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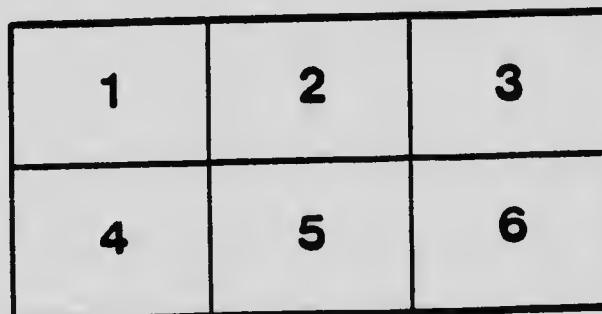
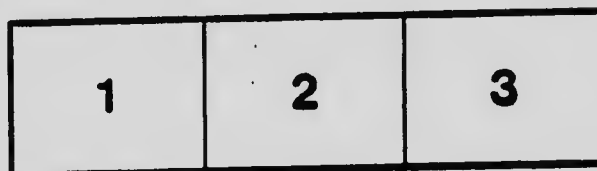
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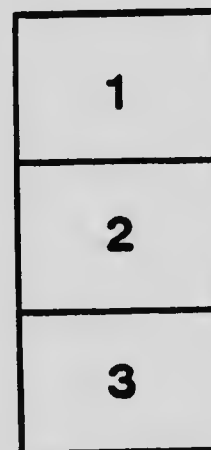
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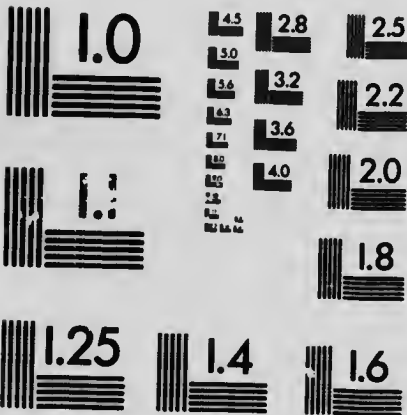
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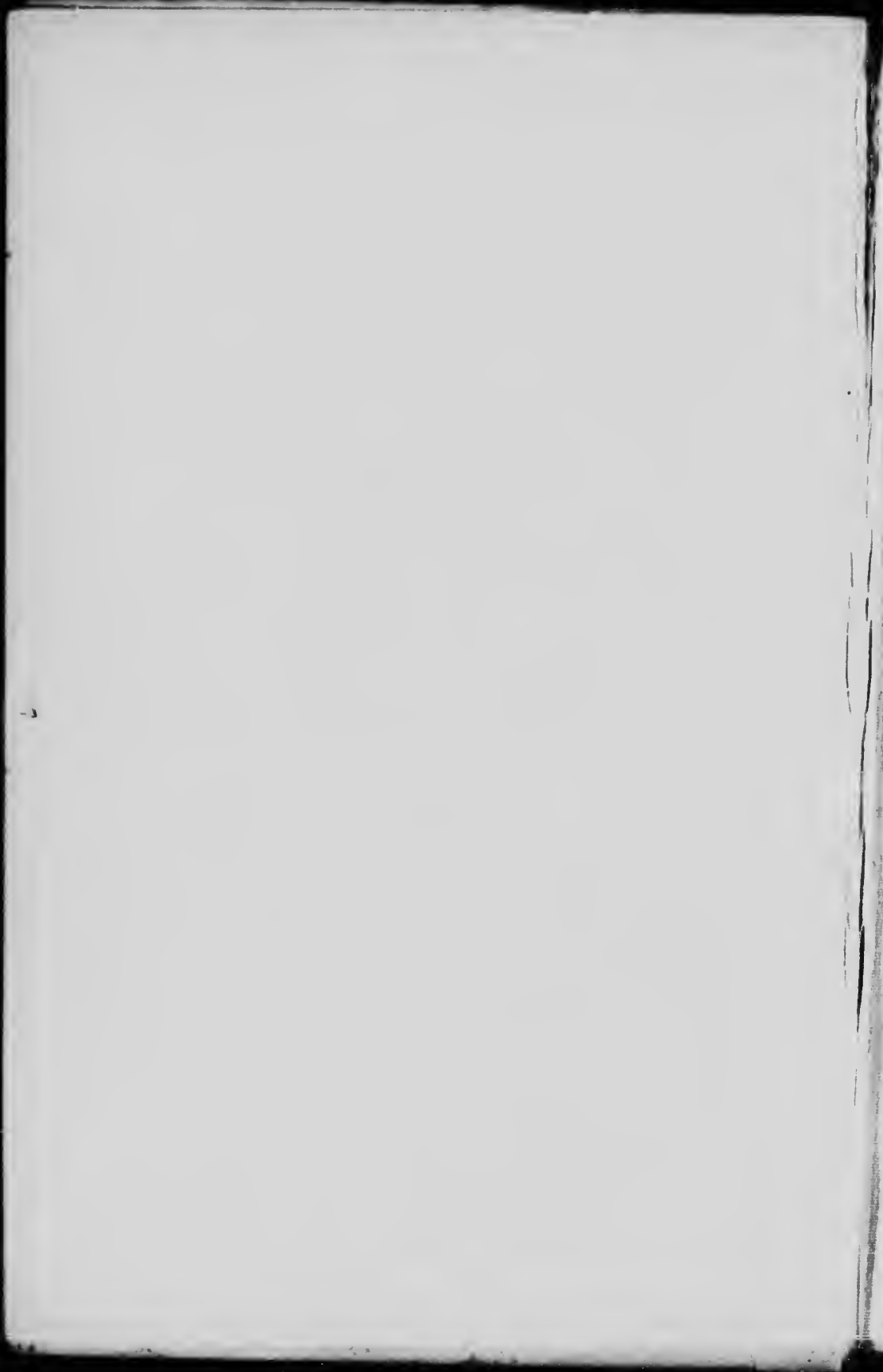
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BEAUTY FOR ASHES

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

A COMEDY OF CASTE

BY

DESMOND COKE

AUTHOR OF

"THE GOLDEN KEY," "THE BENDING OF A TWIG"
"THE COMEDY OF AGE," "THE CALL"
"THE PEDESTAL"

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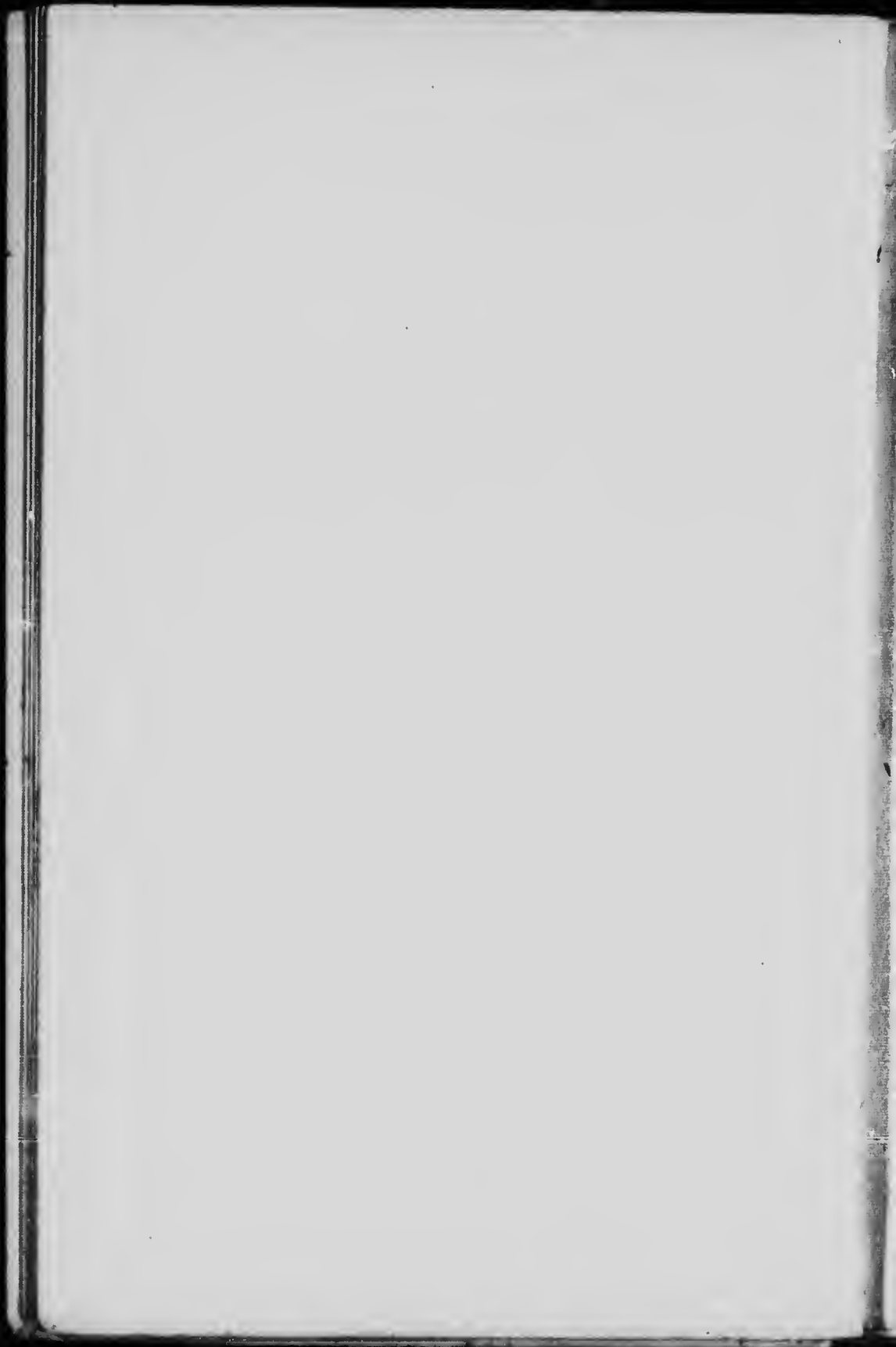
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TO
MY FRIEND AND FELLOW-NOVELIST
MAY BATEMAN
IN GRATITUDE
FOR HELP, ENCOURAGEMENT, EXAMPLE



*" . . . To bind up the broke hearted; to
proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening
of the prison to them that are bound; . . . to
comfort all that mourn; . . . to give unto them
beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the
garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."*

ISAIAH lxi.



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PART I
AMBITION

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CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE

THE sun beamed genially upon the grounds of Burcot Priory.

