird "

"I'll talk that over with my wife and then we'll have another chat."

So on the whole that was a somewhat remarkable week for several of our friends.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MAN WHO BOOMED

John Baird's recommendation was quite sufficient for Brinsley of the *Comet*, and within a fortnight George was beginning to get used to his assistant-sub-editorial chair in the tiny room off Foxley's.

The *Comet* was a flourishing paper. There were men of note in art and letters coming in and out constantly, and he kept his eyes and ears very wide open, and took great interest in his work and all that bore upon it.

Of Mr. Brinsley he did not at first see very much. He was in the inner sanctum off which the sub-editorial room opened, and his dealings, like George's, were chiefly with Mr. Charles James Foxley, the sub-editor.

Mr. Foxley was a person of importance at the moment, and was not unaware of the fact. George was somewhat disappointed with his personal appearance, just as he had been with his book. Cause and effect seemed to him out of proportion in both cases.

He was nothing to look at—short and rather stodgy, with a low forehead, which looked smaller than it really was by reason of a swath of black hair smoothed down over it, in an artistic ripple, which, to its owner's mind, bore a striking resemblance to a raven's wing. He was subject, however, to spasms of considerable energy, during which the rippled hair broke from its moorings and drooped still lower over his brow. At such times it gave him an appearance

of wild absorption which did not add to his good looks, and which was not always borne out by solid facts.

Just at this time he was carrying his head rather high, as was to be expected of a man whose last book had sold fifty thousand copies and was still selling. He greeted Brinsley's visitors, men of twice his own age and ten times his own standing, with a self-sufficiency, and an assumption of equal comradeship, which slightly surprised some of them, and—in conjunction with their surprise—afforded the quiet assistant-sub in his corner cupboard infinite amusement.

To his chief, Brinsley, Mr. Foxley had, since his success, shown reserves in the matter of deference which at once jarred and amused the elder man. Not that there was anything absolutely offensive in the sub-editor's manner. That, Brinsley would not have put up with. But there was a subtle slackening of the cords, a new disposition to take to avizandum, and even gently to argue, the chief's orders, and to suggest improvements on them, the same assumption of something approaching equality which he displayed to the visitors in the outer office.

Brinsley had never in his life written a book which had sold fifty thousand copies. But the books he had written were standards, and he had a sage notion that, before many months were over, "Souls of Fire" would be mouldering like dead ashes, among its fellows in the penny boxes in Holywell Street.

So the elder suffered the younger for the time being, not doubting that time would teach him many things, and might even buffet him rudely in ways he wotted not of. Brinsley was not, perhaps, exactly the ideal editor, for the ideal editor edits and does not write. He possessed, however, many high qualifications for

the post—good sound judgment, considerable foresight, and a mind entirely free from professional jealousies, or the bias of personal advantage. His only jealousy was for the well-being of his paper, and his only bias in favour of good sound work. In business—he used to tell the many aspirants who called on him with letters of introduction, as keys to his goodwill—he knew neither friends nor foes.

The man he wanted was the man who could give him what *he* wanted. He courted no man's favour, and feared no man's dislike.

But his position as a writer entailed its own penalties. He was much sought after by men of light and leading, and the day and night were never long enough for all he had to do in them. This necessitated the delegation of much of his routine work, and delegation, without strict supervision, opens the door to abuses.

George Barty was greatly taken with what he saw and heard of Mr. Brinsley but so far their orbits had barely touched. He always looked back with enjoyment to their first interview.

He had gone armed with a letter from John Baird, which he handed over to a commissionaire in the outer office. In due time he was shown into the editor's room, and he and Richard Brinsley examined one another. He liked Brinsley's looks. Brinsley liked his. Brinsley was a big, burly fellow, with a massive head, and a fine open face, and a hearty voice. His life was so full of the things that mattered, that his personal appearance got but scant attention either from himself or his friends. He clothed himself as a matter of necessity, but wasted little thought in the process. He was wedded to his work, and had never had time to fall in love with any less exacting a mistress, and he showed it in his neckties and collars

and cuffs, and the style of coat he wore. But you never thought about his clothes when you were with him, or even afterwards. The leonine head, and the blazing blue eyes, and the hearty ring of the big voice —these were the things by which you remembered him.

"Sit down, Mr. Barty," he said. "John Baird says you are to be my assistant-sub-editor," at which George's eyes wrinkled into a smile.

"I didn't know he had gone that length," he said.

Brinsley tossed over Baird's note to him.

"DEAR BRINSLEY,

"Here is the man you want.

JOHN BAIRD."

"That is very like him," said George. "He goes right to the point and wastes no time. If you think I can fill the post I shall be very glad to have it, Mr. Brinsley."

"Had any experience?"

"Only on the *Round Table*, assisting Mrs. Baird with proofs and so on."

"I have a very great respect for Mrs. Baird, and Baird himself is a very old friend of mine. If you can do her work you ought to be able for mine. Known them long?"

"Only a few months, but I feel as if I knew them very well."

Brinsley nodded. "You write yourself, I suppose?"

"That is my aim in life, but it is slow going at first, and I want to be paying my way meanwhile."

"Yes, it's a long road. That is"—possibly with a thought of his sub-editor in the next room—"if you foot it solidly and learn all it can teach you."

"I have a great desire to learn, and I would do my very best if you care to try me."

"Yes. I will try you. A word from John Baird goes a long way, and, as you say, he doesn't waste them. You will be under Mr. Foxley, my sub-editor, and I have no doubt he will keep you fully employed,"—George thought he caught the suspicion of a twinkle in the steadfast eyes.—"The salary is fifty shillings a week. When could you start?"

"Now, if you wish."

"Come this way then. I shall not see very much of you at first probably. Possibly more later. I hope you will find—make yourself comfortable." He opened a side door and went in front of George into the next room.

"Foxley!" he said. "Here is our new assistant, Mr. George Barty. Barty, this is Mr. Foxley, our sub-editor. Hope you will get on well together," and with a friendly nod he went back into his own room.

"Going to start right away, Mr. Barty? That's good business," said Foxley, when their greetings were over. "Things are piling up a bit since Jossett left, and he wasn't much good when he was here. Had to do everything myself and correct all his mistakes too. Hope you're not built that way?"

"No, I don't think I'm built that way. Show me what's to be done, and how you want it done, and I'll do it."

"That's the ticket. You can do proofs, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, I can do proofs."

"Here you are then. Run over those, and see that nothing slips through. The old man has fits if a comma's tail's crooked. Correct in red and make 'em as big as a poster. Lay it down as an axiom that our comps. are all drivelling idiots and three parts blind, and act accordingly. See?"

"I see. I'll hit them right in the eye."

"Right!" and silence settled on the office for the space of a couple of hours. It was press day and they had no time to lose.

Now and again, Foxley passed into the editor's room to consult him on some point. And he came over to George every ten minutes, ran his eye over the slips which had passed under his hand, and then bundled them with his own through a trap-door into the outer office.

"Now," he said, when the last proof had vanished through the trap, "we'll go and have some tea and a smoke while they're making up into pages, and then we'll just run round and see they're all right, and that ends it for this week."

He led the way to an Aerated Bread shop up the Strand, where he was evidently looked upon as a distinguished guest. The waitresses ruffled their meagre plumes as he passed in, and one and another murmured in the ear of the young man she was serving, who thereupon turned round and eyed Foxley with interest. He nodded condescendingly to the girls as he passed down to the smoking-room, and the one whose table he selected there felt duly honoured.

"They do give you decent tea here," he said, "and it's mighty refreshing after a whole day on proofs. I'd like you to dine with me one night at my club, Barty. Since we're fellow bondslaves the sooner we get to know one another the better."

George said he would be very happy.

"Well, now, what night will suit you? I'm engaged for Friday and Saturday. What say to Monday?"

"That will suit me all right."

"Monday night, then. Junior Grosvenor, Langham

Place, seven o'clock. You write a bit yourself, I suppose ? "

"Well, I'm putting out sprouts that way. Hope to do something sometime. You've made a big hit."

"Yes. Read it ? What think of it ? "

"It goes with a rush——"

"And has gone with a rush, which is better still. Those old sharks Adhem and Pough get most of the plunder though. They're just raking in the shekels. That's why it pays them to push it so. Never you get discouraged, my boy, if your stuff goes round and round and keeps coming back. That book of mine was refused by a good dozen houses before Adhem gobbled it. Guess some of 'em are biting their nails about it now."

"You'll do better over the next."

"You bet! C.J.F.'ll screw 'em if he knows anything about himself. Then he'll drop the drudgery and make room for Mr. George Barty, and turn on the tap for all he's worth. It's slow work enough till you get astride of a boom. Then the sun shines and you make hay. What the public—my public at all events—wants now is plot, good plot, strong plot, and plenty of it. Character as well, of course, but plot's the thing. A man in my position, with a really good plot in his head, has got a little fortune in his pocket. I'm thinking of dramatising "Souls." That's where the money comes," and he lost himself in meditation on the profitableness of the stage.

"Novelties in the way of plots are not over easy to get hold of," ventured George.

"Easy ? They're the very deuce to get hold of. Everything's been done, and done, and done to death, and then been resurrected and hashed up and done over again, and the more you think, the nearer you come to addling your brains over 'em."

"Bad look out."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about it. It'll come all right when it's ready. Good thing on the whole, perhaps, that novelties are hard to find, or everybody would be booming. I'm busy at present on a dozen shorts for Charley Potts, the agent. He's guaranteed me a thumping big price, so it's all right. Don't care for shorts as a rule. But at the price I'm getting they pay well enough. I only wish I'd stuck out for my own terms on 'Souls,'" he said savagely. "I'd have been rolling in money."

"Perhaps they wouldn't have pushed it to the same extent," said George consolingly.

"Don't suppose they would. Oh, they're business-like people, I can tell you. Still, they've made me a good enough offer for the next one. So perhaps I shouldn't complain."

"You've been uncommonly fortunate, I should say."

"I suppose I have. But there's good stuff in 'Souls' too. The thing now is to keep it up."

They went back to the office, and then through into the printing works behind, and George learned, by observation, some of the mysteries of making up a paper for the machines. To him it was new and full of extreme interest. To Foxley it was, of course, a nuisance and part of the necessary weekly drudgery.

When George got home, about eleven o'clock that night, he felt as if he had had a pretty full day, and they were all waiting up to learn what had become of him.

Such was his first meeting with Richard Brinsley of the *Comet*, and Charles James Foxley, sub-editor thereof; two men who occupied a prominent place in his life for some time to come, and with one of whom he had a singular and most unpleasant experience.

CHAPTER XXIV

LYNDALL'S LOTION

" ROBERT, my boy," said Bob Cato to himself, as he sat at the Gaiety bar and sipped a late whisky and soda, that night when he dragged the hearts of John and Ellen Baird out of the mire. " You've made a pretty considerable ass of yourself, if I'm not much mistaken."

" Hello, Bob, my boy! Been backing a wrong un?" and a big hand descended heartily on his back.

" That's about it, Major," said Bob meekly. " What'll you take?"

" Same. Ah! you should leave 'em alone, my boy. Leave 'em severely alone."

" Which, the whiskies or—— ?"

" No, the wrong uns."

" If one only knew!"

" Follow my lead, me boy, and you'll not go far wrong. Now, what have you got on for the Derby?"

" Nothing. I'm off. Good night, old man. Got some business to do before I go to bed to-night, and it's getting late," and he walked out.

He took a 'bus down Fleet Street, dropped off at Ludgate Circus, and walked quickly up Farringdon Street. He turned into one of the tall buildings opposite the station, and climbed many stairs till he came to the top of the house. He thumped on a door, and it was opened by a young man of about his own age, who looked tired and somewhat dishevelled.

"Why, Cato? I heard you were coining money at Monte Carlo."

"Done coining for the moment," said Cato, as they went inside. "I've come to talk that matter over with you again. How do things stand now?"

"Thought you'd dropped it," said the other, as he lit his pipe.

"So I had. But maybe I'll pick it up again. How's it doing?"

"Much the same. It's just in this position that a few hundreds spent on advertising would turn the scale. We're doing about £40 a week. Get it up to £100 and there's a little fortune in it. Every penny I make I put into ads., as you know. And I live like a church cat. But I can't raise those few hundreds to save my life."

"Let's have a look at the sales book," said Cato.

He turned the pages over and made some notes, and then said slowly:

"Well now, see here, Lyndall! I've faith in the stuff, and I know you, and I'm inclined to take a finger in the pie. You offered me one-third share for £400 and you leave the advertising to me."

"That's it," said the other, sparkling into life. "Don't know anyone who knows more about it than you do."

"Chuck me some paper and I'll draw out an agreement. And then I'll work over those ads. and circulars of yours. They might be better," and Cato lit a fresh cigar and set to work.

When Bob walked back down Farringdon Street, a couple of hours later, it was not simply as Bob Cato the advertising man, but as Mr. Robert Cato, part proprietor of Lyndall's Lotion, a specific for burns, bruises, breakages, etc., etc., etc.; a certain cure for

lung diseases, gout, rheumatism, etc., etc., etc.; invaluable for sprains, varicose veins, and multitudinous other ills of the flesh. There was in fact—according to the claims which its new part-proprietor had just been setting forth in his very brainiest style—hardly a thing that could happen to you, from a railway accident to a slump in stocks, for which Lyndall's Lotion was not a perfect specific or a partial palliative.

That week, and for many weeks afterwards, Lyndall's Lotion had a big advertisement in the *Round Table*, and Mrs. Baird, feeling as if she were shamefully examining the teeth of a gift horse, looked at it somewhat dubiously, and said:

"I hope it's all right, Bob, and won't do us any harm. I wouldn't like to have folks writing in and saying it's a swindle."

"No swindle about it. I've tried the stuff myself, both inside and out, and it's ripping good stuff and will cure anything—well, almost anything. It cured that rib I got sprung at the Turkish bath. It's cured me of neuralgia. It took away a beastly cough I had, in a single night——"

"You couldn't speak better of it if it belonged to you, Bob," said Baird.

"Don't I wish it did?" said Cato. "But I drew up that advertisement anyway, so I feel as if I had a finger in the pie, you see."

And, to make a short story of that matter, Lyndall's Lotion caught on. Cato spread his remaining £200 judiciously, utilised every available pound that came in from sales, and the best of his brains, and before twelve months were up, Lyndall was coining money. If, at the end of that time, you had offered Master Cato £2,000 for his share in the business, he

would have smiled very pleasantly at you, and winked very slowly, and almost imperceptibly, with his left eye.

Sometimes, not always—from a pecuniary point of view at all events—generosity pays even in this world

CHAPTER XXV

CLOUDS AND CLEARANCES

No. 21 Wynyatt Square was the abode of much peace and contentment, and of strenuous endeavour in many directions. There were several people there very much happier than ever they had been in their lives before, and some perhaps happier than they would ever be again.

Niel Felston found there more than he was as yet conscious of, though the knowledge was growing in him by degrees. His picture had reached the Academy just in time. It did not come back. It was well hung, excited much notice, and was sold at the private view.

He had at first been inclined to keep it, but before he had finished working in Joan's head and face on the shoulders of the Angel of the Narrow Way, the idea of his great Aranea picture had begun to take dim shape within him. And with that in his mind, when a surprisingly good offer came for the other, he let it go.

Joan's room became the centre of his life. All that she herself was to him we only know by his own life. The room itself, with its glass extension, made an admirable painting-room, and Joan desired no better than that he should use it. It was a new beam of many colours in her life, and she rejoiced in it greatly. While he worked busily with pencil and brush, they talked of anything and everything under the sun—almost. There were things in his past he would fain have forgotten now. But at all events they were past

and done with. Even their ghosts were not likely ever to rise and trouble him. He stamped them into their graves and built a new reputation on them.

Bright days for Joan. She was by nature surely the sweetest and happiest, and one of the fairest souls God ever sent to be a blessing to her kind. She may have had her darker days, when the gentle wheels ran still more softly, and the black spread was over her chair as a warning to all and sundry, but the black spread was very rarely seen after Felston came. If she made a man of him, he made her a very happy girl, and brightened and widened still more a life that had never known narrowness, though its confines were of necessity sadly limited.

With wealth in his pocket, Niel the Improvident must spend. After the picture was paid for, twice a week at least during the sunny weather, he hired a softly-hung, rubber-tyred coupé, at what expense he only knows. It was an extremely well-appointed turn-out and did him very great credit. When the little groom in buttons and very shiny hat drove it up to the door of No. 21, Niel and George between them carried Joan down to it, and arranged her like a picturesque young princess, and then he drove her far and wide to see the sights she had never seen before.

It would be hard to say which of them enjoyed these excursions most. If they gave Joan pleasure such as she had hardly dreamt of, the sight of her enjoyment stirred his heart to its heights and depths. She was to him the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. When this new radiance shone in her face, and the great brown eyes glowed and sparkled as he had never seen them before, he could hardly drive for looking at her, and many times he desired greatly to stop and paint her on the spot.

Joan's visible horizon was enlarged a thousand-fold that summer, and Niel Felston, stamping the past beneath his feet, said to himself that life was very good.

Then, too, Joan had her page of correspondence in the *Round Table*, which gave her much business each week. Here, indeed, was a mighty widening of her outlook, and she rejoiced in it greatly. Never was so sympathetic and enlightened a correspondent. To her readers she became an omniscient Minor Providence, dealing with their little mundane affairs in a spirit of common-sense wisdom and the most delicate understanding and kindliness. For her omniscience she tapped all springs, from the British Museum per Niel Felston, to Jack Fairfax and the boys from Bart's. For the other things her own sweet heart was responsible, and Mrs. Barty's motherly wisdom enjoyed the constant levies that were made upon it, and was always at her disposal.

Mrs. Baird said it was the kernel of the paper, and only laughed at her husband when he said that she, and everybody else who read it, liked it chiefly because it made them feel as if they were reading other people's letters. He had to acknowledge, however, that he read and enjoyed it himself, so his strictures bore no weight.

Joan's abundant energy must naturally, under the circumstances, attempt painting. But there she had no success, and her only gain was a higher appreciation of other people's powers through the failure of her own.

Mary Lindsay, however, stepped delightedly into the vacated position, and brought with her so natural a gift, that Felston found it pleasant to help her, and prophesied great things for his pupil.

Therein, Master George, stupid fellow, found reason

for heart-burning, and had a long-continued fit of the glooms, which caused his mother much anxiety, under the fear that he was working himself to death or sickening for some illness. Their common interest in brush and palette brought Mary and Niel much together, and induced a good fellowship between them which might well be mistaken for something more; which, indeed, as seen through George's temporarily-green glasses, was tending rapidly and inevitably to something very much more indeed.

Felston had not the slightest idea of his friend's feelings in the matter, and Mary, who perceived them plainly enough, could not very well explain to George in so many words that she loved him and him only. For he had religiously refrained from any actual word of love-making, till such time as he could offer her, along with a full heart, something more than an empty hand. Moreover, she was rejoicing greatly in this expansion of her powers through adequate and much longed-for cultivation, as the possessor of power always must. And she was just a little sore that her friend could not trust her as wholly as she could trust him. But trust comes more naturally to woman than to man, since woman is, by the grace of God, more heart than head. And therein I would not be mistakenly taken to imply that woman's wisdom is inferior to man's. There is a natural wisdom of the heart which goes straighter to the mark than any wisdom of the head. It may not always be perfectly logical, or capable of demonstration in advance, but it is often sticking in the bull's-eye while man's logical brain is proving, beyond all possibility of doubt, that an arrow feathered in that particular way cannot possibly fly at all.

So these two were temporarily at cross-purposes.

But it all worked out right before the catastrophe came, and indeed it was these two and their love for one another that brought it all about.

Mary retained her position in the Burney household with its unusually good pay, and its quite unusual tax on nerve and temper. There had been many changes in her fellow-workers there. Governesses came, tempted by the high salary; and went, broken by the terrible strain of those four vacuous children. That Mary Lindsay had the courage and strength to hold on, was due to her own strong nature, and to the fact that her off-days were spent in the atmosphere, at once bracing and soothing, of Wynyatt Square.

George, in spite of his glooms, which were unnatural to him, and yet, perhaps, not entirely unwarrantable under the circumstances, still insisted on seeing her home each night from Kensington Palace Gardens. Even if she were destined for another, she was still Mary Lindsay. And he must see to her welfare, even though he were only shepherding another man's ewe lamb.

He was a little surprised that Felston did not himself jump at the chance, though as a matter of fact nothing was farther from Niel's thoughts. When he noticed George's shut face he ascribed it to any reason but the right one—put it down to intensity of concentration on his literary work; supposed generally that a man who was writing a book had his mind pretty full; never for one moment imagined that he himself was the root and cause of bitterness, or that his friend could for one moment be so utterly silly as to suppose him capable of trying to supplant him. So George went up to Kensington Palace Gardens every other day, as regularly as the clock struck, and duly escorted Mary home. And many a gloomy walk they had, and many a laugh over them in the aftertimes.

At times George wound himself up to talk of commonplaces, and, if Mary was not feeling unusually beaten by the defective ones, she would respond in kind, and endeavour to get back to the old footing; and then George said to himself that she was frivolous, though he knew quite well that it was not so.

At other times, when the burden had been unusually heavy upon her, they would walk the whole way in almost unbroken silence. Such walks did nothing to lighten her load; and, to shake off the remembrance of them and of the Burney children, she would fling herself into the doings and discussions at home with an energy and gaiety which, by contrast, cut George to the heart and made him gloomier than ever.

We must make allowances for him. He had had no practical experience as a lover. He took it for granted that Mary had known all that was in him respecting herself. He overlooked the fact that, however much she knew, he had never himself told her of it,—in words, at all events, but had, on the contrary, of set purpose abstained from doing so. He would have been mightily surprised if she had made the first advances in a declaration of her love, and yet he was hurt at her apparent lack of understanding of all that was in him.

Meanwhile, since one learns best by experience, and he was ever a seeker after new experiences, possibly the experience was good for him.

His work at the office of the *Comet* kept him busily occupied all day, and gave him plenty of food for his thoughts to work on. Of Brinsley he saw but little. What he did see he liked, and the chief had always a kindly word and nod for him when they met. But Foxley had not yet "chucked the *Comet*," nor the *Comet* Foxley, and the editor's business was with his

sub-editor, and not much with his sub-editor's assistant.

Foxley and he got on very well together, since George was hungry for work and experiences, and Foxley was quite at his disposal on both counts. Work he shovelled on to him with great satisfaction, since it left him the freer for his own undertakings. His experiences, however, were in inverse proportion to his own valuation of himself and them, and it did not take George very long to come to a proper estimate of both. His mental dimensions were limited. "How could any man who brought his hair down across his forehead like that have either height or depth?" said George. But Foxley had made one hit, or his publishers had made it for him, and he believed the world was at his feet. The world, however, has a way of rolling on, and unless a man, so placed, steps lively, it has a way of rolling past him before he gets his second kick.

George asked now and again how the next book was coming on. But Foxley was up to his eyes in the stories he had contracted to write for Potts, and so far the book was in abeyance.

"It's got to be a rouser, you see, my boy," he would reply. "Must beat the last, and those beastly stories are taking a good bit out of me. Plots such as I want are not evolved in a day, or even in a night. It takes a lot of hard thinking, and the harder you think the more convinced you become that the wise man was right, and that there's absolutely nothing new under the blessed old sun."

He was always busily at work in the office, though what he found to do George could not quite make out, since it seemed to him that he himself was doing most of the work that Foxley used to do. He made no

objections, however. Work was experience, and those were the things he had come for.

He made the acquaintance, by sight at all events, of a great many men whom he was delighted to know and hear—writers and artists of note, who came up to see Brinsley, and were often shown into the sub-editor's room in preference to the general waiting-room outside. Foxley knew them all, of course, and treated them as equals, as became the author of a book that was approaching its 75,000th copy.

There were many other callers, friends of Foxley in his pre-historic days. To these he was the genial man of success, generous of advice, and slightly amused at their own stumbling efforts to follow in his steps.

Outside the office, he and George did not foregather much. Their paths lay apart. Foxley was enjoying to the utmost, in his own way, the success that had come to him. But it was a way that had no slightest attractions for George. He revelled in a good play as the consummate illustration of the noble art of story-telling. But dinners, theatres, music-halls, and hilarious suppers every night seemed to him a hideous waste of time with no compensating gain, since the experiences were always much the same, were not likely to be of any practical use, and generally resulted in a bad headache and a distaste for matutinal duty.