Science would no doubt declare that it shone with an equal warmth on very different scenes, haunts of the just and the unjust alike ; but Science notoriously has no soul. How should it ever guess that Phœbus, weary of gazing down at strife, self-seeking, and every sort of ugliness, lingers with quite a special love, sheds a more perfect gold, upon such peaceful backwaters of Time's too rapid stream ?

Thus, he remembers sadly—thus was the world in those idyllic days when he took up his reins ; and turning from the cities, he drops upon them such a listless ray as scarcely serves to pierce the fog that mortals, of their own cleverness, have availed to make. . . .

Burcot was grateful, too. Far off, in London's streets or parks, women put up a hasty parasol, and men in airless city lanes pulled down the blind ; but here the gift thus scorned seemed to set Nature murmuring and astir. The old garden suddenly awoke, in this first instant that the sun poked his face round the edge of a grey sulky cloud, which had defied him all the morning, and whispered once again that it was summer.

Earlier in the day, a human visitor might have remarked that there were weeds upon the paths meandering between such ill-clipped edgings; noticed a general air of desolation and neglect; or made objection that the luxuriant flowers were, after all, of quite a common kind: but now everything was smiling; each blossom seemed to raise its head, almost on tiptoe, as though desiring to get ever nearer to the sun that was its life; the whole garden danced in a light haze, a glorious shimmering thing of dainty hues—and who except a fool would cavil about crooked paths, cheap blooms, or weeds, when he is offered colour?

Certainly not Humphry Scott-Mahon, the sole spectator of this sudden glory, which might seem almost planned to welcome Burcot's heir back to his home. He was not in the mood to be nice about the plumb-line of a path; and Indian life, parent of many vices, makes at least for contentment with the green of grass. As for the flowers, how should he criticize, who loved them all but hardly knew the name of any?

"Honestly," he had once said to old Lady Hill, before he passed into the Civil Service, "I don't know the difference between a gladiolum and a candelabra!"

"A gladiolus," the matron had crushingly replied, "is quite a common thing, a sort of lily; there is no such flower as a candelabra, unless you're thinking of the 'red-hot poker,' whose real name is tritoma?"—for it is ill jesting with county chaperones. . . .

Thus to the newly returned heir, standing upon the terrace steps, this old-time border, with its gay flowers rising in tangled slopes to the twin hedges, was thoroughly impressive; a thing of wonder, without any qualifying phrase. He stood motionless for a few

instants, with a strange thrill at his heart. Such moments come to even the most prosy of men, and Humphry had more excuse than the mere spell of Beauty.

This strip of colour, flung beneath a sun whose task it is to hide the defects of the natural, no less than to expose the weak spots of the sham, meant for him England; meant memories of childhood; home.

That had been true of the great hall, the cloisters, all the well-remembered corners of the house; but there everything had been clouded by the presence of his father, by the gloom of a grievance. Larger things than a home-coming have been spoilt, ere now, by the sense of Injustice, that self-inflicted blindness which can change even heaven into hell. It had been wonderful to see the dear old rooms, to feel their peace, to stand once more beneath the pictures of his ancestors; but all the while, his father had been there—yes, and his pride—and he must show that though he might obey, he could resent. What right had any one to call his son back home, to ask from him the sacrifice of a career? That sort of thing might have passed muster in the old feudal days, but now men were emancipated! It was all very well to speak of "old age," "duty to the family," "need to learn the workings of the estate," and so on; but if a son could not have his *career*——! So with a set face and a hardened heart he had kept his father at the distance which befits a man proved quite irrational, and had refused to let the sentimental charm of a loved place move him one inch from a grievance which he intended fully to enjoy.

But now he was alone, and this panorama seemed spread out only for himself. Here was none of the

calculated splendour of a public park, but Nature's own conception of a garden ; such a wild, tangled, and luxuriant thing as makes the human feel himself intruding.

Humphry stood there, on the steps, for a few seconds ; and in that interval everything was changed. The spell of this place, its freshness and associations, had wrought a kind of revelation. The dusty glare of India—how far away it seemed ; how petty the routine work of his little office ! What had that "career" been, after all ? A few years' unproductive toil ; work for some natives who all wished you dead, and for a government which soon forgot : the early wreck of health repaid by a small pension ! And all the time this—this had been here ; this glory of the summer, here in England ; this perfect spot that was theirs, and was some day to be all his own.

Suddenly his dignity, of which but now he had felt proud, stood out as something altogether different. A vision thrust itself before his eyes : a worn old man who had summoned his own son to help his feebleness, to cheer his lonely age—a poor old man, who now sat, more alone than ever, wondering whether he had acted wisely.

Something urged Humphry to move onward : the charm of that spot, unaccountably, had vanished.

Slowly, with eyes which drank in everything, but with an absent mind, he wandered through the shaded paths that lead down to the lake. His steps carried him idly to the old stone fountain, which he had loved so as a boy. Perhaps it was smaller than he had believed, made a less thunder as it belched its water down into the lake ; but it was very restful in the greens and greys of ancient marble and iron wreathed with moss. He

gazed at it for a few moments, with his thoughts elsewhere; then skirting the near bank, made his way upward once more to the lower terrace, now a mere tangle of neglected brushwood and strong old flowers that battled stoutly with it for supremacy. Here there was something sinister in the air of desertion, and quickening his pace by instinct, he turned down the long path that takes so primly straight a line between its close-set yews; and so out suddenly into the sun again.

He was still dreaming, groping for his own state of mind amid a chaos of vague thoughts. Just now, in the garden, he had felt his grievance small; and yet, after all, a man's life *was* his own, when he was thirty, and he who had always worshipped Liberty——

He came out from under the chill shadow of the yews into the dazzling glare of sunlight on the white stone steps. He emerged almost with a shock, like one abruptly awakened; cast up his eyes in a dazed way; and they lit for the first time in many years upon—the house.

There it stood, the Priory, as it had stood through many a century; part church, part castle, and part dwelling-house; straggling in careless dignity across the ridge; battered perhaps, but solidly defying time; grim in its very hugeness, and yet lovable. Chequered its history, but throughout every page it had been loved: loved by how many generations of Humphry's own race, the old family of the Scott-Mahons?

A curious pride, the senseless pride of birth as an achievement, surged over him, and once again that tremor, almost painful, of the heart; a swift in-take of breath, a sudden chill. The majesty and age of an old

house communed directly with a young man, proud of his modernity.

Humphry gave a little laugh, took out his cigarette-case, and forced himself once more to movement.

"Gad!" he exclaimed, almost as in apology, "but it's good to be back *here* again."

CHAPTER II

EDEN IN DECAY

THE odd thing about Convention's code of morals is the ruthless manner in which it tries to slaughter individuality. Its highest ideal would work out as a pale person without any nastily obtrusive qualities, and "sacrifice thyself" stands as the chief of its commandments. That all great men have been egoists might seem a serious obstacle—to anybody not reflecting that Convention only deals in the stock sizes. These others, they are freaks, misfits; they do not work in with the scheme of things; and some wisely socialistic Government will doubtless shortly do away with them.

England, then, may be expected to go very well indeed. How its inhabitants will all love one another! How they will lie down for the weaker to pass over them; how resolutely say that they will positively not succeed at anybody else's cost! Then there will be no failures, and it would be uncharitable to grumble logically that there cannot be successes. No one will have an enemy, and for that gentle end it is surely worth while to sacrifice one's friends? Yes, loving or hating, every one in this ideal state will slobber gratefully over his neighbours, and Charity, with self-sacrifice, reign throughout the land. Every one shall be his own

master, and therefore, obviously, no one else's; whilst Britain, freed at length from slavery, quit of the tyranny of men who dare to rise, shall live idyllically in her leaderless equality; until, that is, a less conventionally worthy nation takes the whim to bring some great men over, and to conquer her.

Humphry Scott-Mahon had none of this anæmia in his constitution; he belonged to the old, rougher school. Starting life, like all babies, as a supreme egoist, he had slowly gained his way (so he believed) from mere selfishness to self-realization, a journey longer than the similarity of sign-post names might seem, casually, to imply.

"Realize thyself!" that was his commandment, and he had carried its fulfilment almost to a mania. Each for Himself—Survival of the Fittest—the Strong Man Stands Alone—such were the assimilated tags that made him chafe at Oxford's corporate life and strait restrictions; that sent him out, so soon as he was free, to India. By a curious irony, he went there as the bondman of a Civil Service that battens on red tape; and this crowning injustice merely exaggerated the symptoms of his malady. Humphry, beating his helpless fingers against rules and prohibitions, brought up sharp at every turn by parallels and precedents that ruled his conduct for him, found himself something very like a martyr, and gained consolation mainly from the thought that, anyhow, he was Himself, carving out his own career. He was not what he would have been, if he had stayed at Burcot: "young Mr. Scott-Mahon," or "t' Squire's son," holding an honourable place won solely by the chance of birth.

And it was this same Humphry who was now forced to abandon that career, to come and act as steward

here at Burcot, for the sake of his father and "the place"!

Was ever anything more studiously cruel, to an apostle of self-realizing?

Steward! At thirty he was merely that—his father's steward; he who had always argued the superior wisdom of the beast creation, where parentage is a mere temporary thing, a bond violently snapped so soon as the offspring has been taught to fight, to find food, and to Stand Alone. That search for liberty, and then—his father's steward!

Alone indoors, dressing for dinner, he only just resisted mutiny. He had reason, justice, everything, upon his side; and it was tempting. Then he remembered his father's face at that first meeting, and his own agony of remorse, just now, out in the sunlit garden. So with a tightening of the lips, and possibly a merely human assumption of the halo, he said nothing, and complied when, later in the day, a chance was offered him.

"Of course, my boy," the old man said apologetically, "I quite realize—it is a little hard—you had your own career, out there in India, and I was very proud of you——"

The table was cleared after dinner, and having stammered his way thus far, he broke off and sought refuge in fingering his wine-glass.

"Oh, it's all right. Why, I quite understand, of course. It was the only thing to do."

Self-sacrifice should always be complete; a grudging gift is more uncomfortable than a refusal; and besides, Humphry felt the awkwardness of this moment no less than his father. There was something wrong in the spectacle of this stern old man descending from his

throne, and deigning explanations to the son whom he had ruled with iron rods until the revolution of six years ago.