Every spare minute George had, walking to and from the office, at lunch, and best of all in his quiet room upstairs at home, he wrought at his book, and wrought the harder as a distraction from his perverse thoughts of the wayward Mary.

When at last it was finished—finished, that is, for the first time—he managed by great exertion of will,

to leave it alone for a whole week. Then he went at it again, with the critical eye and pen of a total stranger who had not seen it for seven clear days. He chopped, and cut, and re-wrote bits, straightened out whatever was not plain, and smoothed and polished what seemed anyway rough, till it ran smooth on the tongue and expressed exactly what he meant it to mean, or at all events as nearly as he could get it. Many a struggle had he and the chimney pots with the limitations of language and his mother tongue. And many a night he went to bed with his brain in full cry after a word or phrase better than the one he had got, and fell asleep still chasing it, and woke in the middle of the night to catch it on the hop and nail it to the scribbling-pad under his pillow, the pencil of which had a way of working down during the night and admonishing him in various parts of his body.

At times the hieroglyphics he made in the dark only furnished him with a new puzzle in the morning, and once, when he left the scribbled pad under his pillow, the housemaid carried it down to Miss Joan, and plainly intimated that that wasn't the writing of a sane and sober person, and that if she hadn't known Master George, and seen him herself with her own eyes last night, and him as right as right, she'd have thought, etc., etc.

However, at last he decided that it was possible to work too much at a thing, and that over-polishing and over-chasing might wear good metal thin. So he took it down to Joan and bade her read it if she could, and say her say without fear or favour. And she and Mrs. Barty read it in two days, and in the nights thereof Mary Lindsay read it, and they all had one opinion of it, which opinion Master George valued but did not build upon.

Meg and Jack Fairfax were at this time the most shamelessly happy pair of young people within or without the four-mile radius. George had thought of asking Jack to cast his eye over the great work. But Jack, in addition to his other engagements, was up to the neck in a book of his own, so he forebore and sent it off without more ado to be typewritten, a proceeding which cost him the sum of six pounds sterling, and induced a further careful perusal and more corrections on its return.

Then, with some diffidence, because he knew she had little time to spare, but, as it turned out, to his own ultimate welfare, he took his precious burden to Mrs. Baird, and asked her if she thought she could manage just to glance over it.

"We're up to our eyes in work," she said gaily, "but I'll make time to get the hang of it and an idea of the style, if I have to stop up all night. Has Joan read it? and your mother, and Mary Lindsay?"

"Yes, they've seen it."

"And what do they say about it?"

"I'd sooner not prejudice you."

"I understand," she said, with a smile, and turned to her own concerns. "We're doing wonders here. Mr. Felston's sketches are a great hit and advertising has taken a turn. It is such a relief when a thing is paying. The hardest work you can put into it is a pleasure, then. Joan's work is most excellent too."

"She takes great pleasure in it. I think she never was so happy before."

"And how's the *Comet?*"

"Sailing along. Nothing upsets its equanimity. The new things don't seem to affect it at all."

"And how do you get on with Richard Brinsley?"

"First rate. We hardly ever meet."

"And Foxley?"

"We get on all right. He doesn't impress me, perhaps, as much as he would like to."

"What's that book of his got up to now?"

"Seventy-five thousand, he says."

"What a curious world it is!" and he left her nodding her sage little head, and sped back to his work.

He went back a week later and she handed him his parcel.

"I read it all through," she said, "and I think it should go, and go well. There are one or two little points I would have altered. But they were chiefly in methods of expression, and after all one may tinker too much. Your plot is good and striking. It's been done before, with variations, of course. But so has everything else."

"So says the great Foxley."

"You'll try to serialise it, I suppose. It will pay heaps better than publishing at once—if you can manage it. Try——" and she named half-a-dozen likely openings. "If we used serials I would have made John take it. But we stick to our old plan—each number complete in itself. By the way, one of your stories will be in our next issue."

"Capital number!" and he sped away in the best spirits a rather love-sick young man was capable of.

He succeeded in detaching Jack Fairfax from his own concerns and Meg, long enough to get from him a list of the most likely openings for his story as a serial, and picking out from it the papers which Mrs. Baird had also suggested, the precious little craft started out on the troubled waters. It voyaged peacefully to and fro for a time, coming nearer and nearer by slow and appointed ways to its destined end —and that was the making of one man who cared not

at the moment for the making, and the breaking of another who had believed himself made.

While the little ark was voyaging, George devoted his writing time to short stories and articles, which he sent out broadcast and spent much postage on. The *Round Table* had the pick of them, and would have taken more than it did but that John Baird never ceased to urge him to keep on trying for a wider market for his wares.

" Every sale you make outside, my boy, is a brick in your building and a step towards the ladder," he said more than once. "Your work is good. Keep on pegging at them. You'll get there in time."

So George pegged away in gloomy hopefulness. He was paying his way, thanks to the *Comet* stool. The only cloud on his horizon was the lack of understanding between himself and Mary Lindsay, and that drove him to his work with a grim earnestness which a brighter outlook might have failed to produce.

Now and again he made a sale to an outside journal, and reported it with sober joy at home, and took it as the first sign of a flowing tide, and looked out eagerly for publication. But months would drag on without any sign of its appearance, and he had to confess himself devoutly thankful that he did not depend for his living on the fruit of his brain.

"Now I know," he said gloomily to Fairfax one night, "why so few writers get to the top. The others all die before their work comes out."

"I suppose lots of 'em do," said Jack. "Thin reed to lean on at first."

"It's a shame," said George, with the vehemence of the unprinted. "If they can't use the stuff why do they accept it? And if they do accept it they might at least pay for it."

"Some of 'em do. But not too many. Get into Parliament, old chap, and make it law that all literary work shall be paid for on acceptance."

"They not only keep the bread out of your mouth, but they bottle up your brains in their pigeon-holes and hinder your progress."

"Beastly bad form! But it's the way they're made."

"And if you live in spite of them, and climb the ladder, and don't need their help, they'll pay you in advance and sit on the stairs while you scribble drivel for them, and set it up before the ink's dry."

"Simple bald bitter truth, my child. When you're in the making you write and don't publish. When you're made you publish and don't write. Look at that story of Connor Gray's in the *Metropolitan.* Without his name to it they wouldn't have looked at it. As it is they've given him £1,000 for it and it's not worth two pence."

"But surely their readers have some sense, Jack," said Joan.

"Some have. There's a certain class that never use their own brains. Maybe they haven't got any. If Connor Gray copied out a page of Little Arthur's History of England they'd slobber over the beauty of his style and the originality of his ideas. It is a bit sickening. How's that little beast Foxley getting on, George?"

"He's all right as far as one can see."

"I always want to take him by that forelock of his and dust the street with him, every time I see him. Have you no hankerings that way yourself? I can't imagine anyone sitting in an office all day with him and not assaulting him every half hour."

"Good thing we're not all of us made that way,

anyway, or there'd be big business at Bow Street. Foxley's something of a conceited ass, but perhaps if your book had sold 75,000 you'd be as bad. I've no doubt I would, though I'd try not to show it as plainly as Charles James does."

"Is he doing another book, or has that one pumped his fiery soul dry?"

"Going to do another, but it's got to be a rouser. No hurry for it. Doing a dozen shorts for Potts at £100 apiece at present."

"Humph!" in a snort of disgust from Jack. "I've twice the brains Foxley ever had or will have, but so far Potts can't find time to handle my stuff."

It was Mary after all who eventually dispersed the cloud that had risen between herself and George. She suffered more than she had permitted to show. But her nature was compounded about equally of sweetness and common sense. And while a very proper pride bade her suffer in silence and wait patiently, common sense cried out at the absurdity of the whole thing. Wisdom consists simply in common sense prevailing over the less utilitarian virtues, and she gave it a free hand.

One night George was detained later than usual by some corrections for the earlier sheets of the paper. As soon as he was free he hurried west to escort Mary home.

She had had an unusually trying day. Evelyn Burney had been possessed of a devil all that day. Simply that. But it was enough to make things very uncomfortable for all concerned.

The night nurse, when handing over her charges to Mary, had said, "She's in an ugly mood. Best keep an eye on her," and Mary had kept near her, and watched carefully for the first symptoms of an outbreak.

It was a dull heavy day, wet outside, close and muggy within. Evelyn, the possessed, was more restless than usual during the morning. In the afternoon the children were all quietly making pot-hooks on their slates at the table, when, without a word, Evelyn rose in her might, leaned across to the opposite side, and brought her slate crashing down on the head of little Gwendoline before Mary could stop her. And so forceful was the blow that the slate flew in splinters as high as the ceiling, while the frame hung round the child's neck like a horse-collar.

Mary sprang round to little Gwen, fearful of injury. But, beyond a more vacant look than usual on the poor little face, there seemed no great harm done. While she was carefully extricating the child's head from the frame, with the jagged spicules of slate sticking in all round it, Evelyn and Gordon, the eldest boy, indulged in a free fight. Gordon rose and smacked his sister in the face. She smacked back, and so they went on stolidly pounding at one another's faces like two automatic figures built to do that one thing and nothing else. Little Lancelot, meanwhile, went on doing pot-hooks without paying the slightest attention to the turmoil. It was that terrible self-concentration which made them so trying to the nerves. An outbreak such as Evelyn's, so long as no actual bodily harm resulted, was almost a relief from the deadly dull monotony. One may have too much even of relief, however, when it displays itself in so vigorous a fashion.

At tea time, Evelyn, her face still swollen from Gordon's punches, coolly emptied her cup over his head, and Mary, angry as she was, wondered whether this must not really be the stirrings of a memory

within the child. There were several minor casualties during the day, but only such as she had grown hardened to. Nevertheless, she felt tired and worn when she left the house, and when she saw no sign of George, she turned at once and walked away towards home. It was still raining and she decided to take a 'bus as soon as she got to Oxford Street.

A voice at her elbow startled her.

"And how is Miss Lindsay? And how goes the menagerie?"

It was Mr. Frazer Burney, and it seemed to her that the smile on his face made him more hateful than ever. She had only met him three or four times during these months, generally as she entered or left the house, for, of course, he never went near the children. He had never addressed her with anything approaching familiarity before.

"The children have been unusually trying to-day, Mr. Burney," said Mary. "If you will permit me to say so, I think they are suffering from the weather, and a change of air might do them all good."

"Ah? And where would you suggest?" He was walking alongside her now.

"The seaside—anywhere—somewhere where they can get some good strong air into them."

"All the air in the world will never give them what they're short of," he said cheerfully. "Would you take charge of them to the seaside?"

"I don't know. I could do with a little change myself."

"Well, take it with them. I'll see to——"

"I meant away from them," she said quickly. "They are rather trying at times. They get on one's nerves."

"Yes, I'm sure," he said sympathetically. "If you

will take them away to some quiet place on the east coast, for a month or six weeks, it will do you all good, and I will see to all the arrangements."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think.—That is my 'bus, please. Good-night!"

George had turned into Kensington Palace Gardens from High Street, just as Mary and Mr. Burney turned and walked towards the Bayswater Road. He knew Mary at a glance even under her umbrella. Her companion puzzled him for a moment. Then he said to himself that it was Felston, awakened at last to a sense of his responsibilities and opportunities, and he followed slowly and wished he hadn't come, and vowed he would come no more.

When Mary jumped hurriedly into her 'bus, Mr. Burney came striding back, too busy with his own thoughts to notice George. George, however, stood and stared after him with an utterly unjustifiable impulse towards personal violence. Recognising this, he turned and hurried after Mary's 'bus. That, however, was gone, so he jumped into the next, and they alighted at Giltspur Street within a few seconds of one another.

He had had time during his ride to become a trifle ashamed of his gloomy suspicions. He had even said to himself that he was an ass to feel about the matter as he did. He accordingly ranged up alongside Mary in a somewhat chastened humour.

"I missed you," he said, and she jumped at his voice. "Foxley had left a bit of work undone, and the printers were waiting, so I had to stop and do it."

"You shouldn't have troubled to come—in the wet, too."

"If you'd sooner I didn't——" he began gloomily.

"Oh, George! *don't* be so silly! What's come over

you lately? You know I'm always glad of your company on the way home."

"But not so glad of it when you get home," growled George.

Then Mary began to cry quietly, which was perhaps the very best thing she could have done under the circumstances. Evelyn's possession had upset her considerably, and Mr. Burney's undesired attentions had irritated her still more. George's undeserved onslaught completed her undoing.

He could not see her face, but some subtle instinct told him she was crying, and he felt himself a brute.

"I'm sorry. I'd no right to say that, Mary,——" he began.

"I-If you think it, y-you're welcome to say it," jerked Mary.

"Can't help thinking it," said George heavily, "when I see it with my own eyes every night and morning, and feel it all day long."

"See what?"

"Well—that things are not as they used to be between you and me."

"And whose fault is that?" she asked, with a touch of warmth. "It certainly isn't mine."

"Well, it isn't mine. I haven't changed—that is—not inside."

"And I'm quite sure I haven't."

George felt the lameness of all this. He had all a young man's aversion to an admission of jealousy of another man. It was an admission of inferiority. He possessed in full measure all the natural reserve of his northern blood. It was easier to suffer through the concealment of his feelings than to express them. But—he loved Mary Lindsay with all his heart,

and his heart had been sore for many a day. And he was no coward.

"You are more to me than anything in my life," he said abruptly. They were in the wide space near the hospital, and they had it to themselves. He laid his hand on her arm and she stood facing him. "It seemed to me that something—someone—had come in between us, and—and——"

"Do you mean Niel and the painting?" she gasped. "Oh, George! How could you? And I've been rejoicing so in it. It was just what I needed. . . . But I'll give it all up if you feel that way. I'd no idea—. And—besides—can't you see? Niel loves every hair of Joan's head. He worships her. He never gives me a thought, except as a troublesome pupil. Oh, what a silly boy you've been! And I—thought you'd found someone else outside. And it's made me miserable——"

Then he dived under the umbrella and kissed her, and a policeman sauntered round the corner, all agleam with the raindrops under the lamps, and caught them at it, and said: "Now then, move on there! Cawn't have no kerryings on of that kind here, you know."

And George slipped his arm round her, with all the blood in his body jumping and tingling and rushing up through it to experience the new sensation, and carry the word of it throughout the empire, and they went off under the umbrella. And the constable stood and looked after them and shook his head, his personal experiences having run chiefly to the lower phases of human nature.

It took them a good half hour to travel from the hospital to Wynyatt Square, a journey which Meg and Jack Fairfax could, when they chose, accomplish

in something under seven minutes. So they were later than usual in reaching home.

"What was that beast Burney wanting with you?" asked George, as they turned into the Square.

"He was suggesting I should take the children to the seaside."

"I'll take jolly good care you don't. You shall get away from them altogether as soon as I can manage it. If I catch him talking to you again I shall go for him."

"Then I shall lose my place."

"I wish you'd never taken it. It must be killing work. And Burney has no right to speak to you or any decent woman. He's a bad lot all through."

"I detested him from the first moment I met him at Saas-Mürrn."

"Ah! Saas-Mürrn! What times we had there!"

"Y-Yes—on the whole," said Mary. "But I liked some of the other places better."

"Saas-Mürrn stands all by itself. I can see you now standing on the edge of the shelf looking out over the valley, just as I saw you that first time. And I thought then, as I think now, that there never was a sweeter——"

"They'll think we're lost," said Mary, as she disentangled herself. They were on the top step by this time.

"And we've been finding ourselves," and they went in.

"I was beginning to be afraid something had happened to you," said Mrs. Barty, as she came out of the dining-room at the sound of them.

"So it has," said George, and she caught the ring in his voice. And then, more softly, he said, "Mother dear, your daughter dear," and she knew

that whatever cloud had been between them was dissipated.

"God bless you, dear!" she said to Mary, and kissed her warmly. "Doubly my daughter now, and I could not wish a better," and the kind hand that was at Mary's back patted it gently to tell more things than words could express.

They were all delighted at the news, though it was no surprise to them.

Joan sparkled and beamed at them. Niel, unconscious of the part he had played in the matter, congratulated them warmly, and said he had been expecting it for months past. Meg and Jack assured them there was nothing like it. The boys in their own way expressed their approval, though they were all half in love with Mary themselves.

And so that little cloud rolled by and their sky seemed bright and clear. But, in its very passing, it drew upon them that greater darkness which seemed like to overwhelm them all in unutterable disaster

CHAPTER XXVI

STORM GERMS

George Barty found the path of letters a long, long path, as many another had found before him, and as all who follow him must find. It is a case of Spartan selection. The weakly die, or find some less precarious method of subsistence, which comes to the same thing so far as letters are concerned. And of those who survive, some become case-hardened, and, sick of lean days, write down to the level that pays them best. And some learn patience through the grinding of the mill, and from that, experience. And patience and experience wedded bring forth hope, and the little stranger's life is one long striving after the unattainable best. It is possible these may not make the most money. On the other hand there may be compensations which count for more with them. For I take it that the upward reach, although it fail of full accomplishment, still keeps a man's face to the sky. Whereas he who bends and gropes in mud sees mud, and mud is mud even though it carry payable gold.

George slogged away at his work. Sales or no sales, he went on producing the best that was in him, and sending it forth like the Ark-sick mariner, if perchance it might find rest outside for the sole of its foot. And as a rule it returned more promptly even than Noah's dove. And some of it, raven-like, never returned at all, whereby a spark of hope was left in

him that it had found a home. And, now and again, at stray intervals, came olive leaves in the shape of small cheques.

Let no man say that, in this world at all events, the palm-leaf always goes to him who most deserves it. In the long run things average up fairly well on the whole, no doubt, but the distribution is apt to be somewhat uneven, so that when a man hath he receives still more, but until that good time comes he may go lean.

Now ravens as a class are not very lovable. Decorative, maybe, at a distance, but on closer acquaintance quarrelsome and of manners and customs akin to the proverbial savages.

All the same, that primal raven seems to have received quite undue obloquy. At all events he did his best, and went beating to and fro in search of a dry spot, long after the dove had given it up as a bad job. Possibly he went on trying till he fell spent. In any case, the very fact of his not coming back must have given Noah the hope that he had found something which he preferred to the ark. The dove, on the other hand, seems to have given the matter up after a very cursory look round, and came home for a seven days' rest, while the raven was still at work. Quite possibly the raven, under a mistaken idea of what was required of him, devoted his time to a necessarily ineffectual search after plump worms, and never for a moment imagined that an olive leaf would do just as well. Whereas the dove nipped off the first leaf he found, and, lacking the raven's enterprise, came home with it and has borne the palm ever since.

However that may be, I know this, that many of George Barty's stories, which could find no resting

place at that time, have—since he made his name—been welcomed at many times the price he would have rejoiced to accept for them then.

I offer no explanation. I give you simple fact. And there you see is my point—merit and the palm are not always synchronous.

The stool at the "Comet" was a god-send to him. It left him little time for brooding, and made his own higher work a delight to look forward to, a reward for duller service well done.

Each little success was at once a spur and a crown, but compared with expenditure—I do not refer to money matters—the income was small.

It would seem to you that George's position was not one which called for any complaint. He was very busy, and he was making a living, which is more than some folks ever succeed in doing. He insisted on paying for his board and lodging at home, just as Felston and the other boys did. But you must remember that three-fourths of his available working time, all of which he would have wished to devote to the higher work, was given to alien routine which another could have done just as well as he, while he had the belief that greater work lay waiting for him. He felt as he imagined a racehorse might feel if harnessed to a coal cart.

Then again, in spite of his occasional little successes, he could not but feel, and he felt it bitterly, that the progress he was making was so slow that, in the whirling rush of things, it amounted to no progress whatever. And that is a matter of serious import to the beginner. For lack of progress suggests either lack of power or power wasted in a wrong direction. Once introduce the element of doubt and you sap a man's energies. Continuous defeats, even though they

be but small ones, tend to depress one. If continued long enough they break a man's spirit. With a single pin and much perseverance you may bleed a man to death. Defeats and snubs are to the inner man what the pin-pricks are to the outer.

Fortunate it was for him that he had such bulwarks of hope as Mary Lindsay and his own home folks, and so intense and growing a love for his work, that in the work itself he could find a high reward for all his labours. Though, being of this world, he could not afford to lose sight entirely of the lower reward which he thought he had a right to expect.

The Bairds' encouragement was of mighty service to him. They used his work pretty constantly, because they liked it and considered it good. But they never ceased, in his own interest, to urge him on in his attempt to gain a footing elsewhere as well.

Much familiarity with a man breeds either contempt or esteem. It depends upon the man. The more George saw of Foxley the less he felt able to esteem him. The success he had attained was more of a puzzle to him than ever.

Their first disagreement of moment was over the review of Crawford's book. Mrs. Baird had lent it to George after she had reviewed it for the *Round Table*. "It is worth reading," she had said. "There are faults, of course, but they are small ones. I consider it an excellent book. It is worth seven of your friend Foxley's, and if it sells five thousand copies Crawford will consider himself fortunate. It *is* a queer world, my boy."

So George read it and found it good also. And when one day he came on a tart notice of the book smuggled into a late page of the *Comet*, his gorge rose at it.

It was none of his business, however,—except in the larger sense,—and he hesitated before speaking about it. But right would out.

"I say, Foxley," he broke out at last, "that's a rotten notice of that book of Crawford's."

"Oh? Know Crawford?" asked Foxley, glancing meditatively up at his junior.

"Don't know him from Adam. But I've read his book, and that notice gives an utterly unfair view of it."

"Crawford's an ass and a stuck-up prig. Thinks he's got a mission to reform the world. And he's too wordy. Will explain things to the last dot, when you could imagine them quite as well if not better. And those people Shutter and Dore are hogs. They practically flung my book back at my head, and as much as said it was not the class of thing they dealt in. You bet they've been sorry once or twice since then. 'Nemo me,'—you know."

"Still, it's hardly the thing to slate a man's book because you've a grudge against his publishers. How would you like it yourself?"

"Had it, my boy, lots of it. Only made me sell the faster. Nothing like a good slating notice to sell a book."

"This is a blessing in disguise for Crawford, then."

"It's one in the eye for Shutter and Dore, anyway, and not the first they've had nor the last they'll get."

There was nothing more to be said, and the notice went in.

Mrs. Baird tackled George about it the first time they met.

"Who did that absurd notice of Crawford's book for you?"

"Charles James."

"Did you see it before it went in?"

"Oh, I saw it and gave him my opinion about it."

"I'm glad of that. Why did he do it? It's a good book."

"It's Shutter and Dore's, and they flung 'Souls of Fire' at its author's head when he offered it to them. This is one of his replies."

"It's shameful," said little Mrs. Baird, with a stamp. "Why does Richard Brinsley permit it?"

"Well, you see, Richard is a very busy man, and he has to leave a good deal to other people."

"Pity he doesn't get honest people to leave it to then, and I shall tell him so the first time I see him. It's scandalous that a little self-seeking humbug like Foxley should have any power of mischief permitted him. I hope it's not infectious," she said, regarding George gravely.

"I don't think it's infectious," he said. "My fingers itch five times a day on an average to take Foxley by the forelock and mop the floor with him, as Jack Fairfax says."

"I wish you would," said Mrs. Baird, with energy.

Relations between the great sub-editor and his assistant had become somewhat strained, you perceive. But the great cataclysm was none of George's seeking or making.

He had ceased to ask Foxley how his next book was coming on. The question seemed to irritate him. But it was impossible for George to close his ears entirely to what passed when Foxley's many friends and callers interrogated him on the point, as they rarely failed to do.

"To tell you the truth, my dear boy," he heard him say one day to one of his special cronies, "I'm

beginning to be afraid I'm getting a bit too discriminating in the matter of plots. Plot after plot I've rejected,—scores of 'em. It's one of the penalties of —er—success, you know, that there must be no going back, no resting even. Forward or fall out, is the word, and every possible thing under the sun seems to have been done and done to death. Oh, it'll come all right in time. But in the meantime I'm getting a bit sick of making combinations. A's the man—B's the woman. What the deuce can they do that's never been done before? Give it up, eh? Well, it does take a deuce of a lot of thinking, but I'll get there sometime, you bet. How do the shorts strike you?"

"Rattlers!"

"I put a deuce of a lot of work into 'em," he said, reflectively if not regretfully. "And I'm bound to say I think pretty well of them. Old Potts—" and he stopped abruptly.

"What does that old duffer say about 'em?"

"Says they're hardly up to 'Souls' standard. Wish he'd try to boil down a three-volume novel into six thousand words himself, then he'd know more about it. Can't turn yourself round in six thousand words."

"Tight fit," said the other sympathetically. "By the way"—with a thoughtful drop of the voice, so low that it did not get across the room,—"what would it be worth to me if I was able to help you out, old chap?"

"Why, how do you mean?" bristled Foxley, much as the lion may have bristled at first sight of the mouse's impudence.

"Keep your hair on, my boy," said the other softly. "Quiet's the word if I do it. It's a darned

nasty thing to do, but it's for a friend and I'm as hard up as a rat."

"What the deuce are you driving at, Biddles?" His visitor was one Bidlake, sub-editor of a monthly, *The Cosmos*. George had not made his acquaintance, and Bidlake paid no attention to assistant-sub-editors.

"I can put you on to a plot. The best thing I've come across for a very long time, and we see a heap of stuff at *The Cosmos*."

"H'm!" and Foxley regarded him dubiously. "Another man's plot! That's playing pretty low, you know, and besides—there may be consequences."

"Not if you work it right. You can twist it so that it's own father wouldn't be able to swear to it. Well, now, what's it worth—if you use it? No use—no pay!"

And Foxley did some hard thinking in the next few minutes.

Candidly he did not like it. On the other hand he was at his wits' end. Only that morning his publishers had written urgently asking when they might expect something from him, and intimating very plainly that they were getting tired of waiting. All the benefit of their immense advertising of Book I. would be lost if Book II. did not follow within a reasonable time, and the public had a very short memory, and so on and so on. And the very keel of No. II. was not yet laid!

"Who's the man?" he asked.

"Fellow named Bertie. Don't know him. Never heard of him. New man. I can keep his stuff in quad till you're out, if you drive ahead."

"Well, if it's any use to me I'll give you £100," said Foxley. "But I don't suppose it will be, and I don't much like the idea anyhow."

"That's all right. If you don't use it you don't pay. Shall I bring you the MS. to run through?"

"No. I think I'd better not see it at all."

"All right. I'll dot you down a synopsis of it. You can read Pitman's, can't you?"

"If you write plain. Bit out of practice."

"I'll send it on to you to-morrow. You'll like it. So long!"

And the unconscious father sat quietly grinding away at proofs in his cupboard while black treachery to his first-born was being negotiated under his very nose.

CHAPTER XXVII

STORM HATCHING

FROM the amount of work that shortly began to come across to his side of the room, and from Charles James's deep absorption in other matters, George came to the conclusion that Foxley had at last settled on a plot, and was deep in his book. In spite of a certain sympathy and fellow-feeling for a brother of the craft, it did seem to him that his immediate superior was indulging in a very wide latitude, in drawing a salary from the *Comet* for work he did not do, and utilising its time for his own affairs. However, he worked away and said nothing, but could not help wondering how soon the chief's eyes would open to this somewhat incongruous state of matters.

The end came quickly.

Half-a-dozen limping replies from Foxley to questions respecting current matters roused Brinsley's suspicions. He came in to the sub-editor's room during lunch time and found George grinding away there at his proofs. He nodded and asked, "Foxley out?"

"At lunch, sir."

"And why aren't you at lunch?"

"I am," said George, with a smile and a bite from a scone he had sent out for. "I wanted to get through these things so I stopped in."

"I want the proof of Mackellar's article for a moment. Have you got it there, Barty?"

"No, sir, not here," said George, glancing through his pile.

Brinsley walked over to Foxley's desk, flung up the roller top, and looked about among the litter, poked it with his finger for a minute or two, then closed the desk and went back to his own room. When he went out to his own lunch he went through into the printing office and called for the files of corrected proofs for the last three weeks, glanced over them, and went thoughtfully on his way.

In the afternoon he came suddenly into the sub-editorial room again and walked over to Foxley's desk, at which that young gentleman was writing for his life. Foxley looked up with a start and a flush.

"I want a word with you, Foxley," said Brinsley, skimming the desk with a glance, and the two retired to the chief's room.

Foxley emerged ten minutes later, his raven's wing drooping very limply over an angry red face, and fire in his eye.

"I presume I've got to thank you for this turn-up," he flung across at George.

"What turn-up? I know nothing about it. What's wrong?"

"Services dispensed with. Go as soon as you like. Wasn't he in asking you about me?"

"He's never asked a single thing about you since I came."

"H'm!" said Foxley doubtfully. "Well, I'm off anyway," and he began gathering his papers together. "Fortunately I can get along without the *Comet*, and I've no doubt the *Comet* can get along without me. You've got everything pretty well at your finger ends, Barty, but if there's anything crops up that you want to ask me about, drop me

a line to the Junior Grosvenor and I'll help you through.—I think I've got everything that belongs to me," he said, after a prolonged interval of sorting, and arranging, and tearing and tying up. "You'll be taking this desk, I expect. If you come across any old love letters you might just fire them along to the Junior Grosvenor. One generally overlooks something," and so he departed, and George worked away at his proofs in his cupboard.

During the afternoon Mr. Brinsley sauntered in with a cigar in his mouth and stood looking at him.

"How do you stand now, Barty?" he asked.

"I shall manage all right, sir. I'll finish them before I leave."

Brinsley strolled over to the vacant desk and sat down in the chair and looked things over. A grim smile flickered over his face occasionally at things he found there. He took to opening and shutting the drawers and glancing over their contents.

Certain papers he placed in a bundle and eventually took them away with him. He knew Master Foxley and his venomous little disposition. It is possible, indeed, that a chat he had had with Mrs. Baird a few days before, was the mainspring of his present action. He thought the scraps he had collected would be quite sufficient to muzzle his late sub-ordinate if he tried to snap at him, and to justify his own action if need be.

"You can take this desk now, Barty," said Brinsley. "You'll get more light here. We'll discuss future arrangements when this week's number is out. Think you'll come through all right?"

"I have done other weeks," said George, with a smile.

At which Brinsley laughed quietly, and said

"Yes, I see you've been doing it pretty well all," and then more soberly, and with a darkening of the face, "That young man will come to a bad end if he's not careful. His notions of honesty are extremely elementary."

The result of all this was that George occupied Foxley's place, with an increase of salary, and a new assistant sub under him. The closer intercourse which this brought about between himself and his chief led to a pleasant increase of friendliness between them, and George valued it highly.

"How's your own writing getting on?" asked Brinsley, one day when they had been discussing *Comet* matters.

"It's a long lane," said George, drily, "and a rather rough road at first. I suppose it gets smoother further on. I'm on the stones yet."

"And the book? Not found a home yet?"

"Not yet," said George, with a flush. The Wandering-Jew-like proclivities of his cherished first-born were rather a sore subject with him.

"I'd like to have a look at it. Your good friend Mrs. Baird was almost gushing to me about it the other day, and she is not much given to gushing. Where is it?"

"It's with *The Cosmos* people. They've had it for over three months. I've written several times asking them to send it back if they're not going to take it. They say they're considering it."

"Ah! *The Cosmos*," said Brinsley thoughtfully, looking past George.——"Well, now, if I were you, I'd get it back. I happen to know that *The Cosmos* is in pretty low water just now. It belongs to a company and they're all at loggerheads. If they accept it, the chances are about even as to your ever getting paid for it."

"The sooner it's out of their hands the better then."

"Decidedly! Get it back to-day if you can.'

"I'll go up at lunch time."

"By the way, I hear Foxley was up yesterday. What was he wanting?"

"He came to see if he'd left any papers behind him. Seemed to think he had."

"Ah, he always was a careless young man. What did you say to him?"

"Told him I hadn't seen any, but if I came across any I'd send them on to him."

George went up to *The Cosmos* office at lunch time, but he did not get his story.

He was shown into Mr. Bidlake's room, and George recognised him at once as one of the many men who used to come up to see Foxley. Bidlake however did not recognise him. Foxley had never introduced them, and Bidlake had paid no special attention to the industrous worker in the corner cupboard.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Bertie," said he cheerfully. "You've come about your story, I suppose. I'm sorry we've kept it so long. But we get such a heap of stuff sent in that it takes time to go through it with discrimination."

"I want it back if you can let me have it," said George. "There's another man wanting to see it and I promised to get it for him to-day."

"Sorry! But that won't be possible. Our chief's away in Switzerland. Gone for a rest, and the chance to go quietly through a selection of MS., yours among them. I've great hopes of him taking it. If he does, we should begin publishing at the beginning of the year."

"Could you get it for me by writing to him?"

"Well, I might possibly. But if he wants it he

won't let it go. Seems a pity to lose a chance, don't you think?"

"I don't know what the chance may be worth, but I'd be obliged if you'd write and ask him to send it back at once."

"Of course, if you say so. But it does seem a pity when there's every chance of his taking it."

"If you'll write to-night I'll call on Friday. That should give him time to reply."

"All right, Mr. Bertie."

And when his visitor had gone, Bidlake opened the bottom drawer of his desk and looked thoughtfully at George's manuscript lying there, and pursed his lips perplexedly. "I can stave him off for a bit," he said to himself, "but he looks a determined sort of a cuss. I wonder how much longer that ass Foxley is going to be with his book.—Shall I tell him of this or not?" and he considered the point carefully.

George duly came round again on the Friday, but Mr. Bidlake was out. He called again on Saturday, with like result; and again on Monday, when he saw Bidlake who told him that no reply had yet been received from Switzerland. He called every day for a fortnight, and on the last day Bidlake handed him his story, saying that it had arrived that very morning. The editor of *The Cosmos* returned to town next day, with a fine coat of tan from much mountain climbing and a clear eye which had not read a page of MS. for over a month.

George left the recovered parcel on Brinsley's desk, and waited in somewhat of a tumult for his ideas concerning it.

"I see you've got it at last," was all he said that day. "I heard Kerton was expected home to-morrow."

Two days later, however, he beckoned George into his room.

"Well, I've read that story of yours, Barty," he said, "and I consider it extremely good work. How would you like it to run through the *Comet?*"

"Like it?" gasped George, with the feelings of a drowning man who has been asked from] the river bank if he would care for a helping hand.

"I'm just wondering who I could get to illustrate it. Cleaton's away, Lanyers is away,—"

"I can find you the man, and he'd do it well," said George.

"Who?"

"Niel Felston."

"He does those clever odd things for Baird. They've made quite a hit. Is that his usual style? I don't want to poach on a friend's preserves."

"I wouldn't for a moment," said George. "Felston can do any style you want. That was his picture in the Academy, "The Parting of the Ways." He's about the cleverest man I know, and, besides, he knows my story and all about the places and people."

"Ask him to do a couple of illustrations for, say, the first five thousand words, and let me see them as soon as possible. You're quite sure Baird will have no feeling about it?"

"Quite. But I'll ask him myself."

"We'll start it the week after next. Conyers' story can wait. He's got two serials running just now, and I'll be glad to have something outside."

So George ran up to the *Round Table* office that night and burst in on them with the news.

"That's capital. Richard Brinsley's as good a

judge of a story as any man in London," said Mrs. Baird.

"Will you mind if Felston does the illustrations? I'll tell him to adopt quite a different style from the ones he does for you."

"Not a bit. His work has done us good, but we never hoped to monopolise it. Besides, we don't clash with the *Comet*."

Niel took the matter up with enthusiasm. "I'll give the *Comet* such pictures as it doesn't often get," he said.

He skimmed through the first two chapters of the story again, picked out his scenes, and set them all posing as models, a proceeding which sent the entire household into a state of hysterical hilarity.

"Stop!" he shouted to Jack Fairfax, as he came in. "Stand just as you are for a minute, and keep your face exactly so! You'll do for the villain. I'll twist your nose so that nobody'll know you."

"Hanged if you will! Is he mad?" asked Jack gloomily.

"We're all a bit mad to-night, Jack," said Joan. "Niel is doing illustrations for George's story. It's coming out in the *Comet*. Why, where's Meg? Is she downstairs?"

"Not coming to-night," growled Jack. "Big explosion in Fore Street. All hands to the pumps. They were carrying them in in a procession as I came past. I only got half a word with her. Abominably inconsiderate of people going blowing themselves up on Meg's night, when any other night in the week would have done them just as well."

"Poor people!" murmured Joan. "You and Meg don't count."

"Really coming out in the *Comet*, George?" asked Jack incredulously. "That's well worked. How did you manage it?"

"I didn't. Brinsley saw it and suggested it himself."

"Good business anyway. Congratulate you, my boy! It was worth waiting for."

CHAPTER XXVIII

STORM BURSTS

Two weeks later, George Barty's story "A Man of Parts," started in the *Comet*, and it had been running six weeks when the long-expected book by the author of "Souls of Fire" was announced, with a great flourish of advertisements.

For weeks before, titillating paragraphs anent it had been enlivening the literary columns of the papers. The printers were working night and day to supply preliminary orders. All orders would be filled strictly in rotation. Day of publication postponed three times to permit of the provision of adequate supplies. Printers working Sundays in order to catch up with demand, and so on. Oh, they knew their business did Adhem and Pough, and if they were neither of them absolutely what you might, by any elasticity of diction, call men of letters, they could pull the strings with any American patent-medicine man. They played on the public curiosity in a masterly way, tickling it with tit-bits and exciting its appetite. "Souls of Fire" they assured the world was a great book—100,000 copies sold up to date—but the forthcoming one was a greater. The rarest combination of masterly plot with the cleverest characterisation. Hints as to certain well-known literary personages flitting about its pages under thinly-veiled disguises. The very name of the book was kept secret till it was issued. Anything and everything to excite talk and attract attention.

Brinsley's press copy came in the day before publication. He sat down to skim it over, and, as he read, his face darkened, bit by bit, till it grew very black indeed, and the overhanging brows pinched together and his mouth puckered grimly.

"Well,—I—*am*——!" he said at last, and then nodded his head slowly several times, and added —"or some one else is." And then he got up and took the book with him to the next room, and dropped it on George's desk with a quiet—"You might just run through that, Barty, and see what kind of a notice you can give it," and went back to his room and lit a cigar, and smoked, and did no work but apparently some very deep thinking.

He was not half way through it when his door opened suddenly and George Barty came in, and his face was twisted as grimly as Brinsley's had been a short time before. He was pale with excitement. He had Foxley's book in his hand.

"Have you seen this?" he asked abruptly.

Brinsley nodded.

"What's the meaning of it?" asked George breathlessly. "It's my book—my plot at all events—"

"Sit down!" said Brinsley, and just then there came a tap at the door and John Baird was announced.

"Show him in," said Brinsley.

"Ah!" said Baird. "I see you're on the business. What the deuce is the meaning of it, Brinsley?"

"Barty was just asking the question as you came in. That's what we've got to find out, Baird. And it'll be a very nasty bit of business, unless I'm mistaken."

"Do you know when Foxley began on this book?" he asked George.

"I cannot say exactly, of course. He was very late

in starting, I know—And I happened to know, from his talk with some of the men who used to come in to see him, that he had difficulty in finding a plot to his mind.—His publishers could say the exact time they began getting his copy."

"They could if they would. But all this will only appeal to them in the light of an advertisement. I know them. When was your book finished, Barty?"

"It was partly written at Monte Carlo in February, and finished in London in March and April."

"Did you discuss it with anybody in the beginning? The idea of it, I mean. The plot is somewhat original."

"With Niel Felston, by way of amusing him when he was sick. Nobody else. We discussed the plot and I adopted some suggestions he made."

"You never by any chance discussed it with Foxley?"

"Never a word. My people at home, and Mrs. Baird, read it when I had it typed—that was in April. I have the bill at home."

"Who typed it?" asked Baird.

"Miss Joynson, up Holborn."

"There's a possible leakage there," said Baird.

"No, it's not there," said Brinsley thoughtfully. "I think we can get closer than that. Tell me," he said, looking at George, "Whose hands it passed through before it got to *The Cosmos* people's?"

George named the various magazines he had sent it to.

"It stopped with *The Cosmos* for some months, you told me. And I remember the trouble you had to get it back. It was Bidlake, the sub-editor there, you always saw, wasn't it?"

"Yes. The editor was in Switzerland and had my story with him."

"So Bidlake said anyway. Had you ever seen Bidlake before ?"

"Only round my corner when he used to come in seeing Foxley. I did not know who he was then."

"Quite so. There's the leak, Baird. I'll bet you fifty pounds Bidlake's the man."

"I don't know him," said Baird.

"I do," said Brinsley. "I'll find out to-day from Kerton if he actually had your story away with him. If he had *not*, then we prove Bidlake a liar. And the chances are your story was in his desk all the time, and he was sitting on it till Foxley's book came out.—Gad ! wait a moment," and he turned to his own desk and began opening the drawers and rooting in them. He found a packet of papers at last, and ran through it and picked out some sheets of shorthand notes. "I'd forgotten that. There's the whole thing in a nutshell.'

"What is it ?" asked Baird.

"You're not a shorthand man, are you ?"

"No," said Baird. "Never had time to learn."

"You are, Barty. See if you can make this out," and he handed the slips over to George, who bent and pored over them.

"Why, it's a rough précis of my plot," he said at last. "What's the meaning of it ?"

"I found that among Foxley's refuse after he'd left," said Brinsley. "But I didn't know it's value then as I hadn't read your story. You didn't write that ?"

"Not I. Why, he's even got the initials of my characters all through. Where do you suppose he got it from ?"

"From Bidlake, unless I'm mistaken. That's not Foxley's writing. No one can read his stuff, not even

himself sometimes. The question is how to deal with the matter. We're six weeks into the story. The similarity of the plots is patent. We're in for a row and there's no avoiding it. I'm sorry you should be launched on a boom of this kind, my boy,"—to George,—"but it's not of your seeking. I've been thinking it all out while you were looking at Foxley's book. What's your idea, Baird, and what does your wife say? I've a very high opinion of her sagacity, as you know."

"She wants Foxley ground to powder and flung to the winds."

"That is from the heart not from the head. The matter will need very judicious handling, or there will always remain in some people's minds a doubt as to which head the false cap fits best. For Barty's future we must have it made quite clear."

"The whole thing is disgusting," said George, "and I hate to be mixed up in it. It means absolute ruin to Foxley if this all comes out, and he's got a wife, I believe, and some children. I'd sooner sacrifice my story."

"You can't," said Brinsley, "even if it would be wise to do so, and it would not. It's as clear a case of literary larceny as ever was committed, and the innocent man shall not suffer if I can prevent it. It would be practical suicide."

"I could change my pseudonym," said George. "It's not got any market value yet."

"You are known to a certain number as Guy Bertie, and it would creep out," said Brinsley. "If we stopped the story, it would take you the rest of your life to make literary men believe it was not you who were at fault in the matter, to say nothing of outsiders. Isn't that so, Baird?"

"Yes, I'm afraid that's so. But I can see heaps of

difficulties in bringing it home to Foxley. What do you advise yourself, Brinsley?"

"I think our only plan is to go quietly on and tackle the row when it comes. But—" he said doubtfully —"I really don't know. I hate to sit quiet while that book is selling by the thousand. Suppose you and I pay Foxley a visit, Baird, and see what he's got to say about it?"

"I'm willing. But I doubt if anything will come of it."

"It may clear the ground and show us our way. If Foxley loses his temper he may let drop more than he intends. Anyway, as a matter of experience, I would rather like to see how he takes it."

But it was one thing to call on Foxley and quite another thing to catch him at home.

He lived at Brixton, where he had a wife and two children, whom he kept much in the background. Since the sudden development of his fortunes, he had taken rooms in the Temple and was more at home there than at Brixton. Latterly, however, his success had flown to his head and his life had grown more erratic than ever. There was never any difficulty in finding out where he was not; but where he was, was matter for speculation, and search for him was only another name for loss of time.

So after several vain attempts they gave it up and waited events.

A paragraph in the *Athenæum* sounded the first note of the battle, by calling attention to the striking resemblance between the plot of Foxley's new book and the story appearing in the *Comet*.

The following week further reference was made to the matter, and the other literary papers took up the cry.

"Literary coincidences are by no means unknown,"

said the *Athenæum*, "but the practical identity of plot between Mr. Guy Bertie's story "A Man of Parts," at present appearing in the *Comet*, and Mr. Foxley's new book, "The Man with Three Faces," is too startling to be lightly passed over. The plot on which both stories are based is original and striking—and identical. That two writers, presumably unknown to one another, should both light upon it just at the same moment is almost inconceivable. If not a case of coincidence, then—what? For the honour of the craft we think some explanation is due. Our columns are open to the respective authors. Their replies will be awaited with interest by our readers."

The utterances of the other papers were to much the same effect. Some of the daily papers took the matter up as likely to amuse their readers, and demands for explanation filled the air.

An enterprising evening sheet ran Foxley to earth, after a long and arduous chase, and published a column interview with him at his club.

Divested of frillings the gist of Foxley's deliverance was this,—

"I see no cause for hysterics about this matter. Coincidence of thought is as common as similarity of feature. The only wonder is that it does not occur much more frequently. I read a paragraph in a paper, or some friend sends me a note of something he has seen or heard, or thinks would interest me. It starts a certain train of thought in my mind. I weave my own fancies round it and eventually the story evolves itself. Thousands of others may have read the same paragraph or heard of the same incident. What on earth is to prevent their thoughts running on similar lines to my own?

I have never met Mr. Guy Bertie. I do not know

him, nor have I ever read any of his writings. How the plot of his story comes to resemble mine so closely I cannot, of course, explain beyond what I have just said. I should certainly never think of accusing him of stealing my plot. It is true his story commenced before my book came out. But the book was of course written, and in the printers' hands a long time previously. It would have been issued earlier but for the constant cry for more, and the desire of my publishers to put all the trade on an equal footing."

That seemed fair and straightforward enough, even magnanimous, on the part of Mr. Foxley, and those interested in the matter waited Mr. Guy Bertie's reply. Meanwhile the book was selling by the ton, and many who bought it and had seen the discussion in the papers, bought the *Comet* also, to see for themselves how closely the two ran side by side.

The next number of the *Athenæum* contained a letter from Mr. Richard Brinsley. It said simply:—

> "Mr. Guy Bertie absolutely declines to be mixed up in any discussion of this unpleasant matter. He leaves himself entirely in my hands, and requests me to deal with the matter as I judge best. On his attention being called to the coincidence of the plots, Mr. Bertie instantly offered to suffer the complete suppression of his story,—no small matter, I may point out, for a new writer. But that I could not permit, either for his sake or for the sake of my readers.
>
> The whole question lies in a nutshell. Which story was written first? And had the writer of the second story any possible access to the MS. of the first? I therefore call upon Mr. Foxley or his publishers to indicate the exact date on which the MS. of his story, or any part of it, was

completed. And, as I shall furnish the most incontestable proofs of my own side of the case, I ask similar proofs from Mr. Foxley."

Foxley's reply to this was through the mouth of the interviewer once more.

"Mr. Brinsley ought to know, by this time, that the date of the committal of a story to paper bears no necessary relation to the time of its evolution. My plots turn over in my mind for months before a word is written down. Moreover, a plot is frequently the gradual piecing together, or boiling down, of a number of others from which the round whole is slowly educed. The MS. of my book was in the hands of my publishers long before the *Comet* story began."

"And Mr. Brimstone?" asked the interviewer, referring to one of the characters in Foxley's book, a truculent newspaper man.

"He is a composite character," said Mr. Foxley quickly—I quote the interviewer's words—"and is modelled on no single person."

"You were on the *Comet* for a time with Mr. Brinsley, I think, Mr. Foxley?"

"Yes, I was associated with Brinsley for a time. We always got on very well together. I consider him a very able man."

"And there was nothing in your business relations which suggests grounds for this attack upon you?"

"Oh, please don't put it that way," said Mr. Foxley. "I do not so regard it myself, nor, I am sure, does Mr. Brinsley."

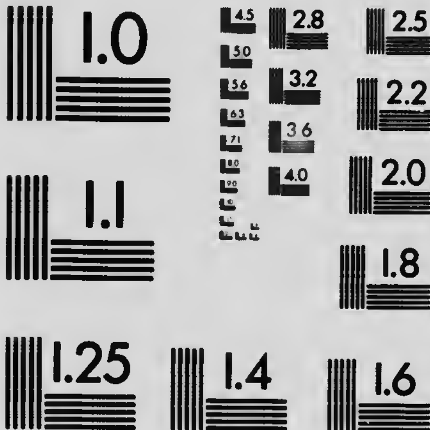
Brinsley's answer to this in the *Athenæum* was short and pointed.