"That's good of you, Humphry; very good" (and the son who listened felt the wonder whether Age would make one more hard man end as sentimentalist); "but you are a Scott-Mahon, and you realize that Burcot has its duties as well as its privileges——"

"Of course, of course, yes," said Humphry, soothingly, but with a definite air of finality. In the old days he had not dared to try and guide his father's tongue.

"Besides," the Squire went on, like one who has his speech by heart, "these are bad times for the proprietors of land. The rent roll decreases; the taxes grow more. The effort to keep up the Priory, as it *should* be kept up——"

Humphry had not quite mastered the knack of altruism yet, and found the matter growing in difficulty with every moment of his father's oratory. He spoke decisively.

"Yes," he said, "things get worse and worse; but we must see what can be done, when we go into matters;" at which remark, delivered in a bedside manner, he left the old man gasping, and with excessive firmness changed the subject.

Clearly, if an apostle of freedom is to act as steward, he must be the master.

But that they were "bad times" made the task no easier. Among the tyrannies which he resented, Humphry numbered that of poverty; and nowhere is its grip more cruel than where expenditure refuses to be limited.

The ordinary man, an individual who seldom realizes

his own happiness, can cut his cloth to suit his purse, as a descriptive proverb has it. If things are bad, he takes a smaller house, and lives in no less comfort, though possibly in fewer rooms.

The Scott-Mahons had their cloth cut by ancestors, and in the present day it did not suit them. It was planned in a style befitting ampler times, and now it sagged upon its poor proprietors. They could and did close rooms, whole wings of the huge pile; but still, like some great monster, it preyed on their resources. Wages, repairs, their little church, the hedges, gardening, subscriptions—a dozen items bulked to make the cost, and not a single one of them well done. Everything was scamped; a hundred things would be changed, "if we could afford it;" and very humble fare was set—by humbler parlourmaids—upon the polished tables that used to boast a dozen courses, gleaming candelabra, and bepowdered footmen. The whole thing was a brutal mockery.

The poverty of Burcot was that most preposterous of all—the poverty of five thousand a year; the hopeless poverty where a mere pound or two at any time "makes no real difference;" the racking poverty where comfort, ease of mind, and everything, are bartered for appearances; that absurd poverty whose crowning irony is to be ignorantly envied by those who are one-fifth as rich, and five times as well off.

Humphry, brooding and reflecting on this curious paradox, gradually came in the next weeks to wonder whether the Priory was worth its sacrifice. He did not forget that sentimental welcome which the old house had breathed down to him from its scarred heights, and yet . . .

"Father," he said suddenly, one day, when they were

holding counsel about ways and means, "has it ever occurred to you that, from a financial point of view, the only sound thing to do, to save the family, would be to let or even shut the Priory, and——"

But he got no further. There was something almost great, a protest against modernity and all its sins, in the air with which the old man drew himself together visibly, to meet this heresy.

"My boy," he answered solemnly, "I hope the moment will never come when we Scott-Mahons forget we are Scott-Mahons of Burcot."

Humphry sat silent and abashed. For one instant, spurred by pride of race, the broken old man who was his father had some of that cold, stern dignity which he had dreaded as a boy.

CHAPTER III

ORIGINAL EVE

HUMPHRY sat behind his father's writing-table and took the farmers' rent, or their excuses.

For more than forty years his father had sat there, at the old, ample table littered with its files and papers. He had sat there, very nervously, as a young man, the new squire, forced to endure congratulations from Mr. Goodrich, the oldest tenant; and later, he had caused another Mr. Goodrich, the youngest tenant, to shiver at an old Squire's coldly genial dignity, which was so far more terrible than any scorn or anger. And now his son sat in his place; a son who, confronted with a Mr. Goodrich of his own age, and dreading lest familiarity might breed a hand-shake, displayed no nervousness, more scorn, and far less dignity.

For close upon four hundred years there had been Squires and Mr. Goodrich's, whether young or old; and when either was a poor specimen, the other condoned his failings by a sort of loyalty. At first, of course, the notion that a squire could fail would have been heretical, and even perilous; but then, the primal Goodrich had possessed neither a hire-system gramophone nor the three R.'s, and one must pay for luxuries.

Of course, the Scott-Mahon family did not date only from the sixteenth century; or merely in a verbal way.

There had been Scotts near Burcot for more than seven hundred years ; and for an equal time there had been Mahons ; long before a bluff and jovial monarch granted the Priory to his faithful henchman, Sir John Mahon ; longer yet before Elizabeth Mahon, heiress, wedded the eldest of the Scotts, and a new, glorious race—the Scott-Mahons—settled and prospered in the larger place.

The first squire, who was thus plain Scott, had been a tyrant, feared and served with a grim loyalty akin to hate : the present squire was little better than a pauper, respected and served with a loyalty that owed something both to private interest and to pity. The first Goodrich, whose name was of French sound, had been a feudal serf : the present "Mr." Goodrich read the *Morning Leader*.

But the arrangement, ever adjusting itself in the scales of Progress, suited either party. Neither the old Squire, in his loved Priory, nor young Mr. Goodrich, with his life of Gladstone, Haeckel, and Encyclopædia, all equally hire-system, saw any reason why it should ever cease. Each, in a quite contented, abstract manner, envied the other's lot and bitterly deplored his own. The Squire clung to a Toryism of centuries gone past : the tenant was a Socialist : and both were happy.

But now behind the ancestral table there sat, outwardly bored and inwardly disgusted, that most dangerous of all enemies to an established order, the Man who is Thinking For Himself.

Humphry Scott-Mahon had always thought, from a boy upwards.

In politics he was of neither party, but took each measure on its private merits ; in religion he believed

what he felt, more than what others told him it was right to feel ; and generally, as befitted his philosophy of Self, he took his own judgment as the thing most vital to his own opinions. The natural result was that most people thought him either an egoist, a humbug, or a bore.

Now, as he sat mechanically fulfilling the details of his stewardship, he was thinking of his own position.

He could not see why he was sitting there, expressing a delight that the drunken wife of fat old Beeley was "less poorly, though she did cough awful sometimes" ; nor could he reconcile his occupation as a whole with his ideas of a man's dignity. Burcot was his career—that was how his father put it—the career of Humphry, as it had been of Robert, Christopher, Gilbert, Francis, and half a hundred more Scott-Mahons.

But why ?

As a boy, he had been first praised, and finally thrashed, for his persistent "*Why?*" The trick had stuck to him, and where most are thoroughly content to drift easily along the line of least resistance, he was constantly stopping, as now, and asking himself "*Why?*"

Why should he admit the right of this Priory to stand as his career ? Why must he not be allowed to do as men "less favoured" ; to go into the world and hack a place out for himself—the place he had begun to make, out there in India ? What sort of career could one enjoy at Burcot ? There was no money, and no way of making it, except by further cutting of expenses. Perhaps the pony trap and luggage cart, with their two sorry nags, sole occupants of the vast stable, ought to be the next thing dropped ?

A fine career for a young man, this calculation of the subtleties in genteel poverty !

And whence exactly came the need to make this sacrifice of all ambition ; to waive one's hope of Fame, Success, or Self-Fulfilment, and to be content with forming one more humble link in the long chain which bound the Scott-Mahons to the Priory at Burcot ?

If he had liked county life, position, things of that sort, it would be quite different ; but he had too clear vision to gain self-satisfaction from a position won, not by himself, but by ancestors of centuries ago, and only retained by a jettison of everything except appearances. As to "the County"—such heresies could not be spoken ; but privately—it bored him ! A man who has been in the wild places of Empire may have a certain roughness of intellect, but he is not provincial. They had been few in India, but picked men, each of them a year's choice from the Universities, flung before a thankless Civil Service. They were men who had taken high honours ; had either thought, or thoroughly absorbed the thoughts of others ; and the mere fact that they were stagnating had forced them to be brilliant. Of sparkle, or indeed of anything less superficial, Humphry as yet had found no traces in "the County," a curious and strait hierarchy from which local schoolmasters, doctors, and other new-comers of intelligence from the Great World, were studiously—and maybe in mere self-defence—excluded. As consolation there was certainly the garden, with its mysterious appeal, its gift for soothing grievances and making all ambitions puny ; a lotus-land, but gained at what a sacrifice ! Its charm, analyzed, was largely a matter of decay, the whole place wore an air of failure. And that was his career !

No ! he revolted. To be Scott-Mahon of Burcot in

the sixteenth century was doubtless a fine thing. To be that now, was no *disgrace* (Humphry's revolt was only moderate!), but it was not enough. One must be something else as well, and if the house and its estate really demanded the care of a whole lifetime——

Humphry, dangerously near to the philosophy of him who found it better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, suddenly realized that the last of the tenants had broken out of the routine and asked for more than mechanical attention. Old Brown, of North Hill Farm, with what in hand and possibly the mere suspicion of cynical amusement in his eye, wanted to know whether Mr. Scott-Mahon liked Burcot better than them furrin parts, and quite hoped that he did.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Brown," said Humphry; "it is very nice to be back at the old place." He hoped that he had hit the proper answer, but was never certain.

As he began to speak, the door opened and his father entered. Humphry, embarrassed, was forced to go on with the platitude. He had not known that it was twelve o'clock, the hour at which the Squire, judging business over, commonly came into his private den.

Mr. Brown ghoulishly watched the old man's slow progress to his chair.

"Ah, Squire," he said humorously, "but we be gettin' old, do you an' me!" Not so did men parley with the first squires of Burcot.

"You can give me five years, I fancy, Brown," said Mr. Scott-Mahon, icily. "I hope your harvest will be satisfactory." He did not like the tenants to speak to him like that—at any rate, not when his son was present.

Lately, for reasons that were roughly obvious, he had concerned himself more than formerly about his son's opinions. He was conscious always of a tacit criticism. He knew that Humphry, in some vague way, considered him at fault, and now as he let himself down gently into his armchair he threw an anxious glance in the direction of this son who, from having been a slave, was growing fast into a tyrant.

"Well, my boy," he said, after his own antique manner, "was everything all right?"

"Yes," answered Humphry, hardly troubling to conceal his irony. "Atlow and Cartwright can't pay just at present; a roof is wanted on one of the cowsheds up at the Brook Farm; and Mrs. Beeley is much better, though she coughs."

"Ah, well, Atlow and Cartwright can be trusted," genially answered the Squire, ignoring all the other details. "Was Brown asking you how you liked being home again?"

Humphry missed the pathos underlying that word "home"; missed, too, the speaker's anxiety, greater than the trivial question might have seemed to warrant.

"Yes," he said carelessly, and there was a note of contemptuous amusement in his tone, as he jotted down a figure on his notes. Youth and Age habitually under-rate each other's subtlety.