"Mr. Foxley does not answer my questions.

Will he, or will he not, tell us when his MS. was delivered to his publishers?

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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What went on in his brain, before he committed anything to paper, does not in the least concern us or affect the question at issue.

Mr. Foxley's services on the *Comet* were dispensed with simply because he preferred doing his own work in my time to doing my work for which I paid him.

I ask him once more for dates—and the proofs of them."

To that Foxley made no reply.

The position was becoming decidedly uncomfortable. In the privacy of his own chambers, he and Bidlake had an unseemly wrangle which left him in a worse position than before.

He accused Bidlake of deceiving him.

Bidlake coolly enquired how?

"You offered me some suggestions for a story," said Foxley. "I had no idea you were going to steal another man's plot complete and foist it on to me."

"Oh, ho!" said Bidlake. "That's your game, is it, my boy? Very well! Now see here, my little son! You're in a deuce of a hole, and you know it, and I know it. Your hole is pretty well feathered, however, Mine is bare. The trifle you have given me doesn't count. You're raking in thousands. I claim a fair share."

"What do you mean?" said Foxley, green in the face.

"I mean what I say. It's plain enough, isn't it? A word from me will bust you sky high. If you don't want it said, you've got to pay for it. See?"

"I see—a case of blackmail!"

"Not at all, my boy. Say partnership. Sounds nicer. Without my help your shower of gold would

never have come off. As it is, I claim a share. What shall we say—half? Well, perhaps that would be a bit steep. You did a bit of the work, didn't you?"

"I did it all," said Foxley, "and I'll be hanged—"

"You will, my boy, you will. But there's no need to anticipate. You'll find it a sight easier to square me. Suppose we say one-fifth? That's not exorbitant. Give me a note, now and here, saying you'll pay me one fifth of all you make out of this book, and I'll clear out—to America, or Honolulu, or anywhere else where one can enjoy one's self,—as soon as I get the cash."

"I don't see how that's going to help me out of the hole you've got me into?"

"Pay me and I'll quit, and if the worst comes to the worst you can put it all onto me,—as you have it in your mind to do now, but can't unless I say the word."

"Why couldn't you keep that man's confounded story buried as you promised to?"

"Did as long as I could. He came after it fourteen times, and I told him Kerton had it with him in Switzerland. Then Kerton came home and that game was up."

"And why the deuce couldn't you tell me he'd got it back and might let it loose at any moment?"

"And what good would that have done? Your book was in your publishers' hands. For anything I knew it might take him ten years to get his out."

"What kind of a fellow is he?"

"Nice-looking young chap. I feel a bit sorry for him."

"Pity you didn't feel it before you stole his book."

"Bless me, man! I didn't steal his book. We were discussing plots in the ordinary way of business. I happened to mention one which struck me as somewhat original. You nefariously purloin, seize, and make

use of it. Am I to blame? Not the least little bit, my boy, unless I choose. No one was more surprised than I when I found you'd turned our little conversation to your own private ends, I assure you! Oh, no, my dear, you can't fix it on George Bidlake—unless G. B. chooses. And you know his terms."

"You're a bad lot, Bidlake."

"Pair of us, my friend, and not a ha'porth to choose between us. Well—to be or not to be? Your conversation is delightful, but I don't want to stop here all night. Am I to go to Honolulu, or am I to stop here and see you, as you say, hanged?"

"I must think it all out. I don't at present see how any amount I might pay you is going to get me out of the hole. Brinsley's on the warpath and he's a—"

"Oh, hang old Brimstone! Adopt my suggestion and you draw his teeth. He'll bluster a bit maybe, but that'll soon blow over, and you'll have heaps of solid consolation in the nibs. If you steal another man's plot for your next book, take my advice and kill the man, and bury him and his manuscript in your back garden. Not the slightest use looking at me like that, my boy. You wouldn't find me a good subject for sudden death. I'll give you till to-morrow to decide. If I don't hear from you by then, I go straight to Brinsley and give him my version of the matter. And then—farewell Mr. Foxley. Strikes me the Temple is not good for my health," and he went.

A Foxley sat for a long time with his hands in his pockets, staring at the toes of his boots and thinking deeply. He was not fool enough to suppose for one moment that if he agreed to Bidlake's proposal it would be the last of his exactions. The man would have him at his mercy and could wring him dry. What an utter idiot he had been to use that

plot! But there,—he had been at his wits' end, pushed on all sides, and he had jumped at the possible way out without full consideration of what he was doing or of the consequences. And then, who could possibly have foreseen the complication with the *Comet?* That other story might have dragged out a couple of years on publishing office shelves. And Brinsley mixing himself up in the matter was another aggravation of unlucky chance.

Still, if he agreed to Bidlake's suggestion and took the risk of the future—of course there was always the chance of his death—he could probably get out of the present coil with some small loss of prestige. And the public very soon forgets. If, by dint of much thought, he could make his next book an advance on either of the others, he could still hold his own,—with Bidlake playing skeleton in the background—a skeleton with a bony hand always asking for more.

There was only one other way,—and that was to go straight to Brinsley, explain the circumstances, and plead guilty to them, acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr. Guy Bertie, and offer him a share of the profits of the book. Brinsley was a magnanimous man. And he had,—to an extent just short of libel—caricatured him as Mr. Brimstone in his book! What a fool he had been! No, he couldn't go to Brinsley. It was too much!

So he was driven back to Bidlake. And that was hateful too. And so he sat tossing between two stools, both of which were seated with pointed nails, till he hated himself, and the world in general, and Bidlake most of all, and could not make up his mind what to do.

Two other ideas obtruded their heads like grisly snakes.

One was to get all the money he could from his publishers—he had been able to abrogate the usual rule of distant settlement, and was to receive cheques on account from time to time according to the sales—and go abroad himself, leaving the field to his adversaries.

The other was to end the whole trouble by blowing his brains out.

The first had more attraction than the last.

To carry it out he would have to muzzle Bidlake in some way—give him the undertaking he wanted, but put off giving him any actual cash, under plea of not having yet received any himself,—and he would have to keep Brinsley at bay long enough to get all the cash he possibly could out of Adhem and Pough.

And that was the course he finally decided on.

CHAPTER XXIX

A RATTLE OF DRY BONES

MEANWHILE George Barty was having worries of his own which made even the Foxley complication seem almost trivial.

That matter caused him at first no little distress of mind. For he could see no way out of it but by the destruction of Foxley's reputation, and, bitterly as he resented the theft of his plot, the thought of bringing another man to ruin lay heavy on him.

He would very willingly have let the whole matter drop and changed his writing name and made a fresh start. But, as Brinsley had emphatically said, to do so would be at risk of his own reputation, and a man's reputation is his first and last stronghold, and is not to be quixotically surrendered even to save another man. For his pen-name was known to some, and the matter had been forced into such prominence that it was almost inevitable that, in the end, his identity would leak out and a haze of suspicion hang round him all his life.

So he left himself in his friends' hands and bent his strong young shoulders to another burden.

Mary Lindsay had written at once to her father in Australia telling him of her engagement to George Barty. She looked forward with nothing but equanimity to his reply. It was a long time in coming, but when it came it astounded her.

"My dear Mary,"—wrote Mr. Lindsay—

"The news of your engagement was a great surprise to me, and at the risk of causing you

some pain I write at once to tell you that I cannot permit it. I do not know Mr. George Barty personally, but I have made my own enquiries, and I regret to say that there are circumstances in connection with Mr. Barty's family history which make an alliance with him extremely undesirable —in fact impossible. Unless you decide to act in open opposition to my wishes you will at once terminate this engagement and have nothing more to do with Mr. Barty or his family.

Apart from disabilities attaching to Mr. Barty—for which I do not for a moment hold him personally responsible—I have other hopes for you. We have struck a great deposit of tin on the Glen Ingalls property, and before very long you will be in a position—if you fall in with my views—to choose from any in the land.

Believe me, my dear girl, my wishes are all for your welfare, and [illegible] what I am doing.

[illegible] ving father,

CHARLES LINDSAY."

This letter caused [illegible] very great surprise, and still greater distress. It hit her like a physical blow. From the way it was worded, it was impossible for her to show it to either George or Mrs. Barty, without causing them pain equal to her own. And yet to tell that her father withheld his consent, and at the same time to withhold his reasons, would place her in a painfully awkward position.

She fled to her bedroom, and pondered it there with crumpled brows and tightened lips, and gradually rising wrath and rebellion in her heart.

What did it matter to her though there was that in the family history of the Bartys which would not bear inspection? It was no dead and gone Barty she

wanted to marry, but this George Barty whom she knew and loved, and who was good and honest and true, and marry him she would—she said to herself—father or no father. And if it came to that, how many families were there in Australia, ay or even here in England, who could show an absolutely clean record. There were black sheep in every flock, and she did not suppose their own family was any exception to the rule.

She had cried a little at first, but by degrees hot indignation dried her tears and only itself remained.

It was absurd and unjust, she said to herself. Her father had raised no objections to her coming away and supporting herself. Now, when she had chosen a way that led to happiness, he thought fit to interfere, and she was not going to stand it.

The question was,—what to do about this most unpleasant letter, and it caused her much greater trouble than the letter itself. They knew she had written home about her engagement to George. They had a right to expect to hear how her home-folks received the news. To show them the letter was to wound sorely those whom she had come to love even more dearly than the folks at home, and she would do anything sooner than that.

And yet to suppress it completely was almost impossible.

Her nature was simple and straightforward. The very thought of concealment or prevarication was offensive to her. Had her mother been alive, her wishes, even in such a matter, would have carried more weight with her. But her mother had died when she was a very small girl. She barely remembered her. Her father, while always kind, had never been

very sympathetic. And her brothers took after him, while she supposed she took after her mother.

The boys had grown up on the ranche, versed in sheep-craft and horses, as their father was, and slightly scornful of the girl to whom these things did not appeal, except as representing the family fortunes.

Yes, Mrs. Barty and Joan and George were dearer to her than her own people had ever been, and was she, for the shadow cast by some ancestor, close or remote, she did not care which it was—was she, for so intangible a thing as that, to give up her friends and that which was so much dearer still? She had promptly decided in her own mind that she would not. Her chief anxiety now was what to do about her father's letter.

It took her a long time to come to a decision. But by slow degrees her common sense showed her two things. That if wounding was inevitable, then the fewer wounded the better. And that since she and George hoped to pass their lives together there should be no concealments between them. Her father's letter had wounded her, it would wound George. They would bear it together. If their love and trust could not stand it they were not worth much.

Having so decided, she waited with such composure as she could summon, till he came home that night, and then quietly followed him up to his den.

"Hello!" he cried, in answer to her tap, and flung open the door. "Why, Mary?—Anything wrong, dear?" he asked anxiously, as he caught the signals in her face.

"Nothing wrong," she said quietly. "Only an annoyance which you must help me to bear, George. This is my father's answer to my letter telling him

of our engagement. It has hurt me and it will hurt you, dear,—"

"Whatever hurts you hurts me,"—he began.

"I know, dear. I would very much sooner not have shown it to you at all. But it seemed to me, George, that it would not be right. I could not mislead you and I want no concealments from— you. I want to share your burdens, and you must share mine. And if you care for me as I care for you, and every one of you, that letter will make no difference to us. Now read it and get done with it."

She saw his face flush as he read it, and it seemed to grow more than usually rugged about the deep-set eyes.

"It is quite true, dear," he said very quietly, when he had finished reading. "My father disgraced himself and was transported. He committed forgery. My mother has never said a word about it. It must have nearly killed her at the time. I don't think Meg or Joan know anything at all about it. All I could ever learn from my mother was that our father died in the Australian desert, where he had gone with an exploring party, and he died a brave man's death."—Mary was regarding him with strange excited eyes.—"That set me searching the newspapers at the Museum and I found it out at last—more than I wanted. It told of [illegible] in the desert—the convict George Barty,—[illegible] spoke well of him. Only one man got through alive, and he was another convict named—now, that is odd! I never till this moment thought of it in this connection, He was named Lindsay—Charles Lindsay——"

"And he was my father," said Mary, with sparkling eyes. "I knew about the expedition and that he was the only survivor, but I never knew he had been a convict. I am so glad. It was the Charles Desmond Gray expedition——"

"Yes——"

"How very very strange, George, that we two should come together from opposite ends of the earth."

"It is very strange. You have no doubt about your father being that same Charles Lindsay?"

"I have heard him tell of the terrible time in the desert dozens of times. The other matter was never named. One does not talk of those things out there. Many of them have some such record behind them, and it is quietly ignored and never spoken of. How glad I am I showed you that letter. I was inclined to burn it and say nothing about it, and it has tortured me all day. What shall we say to your mother?"

George pondered the question for a time, and then said, "I am inclined to think the best way will be to take her into our confidence. She is very wise, and very strong in the higher matters. This trouble helped to make her what she is. This reference to it will not shake her. Without the discovery we have just made it would distress her greatly no doubt. As it is, the sting is drawn and she will advise us what to do."

"We will tell her," said Mary. "Oh, I *am* so glad I showed it to you. If I hadn't, it would have been a thorn in the flesh all the time. As it is, I think I am happier than I was before."

So that night, when all the rest had gone to bed, they gave Margaret Barty Charles Lindsay's letter, and told her all their news.

She took it very quietly. The gentle face flushed, just as George's had done, at the ruthless reference to the old trouble, but the tender lips quivered only once, and the beautiful shining eyes swam more softly than usual for a moment, and then were lit with a pure steady radiance which lighted a responsive faith

wherever it touched. She did not speak for a minute or two, and then said softly:

"God's ways are very strange ways sometimes, my dears, and all we can do is to trust Him." And presently to Mary: "I am sorry your father writes in that way, dear. Knowing what he knows it seems to me a little unjust. But no doubt it was his love for you dictated it, and it is not for us to judge. Under all the circumstances I do not think that letter, or even your father's wishes, should part you. I believe George's happiness in life is bound up in you, and I believe you feel the same towards George——"

"Absolutely," said Mary quickly. "I love everyone of you more than ever I loved my own people. My own mother died when I was four. If she had lived I would have liked her to be just exactly like you, dear," and she kissed the gentle face fervently.

"Would you like me to write to your father?" asked Mrs. Barty, after a thoughtful pause. "I would just tell him how dearly you love one another, and how it would mar your lives to be parted——"

"We don't intend to be parted," said Mary hotly, and George said, "Not a bit of it!" and kissed her warmly, and stood with his arm round his own property.

"And," continued Mrs. Barty, "I would tell him that, under all the circumstances, I hope he will withdraw his opposition which certainly seems somewhat ill-founded."

"And I will write and tell him I intend to marry George if fifty fathers said No," said Mary, upon which George paid her with another kiss.

"Suppose you let me write this mail, and you will have time to cool down before the next," said Mrs. Barty, with a smile. "You have plenty of time before you. George has his way to make, and you could

not think of marrying for two or three years at the soonest. In that time you may have changed your minds——"

"Never!" and a joint kiss met in mid-air.

"Or something may happen——"

And how far beyond their wildest imaginings that something was!

Mrs. Barty's letter to Mary's father did not reach him till a long time afterwards. Not, in fact, until it had followed him to London. In the light of after events, it is invested with a quite peculiar pathos.

"Dear Mr. Lindsay,"—she wrote—"I have not the advantage of knowing you personally, nor you me. But I venture to write to you on behalf of your child and mine. They love one another very dearly. I think I may even go so far as to say that their future happiness is bound up in one another.

"Mary has shown me your letter objecting to her engagement to my son. But I put it to you fairly. Will the stated grounds for your objection hold water? As you truly say, there have been matters in the past which might in some cases offer a bar to their happiness. Is your own family quite clear of such? Are you personally, in a position to cast stones at my son for anything his father may have done?"—You see even the gentlest of doves will ruffle in defence of its young.—"My boy is a good and honest and honourable boy,—and why should not his own mother say it? I am told, by those who understand such matters better than I, that he has a career in letters before him. If devotion to his work will ensure success, and if that is the best thing for him, he will be successful. He has been a good son and a good brother.

He will prove a good husband. What do you want

more? If you truly have your daughter's happiness at heart, you will withdraw your opposition and let the young people follow their own hearts. Mary is as dear to me as my own girls, and my desire for her happiness is as great as for theirs. She has been more than a friend to us all from the first day she came here, and, with herself and George, I thank God for sending her to us.

Yours sincerely,

"MARGARET BARTY."

The next mail brought nothing for Mary. But the following one brought a short note from Mr. Lindsay, to the effect that he was starting almost immediately for London, in connection with the floating of his tin property on the London market. He would write as soon as he arrived, and meanwhile he hoped she was acting on the advice contained in his last letter.

They had decided to say nothing about Mr. Lindsay's letter to Joan or Meg. It would only open up the old wound of which both were in complete ignorance.

Joan was busier and happier than she had ever been in her life. Between her and Niel Felston had sprung up an affection, deep and true,—pathetic, perhaps, in the necessary limitation of its possibilities—all the deeper and truer, possibly, from its entire unselfishness and absolute devotion on either side. Each gave wholly and asked but love in return.

Joan had brought out all that was good in Felston, and with the gentlest and most delicate care nurtured the new life into strength and vigour. She not only made him strong, she made him use his strength. And he, rejoicing in his new-found powers, wrought mightily of that which was in him.

By degrees, as Joan's influence grew, he came to look back on the soiled page of the past with bitter disgust. Gambling had been the cleanest of his vices. And when the recollection of them all came back on him at times, as he stood at work in Joan's room, with the knowledge that those wonderful eyes of hers were on him, he shivered at the thought that she must surely see some after-marks upon him. The page was turned down indeed, but he would have had it torn out and done away with, and that is beyond any man's power of accomplishment. The happiest of crowns rarely lacks its thorns, and the sharpest are the unforgettable follies of the past.

It was in the springtide of this new life that he painted his great picture, " Aranea Felicissima," and it is just a portrait of Joan Barty as seen through Niel Felston's eyes. None but a true artist, intimately acquainted with his model in all her moods and tenses, and inspired by something beyond even his love for his art and his love for his model, could have painted such a picture. It is very difficult to state in cold black and white just what there was in it that captured you at first glance and made you look, and look, and come back from other rooms to look again. But, perhaps, in a word, you felt the inspiration of the thing, and there, I think, you have the whole story.

Niel Felston when he painted the Aranea was inspired—by regret, gratitude, hope, and a love which he felt, but hardly yet understood. Behind him, lay the abyss out of which he had crawled hand in hand with death. Before him, lay the void flushed mistily with new hopes. The one tangible thing to which his sick soul could cling with some confidence was his work. And the thought and sight of this girl with the wonderful face, and the eyes which told him more than all the words in the world could tell, inspired him to a mighty work.

At first sight it captivates you simply by its exquisite beauty—Joan's beauty. But as you look, and look, there grows in you the knowledge that it is something far deeper than the beauty of it that draws you back to it again and again. You feel the richer for looking, and the purer and the better and the nobler for looking, as though some marvellous virtue flowed out from the canvas for the healing of troubled souls.

Well, the painting of it healed one sick soul, and perhaps some of the healing unconsciously got into the picture and so flows out again.

It represents Joan lying back in her chair with her head on a pale-blue figured-silk cushion, her brown hair rippling round her in masses. She is dressed in a loose white silk gown, open at the throat, where the smooth white neck just shows through a ruffling of dainty white laces. In the slim white hands which lie in her lap, is a piece of tapestry work. She is not working, but through her fingers, streaming from the work or to it, there run innumerable silken threads of every conceivable shade. And these, in the most wonderful way, weave and blend themselves together, below, and above, and all round, till they form a background to the picture, iridescent but subdued, compact, of multitudinous rainbow hues, yet never obtrusive, every single thread wrought with extreme and loving care, and each in itself seeming instinct with some hidden meaning.

That wonderful background with its complexity of speaking threads only serves to throw the central figure into prominence, and the centre of the whole is of course the lovely face. And the beauty of the face centres in the great brown eyes, radiant and soft as far-away stars, but full of something which the stars know nothing of. They hold you like a glimpse of heaven. Are they pensive? Do they question?

Are they full of knowledge and deep, deep thoughts? Do they look right into your heart, and challenge all that is best in you to come out and be of service? All these, and very much more. They are strong and gentle, tender and true, sad and glad,—nay let me draw from the words of that fat old pagan, Paul Desvigneaux, and say at once, that they come nearer to my idea of what the eyes of Christ may have been like than any eyes I ever saw. And that it was, I suppose, which wrought so upon all who saw the picture, and came back again and again for another look at it.

It represents ten months of very hard work, and something more which is not measured by months or years, on the part of Niel Felston, and it is a consummation of Joan in many moods, but Joan herself as we knew her,—"only," as Jack Fairfax said, "more so," for none of us knew her as Niel Felston did.

The picture was practically completed before the storm broke over them, and perhaps it was just as well. Though, through it all, Joan maintained that sweet serenity which was proof against all outward disturbance because its roots struck deep and tapped the hidden springs.

CHAPTER XXX

STORM FRUIT

In pursuit of the plan he had finally decided on, Foxley sent to the crafty Bidlake a vaguely worded undertaking to pay to him, as and when received, one-fifth of the profits of a certain venture in which they were jointly interested, but told him at the same time that he could pay him nothing until the venture began to make some return.

Bidlake's reply to this was a request for £100 at once as he was hard up. Further, he stated that if the necessity arose for a journey on his part to the States, more money would have to be provided as he would not start until he got it.

Foxley sent him the £100 with a curt note to the effect that he was hard up himself and would be till the end of the quarter.

Meanwhile, the one-sided controversy continued in the papers. No reply having been received to his last demand, Brinsley wrote in the *Athenæum* the following week:—

> "Mr. Fox[illegible] does not reply. I make him one more of[illegible] or, if you please, I give him one more chance of settling this matter and setting himself right—if he can.
>
> "I have lodged with the Editor of the *Athenæum* such proofs as I hold, of the date when Mr. Guy Bertie's story left his hands and was first offered for sale; also the magazines to which it was sent, and the dates when it was sent and received back by him.

"Will Mr. Foxley do the same, and place his dates—and proofs—in the same hands. The verdict of the Editor of the *Athenæum* will be accepted by us as final."

To this, in pursuit of his plan, Foxley made no reply. He was said to be abroad in search of health, and local colour for his next book. Even Bidlake failed to find him.

Brinsley's last communication to the *Athenæum* was in the nature of an ultimatum. His next was a direct impeachment and made considerable stir.

"Still Mr. Foxley does not reply," wrote Brinsley. "I now, therefore, charge him explicitly, and with full knowledge of the seriousness of such a charge to such a man, with knowingly procuring and using the plot of Mr. Guy Bertie's story, and I am prepared to prove my charge to the hilt as and when he will. In justice to Mr. Bertie I will repeat what I stated at the beginning of this controversy, viz., that, when the matter was brought to his knowledge, Mr. Bertie, while indignant at the treatment he had been subjected to, offered instantly to suppress his story and to leave Mr. Foxley in possession of his ill-gotten gains, rather than be mixed up, even as victim, in so unpleasant a scandal involving another man's reputation. I pointed out to Mr. Bertie that, matters having gone so far, one or other reputation must go by the board, and that he had no right to sacrifice his own quixotically.

"On that, Mr. Bertie—though still reluctant to proceed to extremities—left the matter in my hands, and has had nothing whatever to do with it since.

"As to my own action in pressing this painful affair to a conclusion, I have done so simply in

the interests of the profession of which I am proud to be a member. The basis of the present system of the disposal of literary work is honour. That basis must be maintained above suspicion and at all costs. In the present instance, I am in a position to show that it has been most flagrantly outraged. It is, I am glad to say, the first case of the kind that has come under my notice. For the sake of my profession I have felt it impossible to pass it over. The law of honour has been broken, and—he who breaks pays.

"Once more I charge Mr. Charles James Foxley with the deliberate theft of the plot of another man's story. If he has any word to say in reply, let him say it.

"RICHARD BRINSLEY,

"Editor of the *Comet*."

Foxley never replied. As a literary quantity he disappeared. Rumour assigned him a residence on the Continent, in the States, and elsewhere. He may have continued writing under another name. Under his own, it is doubtful if even Adhem and Pough would have risked the production of a book for him.

One man's loss is generally another man's gain in this world. Whence,—strife and malice and much uncharitableness, and the terrible game of Beggar my Neighbour.