The old Squire had his answer—to another question. He was about to lead the dialogue towards it; everything was planned with all the caution of old men; and now, before it had been asked, he got the answer. Humphry was tickled that any one should even *think* he might feel glad to be back home again!

Afterwards, the pain of it; but just now, action.

"I was wondering, Humphry," he said, as though

embarking on another conversation, "whether it would be polite for you to go and call on the de Kays."

Perhaps it lacked *finesse*, to bring the remedy out pat like this, but he was bursting with the cleverness of his idea, and had come down a little early purposely to spring it on his son if, as he half suspected, it was proved that life at Burcot was the cause of that new gloom and moodiness. In any case, there was no need for guile.

Humphry was still tickled by his own daring in that scornful "Yes," which opened up a new amusement—masking his own feelings, that he so longed to express, under a veil just thick enough to dupe his father. So quite unsuspecting, only wondering at the abrupt change of mood, he scarcely looked up as he answered.

"Who are they?" and he put down another figure.

"They have just come to live at the Dower House, so that they are our nearest neighbours. I—I've not been able to get over, but I understand that they are very charming people, and they seem to have plenty of money. They are quite new to the County, but everybody knows them, I am told. I believe he got his title and his money in trade; but so many have taken to that now, and Lady de Kay was a Leicestershire Dalrymple before her marriage."

It was obviously safe to call! Humphry's lip curled cynically. He was so busy with his figures, and so firm in the conviction of his own superior weapons in a due of words, that it never occurred to him to wonder whether his father was observing his expression.

But the Squire was not discouraged by this failure of the Leicestershire Dalrymples; he still had his best card to play. He was held back from triumph only by

the fear of an excessive eagerness, that would betray his hand.

It was Humphry who gave him the lead.

"What do they consist of?" he threw out, as though the answer to that question would largely decide whether or not he should indulge his elder's whim. No more Charming Old Couples for him!

Mr. Scott-Mahon hesitated. Now, indeed, there was the necessity for care. A little too much keenness, and the game was obvious! A difficult trick, bluff, for men who have not full control of voice and face, unless their adversary should despise them.

"There is Sir George, of course," he began, with the air of one who first dispenses with the inessential, "and there is Lady de Kay, who everybody says is quite delightful;" then suddenly realizing that the essential must be produced quite casually, he added very rapidly, "and there's one daughter, about twenty-five," and stopped with unconvincing suddenness.

But, indeed, his caution was all labour lost, since Humphry was not on his guard at all, and did not even scent a plot when the old man, in quite an abstract way, remarked: "A most original girl, so they say."

"Why, of course I'll go and call," said Humphry, without any special reference to the last remark. "I've nothing else to do, and, as you say, it would be civil." Secretly, he rather leaped at the idea of anybody "about twenty-five" in a county where, so far as he could see, every one followed his own original idea, of keeping away from it till Time had made one fit for a grand-parent.

And the Squire, later in the day, sat chuckling at his study window as he watched his son strike out across the field-path that leads to the old timbered Dower House. He had reached the age when a fixed idea is

very fixed indeed, and something had shaken into his mind the conviction that this Miss de Kay, of whom the County spoke so warmly, was somehow just the very means to convert stubborn Humphry to the joys of county life.

Dotage and its confines are no less sentimental than is puppydom ; and old Mr. Scott-Mahon, with ever so knowing a shake of his white hairs, said to himself that youth must have Romance. Bless you, he understood ; he did not blame the boy. The Scott-Mahons always had been greedy of Romance. Yes, and the Scott-Mahons always had been handsome, too ! Even when Humphry glowered moodily at him, he recognized the strength in the thin lips and the long chin ; realized that this man with the pale, chiselled face and dark, straight brow was not easily to be coerced ; and whilst half of him cursed the boy as a stubborn young fool, the other half of him was proud. Yes—so he admitted to himself, with the fuller liberty of thought that soft old age induced—here was a real Scott-Mahon, a man that men would trust and follow, a man to win the full love, some day, of a woman who could well afford to choose.

Of course, that woman with the choice was quite a vague figment of his romantic fancy ; merely an ideal ; connected nohow with this Miss de Kay. This last named was simply an episode, a means, a sort of anticipatory sample of Romance ! Her object in existence was merely to keep Humphry in the county by making him believe himself in love ; for to a man who found a lack of interests in rural life, what programme could be more inviting ?

If any proof were needed that many parents who seem to be jealous of, or even to dislike, their sons, are

really very proud of them, it might be found in the fact that this father never thought it possible that Miss de Kay should be unwilling to serve as the provider of the romance obviously necessary to his son. She, of course, might not satisfy his standard ; the Squire judged only by report ; but as to him, he was young, handsome, clever, heir to Burcot, a Scott-Mahon ! What woman in her senses could rebuff him ? . . .

And having got thus far with this entirely harmless curriculum of winter entertainment for his son, the antique Cupid set himself to doze till such time as he had more material to build with, in the shape of a report of the afternoon's proceedings.

The self-complacent smile that lurked upon his face even in the land of dreams, might possibly have vanished, had he heard Lady de Kay's welcome of his son. She eddied forward in an impulsive way curiously out of keeping both with her figure and with the old room, so dignified in its soft colourings, dim tapestries, and mellowed oak.

"How do you do, Mr. Scott-Mahon ? I'm very glad to meet our neighbour ! So will my husband be ; he'll be here in a moment, I expect. I wish my daughter were at home, but she motored over to lunch with some friends, and I can't think what has become of her. I think they must have had a puncture !"

She said all this at a great speed, and then ended very unexpectedly, with a smile and a small gasp, as though it were some noise made by the brake that had stopped her so jerkily. Humphry was startled, and could only say that possibly she *had*, or equally, of course, she might have stopped for tea.

"How pleasant motoring would be, if there were no punctures !" said his hostess, with an indescribable air

of gaiety. She was rather stout, in a black dress ; but she knew that young men liked one to be bright.

Humphry decided that the gasp which had so disconcerted him was meant to be a laugh, since it was always accompanied by an understanding smile. He shuddered at the prospect of Sir George's entrance. So much for his vow of No More Charming Old Couples!

But much worse was to come.

"In any case," flashed Lady de Kay, "we shall avoid the last infirmity of being three!" and she gasped so lengthily, that Humphry felt it was polite to smile. "I am expecting Lady Hill. I think you know her?"

Humphry knew the Dowager, and knew her tongue. Lady Hill belonged to the class of praisers of past time, and nothing, unless possibly herself, was quite so good now as it used to be. If this was true generally, it was in especial true of the manners of young men ; and being of those who believe a negative lack of gallantry to be best cured by positive rudeness, she devoted much energy to what she called "putting young men in their place." Needless to say, it was she herself who settled their proper position. Humphry frequently had found himself in it, and having once got beyond the age when it seemed humorous to bait a crank, had preferred, on his last leave, to steer his course clear of the matron.

Thus her eye glistened as she rustled in, presently, and saw her old-time victim there.

"What, Mr. Scott-Mahon?" she said, with an elaborate show of surprise. "They told me you were back from India, but I did not believe it. I thought you would have been to call. Well, I'm delighted, anyhow, to see you *here*."

"I called at Ilterton," Humphry replied ; "but you

were not at home—unhappily.” There was a certain joy in the last word.

Lady Hill peered at the young man suspiciously, met his cold eye, and turned tactfully aside. Here was a stronger enemy than the shy youth of their last meeting; and it is not only male bullies who are cowards.

“Where’s my dear Eleanor?” she said to Lady de Kay.

“I was just saying to Mr. Scott-Mahon, I can’t imagine. She’s out in the motor, but I expected her back here by three.”

Lady Hill relapsed on an oblique attack. “But what a pity!” she said. “Mr. Scott-Mahon would have liked to meet her, and I think they would have got on well together. *She* doesn’t worry about forms and all that sort of thing, does she? She’s so original.”

“So everybody says!” gasped the proud mother smilingly.

There was no sign of her, however, nor even any of her promised father; and Humphry felt that he was in for a real County afternoon. The talk soon turned on politics (the County always spoke of that when men were present), and at each word he had to bite his tongue for fear of being called by the damned name of Radical. The more conventional they waxed, the more he longed to bring out some wild heresy. Hideous doctrines, that he never knew were in him, surged up to his lips. He felt that soon his inmost thoughts—his views of Burcot, of the County, everything—would blurt themselves out into speech. And still no host; worse, still no tea, and he must stay till after that was done.

He began to long, almost to pray, for the arrival of this Eleanor, whom everybody called original.

Half an hour ago, when he had entered, her absence had meant nothing to him. His father, building sentimental castles, had made the old parental error of under-estimating his son's age. Humphry was no boy to be thrilled by the thought of casually meeting any random girl. He was thirty, and he had met women, roughly, of all sorts. He had lived in India.

But now, realizing how hideously he was out of place in this orgy of Convention; how, even when he schooled himself to platitude, he was thought curious and rather shocking; he resolved, in an illuminating flash, that he could never be of the County, because he did not own a County mind. His outlook upon things was not the hereditary prejudice, ready-made, of one who had always existed in a groove, but the hard-won individualism of a man who has fought to make himself even the poor thing that he is. There was no conceit about this discovery; perhaps the other way was better; but certainly the two ways differed. He would always shock the County, and it would never cease to weary him. Seeing this, and feeling like a man who supports a just cause against very unfair odds—mistrusted and despised—he longed for the presence of some one who could understand; could realize that the world is made up of a thousand sorts of men; that each is right to himself, and that the wisest of all is he to whom almost nobody is wrong. Was that, perhaps, what the County found original in this Eleanor de Kay?

Somewhere or other a door banged, and Humphry, midway in a prosy sentence that served only to conceal his views, was hard pressed not to pause and listen. That, surely, must be her?

But neither of the others heard, and as Lady Hill icily embarked upon her criticism of his argument, he

had a sudden view of his absurdity. To flush with excitement, like any lanky Sixth Form boy, at the possible advent of a girl whom he had never seen! Such are the depths of conventional banality to which exile in an uncongenial land can reduce even a Thinker for Himself. . . . Humphry, unknowingly, was in the very mood which loses hearts.

And suddenly Eleanor de Kay in person stood before him. That noise of the banged door had made him keep a wary, half-expectant eye upon the entrance by which he himself had entered. But no one came, and only an inarticulate "Ah!" from his hostess made him follow her gaze and look round in the opposite direction. Miss de Kay had entered through the conservatory.

When the County did not call her original, it said that she was picturesque, and that adjective well described the manner of her coming into Humphry's life.

Had she actually paused for a moment or two with her hand up to the curtain which separated room from conservatory? Humphry was never sure. Perhaps in his surprise, or in the eye's hungry gulp to digest so much in so brief an interval, he had distorted time, and she had merely brushed the thing aside as she went past? But somehow or other, his first impression was of an effective pose.

The chief point is that it was certainly effective.

Tall, dark, graceful—in one word, distinguished—she had the good fortune to be at her prime in an age when fashion harked back to just the right period for its original creations. In a Jacobean ruff she would have been quite ineffective, and in a crinoline, grotesque. No, she was eighteenth-century. With her clinging

white gown, of elaborate simplicity, set off by a gauzy scarf of pink and over-shadowed by a vast black picture hat, she was a Gainsborough of the best period; and knew it. She smiled lovingly at her mother, and it was quite a pity when she had to leave the dark green curtain, which made up the detail of this tableau's colour-scheme.

"Did you think I was dead?" she asked. And then, "Why, there is Lady Hill!" as though unconscious, till then, that she had an audience. Humphry, apparently, she could not see at all.

"You dear, original creature!" cried Lady Hill in her best manner. "I suppose you *never* come in by the right door?" and she kissed her effusively.

"This is Mr. Scott-Mahon, Eleanor," the hostess said; and then to Humphry, "My daughter!"

Eleanor turned an obviously indifferent look upon him, as though she took no interest in men whatever. Humphry, clearly set down as a fool, felt called upon to make some comment.

"I hope you had a nice drive?" was all that he could manage.

"Oh, I was *motoring*, thank you," she answered breezily, and turned to Lady Hill.

Her mother came across to Humphry with a gasp compounded of apology and pride.

"I'm so glad she's come in after all; she's such a clever girl!"

The victim of her bludgeon snub was not sure whether "original" did not fit better, as an adjective. Her rudeness was certainly beyond the average, but it was scarcely intellectual.

It might be expected that Humphry would swallow down the tea, which now mercifully arrived, and so hastily

quit for ever a house that offered only an alternative between boredom and insult. But this is not the way of a man who believes in liberty and self-fulfilment! He patiently survived an argument upon conscription with Lady de Kay, in the hope of a chance to show her daughter—well, to show her that he was not such a fool as she had made him feel.

And presently it came.

"I want you to have a chat with my daughter," said Lady de Kay, abruptly rising. "*She* very nearly went to Oxford, too!" She flitted across the room to where Lady Hill was deep in conversation with the girl, whom it pleased her to regard in some way as her *protégée*. "Now, dear Lady Hill, I want to hear *all* about your Orphanage Bazaar, and Eleanor must have a talk with Mr. Scott-Mahon, who they say is very clever!"

Humphry, noting all the work necessary to engineer their "chat," began to get extremely nervous, and wondered anxiously what his hostess was saying. It was not long before he knew. He stood, feeling very gawkish, by the grand piano, close to where he and Lady de Kay had been sitting, and watched her daughter come obediently, with slow grace, across to him.

"I am to talk to you," she said.

It was a little disconcerting, and her method of dialogue did not lead Humphry to display his best.

"That's very *kind* of you!" he answered lightly, but with just a note of irony that was too subtle for his hearer. She thought him wildly unoriginal.

"Oh, please don't worry about compliments, Mr. Scott-Mahon," she exclaimed, with a plaintive half-sigh. "That sort of thing is so played out, isn't it? And you know quite well that we neither of us want a *bit* to talk

to one another, except that mother wants a chat with Lady Hill!"

Really, it was not quite tennis. By all the laws of gallantry, he could not send back half so hard a service.

"*I'm* enjoying it!" he said, with a slight smile.

Once again she missed the irony, and thought that he was merely bungling the old male game of flattery. She took no notice.

"You've been at Oxford and in India, haven't you?" she asked, for no especial reason. She was almost clever, Humphry decided with a secret wriggle, in making one feel that she thought herself talking to a child, or to a fool. Again and again he tried to show himself to more advantage; but always she contrived to quell him by a chill "Really?" or elaborately to start a new topic, and not hide the fact that she was manufacturing the conversation.

When, finally, he decided that flight was the sole hope of victory, and said that he must go, she murmured—

"Really? Well, I expect mother has finished, by now, about her bazaar," as though they both knew that this alone accounted for their tiresome duologue.

Lady de Kay was more demonstrative.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Scott-Mahon. It was very nice indeed of you to trouble to come over, and I hope now that you've settled at Burcot, we shall see a lot of you?"

"Thanks very much," said Humphry, awkwardly, still tongue-tied from his late experience.

"If you're doing nothing," she went on, "we shall expect you on Thursday afternoon for our classical tableaux. I am so glad we've got to know you just in time!" and once again she gasped in her amusement.

"Thank you very much, Lady de Kay," said Humphry, feeling all the time that her daughter was listening to his inadequate replies, "and I should like to come."

He said good-bye to Lady Hill, who peered with ill-concealed pleasure at his flushed cheeks, and then hurried to the door, feeling more of an idiot than ever during the last dozen years.

He walked home with a burning face ; a thousand clever repartees, none too rude, now thronging to his brain ; and as he walked he slashed at grass and hedges fiercely with his stick. His anger, somehow, was less against Miss de Kay than against himself.

Throughout dinner he sat, more sullen even than of late, in a persistent silence, and so gave no real clue or satisfaction to the parent-plotter who had been waiting eagerly to diagnose his mood.

CHAPTER IV

A SECOND DOSE

THOSE dazed people who breathe into one's ear the admission that they "can't quite understand" such or such an one among their fellows, commonly fail because they do not allow enough for the mutability of human character. They are, as a rule, mortals without many spiritual changes or adventures (for otherwise they would have more perception), and they expect others to be static like themselves. A man's actions are of a type broad enough for them to place his vice as meanness; and from that moment they look for him to be uniformly mean. It is all delightfully simple, and they hug themselves by reason of their cleverness, until the man does something generous. Then they are puzzled. With their faith in human nature almost dimmed, they seek out a friend and candidly admit that they can't quite *understand* So And So; they always thought that he was mean, and now he has done this!

The old Greek thinker who made the noble guess that everything was in a state of flux is obviously the man for folk like this to read. There may be certain things that are quite solid and unchangeable, but human character is not among them. No man has ever clearly fixed a period at which one's new bicycle grows old or ceases to be new, and the same vagueness of definition

holds true, not only of a woman's age, but of anybody's morals. Perfect saints are scarce, the pessimist declares ; but so are perfect devils. Except in drama, every villain sooner or later has his moments of remorse. In fact, not to be long with instances or to embark on the troubled waters of the new German theories of sex, it may be admitted that the world in general has given too little notice to the grey strip which separates pure white from murky black.

Eleanor de Kay belonged essentially to that midway space wherein old Aristotle found his virtue. She was in the first place and quite roughly, neither a clever woman nor a silly girl ; and if her originality was somewhat less startling than appeared from the County's parrot-cry, "She's *so* original," she was at least distinctive enough to be capable of the effort to seem a little different.

The fact that there was any effort, may explain her failure.

At first, when the drawing-room took her over from a loftier portion of the house, she was properly original. Even then, her mother encouraged her towards the picturesque in dress, and soon enough she proved that she had thought. Of course, every one had met plain women with peculiar views, but to hear seventeen-year-old Miss de Kay, from under a six-guinea hat, denouncing luxury, was certainly a trifle piquant.

The odd thing was, she meant it. In those days between the nursery and the ball-room she had read almost what she liked, and many books had painted luridly the miseries and labours of the poor. A fleeting view of London's slumland, whilst she was whisked from terminus to terminus, completed her equipment as a sentimental socialist. The fact that she was wearing an

expensive hat did not affect the argument or her sincerity. She had not paid for it herself; and if she were born into the rich class, she had to do as others did, but—she did not think that it was fair.

Eleanor de Kay was an immediate success. Before the age of twenty she was hall-marked as uncommon. Even those who did not like her ended their strictures with "But she's very *original*." And naturally, as her convictions grew more dim under the attractions of the life that she despised, she set herself to deserve that epithet. Her aim gradually became less to help the class below her than to horrify her own.

Of course, she was discreet, and chose her theories; in County society even a licensed eccentric must be careful not to wander too far from the normal view. But whether it was some new, undramatic form of drama or some heresy in politics that made a bid for London's notice, Miss de Kay was certain, sooner or later, to secure it for the County. Chameleon-ways, she took her colour from the things around her, or, by another figure, she might be a gramophone that made its records from the movements in the air, but was a little slow in starting. Anybody who heard her latest theory could be sure that he had got in touch with the moment's topic—of half a year ago.

Just before moving to the Dower House she had been militant about the woman's vote, and made a statuesque appearance upon several platforms. But because she belonged to the grey middle space, and if not very clever, was by no means stupid, she came to see that her fellows in the movement had neither the gentleness of a woman nor the instincts of a man, and rapidly dropped out of it. To be a suffragist, not militant, seemed tame to Eleanor de Kay.

From this phase there survived in her, on moving to the new home, something that was more genuine than almost anything since her first girlish pity for the poor; and this was her contempt for men.

Among the mad things yelled by hectic women at those public meetings there had been this grain of good sense: Man had used Woman too much as a charming plaything. Herself essentially a healthy girl and too keenly interested in sport to have room for morbidity on sexual problems, she had wondered in an unreflective way why it was that the manner of most men repelled her vaguely. Now she understood; always, under everything else, there had lain that absurd flattery which was so little different from contempt. "By Gad, quite a pretty girl, and, d—— it all, she thinks! Almost a pity, don't you know; but still they must do *something* to attract our notice . . ." From that analysis of the male attitude towards her it was but a little step to becoming herself the one who manifested scorn. She dawned upon the County, her new home, as that most tantalizing enigma, a handsome and obviously innocent girl of twenty-five who took no pains to be even reasonably polite to men. She treated them with an amused disdain, like one who knew their game and really did not care to play it. Flirtation, obviously, only bored her, and she was plainly sick of admiration. With a cold smile, she seemed to say that if they had anything rational to offer she would listen; at moments she would frivel, like the wisest men; but if they wanted to pay compliments and treat her as a rather cleverly dressed doll, they could pass along rapidly to some one else. And indeed that, so far as she was concerned, they might as well do that at once.