George Barty, however, had been stirred by no such feelings, and he had nothing but regret at having been all unconsciously the means of bringing another man to the ground.

When mud is flying some is as likely to stick to the innocent as to the guilty. Even with his very small experience he knew that, with the busy short-memoried public, to be mixed up in a scandal is to carry a possible

smirch. He could just imagine, when his book came out, some such discussion as this :—

"Let's see—Bertie, Bertie ? Wasn't that the man who stole the other fellow's book and passed it off as his own ? Low thing to do, don't you know ! Not him that stole the other fellow's book ? Sure ? Oh, the other fellow stole his book ? Well, I knew he was mixed up in it somehow. Beastly mean business, however it was." And the chances, he knew, would be ten to one, that, after all, the loose-minded one would retain the impression that the thief was named Bertie.

Thanks to Brinsley's valiant championship and straightforward handling of the matter, no such opinion could possibly obtain in literary circles. Through Brinsley he received many encouraging messages, both verbal and written, complimenting him on his action in the matter. He made a number of very good friends, too, among the men who came up to see his chief, and the relations between himself and Brinsley were of the warmest.

One thing he flatly refused to be led into, and that was the issue of his story in book form.

He had many offers for it, some of them very tempting ones. But he discussed the whole matter with Brinsley and Mr. and Mrs. Baird, and upheld his own view of the matter.

"I have no doubt it would go, and perhaps even make a bit of a boom. But I don't want that kind of a boom. To the public it would be 'the book that smashed Foxley,' and I the smasher. I want the whole thing forgotten as soon as possible, and I'd sooner climb my steps than get shot up them in that way."

It was rather remarkable self-repression in so young a writer, and I do not think he lost by it in the end. It tightened his present friendships and made him many new ones.

He was working hard all this time. Every spare minute was given to his writing, and by degrees he found the market for his wares widening, to his very great content. Brinsley bespoke first sight of his next book for the *Comet*, and he set to work on it with keen enjoyment.

But, while the Foxley matter was still slowly uncoiling itself, George suddenly found himself once more chief actor in a drama of real life which taxed his powers of equanimity and endurance to the utmost, and brought changes into his life such as he had never dreamed of.

Possibly the greater trouble helped him through the annoyance of the smaller, as an aching tooth is forgotten in the rush and turmoil of battle.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE IRON-GREY MAN

"MY father has arrived," Mary Lindsay announced one morning on receipt of a letter, and her lips tightened a trifle at the imminence of conflict. "He is stopping at the Grosvenor. He wants me to see him as soon as possible."

"You will go, of course, dear, at once," said Mrs. Barty.

"And I will go with you," said George. "I'm interested in this affair."

"I see no objection to your going if Mary does not," said Mrs. Barty.

"I'm certainly not going alone," said Mary. "We must present a bold front to the—well, we'll not say enemy yet. But as soon as he sees George he won't have a word to say, I expect."

So they set off immediately after breakfast, calling first at the office, to enable George to run through his share of the letters and arrange for an hour's absence.

He seated her in the visitors' chair with a morning paper, and sliced away at his letters, while she familiarised herself with the surroundings among which so much of his time was passed. Everything interested her, from the pile of new books set aside for notice, to the bristling spikes behind his desk on which were impaled the long fluttering galley-slips of set matter waiting future use. He went into Brinsley's room presently, with a bundle of correspondence, and came out again and beckoned her to come in.

Mr. Brinsley received her with much cordiality, said a few cheery words about George, their pleasant relations and his future prospects, and bade them run away and enjoy themselves while they were still young as they were getting older every minute.

Arrived at length at the Grosvenor, they were informed that Mr. Lindsay was out and was not expected back until the evening.

This was in the nature of a reprieve. They had been rather silent on the way up, at the near prospect of a possibly trying interview. Now they felt like children out for a holiday.

" It's a chance not to be missed," said George. " The office owes me a good many hours' overtime. We'll go and enjoy ourselves."

So they took 'bus down to Chelsea and strolled along the quaint old front, took a look at Carlyle's house, and went into the old Church. Then they crossed the river to Battersea Park and rambled among its deserted byways, with an enjoyment out of all proportion to the outward aspect of things. For it was a rather raw January morning, and the sky was grey with unshed snow, and the ground was soft and muddy, and their boots accumulated such loads of yellow gravel that when they issued from the wilderness they had to apply to a small shoe-black for relief. And George was enjoying himself so much that the small shoe-black blessed his stars, and promptly invested his unexpected windfall in a game of chuck-penny with his next neighbour on the beat, cleaned him out to his last copper, and then got his head severely punched for putting on side, and they made it up over a cup of coffee at a stall.

And George and Mary rambled on, across Chelsea Bridge, and up Vauxhall Bridge Road, till they came

to Victoria Station again. And there they had lunch in a restaurant which they chose with much discrimination, and then they got into a 'bus, and he dropped off at his office and she went on home.

But all this was only a temporary postponement of the inevitable, and that same evening found them once more at the Grosvenor, and this time Mr. Lindsay was in, and they were shown up at once to a private parlour on the second floor.

The table was strewn with papers and coloured plans and maps, and Mr. Lindsay got up from it to greet his daughter. He was a tall, well set-up man of apparently fifty-five or sixty, with iron-grey hair and flowing beard. Very Australian, said George to himself, and eyed with interest the man who was not only Mary's father, but the man who had known his own father and had been with him when he died. He had strongly marked features. His eyebrows were iron-grey penthouses, and the eyes below seemed cold and hard, cold and hard at all events when they turned on George. He could trace no likeness to Mary in him. She took no doubt after her mother.

"Well, Mary?" said Mr. Lindsay, as his daughter entered and he rose to greet her, and then he saw George behind, and asked, "And this is——?"

"George," said Mary. "George Barty whom I am going to marry."

"Ah!" said Mr. Lindsay, and George saw the strong jaw clench inside in angry repression. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Barty? We must have some talk about this."

"That is what I came for, Mr. Lindsay," said George.

"You got my letter?" asked Lindsay of his daughter.

"Yes, father. Did you get a letter from Mrs. Barty? No, of course you couldn't before you left."

"No. What was it about?"

"About George and me. Your letter caused me great distress, and it was only after very long consideration that I decided to show it to George and Mrs. Barty. Why did you write so, father? You must know——" and she stopped.

"Must know what?" asked her father.

"You must know, Mr. Lindsay," said George, feeling her distress, "that the disabilities you mentioned as applying to my side, though they are none of my causing, apply equally to your own. Excuse me putting it so plainly, but this is a matter on which Mary's happiness depends equally with my own. We love one another very dearly. You say we must part because my father, whom I do not even remember, slipped and fell. I do not know much about the matter for I was never told, and what I know I had to find out for myself. When I did find it out it nearly broke my heart, as it must have gone near to breaking my mother's heart when it happened. She is, I think, one of the very best women God has created——"

"She is," said Mary emphatically.

"And she has done enough good in the world to compensate for any wrong my father did, and for which we are none of us responsible. I have done nothing to forfeit any man's esteem, and I hope I never shall do. We are not rich but I am winning my way, and—and I ask your permission to marry Mary."

"What do you mean when you say your disabilities apply equally to me or to my side of the question?" asked Mr. Lindsay coldly.

"I mean, sir, that if my father had the misfortune to be a convict the same misfortune befel yourself,"—at

which Lindsay flushed angrily for a moment.—" You and he were selected to form part of the Gray expedition. He died in the desert, you won through. That is all the difference between you as far as I can see. Possibly his was the nobler ending. I know nothing about that. At all events he lost his life doing his duty."

Mr. Lindsay regarded him thoughtfully for a time, and then said, " There are differences even in the matter of crime. Some are more ignoble than others. Do you know the nature of your father's crime ? "

" He committed forgery, I have been told, under great stress. I have no doubt he did it for the sake of his wife and children. I do not know the circumstances and I dare not judge him. I think as kindly of him as I can. He did us a bitter wrong, but he may have done it mistakenly and for our sakes. I would dearly like to ask you about him as he was when you knew him. After all he was my father, whatever he had done."

" And what brought me under the law ? " asked Lindsay.

" I have no idea," said George.

" I killed a man in hot blood, and never repented it, for he deserved his death——"

" Ah ! " said George. " Before I knew what my father's crime was I hoped it might be something like that. Yes, there is a difference,—but—unless we knew all the circumstances of my father's case we cannot judge him. There may have been——"

" Forgery, however, is forgery," said Lindsay coldly, " and you can't get over it."

" And, after all, crime is crime, and breakers of the law are on much of a level in the eyes of the law," said George. " And I see no reason in all this why you should object to my marrying your daughter."

"I have other views for her."

"Apart from her own wishes?"

"A daughter's wishes ought to run with her father's."

"Possibly she may know best what makes for her own happiness."

"And quite possibly a father's experience may be of more value than his daughter's inexperience."

George shook his head. "Mary knows her own mind," he said. "Unless she bids me leave her I will not do so, for you or anyone else."

"And you?" he said, looking at Mary.

"George is more to me than anyone else in the world," she said.

"In fact you have made up your minds to follow your own line, regardless of my wishes, and have simply come here to tell me so."

"We hoped you would look at things from our point of view," said George. "But we do not intend to part with one another."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," said Mr. Lindsay. "You are acting against my wishes and must take the consequences. And I tell you plainly that the course you are taking will not make for your happiness. If you like to come here," he said, looking at Mary, "and live with me,—all well. If not, I wash my hands of you."

"If it must be so," said Mary sadly, "it must be so. I will not give George up."

"Then I wish you both good evening. Some day you will remember that I warned you," said Mr. Lindsay, and sat down to his maps and papers again, and George and Mary went out.

She had kept up bravely through the interview, but in the corridor George heard her catch her breath with a little sob. He passed her arm through his and

stood a moment for her to recover herself. Then she dropped her veil and they passed out into the street.

"He is hard," said George.

"He has always been hard," she said. "I don't think he understands girls as well as he does boys. They always seemed to get on better with him than I did."

Mrs. Barty shared their disappointment at the result of the interview, but she had been prepared for it by Mr. Lindsay's letter. She was more than usually silent over her knitting that night, beaming softly upon them all as usual, but not joining in their talk, and evidently busy with her own thoughts.

"I think I will go and see your father myself, Mary dear," she said, at breakfast next morning. "Perhaps the old people may draw closer than the young."

"Oh, if you would, dear Mrs. Barty!" began Mary. "But—I am afraid it will only give you pain and do no good. He never changes his mind, and the more you try to make him, the harder he gets. I'm afraid it will do no good. We will just try and forget that he objects."

"I will see him, however, and see what I can do," said Mrs. Barty. "And as he is probably very busy, I will write to him to-day begging him to spare me five minutes to-morrow morning before he goes out."

So, after breakfast next morning, she arrayed herself in her best, and Joan and Mary finished off her toilet with loving little tugs and pats, and finally released her with words of approval.

"You are more like a duchess than any duchess I ever saw," said Joan.

"You have seen so many," smiled her mother.

"I have seen plenty in the park," said Mary, "and all of them put together couldn't come up to you."

"Dear, dear! I must be getting stout," laughed Mrs. Barty.

"You are the stoutest-hearted, and the dearest, and sweetest old lady that ever was," said Mary.

"I am only forty-six," said Margaret. "That is still comparatively young when you have got past forty."

George insisted on seeing her into a cab, and exacted a solemn promise that she would take one on her return.

"You would certainly get lost between here and Pimlico," he said, "and what would home be without its mother?"

"Oh, mother dear, do be careful in getting in and out of the cab!" said Joan anxiously.

"Bless me, child!" said her mother, "I got into cabs before you were ever dreamt of," and away she went.

But she was back inside a couple of hours. Mr. Lindsay had left early that morning for the continent, and they did not know anything about his future movements at the hotel.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEELS OF CHANCE

For a clear comprehension of after events we must follow Charles Lindsay for a time, whereby we have an advantage over our friends in Wynyatt Square. They only arrived at partial knowledge of these matters later on. For the sake of continuity, however, it is as well to insert them here.

Mr. Lindsay had come to Europe with one sole end in view, and that was the flotation of his tin mine on the London market. It was an exceedingly rich find. Skilfully exploited it would more than repair the fortunes which had drooped and died with his thousands of tortured sheep on the parched ranges. He was a man of strong will and much energy, and he was determined that nothing should be wanting to compel success.

He had tried in the first place to float the property in the colony. But wool was bad, and everything was bad. The sheep had died by hundreds of thousands, and all spirit of enterprise had died with them.

So he turned everything he had left, which was not very much beyond the land on which the tin deposits lay, into money, to pay for the best obtainable surveys, assays, and reports. And armed with these, and a few letters of introduction, he came to London, anticipating no very great difficulty in getting the matter taken up there.

But he found matters in London very little better than he had left them in Sydney. Australian wool

had not very much to do with it indeed. That was only one dry bone among the many. There was no life anywhere. The public having suffered punishment from long-falling prices was, with sulky virtue, abstaining from speculation and even from investment, and Lindsay could not have chosen a worse time for bringing his wares to market any time these five years.

It only needed a couple of days to tell him this. In that time he had made the round of his letters of introduction, doubting the assertions of the first man, shaken in his doubts by the next, half convinced by the third, and wholly convinced at last by the agreement of all.

"In a month or two things may pick up a bit and there may be a chance," was the general verdict. But a month or two make all the difference in the world to a man whose resources are limited, who has strained himself to the utmost to accomplish this much, and who has no reserves to fall back upon.

So, with a possible fortune in his hand,—away off in Australia it is true, but still his if he could only turn it to account—Charles Lindsay found himself in a somewhat trying situation. It would tax his slender resources to the utmost to hold out for the necessary two or three months. To ask any of his new acquaintances for assistance was to stand condemned of the unpardonable sin of impecuniosity and to ruin all his chances. The strictest economy was necessary, and to that end he gave out at the hotel that he was going abroad for a time, and went into cheap lodgings in Burton Crescent, Bloomsbury.

There he spent two lean months, watching the slow revival of the markets, perfecting his schemes to meet various eventualities, and staying his appetite for

larger things with the confident hope of the better times to come.

The worst was past at last. The advertising columns of the daily papers began to swell somewhat with prospectuses of new companies, and it seemed to him that he might venture to approach some of his financial friends once more.

With that end in view,—since Burton Crescent is not an address calculated to inspire respect in financial circles, he moved his quarters to the First Avenue Hotel in Holborn, and as he descended there from a cab one evening, his daughter Mary happened to be passing with George Barty, on their way home from Kensington Palace Gardens.

It was one of those chance meetings which play so very much larger a part in the strange game of life than we are disposed to think sometimes. To put matters on a higher and truer plane, what seems to us mere accident is probably something infinitely greater. Accept the idea of an over-ruling hand in the game, and one's view of life deepens instantly into a recognition of the providential guidance of human affairs, and one's interest deepens in proportion.

If George and Mary had dallied two minutes longer in a certain tempting second-hand bookshop, where they had called to purchase a copy of "Sesame and Lilies" for Joan,—or if they had decided to postpone the purchase till a more convenient season, they would not have seen Charles Lindsay get out of his cab at the First Avenue Hotel. And if Mr. Lindsay's cab had not been blocked for three and a half minutes in Cheapside, by reason of the pavement being up, he would have been in the hotel before they got there. And things might have been a little different. But in the end they would have worked out right, for the Higher Hand

always wins the game, and the sooner a man learns that part of his lesson, the better it is for his peace of mind.

But when and where that end would have come, and whether we should have seen it, is quite another question. So we return thanks—to the dilatory navigators of Cheapside, and to "Sesame and Lilies" in the second-hand bookshop.

They mentioned the matter to Mrs. Barty, of course. And equally, of course, she started off first thing next morning, arrayed in her best and looking like a duchess, to interview—Mary's father.

For though, after their previous attempts, they had quietly shelved the question and made up their minds to take no notice of Mr. Lindsay's unreasonable opposition, it caused Margaret Barty much quiet discomfort to think that, in order to make George happy, Mary must fly in the face of her father's wishes.

She believed that a few minutes' quiet talk with him might induce him to alter his views, and she had never shirked her duty from fear of personal discomfort.

She reached the hotel and stood for a moment looking about the entrance hall for someone to ask. Critical moment,—the last moment of outward peace she was to know for many a day.

A gorgeous giant in blue and gold was speaking to tall gentleman with iron-grey hair and bushy beard. Margaret made for them, and as the hall porter turned to her,—

"I wish to see Mr. Lindsay, of Sydney, who is stopping here," she said.

"This is the gentleman," said the hall porter.

The tall man with the beard turned and looked at her and she at him. Two months of London had not

obliterated the tan of Australia. His face paled till it was the colour of parchment.

And as Margaret Barty gazed, the ghost of a dead and buried past looked out at her from the deep-set eyes.

She stood speechless, motionless. Her face blanched, till her lips were colourless. Then the hall and the people began to swing slowly round her. Her hand crept up to her heart, and, if the tall man had not caught her, she would have fallen.

They carried her into a private parlour and a young lady from the office hurried in to assist. Mr. Lindsay left her in the young lady's care and hurried out.

Margaret Barty opened her eyes at last, with a sigh and a shiver. She glanced hurriedly round, saw only the girl, and sat up.

"I am afraid I fainted," she said presently. "I am sorry to have troubled you, my dear. I will take a little brandy and water. I have had a shock."

She scrupulously paid for her medicine, sat for a time as though expecting a visitor, and then asked them to call her a cab. Instead of going home she directed the man to John Sinclair's office in Old Broad Street.

Sinclair came out of his private room and welcomed her warmly.

"This is an unusual honour and an unexpected pleasure," he began. Then, seeing her deadly white face, he drew her quickly into his room and closed the door.

"What is it? What is wrong, Margaret?" he asked.

"My husband is alive. He is Mr. Lindsay, Mary's father."

"Good—God!" said Sinclair, and then—though he knew her much too well to have any real doubt in his own mind—"You are sure? It is not an accidental likeness?"

"He knew me and I knew him," she said slowly. "I went to his hotel to try and move him about Mary and George. He was in the hall. We knew one another. I fainted. He—I do not know. He did not come back."

"Poor lad! Poor girl!" said Sinclair at last. "It will break their lives."

"Mine broke twenty years ago," said Margaret.

"It has been the more beautiful for the breaking," he said. "What are we to do about them?"

"They must be told," she said. "But how,—oh, how to tell them? . . . It is infamy! . . . Poor, poor Mary! . . . And my poor boy!"

And they both sat in silence, trying to see their next step through this great darkness.

"You will help me?" said Margaret at last.

"You know I will, Margaret."

"Please be there at seven. It is George's late night. You must tell him. . . . Mary is waiting now to hear how I got on. How *am* I to tell her?"

"I will come with you now," said Sinclair. "It is easier for an outsider to deal with a thing of this kind."

"Thank you!" she said. "But you can never be an outsider, John. You are the best friend I ever had."

If he had had his way he would have been more, any time these last fifteen years, and she knew it.

So he took her downstairs and called a cab, and they went slowly away through the grinding whirlpools of the city to break Mary Lindsay's heart.

First, however, with the natural desire of cautious man to eliminate as far as possible any possibility of mistake—since the bruising of many hearts depended on it—he took her back to the hotel and went inside while she sat in the cab. But all he could learn was that Lindsay had left half-an-hour previously with his baggage.

It was only half-past ten when they reached Wynyat
Square, so vast a change can a short hour and a ha
make—or a short n 'e if it comes to that—i
one's life and prospects.

Mary was at the door before Mrs. Barty's foo
was on the bottom step. Her face was eager for new
One look at Mrs. Barty's face turned her eagerness t
anxiety, and the sight of John Sinclair increased i
She knew Mrs. Barty always turned to him when troub
was about.

"What is it?" she asked, as they came up the step

Mrs. Barty kissed her,—oh, so tenderly, and Mar
saw that the gentle eyes were full of tears. "Joh
Sinclair will tell you, dear," she said. "I will go t
Joan," and she went on up the stairs, holding by th
bannister rail because she could not see very clearly.

"Mother, dearest! What is it?" cried Joan, at sigh
of her. "Have you been run over?"

"No, dear. Listen to me and help me, Joan. Yo
have much sense and we shall need all we have.
is something very terrible I have to tell you. Yo
must not break down or faint. I did that for a
the family. The man who calls himself Mr. Lindsay-
Mary's father—is my husband, George Barty—you
father."

"*Mother!*" cried Joan, her eyes blazing double the
usual size in her amazement.

"He knew me in a moment, and I knew him.
struck me down, and when I came to he was gone."

"Then Mary—. But how—? I don't unde
stand——" and then, "Oh, poor, poor George!
will kill him."

"It will not kill him, but it will break his heart
said Mrs. Barty quietly.

And in the little back parlour downstairs, Joh

Sinclair stood before the other frightened girl and tried to make her sit down.

"Tell me quickly, please," she said. "Is it George?"

"No, dear. It has nothing to do with George. It is about your father——"

"Oh!" said Mary, with great relief, as though nothing she could be told on that subject was of such very great consequence.

"It is something very terrible, Mary," said Sinclair. "You must bear it like the brave girl you are——"

"Is he dead?"

"No. He died nominally years ago. The pity is that he has come to life again. Your father is Mrs. Barty's husband who was supposed to have died in the desert——"

She gazed wildly at him, and gasped, "My father!—Mrs. Barty's husband!—Oh, no, no—George!"—and then she sank helplessly into a chair and gazed straight before her, seeing nothing, and her slim fingers caught hold of folds of her skirt and pinched them as tightly as a drowning man grips straws which cannot save him. She did not faint, but the shock of it stunned her, and she could neither think nor speak.

"What does it mean?" she asked at last, lifting her woeful eyes to his.

"We can only imagine how it has come about," he said. "I have been up to the hotel but he has gone."

"It is some terrible mistake."

"Mrs. Barty is not likely to have made a mistake in such a matter, dear. She says he knew her as quickly as she knew him. Then she fainted, and when she came to he was gone."

"I think I will go up to my room," said Mary, and crept away to cover like a wounded bird.

Then John Sinclair went up to Joan's room. He bent

over and kissed her, still holding her shaking hand in his.

"This is a sore trouble," he said. "That poor girl is crushed. She has gone up to her room."

"Poor Mary! and poor George!" said Joan. "I find it hard to believe, and I do not understand it yet. If it is true, why did he do it, and why has gone on doing it?"

"It is hard to say. One can only guess. Where is your mother?"

"She has gone to lie down. It is terrible for her. I thought she was going to break down again while she was telling me. Will you come back and help to break it to George, Uncle John? I am afraid for him. It will be awful."

"I will come back at seven. I promised your mother," and he went back to his work in the City.

George pushed through and got the paper closed up earlier than usual that night, and came striding home, eager to hear how his mother had fared with the iron-grey man.

He arrived before Sinclair, and went up to Joan's room three stairs at a time. He found Joan and Niel Felston talking together in whispers, as though a corpse were in the house.

"Hello, you two! Where's everybody? Where's Mary? Where's Mother? Don't go, old man,——" but Niel murmured something about fetching something and quietly left the room.

"George, dear," said Joan, gripping his hand convulsively in her small one, as he was about to go, "Wait here! Something very terrible has happened. John Sinclair was to be here to tell you——"

"What is it?—Mary?—Mother?"

"No. They are all right."

"Then what——?"

"It is about our father. Oh, why isn't John Sinclair here?——"

"Our *father?*" cried George.

"They say he is not dead, and—and—he is Mr. Lindsay——"

"He is—*WHAT?*" shouted George. And just then the door opened and Sinclair came in.

"Sit down, George!" he said. "And I will tell you all we know. . . . Your mother went to see Mr. Lindsay at his hotel this morning. She met him face to face and—recognised him, and he her. She states that he is George Barty, your father, whom we thought dead. The shock was too much for her, and when she came to herself he was gone."

George had been staring at him with wide eyes of horror.

"You say Mr. Lindsay—Mary's father—is—*our* father?" he jerked out at last.

"Your mother says so. She is suffering terribly, but chiefly at thought of you and Mary."

The boy's face was ghastly—white and drawn and pinched; his eyes were like caverns with live coals inside them.

"If all that is true," he said slowly, at last, as though feeling his way through a fog, "it would make Mary my half-sister——! What silly rot!" and he laughed,—a harsh laugh of derision. "What—! Mary, my *sister!* . . . Where is this man?" and he sprang up as though to go in instant search of him. "I will——"

"I went back to the hotel with your mother at once, my boy," said Sinclair quietly. "He had gone, bag and baggage. That looks bad, I'm afraid."