It depended, of course, on the man's temperament

whether his admiration died or flourished under this stern treatment. Some men thought it jolly rude and beastly bad form, and wondered some one did not tell her so, whilst others found it eminently piquant.

Humphry, in a sense, enrolled himself in this last class.

Certainly he did not definitely like Miss de Kay the better for having trampled cruelly upon him ; but neither did he blame her half so much as he abused himself for his most tame submission. And of one thing he was certain : he must see her soon again. Things could not be left as they were—so much was definite. Humphry Scott-Mahon was not accustomed either to despise himself, or to be openly scorned as a mere fool : and the whole mass of his self-centred philosophy rose in revolt against the continuance of such a state. He must show this Miss de Kay, however original, that he was not to be dismissed as one of the blind worshippers at the old shrine of Convention. He did not know what her ideas might be, but if they got a proper talk he would soon prove to her that he, too, had his theories, that he was not as others in the County were. She must not think that he was one of those. . . .

From all of which it may be gathered that her opinion of him was not a matter of indifference ; and so soon as a man sets himself to get right in a woman's eyes, he is exposing a large target for a small god's shaft.

At lunch on Thursday, Humphry astounded his father by announcing abruptly that he would not be in to tea, as he was going to a party.

"A party, eh ? I thought that you had vowed to keep clear of such things altogether ? What is it, then ?" (Was it possibly the cure, already ?)

"Some tableaux, classical or something," murmured Humphry, carelessly.

"At Lady Hill's?" went on the cross-examination. The Squire retained some relics of a dry, sardonic sense of humour.

"No," answered Humphrey. "I don't think she seems to do much entertaining now?"

This was very much like checkmate, and the old man dropped all subtlety. "Where *is* it, then?"

Humphry looked a trifle angry. "Where? What? Oh, the party! Oh yes," he stammered out, "at the de Kays. I thought you knew? It's classical tableaux, or something."

He hated saying it; he knew that his father would think that, like everybody else, he found this rude Miss de Kay original and interesting. Old people got so horribly obvious about these things!

And, sure enough, his father chuckled rakishly, with some banal comment about her suitability for tableaux, which Humphry treated to contempt and silence.

As a matter of fact, Eleanor looked duly picturesque, if very slightly classical. Herein she gave fresh proof of her wisdom as to style, since the Grecian head-dress scarcely fits the Gainsborough type, and it would obviously hurt the County less to have an eighteenth-century Athene than to see Miss de Kay at anything except her best.

Humphry did not see at all. Balanced on the extreme end of an antique bench that was covered in valuable brocade, but had no back; behind ten rows of hats; in a room not sloped for theatrical performance; he endured the present, hoping in a near future for some chance of re-establishing himself in the eyes of this invisible Athene.

"That must have been Miss de Kay, I think," hopefully remarked the lady next him, whose name he had failed to catch. "Have you met her yet? They say that she is charming, but she was getting herself up just now."

"Yes," he replied; "I met her only a few days ago."

For the first time his neighbour seemed to find him interesting. "Well, do tell me," she asked, "is she really as peculiar as they say?"

A ghastly hush preceded the last words, and Humphry had the hideous feeling that three rows of people were hanging on his answer.

"Oh yes," he said presently, "she's *most* original." It is affectation to pretend that one cannot fit oneself, in time, to any manner of society.

After an interval of possibly ten minutes, in which the hot room rang with vibrant conversation, the curtain rattled once again along its metal rods, exposing yet another solitary classic figure to those in the front rows, a few of whom, and several of the others, clapped politely with gloved hands, as the rattling process was reversed. Then once again the buzz of talk, like something suddenly let loose, as everybody said, "How charming!"

When this had happened half a dozen times, and every one was secretly coming to think that, if ever *they* gave tableaux, they would have the tea beforehand, a much shorter interval suddenly broke the dialogue; back jerked the curtain; and on a doubtlessly classic pillar there perched a small boy draped in a big towel, who held above his chaplet-covered head a banner bearing this device: VALE!

"Why 'vale'?" asked somebody in a clear whisper, whilst others murmured, "What an odd idea!" but it

had spoken its glad tidings to the many, for chairs were scraped along the floor; and as the footmen hurried in with lamps, everybody most politely waited for some one else to go first to the tea so generally desired.

All the County seemed to have appeared for this, which was not only Lady de Kay's first party at the Dower House, but the opening function of the autumn season. Humphry, amid his duties as unsalaried footman (for men are lured with difficulty to these entertainments), realized the fact, and saw his hope of any talk with Miss de Kay to have been optimistic. Already Lady Hill had said, "But I thought you *never* went to parties anywhere, Mr. Scott-Mahon?" and other hostesses, with brains working on the same line of logic, had rapidly marked down their victim.

Disconsolate to an extreme, which he made no endeavour to explain, he was just trailing out behind the crowd that squashed its way through into the great hall, when suddenly an apologetic voice was heard behind him, and a restraining hand was laid, almost affectionately, on his sleeve. It was Lady de Kay, very hot in a mauve gown, holding a plate in which a sloppy ice ran to and fro, but gasping in the genial way befitting a hostess universally congratulated on a big success.

"Oh, Mr. Scott-Mahon, are you feeling very kind? You've worked so nobly that I scarcely dare to ask you!"

"You have but to command!" said he, and laid his hand with a mock gesture on his heart. He had realized, a little tardily, that Lady de Kay regarded herself as something of a humorist.

She beamed kindly, quite liking this young man.

Most of them, she found, were so abominably serious, and when she was flippant, answered her in earnest.

"I was only wondering," she said. "Our performers have had to get up-to-date again, you see, and they're only just coming down for their tea; and people *will* go away so early, so that all the servants are wanted in the hall!"

Here she paused and gasped; not that her sentence seemed to have found its end, but because—as it appeared to Humphry—she either had to smile or else to burst.

"And am I appointed Butler-in-Chief? Please don't apologise; it is an honour!" said Humphry, in his old manner of burlesque.

Lady de Kay, flashing a smile at him, and handing him her ice-plate with an apologetic bow, sailed through the double doors in search of her fast disappearing guests. Decidedly, she quite liked that most pleasant and amusing young man, and could not imagine why Eleanor, asked what she thought of him the other day, had said, "*I didn't* think of him,"—except that Eleanor was so original . . .

Humphry, amused at this small episode, and seeing in it a better chance for his rehearsed self-vindication, turned about and found himself in a room empty except for two maids, who stood behind the buffet, and stopped giggling very obviously as he looked around for somewhere to put down his ice-plate.

He was just feeling a little ridiculous and deciding to retreat, till wanted, when the other door opened. Miss de Kay peeped in, and after a careless glance to see that the room was empty, stepped back, while two other girls came in.

"Tea, tea!" she cried eagerly from behind the door; "tea in comfort, without any How-de-dos!"

The other girls, seeing a belated guest still there, looked half amused and half embarrassed, but said nothing. Then Eleanor entered, and in her turn caught sight of Humphry.

Of course, strictly, it was she who should have felt a fool; but, somehow, she had got a gift for making others feel like that. Besides, the circumstances were a little against Humphry. Here he was, discovered all alone in the tea-room, just like a greedy infant, an ice-plate in his hand! It seemed his fate always to be put into an absurd position before this scornful Miss de Kay. He hurriedly shifted the plate to his left hand.

Eleanor advanced with the polite mien of Society, but also with no attempt to hide the fact that his presence came as a surprise to her.

"How do you *do*, Mr. Scott-Mahon?" she said genially, shaking his hand (and her use of that phrase, with its memory of the joyful "No How-de-do's," made Humphry feel yet more superfluous). Then, with a very open and delightful smile, she said, "I *am* so sorry, but mother told us every one had gone!"

There was something ingenuous and friendly in the manner of her apology, something that seemed to admit him, without any humbug, as sharer of a joke and so as friend; but equally in its matter there was what made it yet more obvious that he was not expected.

"She asked me to stay and look after you," said Humphry; and, even as he spoke, realized that he was being no less clumsy than last time; that she must think him equally a boor. An uncomfortable person, Miss de Kay!

"How very unkind of her!" she said. "Mother seems to imagine that men only come to parties to

be used as waiters;" at which the three girls, very excited at their first taste of applause, and clearly great admirers of Eleanor, all laughed appreciatively.

Humphry was saved from the arduous search for a retort by the entry of Lady de Kay herself, who came in with the stir of a tornado.

"Now then," she said cheerily, "there's no time for talking! Everybody's wanting to congratulate you in the drawing-room. What is Mr. Scott-Mahon getting for you?" and again she turned the rapid stream of words off suddenly.

Eleanor, refusing to be hustled, answered with a slow deliberation.

"We were just trying to persuade Mr. Scott-Mahon to let us look after ourselves! Really, mother, it's too bad of you to have kept him here, when he could have been talking to every one next door!"

Scarcely a fair attack on one who was debarred the counter-thrust of compliment. . . .

Even while she spoke, the two maids bustled up with trays of tea, coffee, ices, sandwiches, cakes—everything that even Mr. Scott-Mahon could have possibly provided.

"Ada has solved the matter for us," cried Lady de Kay, with a friendly smile at a trusted servant. "So poor Mr. Scott-Mahon is set free!" Here she looked extremely coy. "I'm not sure, though, that he was really so sorry for himself; but Lady Hill has been inquiring for you, Mr. Scott-Mahon. I think she wants you to conduct the Competitions at her Children's Home bazaar!"

Eleanor smiled triumphantly. "You *see*, mother!" she exclaimed. "You always think no one ever wants to see any one but me. Touching maternal love, isn't

it?" she said to Humphry, with another of those rather baffling friendly smiles. "Thank you so much, but *please* don't trouble to wait for us." She glanced at the ice-plate, which he had hurriedly put down, and for one moment he was afraid that she would ask him whether he had finished his own tea; but in the next she held her hand out, and said, "Good-bye, Mr. Scott-Mahon—and thank you very much."

Lady de Kay, who had stood beaming proudly on her daughter's conduct of this business, interrupted here.

"Why, Eleanor, you needn't say good-bye; you won't be so long over tea, I hope, as that!"

"No, of course," said Eleanor; "how stupid of me! Well, au revoir, then—in the next room!" She was firm in giving him his order of dismissal.

Humphry turned away with a little bow at the three girls, whose eyes were full of laughter, as though they thought Eleanor a prime humorist; and then he went out with Lady de Kay, who threw behind her a last request for haste.

As he closed the door, they both heard the three girls let loose their hardly suppressed merriment; and Humphry hoped that he heard Eleanor say "'Ssh!"

"Those girls are as excited as if they had been to their first ball!" said his hostess, in obvious apology. "The fair one is a daughter of Lord Kenton's; such a pretty girl! I suppose my daughter introduced you?"

"No," said Humphry, dryly. "Perhaps she was excited, too!"

"Fancy not introducing you! . . . What a curious girl, isn't she?" said Lady de Kay, as though criticizing something with which she had no connection; which, moreover, she did not even claim to understand.

Humphry was too worried to make the obvious County retort. He was not sure whether Miss de Kay had done the thing cleverly or ill; but there was no doubt whatsoever that she had, somehow, got rid of the unnecessary guest, and was now enjoying her tea duly without any How-de-do's. He had been blatantly turned out, and the three girls had known it.

Under the circumstances, "Good-bye" seemed rather preferable to "Au revoir." He might have cut a poor figure, in there with that silly pale red ice-plate; but he had still his dignity. Miss de Kay might possibly not notice, but in any case she would not find him waiting there, "in the next room," for a new course of snubs. Cruelly ignoring Lady Hill and all her competitions, he protested to his hostess that he was honestly expected back at the Priory on most important business; ought never really to have come; and so trudged home once more with a sense of injustice and of self-contempt.

To the old Squire it seemed clear that either this gloomy, silent son was finally weary of the rural life, or—far more probable—was hopelessly in love. In short, his cure had either failed or had succeeded; alternatives that offered a broad field for speculation. Well, it was soon, as yet, to judge; but two visits to the Dower House in four days, and each followed by a silent dinner, certainly seemed to show that the great scheme was working, and that Cupid would yet succeed in chaining Humphry to the land.

CHAPTER V

A DUEL OF THE SEXES

HUMPHRY decided that he must have it out with her. The whole thing was ridiculous. He did not really mind a *bit* what this Miss de Kay thought of him—but it was too absurd that she should think him a mere fool!

Of course, a party had been the very worst time possible for trying to give her a proper impression of himself. He should have known that he was almost certain to see her in a crowd; and for his purpose it was essential that they should have a proper talk. In some extraordinary way he had, at each of their meetings, been forced to take up a *rôle* quite alien from his nature, and she had not unnaturally got the idea that he was the sort of man who went about paying compliments to women and saying all the things that always had been said; a type which, from her attitude no less than from her reputation in the County, she patently despised.

A certain amount of this new line of reasoning, with more of the old sort, resulted on Sunday in Humphry's surprising admission, at lunch, that he rather half thought of dropping in at the Dower House, just for something to do, don't you know. His parent tactfully decided that his strength was to sit still, and merely

showed an interest more or less intelligent. His actual remark was that it certainly would be polite, after the party, though he supposed that this was an old-fashioned notion, nowadays.

"Lady de Kay was very nice about it," answered Humphry, in a deprecating way. "Said we were neighbours, and I must drop in when I liked, and they were never out on Sunday afternoons, and all that sort of thing."

But never a word of Eleanor, the sole person in the house about whom other people ever talked at all! The Squire concluded that there was something in it, certainly—and working purely *a priori*, he could not be expected to guess what. He waited once more for the evening.

Humphry, as he struck off across country, felt quite an unaccountable exhilaration. Like most men, he did not worry much with introspection, except on matters that seemed to dictate his action in the future, but in some vague way it occurred to him to reflect what a stagnant existence it must be, in which such a trifle of a thing created a ripple so perceptible! County intercourse was such a formula, that any small divergence from the ordinary bulked into something nearly a sensation. But in any case, every man, deep down, dearly loves a fight. . . .

Fate, this time, provided a clear battle-ground.

Sunday tea at the de Kays' appeared, so soon, to have become something of a function. Every one had always stayed at home upon that afternoon, and there was quite a flutter in the County when the new tenants of the Dower House announced that they would then be—in another sense—At Home. Some, of course, would never think of ordering their carriage or

their motor-car on Sunday, whilst all the rest decided that it would be best to wait and see what other people did. But when they began asking each other, they found that some of their best friends were shocked at the mere question, and they suspected that many of their enemies did not give quite the truthful answer, whilst nobody knew whether the Kentons, who could set any fashion, had yet gone ; so that eventually the quickest way of proof seemed by experiment. If there was no one there, or it seemed somehow wrong, they need not go again. As a matter of fact, there was a big crowd there, including the Kentons, and it seemed quite all right, and every one enjoyed it, excepting the chauffeurs. So that on this, about the thirtieth of these sabbatical At Homes, the County was there almost to the extent of a party ; for no society is quite so respectable as it believes, and really one couldn't take offence at anything that dear, uncommon Miss de Kay did, because it all seemed different, you know. . . .

Lady de Kay was determined that Mr. Scott-Mahon should really get that chat with her daughter, and so fully realize her cleverness. He was an able man, everybody said ; he had done well in India ; and therefore his praise was worth having. To this doting mother, her daughter was like a collector's latest treasure ; a thing which must be shown to all, that she might feed upon their approbation. She sometimes wished that Eleanor was not so chilling to young men, and she had even said so to her, in the case of this new neighbour. Eleanor, of course, had not realized that she was crushing him, and did not think much of any man who could be squashed so easily—whereat her mother lapsed from the unequal combat : after all, one must not expect so original a girl to be like everybody

else! But though verbally defeated, she persevered in action, and so manœuvred her guests that, after tea, she led Humphry across to Eleanor; elaborately drew away her present partner, and gave her a pregnant glance of warning, which she carefully ignored.

"Mr. Scott-Mahon is *so* anxious, Eleanor, to hear all your ideas. He has just been telling me his, but," she added, with the knowledge that no woman is too eccentric for flattery to soften, "they're far too clever, naturally, for *me*!"

Eleanor did not look very much more amiable. She was not intensely fond of clever men; in fact, she was a little bit afraid of them. They were always horribly in earnest, and knew so much about their subject! Once, at a dinner-party near her former home, she had been saying something quite casual about oligarchy in Ancient Greece, and its absurdity, when a little man, whom she had thought extremely stupid, asked whether she meant this sort of oligarchy or that; two great adjectives that she had never even known to be existent. It was an awkward moment—such a moment, in fact, as kills reputations—and even when she somehow put him off, the silly little man persisted in talking with huge keenness about his old Greek oligarchies, as though she cared the slightest bit about them! Of course, she had not meant either of those long sorts of oligarchies, but just any one at all, and she was sure that all of them were equally absurd. Anybody but a clever man, who cared for those dull things, would have seen that she was only talking quite roughly, and that it was stupid and very rude to go into details before a lot of people, who mostly didn't know what oligarchy meant!

From that moment she became extra hard on clever men. The only thing to do with them was (as her

patron, Lady Hill, would say) to keep them in their place: the exact policy that she had adopted towards Humphry. She had no desire to set out her theories before him, and have them bowled over by some of his great Balliol adjectives. It was much easier to hold him scornfully at a man's proper distance.

As her mother sailed away, she metaphorically turned a key on her "ideas," sat upon the casket's lid, and prepared to sell it with her life.

This was a mistake, so soon, for Humphry had no designs whatever upon her philosophy; nor was he preparing to battle with the arms of intellect. As he noted her cold smile, and the unwilling way in which she entered on their dialogue, he suddenly chose a quite different and strangely appropriate weapon of offence.

He resolved that he would be original.

"Why do you dislike me, Miss de Kay?" he said in a conversational way, as he sat down. With the most easy manner possible, he took a small reef in his trouser-knees.

Eleanor was startled. Men were usually terrified of her, except in London; and here was this Mr. Scott-Mahon, whom she had thought dull and of the County conventional, daring quite calmly to ask her such a question after two brief meetings! For a moment she was thrown entirely off her balance: the shot had come from such an unexpected quarter. Worst of all, she knew that she had shown surprise. The clumsy and scorned Mr. Scott-Mahon seemed, by a quick change, to have her flushed and embarrassed before him; and in the instant that she saw for the first time a rather grim and terrifying firmness in his strong-chiselled face, there came to her a quick incongruous memory of the little

oligarchic man. But this was all a flash. A thousand repartees and lines of conduct offered themselves, under her mind's pressure, for selection, and after that betraying moment she had schooled her face to a due mixture of amusement and disdain.

"'Dislike' you, Mr. Scott-Mahon?" she said, gaining time. "What an *extraordinary* notion!"

Below her reputation, possibly; but the sting lay, as so often, in her tone and her expression. Very clearly they expressed the fact that she had never flattered him by forming any judgment whatsoever; and she looked at him from under her eyelids in an inimitable way, which suggested the glance of a woman who is not sure, but rather fancies, that she *has* met one, somewhere, before. Eleanor did this rather well, and it was fortunate that she had long ago reduced the tricks of rudeness to something very like an art.

Humphry carefully ignored her meaning. "Perhaps you dislike all men generally?" he asked quite pleasantly.

"No—o," she answered, as though after deliberation on an unimportant matter. "I sometimes meet men that interest me; in London or in Paris." She was very collected and superior again. If he had pressed the personal question any further, she might have got yet more confused; but either through mercy or from lack of skill, he had relapsed on generalities. There she felt safe again, a match for him, and it never occurred to her to notice that with the shock of his first artillery, she had let go of the key and given him free access to that casket of "ideas."

"Why London or Paris?" he asked with an ease almost contemptuous; oddly different from the flustered youth of those two other meetings.

"Because I think provincial men get dull." A bludgeon stroke, but she was irritated.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad to hear you say that!" exclaimed Humphry in delight, to her chagrin; she had forgotten that he had not always been at Burcot. "I can never imagine, unless they've got no interests but sport, how they ever survive it." (Thus early, he grabbed at the chance to show that he was different!) "But I suppose you realize that it's an awful heresy to say so, here?"

This was annoying: Eleanor found her adversary and herself agreeing, without her having got revenge for that initial blow.

"And yet," she therefore said, "you've come to live here! But perhaps you're very keen on sport?"

"No, not especially—not enough, anyhow, for it to act as my career."

"Then what *will* your career be—here?"

"Burcot!" said Humphry, with a sardonic laugh.

Eleanor could now finally assume an attitude of condescension. "*That's* why I like men who live in cities; each of them has got his job, and they're all fighting. I can't imagine how any estate can be good enough, as a career? Of course, you probably think I'm very rude to say all this" (at which new symptom of politeness Humphry shook his head and smiled), "but I believe most women would agree, if they said what they thought about men; but they hardly ever do."