"We must find him. There are ways—. I don't

believe a word of it. It is some horrible mistake. We must find the man at once——"

"You might search for a year, with all the detectives in London, and never find him if he doesn't want to be found. What would you do if you found him?" He was talking for the sake of talking. Any discussion of the matter was a safety-valve which might save an explosion.

"Wring it out of him," said George fiercely, "if there's anything to wring."

"You can't wring things out of people if they decline to be wrung," said Sinclair.

"And what do you advise?" rasped George. "Sit still and do nothing?"

"It is always the hardest thing to do. Sometimes it is the only thing one can do. But if we can find him we will, though I don't see how it will help us if we do."

"I will go upstairs," said George. "My head is in a whirl. I can't think straight at present," and he went.

Felston heard him go into his room and came down at once to Joan.

"It hits him hard," he said, as he shook hands with Sinclair. "I could tell it by the way he locked his door. Is there no room for doubt in the matter, Mr. Sinclair?"

"There is room for doubt in most things, but Mrs. Barty has no doubt about this, and she is not one to make a mistake in so serious a matter."

"If Mary and George had never come together it wouldn't have mattered so much——"

"That is the ghastly part of the business," said Sinclair, "and at present I see no way out. . . . Felston," he said, after a pause for consideration, "you must do what you can to keep him from brooding. Stir him up in any way you can. Let him talk. Let

him go and try and find Lindsay. I was wrong in that. Anything sooner than sit there thinking. It would do no good if he found him probably, but he's better doing than thinking. He's strong, but it's a terrible blow. How is your mother, Joan?"

"She is prostrated. But she is very strong—inside I mean. Her grief is chiefly for George and Mary, I think. She bore her own sorrow twenty years ago."

"Yes," said Sinclair. "It was the thought of you little ones,—you weren't born then—that kept her up at that time. She has always thought more of other people than herself."

"She is the best mother that ever lived. Why did she have such a husband?" said Joan.

"Ah!" said Sinclair, and thought more than he said. For, if this thing were true, and he had little hopes of it not being so, it was indeed a strange fulfilment of the words he remembered using to George Barty, that night when he and Mr. Burney came up to his house,—and the man's soul had succumbed to the temptations among which he had of his own choice cast it.

"There must be a great deal behind that we do not understand," he said, "and it is not for us to judge him. He could not possibly imagine that George and Mary would ever meet. That is a calamity no one could foresee——"

"The blame is his all the same," said Joan vehemently.

"Yes, the blame is his, and the suffering falls on innocent shoulders, as it so often does. Tell your mother I will come round to-morrow night, Joan. Good-night, dear! Good-night, Felston!" and he went away.

"Would you try and get George to eat something, Niel," said Joan. "He always starves on press-day, and ill news lies twice as heavy on an empty stomach."

"I'll take him something up," said Niel, and went downstairs to see what he could get.

When he climbed to the top of the house with a tray, and knocked on George's door, it was some time before he could get a reply. But at last a muffled voice asked impatiently, "Well ?—What is it ?"

"A message from Joan."

The bed creaked, and George unlocked the door and stood in the doorway in the dark.

"What is it ?" he asked angrily again.

"See here, old man, you'll be sick if you don't eat something——" and Niel pushed in with his tray.

"I've got more to eat than I want——" said George roughly.

"Yes, I know," said Niel, with equal brusqueness. "Eating your heart and all that. Don't be a fool, George! It won't help ma[illegible] for you to starve yourself. You and I are goin[illegible] ind this man and screw the truth out of him. I don't want to have to carry you round, so set to and eat something, I tell you," and he struck a match and lit the gas, and fussed about setting out the things on the table, so as not to have to look at George, who sat blinking like a ruffled owl on the bedside.

"Now see here, George," said Niel, making talk. "Imagination is not my strong point,—take a bit of something, won't you ? —" George gloomily picked up a piece of bread and broke bits off, and ate them as if they were poison, and drank a glass of water.—"But I can see possibilities of mistake in this matter.—Try a bit of that meat. It's uncommonly good.—And it's your place, and my place if you'll let me help, to get right at the bottom of things."

"What possibilities ?" growled George, reaching for a knife and fork, and stabbing a slice of cold meat as if it

were the body of an iron-grey man with a long beard. He had hardly eaten a bite since morning, and the sight of food made him hungry, in spite of the heart-sickness.

"Well, for instance," said Niel, delighted with his success so far, and racking his brain wildly for ideas, "even though this man should turn out to be your father, what proof have you that Mary is his daughter?"

"Only that she says she is and believes she is. That's all."

"Just as Joan believes *she* is. Because she is told so. She has never even seen him. There is quite a possible loophole there. Do you yourself believe Mary is your half-sister?"

"Do I?—No, I don't. That is—I know she isn't. I couldn't possibly feel towards Mary as I do, if she were. It is different altogether——"

"Exactly!—Try a bit of that pie!—And when it's a question of heart or brain you're generally safe in following heart. Isn't that so?"

"My mother might be mistaken—but I don't think that likely," said George, carving savagely into the pie. "But I'll swear Mary is no half-sister of mine, however that may come about."

"Does she resemble him at all?" asked Niel. "I wish I'd seen him. I'm pretty good at tracing resemblances or the reverse."

"She's about as like him as that salt spoon is like that jug."

"There you are," said Niel enthusiastically.

"She might take after her mother."

"Does she remember her mother?"

"No. She died when Mary was three or four."

"And who was she?"

"Daughter of Alexander Lindsay, a squatter in the back blocks. No relation to the Lindsay of the

expedition. But this man, my father—if he is my father—had stayed with him as he came down towards the coast, and when he was set free he went back at his invitation. Mary told me all about that after her father's letter set us on the track."

"What made him take the other Lindsay's name and place, do you suppose?"

"If offered him some advantage, I suppose, and he jumped at it. Possibly he had less time to serve than my father had."

"He'd have been freed in any case."

"He couldn't tell that. And he may have had othe motives."

"Well, you see there are possibilities. Old Lindsay' daughter might have been married before, and Mar might be her daughter without being her second hus band's. If we can get hold of this so-called M Lindsay we may learn something. That's our firs job. Try some of that tobacco. It's almost up to you Chubb mixture.—How'll we set to work now?"

"Detectives?" suggested George, filling his pipe.

"Unless you've some charge against him you coul only go to private detectives, and they're slimy thing to deal with."

"He's here about floating a tin mine or something the kind."

"That's not absolutely criminal, but we might g at him through it. We must keep an eye on th papers. Mary will know where the property is."

"He might make his arrangements and get away ba before it came out," said George.

"That's possible, of course. Know anyone on th Stock Exchange who could tell us who's got the thing hand?"

"No. Sinclair might."

"We'll ask him to find out.—Finished? Then I'll take the things down. Won't you come and have a chat with Joan?"

"Not to-night. I feel pretty well done up with all this. Ask her to excuse me, old man. I shall turn in early." And Niel went off with his tray to receive Joan's thanks for having acquitted himself so well.

George sat smoking for a time, feeling very much the better, both bodily and mentally, for all that Niel had so skilfully wheedled into him. He got up and walked the room thoughtfully, and then he went quietly down the passage and tapped at Mary Lindsay's door.

She opened it instantly. She might have been waiting and longing for that tap.

"Oh, George!" she cried, and fell sobbing into his arms. He closed the door and held her to him, smoothing her hair as if she were a child.

"Take heart, dearest," he said. "You and I are not going to believe any such foolishness. I am certain there is a mistake somewhere."

"Oh, George! Is it possible? Oh, you give me hope! I have been in the bottomless pit ever since I heard. It was too terrible. Do you think your mother could possibly be mistaken?"

"I'm afraid not that, dear. But even if she is right it does not follow that you are his daughter."

"I don't understand. What do you mean?" she said, holding herself back to look into his face.

"Do you feel as if you were my sister, or half-sister, or anything less than I want you to be?"

"You know I don't," and she kissed him hungrily.

"Well, neither do I. Not the very least little bit. And we won't believe it till it is proved to the hilt. This man may be my father. He has certainly in some way acquired the right to call himself *your*

father. But where we know of one deception there may be many, and I'm going to find out. With a man who has been living under a false name for twenty years, away off in Australia, the possibilities are almost endless. Have you any idea where you were born, Mary ?"

"I suppose at Coonanbarra, where we lived until the drought."

"What is the nearest town ?"

"Glen Tanar."

"I will write to the registrar there, and the minister if there is one, and anyone else you can think of, to see if they can give us any information. If we can't get it that way, I'll go across myself and find out. That you are not my sister I'm as certain as that I want you to be my wife."

"You give me hope, dear. My heart was sick," she said.

"We will hope together and stick together, and no one shall come between us. Now I am going to see my mother for a minute. Good-night, dearest. Be brave, and don't worry any more than you can help."

Mrs. Barty had gone to bed. Strong as she was,—with that inward strength which can endure so much more than the outward flesh—the day had been too much for her. The shock of that sudden meeting had numbed her for the moment, as an outward blow on the heart or head might have done. All she wanted was to lie still, and in quietness and confidence recover herself.

George stepped softly into the dark room, and she asked instantly, "Is that you, George ?"

"Yes, Mother dear," and he bent over and kissed her, and sat down on the bedside, and felt for her hand.

"This has been a sore day for you, Mother," he said.

"And for you, my boy. How does Mary stand it ?"

"I have just left her. She is feeling happier now. We are not going to believe it all till there is no possible hope."

Margaret Barty sighed. She was satisfied that there was no possible hope.

"I mean about his being her father," said George hastily. "We have nothing to go on there but assumption, you see, and—and—well,—we can't feel that we are brother and sister, and we don't intend to, one moment sooner than we have to."

"I am afraid there is no room for hope, George," said her rigid honesty and valiant habit of looking troubles squarely in the face.

"As to his being Mary's father there is, Mother, until it is proved, and we are going to cling to that doubt. He has misled us in the one thing. It leaves at all events the possibility of doubt in the other."

"I wish it might be so," she said quietly. "I hope it may be so. Now good-night, dear boy. I am very tired."

Meg and Jack Fairfax received the news with surprise equal to its magnitude. They were not, however, hit so hard as the others had been. Their own concerns occupied much of their thoughts, and the hopeful attitude maintained by Mary and George, to whom their sympathies naturally overflowed at once, tended to cast some doubt on the direct outcome of the calamity.

With the exception of John Sinclair, and Jack Fairfax, and Niel Felston, no one outside the family heard anything about the matter, and these were sufficiently members of it to keep their own counsel.

CHAPTER XXXIII

UNDER THE WHEELS

As the result of a family council on the following night
John Sinclair undertook to learn what he could re
specting Mr. Lindsay's financial relations in the City
with the ultimate object of finding Lindsay himself.

Mrs. Barty was at first averse to following the matte
up at all. She did not see that anything was to b
gained, while the results to her husband might b
painful. Such tender regret as might have survive
the last twenty years, and the catastrophe that precede
them, died sudden death at sight of her husband in th
flesh, and his instant fresh desertion. She bore no re
sentment, however. It was a quality one could no
possibly associate with Margaret Barty. Her sole desi
was to drop the veil once more and forget that it ha
ever been lifted.

But when they made it clear to her that, for the sak
of George and Mary, the matter must be probed to th
bottom, no matter who suffered in the process, sh
acquiesced at once, and stipulated only that the enqui
should be confined to the question of Mary's parentag

For herself she had done with George Barty, th
elder. Quiet as she was, and forgiving, and possesse
of every gentle virtue, there were things which migh
indeed be forgiven, but could never be condoned, an
she possessed the steel-like endurance and tenacity whic
not seldom form the corner stones of such a natur

But Sinclair's enquiries elicited nothing. The t
business was not apparently flourishing enough
show its head yet.

The days became weeks, and matters in Wynyatt Square settled back by degrees into an apparently steady flow after the break over the rocks. The surface seemed almost as smooth as ever, but the currents below were shot with new impulses, as the waters below the fall are stirred with fuller life by what they gain in their descent. There was a closer knitting together of the circle through the menace from without. There was a subdual of surface gaiety, but there was a deepening and widening of their common faith, and hope, and love, and courage. And the sense of expectation which filled all their minds was akin to the bubbles from the fall and kept them charged with a certain excitement.

To Mary Lindsay and George Barty it was a time of quiet endurance, and at times of much mental agony with which they wrestled manfully and came out the stronger. They set their faces resolutely against the horrible doubt which Mrs. Barty's discovery had given rise to. When the serpent's head intruded into their Paradise, they trampled it under foot and clung the closer to one another.

At times, however, it was inevitable that, to each of them apart, the thought should come,—"If it should be so,—What?" And neither ever found the answer.

George over his work, at the office or upstairs in his room, and Mary amid the bewildering vacuities of her four innocents, would stop dead for the moment, face to face with that grisly head. And—"My God! my God! if it should be so—!" was George's cry deep down in his heart. And Mary's hand would slip to her heart with a fervent, "God pity us!" which her lips had no need to utter. And they hungered the more to meet quickly and draw strength one from the other,

each crediting the other with the fuller belief and hiding the fears that lurked below.

George looked at Mary through new eyes as he said to himself, "Can it be possible?" And every fibre of his being cried out in acute physical pain that it could not be—that it was not; that never since man was made had brother yearned for sister as he yearned for Mary. And the idea grew stronger and stronger within him that, before their hearts could ever know rest again, he would have to go to Australia and find out everything for himself. Even though this Lindsay-Barty—for whom he entertained no slightest filial feeling—took solemn oath that Mary either was or was not his own daughter, they could none of them trust his word, and it was a matter in which no faintest shadow of doubt could be suffered to exist.

But, harassed and exercised in mind as he was by this matter, his work, after the first day or two, did not greatly suffer. On the contrary, he turned to it at night with an energy born of a desperate desire to escape for a while from the tangles of the outer world into the ordered courses of his own creation, where he held the threads in his own hands and could bend matters to his own will.

He was deep in his second book, and the delight of the work had gripped him again and went far towards helping him to bear the outside troubles with a certain equanimity. He was conscious too of growing power, of a deepening and widening of his outlooks on life, of larger sympathies and keener understandings, and strength made for quietness. Under such conditions the Foxley controversy was little more than a pin-prick, and he left the matter in the hands of his friends, desiring only to be kept out of it as far as was possible.

But now and again, and in spite of himself, t

demon of doubt in his own self-constituted belief would grow too strong for him. Even his work would become impossible to him, and he could not sit still or settle to anything for the gloomy thoughts which rode him. Then he would up and out into the night, and cover untold leagues of gas-lit streets,—with gritting teeth, and crumpled face, and the horror of it all gnawing at his heart,—as though peace of mind lay only through the chastening and jading of the body. These black pilgrimages were perhaps not wholly without their uses. They taught him many things,—the stony loneliness of the great City, the utter insignificance of the single unit,—the abomination of desolation in the wanderer, while millions eat and drink and sleep all round with no more thought of him than of a used postage stamp. He came across many miseries greater than his own in those dogged trampings of his, miseries that were positive where his were still only possible, and nothing tunes a man's heart back to thankfulness more readily than the knowledge of depths deeper than his own. Rarely, as he stood on the top step and let himself in with his latchkey in the grey of the dawn, body-weary and heart perhaps somewhat less sick,—but he thanked God for Mary and his mother and Joan. Happy, I say again, the man who has three such white souls to think of and to cling to when the dark times are on him.

* * * * *

John Sinclair was sitting in his office one evening, clearing up some matters which had got shelved during an unusually busy day. It was after hours, and he had the place to himself, except for the one-armed commissionaire who acted as caretaker and lived upstairs, and whose wife was busily sweeping the outer office.

The commissionaire tapped on the door, and put in his head after carefully removing his cap and tucking it under his missing arm, and said, " A gentleman to see you, Mr. Sinclair, sir."

" Anybody I know, Brown ? I'm just going."

" Stranger, sir. Says he must see you if you're in."

" Very well. Show him in," and the stranger promptly appeared—a tall, well-built man with iron-grey hair and bushy beard. Sinclair did not know him and stood looking at him enquiringly.

" You don't recognise me, Sinclair. I am George Barty," he said, and John Sinclair sat down. George Barty did the same.

" So it *was* you. I began to hope your wife was mistaken," said Sinclair at last.

" No, she wasn't mistaken, poor thing ! I'm only sorry she came that day. It was a misfortune for both of us. I did my best to keep out of her way."

" What is the meaning of it all ? "

" That would be a very long story. I took the other man's name and place because he had a better record behind him, and a shorter term in front, than I had. You were quite right, that night. It was a bad bargain I made with old Burney. You can't live among lepers without becoming leprous. I meant well but the devils and the Devil were too much for me I was in hell. The chance of escape offered, and I took it and burned my bridges."

" And now ? "

" I want your help. The drought ruined me. The I found tin on an outlying property. I tried to explo it there, but things were dead and I had to come acros I found things almost as bad here. They're comin round, but they're slow yet and the waiting h

exhausted my funds. What about that money I left you? All used, I suppose?"

"It is intact and has been out at compound interest from the day you left. Your wife declined to touch it."

"That was like her. What does it amount to now?"

"Over £10,000."

"That would help——"

"It belongs to your wife and children. You have treated them shamefully. The time may come when they'll need it!"

Barty flushed angrily but held himself in.

"You cannot think worse of me than I do of myself," he said quietly.

"I'm not at all sure of that," said Sinclair coldly. "Since you chose to be dead I'd have thought a good deal better of you if you'd stopped dead and not come back to break all their lives again. What about Mary Lindsay? Is she your daughter?"

"My daughter?" said Barty, with a look of much surprise. "Why, of course she's my daughter. Of course—since I had been married before——"

"I have reason to believe that Mary's mother had also been married before," said Sinclair quietly.

It was only a chance shot, and he watched Barty's face keenly. It remained perfectly unmoved, but Sinclair got the impression of a momentary flicker in the cold blue eyes.

"What on earth made you think that?" said Barty. "Oh, I see. It's of George and Mary you're thinking. It's a nasty business that, and I'm very sorry for them. But I couldn't possibly foresee anything of the kind, and the moment I heard of it I did my best to part them."

"You don't answer my question," said Sinclair. "Had Mary's mother been married before you married her?"

"Of course she hadn't," said the other angrily. "Now, see here, Sinclair, that's a matter I can't cure and can hardly be held responsible for. I'm as sorry as I can be about it. All I can do is this.—If you'll help me with my scheme I'll make over a fair proportion of the profits to Mary and Margaret and the rest. I can't do more."

"You can't right this wrong with money. They wouldn't any of them touch a penny of it. If Mary is really your daughter there are two more broken lives to your account. But, I tell you candidly, your word carries no conviction to my mind."

"Why on earth should I lie to you about such a matter? It doesn't affect me in the slightest."

"If it did you would, I presume. How it might affect you I can't say at present. I shall make it my business to find out."

"And you won't give me any help in this tin matter?"

"I could not undertake any such responsibility," said Sinclair.

"I have surveys and reports and assays by all the very best men in the colony. They're beyond question."

Sinclair shook his head. "Outside my line."

"Then I must play my last card and that may drag you in. That's why I came to see you."

"What is the last card?"

"The Burneys. If they will go in I can get others in. If they won't——"

Sinclair shook his head again. "A nasty business!"

"When a man's at the end of his tether he can't be over particular."

"You'd have difficulty in fixing it on Burney now, I should say, apart from any other considerations."

"I can fix it all right. I came across little Zettner the other day, the Jew to whom Burney paid that cheque. He's a financier now, but not big enough for my thing. But he's open to business, and he knew as well as old Burney did who forged that cheque. I don't hanker to stir the mud up, but I've got a fortune in my hand and I'm going to realise it—one way or another. The only other way is for you to assist me or to let me have that money."

"I've done my duty by your family for the last twenty years," said Sinclair. "I'm not going to fail in it now."

"Then you force me to the other thing."

"I force you to nothing, but I'm not going to let you force me to a course I don't approve of. One of your daughters—the one you have never seen—is hopelessly crippled. She may need that money some day."

"It's a bit hard, you know,"—

"Hard? What has it been for your wife all these years? What was it for her that other morning, when you met her face to face and left her again? I had a certain amount of sympathy for you dead. Disgracefully alive, I have none. I won't help you in your schemes, but there is one thing I require of you."

"And what's that?"

"I want explicit information as to where and when you were married to Mary's mother, and where and when Mary was born."

"That won't help you at all. I don't know what bee you've got in your bonnet, man, but there's nothing in it."

"In that case you can have no objection to giving me the information. It may be of service or it may not. But until I have copies of those certificates I won't take your word for it,"

"Then it can just rest where it is. You decline to help me. I decline to help you."

"If, for Mary's sake and George's, I could prove that she was not your daughter, I might be tempted to let everything else slide and not interfere," said Sinclair meaningly, and watched his man keenly again, and again caught, as he thought, a sudden gleam in the blue eyes, like a tiny flake of molten steel struck out by the hammer.

"Now what do you mean by that?" said Barty. "Seems to me you're tempting me to lie to you in this matter, and I'm not going to do it. The trouble's big enough already."

"I don't want you to lie. I want you to tell me the simple truth. Where were you married? Where was Mary born?"

"Nothing for nothing, my friend. You won't help me. I certainly won't help you—even to the destruction of mare's nests and bees in your bonnet," and he got up to go.

"I want the date and place of your marriage, and the date and place of Mary's birth," said Sinclair once more, without moving a finger.

"And I decline to discuss the matter further."

"Tchutt, man! Australia hasn't sharpened your wits. I'm not asking a favour of you. I hold the whip. If you don't tell me what I want to know I will knock your company into a cocked hat."

"And how?"

"No need to go into details. I can do it from this desk in five minutes, as you know."

"Your consideration for your friends in Wynyatt Square is not apparently very deep."

"Deeper than you think, perhaps. The revival of the old scandal would be bitter, no doubt, but there are bitterer things than that,"

"I see. . . . And if I give you what you want, you promise not to interfere in my affairs."

"I have no present desire to interfere in your affairs. That's all I can say. The rest would depend on circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"I can't say till they crop up."

"You're a good fighter, Sinclair, and a staunch friend, and a very hard man. . . . However, it's no good making two bites at a file. Write to the Registrar at Bandabra, Darling County, New South Wales, and ask him for copies of the register of the marriage of Charles and Mary Lindsay, and of the birth of their daughter, Mary."

"I understood you lived at Coonanbarra."

"Afterwards," said Barty, coolly, "Write to Bandabra, that will give you all you want. Now I'm going up to give old Burney a bad quarter of an hour," and he nodded and went out.

Sinclair turned in his chair and wrote a letter to the address Lindsay had given him, walked along to the post office and enclosed a couple of postal orders for a pound each in it, and posted it. Then he jumped into a cab and drove off to Wynyatt Square.

They were always glad to see him there. He had been the friend of the family before the flood and through it, and Margaret had always turned to him for counsel and sympathy. He found her and Joan alone in the Spider's Nest. And as soon as Mrs. Barty saw him she said—

"You have some news."

"Well, I have—such as it is. But it's nothing very definite. Perhaps suspicions would be nearer the mark," and he told them just what had passed.

"It is not much to go upon," said Mrs. Barty, with a quiet shake of the head.

"It sounds less in the telling, I confess. But it gav
me, at the time, a very strong impression that there i
something behind that we don't know yet."

"I would welcome anything that would help thos
two,—anything!" said Mrs. Barty. "They hav
suffered greatly. The way they cling to hope an
one another is most wonderful."

"Shall we tell them, or wait till we have somethin
more to go on?" said Sinclair.

"Tell them. It is always best," said Mrs. Barty
"I'll go and fetch them. Mary is in his room. H
has liked to have her there while he is working o
late."

And presently they came hastily down and heard al
Sinclair had got to tell.

"Bandabra!" said Mary. "Why, that's hundred
of miles away from Coonanbarra. I don't eve
remember living there."

"You may have lived there before you remember,'
said Sinclair.

"It is possible," she said, with a thoughtful shak
of the head, "but I never heard of it."

"I wrote to Coonanbarra over six weeks ago,'
said George. "Between the two we may learn some
thing. If we don't, I'll go out myself if I have to worl
my passage. Meanwhile I'm surer than ever, ever
time I look at Mary, that there's something behin
all this that we don't understand yet. And I'll neve
rest till I've got to the bottom of it."

CHAPTER XXXIV

AGAINST TIME

GEORGE BARTY, the elder, whom for the sake of distinction we will still call Lindsay, could not, for reasons of his own, afford to let the grass grow under his feet. As he had told Sinclair, he was at the end of his resources. Unless, by a bold stroke, he could recover himself he must go under, and he was not the man to go under without a struggle, no matter what the weapons he used.

He had had no great hope of obtaining Sinclair's direct assistance, and as to the money left in his hands he had supposed that long since exhausted. Still, he would have preferred not to have to play his final card if his ends could have been attained by any other means, and in any case, as he had said to Sinclair, he might have to drag him into the matter and it was just as well he should be warned.

He had had ample time to perfect his plans while waiting for the markets to come round, and within an hour after leaving Sinclair he was ringing the bell of the Burney house in Kensington Palace Gardens.

Sir John, however, was down with gout and unable to see even so urgent a visitor as this, and Mr. Burney was out.

Next morning, therefore, found him sauntering about Lombard Street. He saw Frazer Burney go into the bank, allowed him half-an-hour for his letters, and then entered and requested audience of him.

He was shown into Mr. Burney's private room at las past his old desk where he had sat gloomil stabbing his blotting-pad one morning twenty year before.

"I have come, Mr. Burney," he said, "to endeavou to enlist the interests of your firm in a very valuabl discovery of tin in Australia. I have got all par ticulars with me, assays, reports, and so on, from th very best experts in the colony. I want financia backing. There is a heap of money in it, but it need money to get it out."

"We are not promoters——" said Burney.

"Of course not. You are bankers. But the fac that you are behind me will be quite sufficient to carr the matter through in other quarters."

"It is not at all in our line. If your scheme is a good as you say, you will find no difficulty in floating i in the usual way. I am afraid it is only wasting you time to discuss the matter any further——" and h picked up a bundle of papers to indicate that th interview was concluded.

"Perhaps not," said Lindsay coolly. "I hav several very good reasons why you should take thi matter up. I will tell you one of them. Twenty year ago you yourself were in a hole for money. To ge out of it you forged the name of Lady Sarah Gwynn to a cheque for £950. Your father, in order to save you induced one of your cashiers, George Barty, to assum the liability. Barty was transported and was suppose to have died in Australia. Fortunately for me, un fortunately for you, he did not die. He assumed th name of a fellow-convict who did die in the desert, and here he sits. I am George Barty, and I want you backing to my tin scheme. What do you say to it now Mr. Burney?"

Mr. Burney sat, with scowling grey face and knitted brow, glaring at this evil reminder of old days.

"It's a lie," he jerked out at last. "You're crazy——"

"You know better," said Lindsay. "I was crazy to do what I did, and to suffer what I suffered, for your sake, or rather for the sake of the sum your father paid me. But let me speak quite plainly. I can prove all this to the hilt, and if you force me to it I shall do so. I have no wish to re-open the matter. On the other hand the drought a couple of years ago ruined me. This tin discovery will set me on my feet again, and I want your help in the matter. The thing is genuine and you can make money out of it while helping me to do the same. Now, what do you say?"

"I say nothing," growled Burney. "If you care to see my father about your scheme you can of course do so. He is the head of the firm."

"He is laid up with gout, I understand. I called at Kensington Palace Gardens last night but could not get to see him."

"I'll give you a line to him," said Frazer Burney, with a very distinct appreciation of this shifting of the burden from his own shoulders, and a vague idea, too shadowy as yet to be a hope, that the outcome of the interview might possibly be more advantageous to himself than to either of the others.

The line opened the doors of Kensington Palace Gardens to Lindsay, and in due course he was shown into the room where twenty years before he had sold his soul for cash.

He hardly knew the shrivelled old man who lay sunk in his chair with his foot propped up on the rest. Twenty years and many disappointments had wrought

great changes in him. His eyes, however, were keer still and he looked sharply at his visitor.

" My son tells me you have some important busines to lay before me, Mr. Lindsay. What is it ? "

" Briefly, Sir John, it is this. On my land in Australia I have discovered stream tin in vast abundance. I want Burneys to help me to exploit it."

" Not in our line at all. What the deuce——" begar the old man irritably, and looked about for his bell.

" One moment, Sir John. The reason why your sor sent me to you was this. Twenty years ago in this room you bought me, body and soul, for £5,000. It was a bad bargain—for me, at all events. I sold more thar I knew. I am George Barty——"

" Barty ?—Barty is dead," said the old man, much disturbed, and glaring at him with eyes like smoulder-ing coals.

" Well, I don't feel very dead. I died, nominally, in the desert, because it suited me to do so. Now it suits me to come to life again. I was doing well till the drought carried off my sheep. Now I'm on my beam ends unless I can carry my tin scheme through. There's heaps of money in it, but I need your backing. Of course you will take a share of the plunder. But it's a genuine find and as safe as your bank."

If Frazer Burney had had any hope that the sudder resurrection of George Barty might upset his father to the detriment of his health he was mistaken. It was not the first time in his life that those shrewd old eyes had looked sharply out of a corner seeking ways of escape.

He knew that the man before him spoke the truth concerning his identity, and it was something of a shock to be suddenly confronted with him so startlingly alive, when, on the rare occasions when he had

thought about him at all, he had always thought of him as dead.

But he was too old to fight a scandal; and money, for any use he could make of it, was less of an object to him now than it had been at one time. For one thing, he had plenty of it. For another, he knew how very little it can purchase compared with the things it can *not* purchase. If he had never known material want, neither had he been able, with all his wealth, to procure those two or three essential things which make for happiness.

"So you're Barty," he said slowly, "and alive. Well, I'm glad I haven't got your death at my door at any rate. What is it you want?"

Lindsay was surprised at the easy playing of his last card. He was not to have the game all his own way after all though.

"It is very simple," he said. "In my prosperous days I acquired a certain property at Glen Ingalls, in the north of New South Wales. The drought swept me bare of everything except this. I always had the idea that it might have a mineral value. It was no good for sheep. I had it carefully surveyed by experts, and they discovered tin in very large quantities, stream, lode and vein. I had the best men obtainable and their reports are above suspicion. I had to mortgage it to raise the money and to live. It is not a heavy sum—£5,000—the price you originally paid for me, by the way. The next interest is due in June, and I want my company floated before then. The experts say there is tin there to the extent of at least half-a-million, and probably a great deal more. My idea is a company of say £350,000, purchase price £300,000, of which you take £50,000 and I take the balance——"

"We should want more than that," said the old man.

"Under the circumstances," said Lindsay, "I think you are doing very well."

"Never mind the circumstances. If we go in at al it is on the understanding that there are no circum-stances. You understand? We are talking simple business now. We should want £100,000 at least out of the £300,000, supposing any such sum can be ob-tained. If you can do better elsewhere we don't ask you to come to us. Have you got a good title? That is the first thing. Let us see to the foundations." Useless as the money was to him, the spirit of Lombard Street woke up at scent of a big profit. The old man looked within measurable distance of death. The spirit of gain galvanized him into sudden life, and that not so much for the sake of the profit as for the pleasure of making it.

"The title deeds are in the hands of the mort-gagees——"

"Of course, of course."

"I have an abstract here along with the other docu-ments."

"Let me see," and the frail old hands hooked the glasses on to the sharp old nose, and he skimmed through the document with a practised eye. "Um—um—um—um—um— Alexander Lindsay. That you?"

"No. I'm Charles Lindsay."

"Who is the Alexander who bought the property originally?"

"He's the man through whom it came to me."

"Ah?—and why?" and the sharp eyes bored into him like gimlets.

"It's all there," said Lindsay. "You'll find the copy of Alexander Lindsay's will."

The old man turned over the papers till he came to it, glanced through it and looked up sharply at the other

"You inherit through Mary Lindsay, daughter of Alexander. Who is she?"

"My wife."

"You married again out there?"

"Yes."

"I—see. Any children?"

"Girl and two boys."

"Wife living?"

"No."

"Just as well for you, perhaps. Well, if we go into it, and, mind you, I don't say yet that we will, we shall want £150,000 out of it—equal shares with yourself."

"You said £100,000 just now."

"You hadn't committed bigamy then, at least I wasn't aware of it. That introduces an element of risk, a very grave element of risk. . . . Where we accept risks we expect commensurate profits."

Lindsay rapidly reviewed the situation. On the one hand—endless troubles. The revival of the old scandal, a possible prosecution for bigamy, the certain upsetting of his schemes. On the other—£150,000.

"Very well," he said. "I must agree."

And upstairs, Mary Lindsay, daughter of that other Mary Lindsay, sat in charge of four vacant-eyed children, while the two men below, the one knowingly and the other unknowingly, bargained for her inheritance.

It was more than three months before George received any answers to the letters he had written to the various parties at Glen Tanar.

The first letter came by the evening post one day, and Mary, sitting working in George's room with him, ran down to see what the post had brought. She was pale with excitement as she handed the letter to him, and her hand shook as with an ague.

He held it unopened in his hand, and they stood

looking at one another. He almost wished it had not come, almost feared to open it now that it had come. So very much depended on it. All his own and Mary's future happiness. Which would it be—life or death to their hopes? One or the other almost certainly lay inside that envelope. Doubt had left room for hope, and now the doubts were to be ended with a twist of the finger.

He kissed her white face almost roughly, in his upsetting, and tore open the envelope. A letter and a slip fell out. The fingers of a great icy hand were gripping his heart as he picked them up and opened them out.

The letter was from the Registrar at Glen Tanar and stated briefly that he had examined the registers, and now enclosed the only certificate which seemed to bear upon the subject of Mr. Barty's enquiry. The certificate proved to be that of the marriage of Mary Dennet, widow, daughter of Alexander Lindsay, of Coonanbarra, to Charles Lindsay, also of Coonanbarra. It was dated 16th May, 1872. He could find no entry of the birth of Mary Lindsay. He had only recently been appointed, and was not personally acquainted with any of the parties named.

"That doesn't help us much," said George, with a twisted face. . . . "It proves, however, that your mother was a widow when my father married her. . . It may be just what we want after all. . . . I wonder where you were born now?" and he looked musingly at her.

"Oh, I don't remember," she said breathlessly. "Coonanbarra is the only place I have any recollection of until we went to Sydney."

"It is probably just as we have been hoping," he said, following out his own train of thought. "If y

had been born at Coonanbarra you'd be on the register. Your mother was a widow. . . . You must have been born elsewhere . . . before they were married. . . . The chances are you are not Mary Lindsay at all."

"Oh, George, who am I?" she cried in distress.

"Most likely Mary Dennett."

"Oh!"

"Anything sooner than Mary Lindsay, dear."

"Ye-s. I suppose so. But it's terribly disturbing to be told that you're not yourself, and never have been. I'm almost afraid to dig any deeper. We have got among skeletons."

"We must go right through them. If necessary I must go out there. Let us see what mother and Joan make of it."

They carried the letter and slip downstairs, and Mrs. Barty and Joan puzzled over them also. But all their puzzling could make no more of them than George had already done. On the face of it, it looked as though Mary had no right to the name she had borne all her life, and that Charles Lindsay was not her father.

George could not wait for the morning; he went off at once to John Sinclair's house in Hampstead and laid the matter before him.

Sinclair read the documents in his slow careful way, as if every word contained hidden meanings and needed consideration and translation into [illegible] language.

"What do you make of it? [illegible] patiently.

"Just what we have been hoping," said Sinclair. "Mary is not his daughter at all. She is very probably Mary Dennett."

"She has never heard the name, she says."

"That is quite possible. There may be reasons for it. I think that matter is all right." And George trod air as he went back home, while Sinclair sat up late into the night thinking it all over.

Lindsay must have had some motive for lying to him as he had done. What was it? A man does not as a rule lie for the simple pleasure of it. Most men lie to further their own ends. Lindsay's end was the flotation of his company, and Sinclair decided in his own mind that as soon as he saw any signs of it coming out he would take the opportunity of inspecting the documents relating to it, and had little doubt that he would find in them the key to this puzzle.

The next mail brought George a letter from the Presbyterian minister at Glen Tanar which made the whole matter clear, and told Mary more about herself than she had ever known before.

Her mother, Mary Lindsay, had been married to one James Dennett before her father Alexander Lindsay came to Coonanbarra. Dennett had not proved a success —as the old Scotchman cautiously put it. He was shot in the bush four months after his marriage, and Mary was born some months after his death. She was an infant of a few months old when Alexander brought his widowed daughter to Coonanbarra and settled there. Those were facts within the old man's knowledge, though they were not spoken of. He remembered Charles Lindsay of the Gray Expedition coming to Coonanbarra on Alexander's invitation, and before the child was one year old her mother and he were married. That marriage had turned out prosperously. Two sons were born of it. Old Alexander died, and Lindsay and his wife were left in possession. Then Mrs. Lindsay died, and Lindsay came into the whole property, and

managed it with much success till the drought ruined him along with everybody else.

John Sinclair said nothing when he read this letter. There was no need to cloud their joy at the outcome of the matter. But he saw at a glance that if the property Lindsay was attempting to float came to him through his wife, as was more than likely, the whole thing was fraudulent as far as he was concerned, as he could have no legal interest in the matter and no possible right to dispose of it.

CHAPTER XXXV

MAN AND HIS ANGELS

IT was some six weeks later that George Barty, sitting in his room at the *Comet* office, received an unexpected visit from his father.

When his name was brought in he hesitated for one moment whether to see him or not. Then, having a great curiosity in the matter, he decided to do so. He sent off his sub to his lunch and told the attendant to show Mr. Lindsay in.

He looked bigger than ever, and there was a somewhat assertive air of prosperity about him which insensibly increased the chill of George's manner.

"You hardly expected a visit from me, I'll be bound," said Lindsay.

"I did not," said George.

"I am starting for Australia shortly, and I wanted to see you before I went. We shall probably not meet again. I understand all your feelings in the matter, my boy, and I cannot say much in my own defence. I don't suppose you would believe me if I did. I must say this, however, that, sometime, it is possible that you will see things in a somewhat different light and will judge me less harshly. In the meantime I want to make such amends as are now in my power for the wrong I have done you all."

George opened his mouth to speak, but Lindsay waved him down, and went on.

"The business I came about is now practically carried through, and I am a wealthy man, or shall be

very shortly. It is only right that I should make such provision as I can for you all."

"We would not accept a penny from you," said George. "The wrong you did cannot be wiped out with money. You must find some other way of salving your conscience." He was curious to see if he would still maintain his fiction about Mary.

"That is bitter," said his father. "Some day, perhaps, you will regret having said it. That it is not undeserved makes it none the less bitter to bear. You cannot however, prevent me handing over to Mary such a sum as I think right."

"I cannot prevent you doing anything you like with what is fairly yours. But Mary won't touch it. She is wise enough to know that there are better things in this world than money."

"It's a great help towards happiness all the same. I shall leave her £20,000 in Burney's hands. At my death it will be increased to £50,000, perhaps very much more. There is one other thing—two other things. I have two boys in Sydney. Rightly or wrongly, they are your half-brothers, and you can't get out of it. Mary knows their addresses. She used to write to them. I simply ask you to remember that they are there and that they have Barty blood in them. And the other thing is—I want to see Joan."

George's eyebrows lifted for a moment, and then shut down again on the deep-set eyes which were so like those opposite them.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" he asked.

"I have never seen her," urged Lindsay.

"Your own fault," was on George's lips, but he forbore, and only looked at him thoughtfully.

Man at his best is a queer mixture, at his worst no less queer, and all in between is perhaps queerest of all.

At his best, the possibilities of descent are rarely absent. At his worst, the possibilities of ascent are always present. In the great common level between, the admixture of possibilities is so vast that no man may fathom absolutely the workings of another man's mind, or say with certainty what he may rise to or what he may fall to. He is a bundle of contradictions, born of training, temperament, and his forbears. Compact of good and evil, he does the one and he does the other, and sometimes he does them both at the same time, and the things that he does are very surprising. Whence it comes that the unexpected happens. No need to illustrate so patent a truth. Just look round!

Here was this man Lindsay, swindling the daughter of the wife who had never been his wife, out of her inheritance; swindling every man he had interested in his company, by selling them a property which was not his to sell, if the whole truth were known; offering a partial restitution for a part of the wrong he had done; and—hungrily craving a sight of the daughter he had never seen.

I have no doubt he found ample justification for the course he was taking. It is a strange scoundrel who cannot do that. No doubt he said to himself that, in the first place, if the property had remained in Mary's hands it would have remained as it was and never been developed, and that therefore the right of user of the increment was with him; and, furthermore, that Mary would ultimately benefit enormously by his skilful handling of the money. That old Jesuit plea of present ill for future good has covered innumerable sins, and will do until men learn that good is good in itself, and evil is evil in itself, and that consequences do not alter primary facts.

"You know, I suppose, that Joan is crippled," said

George at last. “You could only see her at the house, and—it is better, I think, that you should not meet my mother again. It is only turning the knife in an old wound.”

“I know, I know,” said his father sadly. “And yet, if she knew all, even she would judge me less harshly perhaps. I did not seek that last meeting,” he added quickly. “I did my utmost to avoid her because I knew it would cause her needless pain——”

“Yes, I'm bound to say I think it would have been better for all of us if you had remained dead,” said George bluntly.

“I have seen Meg,” said Lindsay, without heeding him. “I called at the Hospital yesterday. I have seen you all except Joan. I want very much to see her before I go back.”

“I really don't see what good could come of it,” said George, after another thoughtful pause, and thinking only of Joan and his mother in the matter.

“Even the condemned criminal is allowed a last interview,” said his father grimly. “I shall never return to England. It is my last chance. I think I have a right to see he ”

“It is late in the day to talk of rights.”

“No one knows that better than I do. All the same —I want to see her.”

“You can see her picture at the Academy,” said George, “perhaps that would——”

“I saw it this morning. Meg told me of it. I want to see Joan herself all the more.”

He was very much in earnest, and George found himself considering the case and the man with critical, and, to an extent, impersonal curiosity. It was such a very strange mixture. He had hoped, each moment, that he would explain the matter of his relationship to Mary,

and possibly even express some regret at the racking he had given their hearts. And it is likely enough that Lindsay intended to do so—as soon as he had received his payments from the company and felt himself safe from the consequences of confession. George, however, knew nothing of that, and was determined to force it out of him if he would not speak of his own accord.

"What have you got to say about Mary?" he asked brusquely.

"About Mary?" said Lindsay, with a wary look at him. "Nothing."

"Then I'm sorry to say you are worse even than I thought you, which is saying a good deal. But, since you won't tell me anything about Mary, I'll tell you something. Possibly it may be news to you. Mary is not your daughter at all, and you might have saved us the most grievous trouble with a word."—Lindsay was gazing at him with twisted brows.—"She is the daughter of James Dennett, whose widow you married seven months after Mary was born. You have no right to control her actions in any way. You have done your best to ruin her life, and you offer her £20,000 as solatium. What do you think of yourself?"

"So you know all that, do you?" said Lindsay, keeping his face as well as he could. It seemed to George, however, that he was not a little disturbed at the news.

"As you hear," said George coldly.

His father sat for a time in silence with knitted brows.

"You will probably not believe me," he said at last. "But I should have told you all you have just told me—at my own time. I am sorry you have learned it elsewhere. I had reasons, and good reasons—from my point of view."

"I'm bound to say I don't believe you," said George. "You have lied consistently from the first day you came back. Your whole life is a lie."

But Lindsay was busy with his own thoughts and paid no heed to the hard saying.

"Will you let me see Joan?" he said at last. "I am sick of all this. I want to get back, but I won't go till I've seen her. And it would be better I should see her with your consent than——" and he broke off.

"I will see what my mother says about it," said George. "If she consents, it is not for me to say no. You have treated her shamefully," he broke out vehemently, "but she is a saint if ever there was one, and I suppose she will say yes. It would be painful for her to hear afterwards that you had been to the house without her knowledge."

"I know," said Lindsay. "I have sinned too deeply to be forgiven there."

"You don't know her as we do. But I think you have broken her heart. She may forgive. She could hardly condone."

"That is true. I sold more than I knew," he said bitterly, and it was not till afterwards that George understood his saying. "You will let me know then? Here is my address. Will you shake hands with me? We may not meet again."

George hesitated, but his father took the reluctant hand, and shook it, and went. And George sat for a long time gazing thoughtfully at the chair in which he had sat.

He followed his mother up to her room that night and told her just what had passed.

"He must see her, George, of course," she said quietly, and George, knowing her even so well as he did, was surprised at her calmness. "Have you spoken to Joan about it?"

"Not yet. I wanted your ideas first, Mother."

"Let me know when it is, and I——" Yes, th her voice broke a little—"I will not be in the way."

He kissed her warmly and said, "I think yo are the best woman in the world. I told him to-day."

She looked at him with the stars swimming in h eyes, and George replied to her look—

"He said he knew it, but that he had sinned to deeply there to be forgiven."

"You were not hard to him, George?"

"I'm afraid I was, mother. But I had to tell hi what I thought or burst. He would have gone withou a word about Mary."

"I cannot understand it," said his mother.

Joan was not a little agitated at thoughts seeing this unknown, never-seen father, whose resu rection had brought so much trouble in its train; bu a very natural curiosity was not entirely wanting in he

George wrote to Mr. Lindsay's hotel telling him h would meet him at 21 Wynyatt Square at four o'cloc the following day. He got leave from the office and wa awaiting him, when he walked briskly up and turned u the steps as naturally as if he did it every day of his lif George met him at the top and took him straight up t Joan's room.

She had rolled her chair into the sunshine, and he flowers and birds and the tiny splash of falling water were all round her. Coming in upon her from th momentary darkness of the staircase she was a radian vision which might have made any man pause. Lindsa stopped dead on the threshold, and gazed with sus pended breath at that strange bright room and it strange bright occupant.

He had stood for an hour looking at the lovely face o

the "Aranea Felicissima" the day before, wondering and somewhat awed by the charm of its beauty and the witchery of those wonderful eyes. They had wrought in him till nothing less than the sight of the living Joan would satisfy him. He knew that if he did not see her he would ache for the sight of her to the last day of his life, and he had gone straight to George's office.

And now he saw herself, and the sweet face faced him with brave shyness, and the great pure eyes, with the infinity of the stars shining out from them, seemed to envelop him, caress him, chide him. They held him and they drew him. They filled him with a strange delight, and covered him with an overwhelming reproach. It is not impossible that the knowledge of the gulf that his own hand had hewn between himself and this radiant being was one of the heaviest parts of his punishment. He drew one great breath which sounded like a sigh. Then he went quickly forward and dropped on his knees by her chair, and George went out softly and closed the door.

Margaret Barty, in her own room, had heard them come in. George went along to it and softly turned the handle. The door was locked. She heard him there but did not open to him, and he understood and went quietly away.

It was a good hour before Joan's door opened and her father came out. She never spoke, even to her mother, of what had passed between them.

George had been waiting his coming and came down the stair from his own room to meet him.

But some one else had been waiting too, and she was before him. George, from the darkness of the upper staircase, saw his mother's door open suddenly, and husband and wife stood face to face once more. She silently stretched out her hand to him. George saw his

father's two hands rise and fall with the gesture of
whose cup was overfull, and then he went to her.
door closed on them also, and George went meditativ
up his staircase again.

Margaret Barty had listened to her husband's f
on the stair, and it put her heart back twenty yea
and set it beating as it had beaten then, when Meg a
George were dragging at her skirts and hindering
with their help in her household duties. His step w
heavier now than then, and slower. It had travell
far since those days—very far away from her, a
down strange paths. And in a very few minutes
would pass her door again, and go, and she wou
never hear it again.

There was a foretouch of death in the thought. A
death wipes out all differences to the hearts that st
behind. She fell on her knees beside her bed a
dropped her face into her hands. It came natural to he

"As we forgive!" Was he to go without heari
from her own lips that she had forgiven it all? All t
breaking and the bruising, and that last dire blow
all. Nay, she must tell him, though it should be on
through the clasp of a shaking hand.

And when Joan's door opened, hers opened to
and she met him with outstretched hand, and gent
face, and the starry eyes of an angel.

George's last sight of his father was of him goin
into his mother's room. He never saw him agai
How long they two spent together, and what passe
between them, he never knew in full. Margaret Bart
let her husband out of the front door herself whe
they had said their say, and George purposely kept t
his own room lest he should find himself in the way

CHAPTER XXXVI

CONSEQUENCES

JOHN SINCLAIR possessed in an eminent degree the qualities of his race. With great kindness of heart where his sympathies were touched, he was shrewd, cautious, and, where his suspicions were once aroused, keen as a knife to confirm or dissipate them.

As he had plainly told Lindsay, he distrusted him entirely. It was natural, then, that when the Glen Ingalls Tin Company began at last to be talked about in City circles, he should take an interest therein, of a hypercritical and strictly non-pecuniary character, of course.

There happened to be just then a strong, and constantly increasing demand for tin. With the general improvement in trade new sources of supply began to attract attention. The Glen Ingalls Company, with Burney's Bank behind it, was a very different affair from Charles Lindsay's tin property. Its success was a foregone conclusion, and Sinclair heard that the bulk of the shares were privately applied for before they were formally offered to the public. The lists were closed, with the whole amount over-subscribed, the day that Charles Lindsay called at Wynyatt Square. The matter had been practically settled and his mind at ease concerning it for some days past.

With his mind abristle with suspicion, Sinclair went over to the offices of the Solicitors of the Company to take a look at the documents referred to in the prospectus.

He was well-known to the firm, and after his
spection, one of its members asked, "Well, Mr. Sinc
how many shall we put you down for? First-
thing. Shares will be at a premium inside a week.
a couple of thousand if you want a couple of hund
and we'll do our best for you."

"Thanks! I think I'll stand out this time,"
Sinclair, and went thoughtfully downstairs.

With his fuller knowledge, he saw at a glance
the property Lindsay had sold was his Australian wi
and therefore her daughter's, and that Lindsay him
if all the facts were known, had neither part nor pa
in it.

The unscrupulous audacity of the thing surprised
and angered him somewhat. The man knew perfe
well that a word would blow his house of cards to
winds and perhaps land him in the dock again.
presumed upon his position and their desire for pea

If the word should never be spoken, indeed, t
was no reason why the Company should not go p
perously on its way. And, so far as he was concer
—though he strongly resented the treatment he
been subjected to, and the grounds for which he
perfectly understood—he would lift no finger aga
Lindsay so long as he did nothing further to dist
the peace of Wynyatt Square. The past was incura
The present and the future he would guard to
best of his power, without any consideration for
schemer.

But there were other considerations, apart f
Lindsay himself, and yet inseparably connected v
his fortunes. There was Mary. And there were
two boys in Australia.

Legally, of course, the latter were outside the p

through their father's defective marriage. Morally, they stood in the same relation to their innocent mother as Mary herself did. If Mary claimed the property, that matter could be adjusted all right. But he doubted very much whether she would do so. It might necessitate the dragging of her mother's good name through a certain amount of mire, though she was absolutely innocent of wrong. Mary's only wish, he felt certain, would be to wash her hands of the whole matter.

To blow the Company to pieces with no possible resultant good would simply make trouble for many innocent people and was not to be thought of. The Burneys would be the heaviest sufferers, in prestige, at all events, from their connection with a Company whose foundations were sand. And that, he considered, would be somewhat in the nature of equitable retaliation, since all the trouble had arisen through old Burney tempting George Barty, the elder, to his fall. But he was not going to let others suffer simply in order that the Burneys might receive their due reward.

He decided to take the whole matter to avizandum for the night. The quiet of the darkness often brought him light. In the morning he had made up his mind to see Mary Lindsay, lay the whole matter before her, and ask her what she would do. He was not sure if this was one of her off-days. When he had got through his letters he would run over to Wynyatt Square and see. Before he could do so, Charles Lindsay's name was brought in to him, and he told the commissionaire to show him in.

He saw at a glance that something had happened to the man. His face was grave, rigidly set indeed. It looked like a wooded cliff after a storm.

"Can you spare me a few minutes, Sinclair?" he said. "I have something of importance to say to you."

He spoke slowly and weightily, as though sympathy with his subject.

"Yesterday, I called at Wynyatt Square to see n daughter Joan."—At Sinclair's look of surprised anno ance, he made an irritable gesture with his hand stop him speaking.—"It was with the consent of n wife and my son that I did so. I spent an hour wi Joan, and when I left her my wife met me—of her ov accord, and—and——" —another downward sweep the hand. "Well, I have had a bad night. But have made up my mind, and I shall need your hel The Glen Ingalls will bring me in, between cash ar shares, something over £150,000. There is a flaw in tl Company's title——"

"I am aware of it," Sinclair could not deny himse that.

"Ah! Well, it does not matter. Possibly you we going to blow me sky high on the strength of it. Hov ever, Mary and the lawyers can remedy that defec The property is, of course, legally hers. On the oth hand my boys are her half-brothers in spite of th flaw. I want them provided for as her mother children—the rest she can take."

"And yourself?" asked Sinclair, quietly, an showing no sign of the surprise that was in him.

"At the moment I am sick of myself. I feel lik making an end of it all. That may pass. If it doe with the provision for the boys I will make such a sta again in sheep, along with them, as may keep us. M idea is that the boys might have £25,000 each, whic leaves Mary £100,000. It will practically come to Georg and he will look after his mother and the girls know. But I am in your hands. What do yo say?"

"I should say the division is not inequitable. An

I am bound to say I am glad you have come to this mind. It will save much trouble for a great many people. You wish me to see Mary about it, I suppose?"

"If you will. And the sooner the better. I want to get away out of this."

"I will see her to-day. I consider you are doing the only right thing. There is much that you cannot repair, but in this matter at all events you are doing well," and as Lindsay rose to go the two shook hands, and one of them found some comfort in the grip.

Sinclair went up to Wynyatt Square at once, and found Mary there. She was in Joan's room with Mrs. Barty.

"I have come on business of importance with this young lady," he said, "but I would like you all to hear the whole matter, as it is through you two it has come about. Your husband called on me this morning,"—he looked at Mrs. Barty. "He told me he had been here yesterday, and from his present frame of mind I can understand to some extent what passed. As far as lies in his power he is bent on repairing damages. He is, I should say, even more conscious of what he cannot do than of what he can do in that respect. But the one thing that he can do is in the matter of this Tin Company he has just carried through. The property he sold to the Company was your mother's,"—he turned to Mary.

"I want nothing to do with it," she said quickly.

"That's what I expected, but you can't help yourself, my dear, unless you wish to make much scandal and a great deal of trouble for a great many people."

Mary tightened her lips and regarded him anxiously.

"This is how the matter lies. Your reputed father

had no legal right to deal with that property at all. Had he been legally married to your mother, of course he would have had that right. As it is, the property is yours, and, legally, yours only. There are your half brothers, however, in Australia, and it is only right that they should benefit by the sale, since your mother was also theirs."

"Surely," said Mary.

"You will have to sign certain documents which the lawyers will prepare, and which will remedy the defect in the sale by him to the Company, and then the amount derived from the sale will be divided between you children——"

"And he?" asked Mary.

"With the boys' shares he will start again in sheep up country, at least that is his present idea, and it seems to me the most sensible thing to do. Your share will come to about £100,000."

"How much?" said Mary, in a scared whisper.

"£100,000," said Sinclair discountingly, to bring her down to level again. "It is not very much, but it will save you some anxieties no doubt."

And the three sat gazing at him with various and strong emotions on their faces.

"It will be quite a nice little surprise for George," said Sinclair.

"It will be a surprise," said Mrs. Barty, "but I am not sure that it will be much to his mind. . . . His father made some such suggestion when he called on him yesterday, and George would not hear of it. He has gone to Paris with Niel."

"Oh?—What's that for? Niel——?" He looked as though he feared Felston had broken out again, but did not like to put it into words.

"They've gone on business for Sir John Burney," said

Joan quickly, perceiving his thought and resenting it "Mr. Burney went there ten days ago and has never come back, and the old man is afraid he has met with some accident."

"I see," said Sinclair, and knowing something of Mr. Burney, he thought it by no means unlikely.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A RAKE THROUGH HADES

THAT same evening on which George Barty, the elder, called at Wynyatt Square, there came a telegram for George, the younger, which caused him no little surprise, and started him and Niel Felston off on a hurried journey.

The telegram was from Sir John Burney, and it ran—

"Please come and see me at once, urgent."

After a few minutes' quiet talk with Joan, Mrs. Barty had kept to her room after her interview with her husband. George ran down to Joan, who was sitting with her hands in her lap, idle for a wonder, for she had much to think about.

"What can he want?" she asked, at sight of the telegram.

"I am going up at once to see," said George. "Tell mother where I have gone, if she asks," and he set off at once for Kensington Palace Gardens.

He was shown into Sir John's private room. It was a considerable time since he had seen him, and he was startled by the changes in the old man. He seemed more shrunken and shrivelled than ever. His face was thinner, and whiter, and sharper. His voice was even more querulous than before, and his hand shook even when it gripped the arm of his chair.

"Ah!" he said, as George was announced by the solemn Buckle. "You are Barty—George Barty—and I thought you were dead. I'm glad to see you alive again. *That* does not lie at my door, in any case.

Body and soul! Well, your body's all right, and your soul must look after itself. But you did it with your eyes open. You can't blame me——"

George could make nothing ot all this, and did not suppose it was for the purpose of listening to it that he had been sent for so urgently. He did not know of his father's close connection with the Burneys, or he might have supposed the telegram had reached his hands by mistake.

"You sent for me, sir," he said—"a telegram marked urgent——"

"Urgent? urgent? Ah! Yes!" and the old man came suddenly to himself with a snap. The vagueness disappeared from his eyes and he stiffened all over with evident effort.

"Come closer!" he said, and George stood by his side.

"Sit down and come closer!" said the old man again, and George sat down and bent towards him.

"You are a man to be trusted, young Barty, aren't you?" he said in a whisper.

"You trusted me once, sir, and I did my best," said George, wondering much if the old man had taken complete leave of his senses.

"Yes, yes. That was the son, this is the father. That was the father, now it's the son. This is the matter"—and he laid a thin, shaking finger on George's sleeve.—"My son, Frazer—not young Frazer, he's dead—Frazer from the Bank, you know! Well, he went to Paris ten days ago on business—important business.—He was to be back in two days. He never did come back when he should have done—never. I've an idea——. Well, never mind. He is seven days overdue, and each day I have looked for him, and he has not come—seven days! And I'm beginning to fear

—to fear—I don't know what I'm beginning to fear I'd go myself "—he said in a hoarse whisper, and the idea of the helpless, shaking old man starting off for Paris, when he could not raise himself in his chair was a painful one—" but I'm not feeling up to the mark just now. Now you're safe, Barty. I trusted you before and you did your best. It may be "—the wizened face twisted into a scowl—" it may be there's something wrong. And we don't want any scandal. I want you to go across to Paris and find out if anything is wrong, Barty. Will you go? How soon can you start? There's money in that drawer. Take £50—no £100—you may need help. The Continental is where he stops. And if anything is wrong "—and the shaky voice dropped to a still lower whisper—" Keep it to yourself, Barty. I can trust you and you'll do your best. When can you start?"

"I will lose no time, sir," said George, thinking rapidly of what he would have to do, "but it may not be till to-morrow morning——"

"To-night, if you can," urged the old man.

"To-night, if I can," said George. "And I will wire you as soon as I have any news. We will hope there is nothing wrong. He may have been taken ill, or had some accident——"

"Yes, yes! that's it—taken ill or some accident. No scandal, mind. Take the money, and go quickly."

George took five twenty-pound notes out of the drawer, and shook the trembling hand and went out.

Mrs. Frazer Burney came along the passage in evening costume and a cloud of scent, and he stood aside to let her pass. Her jaws were working slowly on something as usual. She passed heavily down the stairs in front of him and climbed into the carriage which stood waiting at the foot of the steps.

George walked into Kensington High Street and jumped into a cab, and drove off to find Brinsley to beg leave of absence for a day or two, and then went quickly home, laying his plans as he went.

From what he knew of Frazer Burney, he knew that anything might have befallen him. Niel Felston's assistance would be invaluable to him, and Niel agreed instantly when it was put to him. They managed to catch the ten o'clock train that night from London Bridge and were in Paris the following morning.

They went straight to the Continental, engaged rooms there, and started their enquiries before permitting themselves even a wash and breakfast.

Mr. Burney had been there about ten days before, had stopped two days, and had then left in the usual way. Some letters had arrived after he left, and they were still there, as he had given no instructions as to forwarding.

"That widens the possibilities," said Felston. "If he'd left his portmanteau here it would have been natural to suppose he had no intention of leaving Paris. As it is, he may be anywhere, and I expect we'll have difficulty in making the police believe he's here at all."

They went to the Chief of Police. He listened politely, fastened at once on the weak spot in the matter, and assured them that no one could possibly disappear in Paris without his knowledge. What is more, he really seemed to believe it. The missing man had most likely crossed to Dover, or back to London, and disappeared there, he suggested.

However, he placed detectives at their disposal, and they commenced a systematic search of the city. First—in charity, but with little hope—the hospitals, with no result. Then a comprehensive round of Hades—to Niel Felston, a bitter reminder of old follies; and

to George Barty, a Dantesque descent throug ever-deepening circles of infamy, which lowered h views of man in the ranks of the animal world an filled him with pity and disgust.

They found much which was useless even as ex perience, but not a trace of Frazer Burney. He ha disappeared as completely as any fly that ever blundere unwarily into a dark corner web and was sought fo seven days afterwards.

Each night George penned a brief announcemen of their ill-success to the old man, waiting in tha gloomy room in Kensington Palace Gardens. Eac night he held out such hopes as he could string himse up to, of something turning up on the morrow. Bu the morrows passed and nothing turned up, an each day lessened the chances of anything eve turning up.

At the end of seven days the detectives confessed t doubts, and reluctantly—since the extra pay wa good—came round to their chief's opinion that th missing man must have left Paris. And at that, i seemed to George and Niel that they could do no more.

George wrote to Sir John putting the matter to hin as gently as it could be put, and stating that he feare it was only waste of time and money to search furthe in Paris. From what he had seen himself, he knew tha a man might disappear in scores of the places int which they had penetrated, and no slightest trace o him ever be discovered from the outside, and Niel con firmed him fully.

And no slightest trace of Frazer Burney ever was dis covered. He had vanished into the seething wildernes of the gay city, as his son had vanished into the whit solitudes of the mountains. What the actual end o either was, no man may know, but the similarity o

their fates was somewhat startling. And it seemed to George Barty that, of the two, the one who died among the snows died probably the cleaner death.

He went up to see Sir John the night they reached home, and the interview was a painful one.

"Couldn't find him, eh ?" said the old man, with a laugh that rattled painfully in George's memory for many a day. "Of course not."—He leaned over, with a sharp glance round the room and a beckoning jerk of the head, and whispered hoarsely, "Gone to New York—on business—business of the firm—quite forgot about it.—Private business—very private business.—Best say nothing—won't be back for some time.—Wrong ? God bless my soul, no ! What should there be wrong ?" Then his brows puckered up, and he looked vaguely at George, and asked abruptly, "Who do you say you are ?—George Barty ?—Barty's dead," he said—"Ay, ay ! I remember. He came to life again.—Some to life and some to death—and not a brain among them all—not a brain among them all ——" and he sank back into his chair, staring at things which none could see but himself.

George spoke to him and tried to rouse him, but the old man only muttered incoherencies. So, at last, leaving a statement of his expenditure and the balance of cash on the table by his side, he came away.

Buckle, with a face even more solemnly clerical than usual, was waiting for him in the hall. His dignity, and stern sense of what was due to a man in his position, had crumbled somewhat under his growing apprehensions concerning his master.

"Mr. Burney be home soon, sir ?" he asked anxiously, and his shrewd eyes watched George's face keenly.

"I'm afraid not, Buckle. Sir John does not expe
him for some time yet."

"He'd ought to be here, sir," said Buckle s
verely. "He's failing quick"—with a jerk of the hea
towards Sir John's room.

"I'm afraid he is. I see a great change in him eve
in the last ten days. Is the doctor attending him ?

"He is, sir, but doctors ain't no good for the lik
of that. He's breaking up, sir; that's just what it is-
breaking up, and he may go off sudden at any tim
Mr. Burney'd ought to be here. It makes things ver
awkward. Mrs. Burney she ain't no good—in a cas
of this kind, I mean. He's always been master, an
now he's going, and he'll go quick belike."

But George could do nothing to relieve the old man'
anxieties, and as he left the gloomy house he thought i
very unlikely that he would ever enter it again.

On reaching home he heard, for the first time i
detail, all that had happened in his absence, and tha
gave him quite enough to think about.

Mary had developed a spirit of obstinacy, which
Mrs. Barty, with a loving smile at the girl, said
augured ill for George. But her smile belied her
words.

John Sinclair had, with some difficulty, prevailed on
the lawyers of the Company to prepare a short deed by
which Mary, for the consideration of £100,000 made
over to her father all her rights in the Glen Ingalls
property. The lawyers were very angry with Lindsay,
and talked at first of prosecutions and so on. But
Sinclair's large common sense prevailed, and they did
as he suggested, dated the new deed prior to the contract of sale to the Company, and so rectified the flaw
in its foundation.

But Mary, having thought the whole matter out,

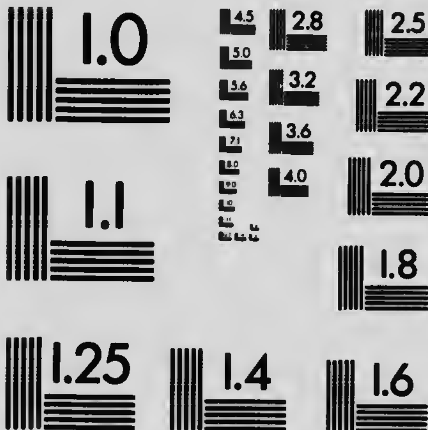
flatly refused to sign it unless Mrs. Barty, and Meg, and Joan, and George, agreed to share the windfall with her. She reasoned thus: the property certainly had come to her through her mother, but the chances were that, if her reputed father had not taken it in hand, it would have remained undeveloped, and so the money would never have come to her. Her gain had been purchased at sore loss and trouble to these more than friends in England. It was only right, she said, that they should share equally with her in the unlooked-for fortune, and she set her face stonily till they agreed. And as time pressed, for Lindsay was sailing immediately for Sydney, they had perforce to agree to her proposition in George's absence. When he came back from his raking of Hades, he found his father gone and the property divided.

At first he was inclined to raise difficulties and lodge objections, but, when Sinclair took him in hand, and in his quiet, forceful way showed him just how matters lay, he could not but admit a certain rough and ready justice in the arrangement, and he accepted it as the rest had done.

And so, clever Mary avoided a pre-eminence in worldly wealth which she certainly had not sought, and which might have introduced some slight element of discomfort into her relations with George. For it is one thing for a young man, earning a bare living, to woo a girl who has nothing, and for whom it would be the joy and pride of his life to win everything; and it is a very different thing for that young man to woo a girl with £100,000 and to preserve his independence of spirit intact. It was excellently well done on Mary's part, but it was dictated solely by her own good heart and her elementary ideas of justice and the fitness of things.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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Margaret Barty agreed to the matter perforce. There were scandals enough in the family. She would have given up every penny she possessed to avoid more. And, feeling so, she accepted the good fortune as quietly and calmly as she had in her time accepted the bad.

Once it was all settled she could not but feel grateful that all her anxieties for the future—for Joan especially—were at an end. For George she had no fears. Money enough to live on without personal exertion would spell mental ruin for many men. But she knew her boy and could trust him, and she believed that his love for his work would not let it suffer because his bread and butter did not depend on it. She believed, indeed, that freedom from anxiety on that account would give his faculties all the freer play, and enable him to put them and his time to their fullest and largest uses. And she was right.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CLEANING UP

ONE evening, about a month after George Barty and Niel Felston returned from Paris, John Sinclair walked in on the company in Joan's room, and one at all events among them knew by his face that he had news to tell and guessed what it was.

It was Meg's night, and she and Jack Fairfax were in high feather, talking, laughing, disputing—with the boys and with one another, but always, as usual, combining for common defence against the rest when either of them was attacked.

Niel Felston had long since become quite one of them. His genius and his great friendship with Joan—the outward and visible signs whereof were then hanging on the walls of the Academy and bringing the artist much fame and many commissions—had commended him to the boys, and they had accepted him with the hearty goodwill which distinguished all Barty boys. Niel was never far away from Joan. The feeling between these two had grown, down and up, till its roots were very deep, and the flowers and fruit of its branches were visible to all. It speaks volumes for both Joan and Niel, that the other boys never resented his coming in between them and the object of their own worship.

When Sinclair came in that night, Felston was tossing off good-natured caricatures of the various

members of the company which evoked shouts of laughter even from the victims. Joan was rosy with her enjoyment of them all, and Mrs. Barty, with her white shawl falling off her shoulders, and her needles flashing homely lightnings, beamed peace and goodwill as of yore. There was, perhaps, even something more of quiet contentment in her gentle face than there had been before, for there was a certainty as to the future now, which had then been only matter of faith and hope. But these after all are great matters, and the boys, knowing nothing of these other things, knew only that she looked more gracious and beautiful than ever.

Sinclair waited till the boys had drifted off to their rooms. He detained Meg and Jack when they got up to go, and when all had gone except Niel, whom he had come to look upon as one of the family in everything except the actual fact, he said gravely—

"I have something to tell you, and I am going to tell you all together, so that once telling may do, and it may then be buried and forgotten. Sir John Burney died at noon to-day——"

"They hardly expected him to live through the night, when I was there yesterday," said Mary. "Whatever will Mrs. Burney and those poor children do?"

"I take it that nothing more will ever be heard of Mr. Burney——" said Sinclair, looking from George to Niel Felston.

Both shook their heads.

"Well, the deaths of those two unseals my lips [illegible] a secret imposed upon me, very much against my will, over twenty years ago. It has been hard to keep from speaking on many occasions, but the secret was not mine and I was pledged by both sides to keep it. For twenty years, my dear friend," he said, laying his hand

on Mrs. Barty's needles, which went on as imperturbably as ever, in spite of the weight of it—"Why, I believe you know,"—he said, as he caught the deep light in her eyes.

"Yes," she said quietly. "He told me."

"That relieves me greatly. I was afraid it would bring back the old pain."

"No, it has taken it away," she said. "Sorrow remains, but the pain is gone. Tell them."

The others were listening in wonder.

"Twenty years ago, George Barty, your father," he said, looking at George, "was transported for a crime which he did not commit. The actual criminal was Frazer Burney——" George snapped out an ejaculation and a storm swept over his face. "Your father was in financial difficulties through some unfortunate speculations. He was a cashier in Burney's Bank, and it meant the loss of his position, and almost certainly the impossibility of obtaining another. Frazer Burney committed a forgery and it could not be hidden. The old man, knowing of your father's troubles, induced him to take the matter on his own shoulders in exchange for the sum of £5,000. He and old Burney came to my house, late one night, to place the money in my hands, because, I presume, Mr. Barty could not trust the Burneys in the matter. His chief thought in going into so mad a business was, I am certain—in the beginning at all events—to provide for his wife and children. I did my best to dissuade him. But he had made up his mind to it, and no doubt believed in his own power to come through unscathed and start afresh when his time was up. It was probably beyond any man's power to come unsmirched through what he had to go through, and, as we know, he did not succeed. We may not judge him, because it is past our understanding. But when George

Barty left England, far from being a breaker of the law, except, indeed, that he was knowingly bearing another man's punishment, he was doing what he believed to be the best thing he could do for his children's interests. It is useless thinking of repairing the wrong now," he said, looking at George. "The idea is naturally in your mind, but the better way, considering all that has happened since, is to bury the whole matter, once and for all. Is it not so, dear friend?" to Mrs. Barty.

"Surely!" she said quietly. "We know the whole truth and the world does not matter. Besides, it has forgotten all about it."

"I wish I had known the truth when he was here," said George, in a voice full of regrets.

"It might have done more harm than good to know it then," said Sinclair. "At all events things would probably have been very different from what they are. You would have gained nothing and lost much."

"Oh—gained!" said George, with quick scorn and irritation. "I would have sacrificed everything to set his name straight."

"Exactly! And in straightening out one coil you would only have involved him in fresh ones. It is better as it is for all concerned."

"Yes," said Mrs. Barty, with gentle decision. "Things are better than they might have been, and certainly better than I ever dared hope. We will let the dead past bury its dead and think of the future."

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