"Perhaps it would be bad for marriage!" smiled Humphry, who was gaining confidence each moment.

"After all," she went on, sternly, "what is there to do with an estate? It's only a job that you're born into, you've not won it by merit, and when you've got it, you can't be very enterprising with it. You can't make millions, or get famous, or help the country anyhow,

except by just employing whatever men the place always used to; and unless your neighbour wants to sell, you can't even increase it. You just hand it over as you took it, and where's your career?"

"It *isn't* one, I know. That's it"—a mournful answer which quite baffled her. The thing was not half enough of a duel for Eleanor, who went back once more to the personal.

"Didn't you like India?"

Humphry sighed. "Oh yes, I liked India. . . . Of course, Miss de Kay, I thoroughly agree with everything you've said, but it's a bit difficult, all the same. My father asked me to come back from India, because of—the estate! After all, it's there; it limits one. If one's going out to get rich or famous or anything like that, what becomes of the estate?"

"Why, you could let it."

"Yes—but nobody takes country places, nowadays."

"*We've taken this*," came the second shrewd hit of that much underrated logic which is Woman's.

Humphry had no way to meet it, and prudently went round, to tackle a new side of the old subject.

"Yes; but supposing I did that—of course, Burcot isn't *mine* yet!—but supposing, some day, I did let it——"

Eleanor, despite herself, was getting drawn into the scheme.

"Why some day?" she asked, almost eagerly. "I don't see why you've got to wait till Burcot's yours? You say that's what holds you back—but it's not yours yet, you're still free!"

"I've got to act as steward"—and as Humphry said it, he felt ashamed to mention so humble a business to any one with such ideals.

Miss de Kay obviously felt the same. "*Anybody* could do that," she said, with typical contempt. Now, however, she had dropped all effort to be rude. Humphry, by dashing tactics, had arrived at the real Eleanor.

"The idea *is*," began Humphry, in a deprecating tone, "that I'm to get used to running the place before I settle here for good."

"But you're not *going* to settle," cried Eleanor, tempestuously, and then laughed. "I mean," she added, "according to the argument."

Humphry, too, could not help laughing, so that Lady de Kay looked across at them with genial, soft-eyed approval. Eleanor, at length, was showing herself properly.

"Yes," said he; "but what—even 'according to the argument'—is a poor devil like me, who's thrown up the only job he's fit for, and got a measly six or seven hundred a year (from my mother), going to do now?" To his surprise, he suddenly found himself arguing as freely with this girl as with some man in Oxford rooms or up among the hills in India. "I cannot dig—and there's no need to beg. I can't do anything practical; I'm the Finished Product of Oxford and the Public Schools! No, that's cheap; but all the things I *could* do have to be begun at twenty-four, except the Church, and that I am not keen to do. So now—according to the argument—I'm only fit to get 'dull' in the County here, and envy the lucky beggars who've got no estate, but have a job instead; unless you see some other way."

Eleanor was like her hated clever men—she seemed to take this very much in earnest. For a moment or two she sat in silence, trying to find a hole in this

argument which threatened to shatter one of the few theories about which she was honestly sincere ; and then her brow cleared suddenly.

"You see," she began loftily, "you're only talking of what they call 'the professions'—don't they? There must be ever so many other careers, especially if, as you say, you've got a little money of your own."

Humphry really was not half serious enough about it.

"What?" he said. "Go on the stage, and live on my six hundred while I'm 'resting,' which will probably be all the time?"

"No," said Eleanor, with only a faint smile; "that would be just as bad; you wouldn't be getting anything *done* in the world, and that's what every man who's worth anything ought to be keen on, don't you think! There simply must be endless useful things a man with six hundred a year could do."

"Such as what?" asked Humphry, as she seemed to pause.

Eleanor began afresh. Something in his voice, a note of keenness, of real interest, as he said, "Such as what?" had brought a sudden sense of drama to the conversation, and with it Eleanor's sincerity was doomed. She could resist everything except effective situations. Confronted with a young man who seemed actually, if half in jest, to be consulting her upon the conduct of his life, she fell back quite unconsciously upon a former pose. She was so used to being picturesque.

"I know what *I* should do," she answered in low, earnest tones.

"What?" asked Humphry, equally intense.

Eleanor knew how to get effects. "As a child," she started, "when I drove once across London, I got a glimpse

of its slum life, and it haunted me for years." So much sincere; but now the moment at which that former pose gripped hold of her. "I swore then," she went on, in her old-time platform manner, "that I would give my life to helping those poor people; that I would never go on living among a class that threw money away on luxuries and empty rooms."

Humphry felt a vague sense of discomfort, and said, "Yes," at random.

Eleanor, now utterly unconscious that she was acting, clutched in the relentless grip of her dramatic sense of fitness, gave a bitter little laugh.

"That was when I was quite a child. I didn't realize—then—how little we women could do. Later, I came to see that the idea of *my* going down to the East End was utterly preposterous. But if I were a man——"

"You'd still go there and help them, Miss de Kay?" Humphry, at least, was utterly convinced of her sincerity, if rather pained by its lack of reserve; and he saw new depths in this Miss de Kay. Suddenly, by the side of her, he seemed mean, selfish, insignificant.

"I should," she answered very simply. And really, for the moment, she believed she would.

He felt an overpowering impulse to defend himself at any cost. Quite without intent, she had won a more decided victory than either of her others, and now he crawled abjectly at her feet, contemptible and humble. Her woman's heart had felt this impulse, whilst he—what had he ever thought about except himself? What other recipient had he imagined, ever, for his little fortune?

The fact that she no longer seemed to scorn him made his self-abasement more complete. The idea of

defence was solely to recover his esteem, and not in any way to vanquish her. She must be wrong, though; it was merely woman's sentiment!

"Don't you think, though," he replied, with a new courage, "that '*la Misère*'—the submerged tenth—is something that must always be, as it has always been? Of course, one's sorry for them—very; but there are people who are made to sink, and nobody on earth can hold them up. It's only natural—human nature!—and you can't ever cure it."

"Yes," she replied (she had heard this retort so often in the socialistic meetings), "but there are others who are made to rise, and never get their chance. The children, what of them? Is it their fault? Can it be right that they should *start* 'submerged'? Can they be blamed; and is *that* natural?"

"You mean you'd go and help the children?"

Eleanor's plans had never got so definite as that, but she would certainly have answered "Yes," had not the need for her to say good-bye to some one caused a break and a general commotion, in which Lady Hill seized the chance of finally securing Humphry to adjudicate her competitions.

It is to be feared that he took the honour of selection for this post a trifle coldly, and ended with almost as little notion of his duties as when she began. His mind was not with animals made out of fruit, nor with the humour of hats trimmed by men, and even the suggestion of a trial of speed in adding rows of figures—"Such fun!" Lady Hill exuded almost passionately—left him cold.

If Eleanor de Kay had started on almost any other of her many lines, she would probably have roused Humphry only to be amused with the girl whom he

had been so anxious to impress ; but quite unknowingly she had simply put into words thoughts that had been burning in his brain since the return from India. She had echoed his scorn for the life of mere existence, the contempt which Ambition feels for anyone who is content to have, as his whole wealth, the silver spoon with which he happened somehow to be born. But she had also done much more than this: for whereas his mood was simple discontent, the idle mutiny of a man who finds himself without escape in a drear prison, she had suggested the way out. Of leaving Burcot he had often thought, but there seemed nothing that a man like him could do. Now Miss de Kay had lit upon the very thing that fitted all his theories of life. At Oxford he had been a keenly abstract Socialist, and had once very nearly spent a weekend at a big East End settlement connected with the University. Later, when Experience matured his views and lifted them from mere abstraction, his love of Liberty and Self-Realization had made him understand, better than many of his class, the horrors of a potentially big nature cramped hopelessly by its environment. To help, without cant, in this sort of work seemed to him a thing not only useful but of the greatest interest to himself. Could he really do it, with his little income? She had seemed to think so ; and she was sensible.

After all, in practical affairs, what is sense except the views of those who share our own opinions?

Humphry, escaped at length from Lady Hill and all her works for charity, found that every one was gradually going, and only waited until his leave-taking seemed likely to give him the few words which he much desired with Miss de Kay.

"Good-bye," she said. "I quite enjoyed our little talk."

That was a high testimonial from this original young lady—she did not often condescend so low to men; but few women can be cold to anybody whom they seem to be converting.

Humphry carefully avoided compliments, as by request. "And you really think," he asked, "that I could do anything in the East End with my six hundred odd?"

"You'd be a millionaire down there!" she smiled. "But I don't quite know why you should take my random suggestions seriously."

People who are human enough to want compliments should not be so superior as to forbid them. Humphry did not take the bait.

"The only thing is," he said doubtfully, "that it would be like a new country: I shouldn't know their ways and customs, or how on earth to start."

"But wouldn't you go to one of the established clubs or settlements?"

"Oh no," he answered almost scornfully; at last his schemes had shaken clear of hers, and he was independent. Established settlements for a lover of Liberty! "No, I should want to start a club on my own lines, or else not go at all."

"That would be splendid!" she exclaimed. She began to see that there was something in this Mr. Scott-Mahon. "Six hundred a year ought to be ample, I should think, because rents and everything are all so cheap down there." It was a little vague, but she realized whilst speaking that she knew hardly anything about it. "Don't you know some one, a clergyman or any one, down there, who would give you some hints?"

Humphry thought a moment. "There was a man at Balliol with me," he said doubtfully, "I rather think I've got the name of his church somewhere——"

"The very man!" exclaimed Eleanor, in tones that clinched the matter finally. It gave her an uncommon joy to be thus managing this business.

But now there were yet more who wished to say good-bye, and Humphry must make way for them.

"Well, good-bye, Miss de Kay," he said, "and thank you very much for your advice."

"Not a bit," she answered in her most manly, off-hand way; "and mind you tell me what the parson says! We're nearly *always* in at tea. Good-bye!"

It was rather an odd end to what Humphry had planned as a ruthless duel. He did not ask himself which side had won; nor did he worry to revise his estimate of Miss de Kay; for to him her chief importance was that she had fanned into flame what hitherto had only been smouldering discontent, and now he could no longer moderate the blaze. All the revolt of these last weeks against County life, stagnation, uselessness, had reached its head, and he felt action necessary. Miss de Kay was inessential—so he believed; the point was not what she had thought of him, but what he thought about himself. And he knew that if, with all his theories, he stayed here any longer as his father's steward, he would never cease to writhe under a just self-contempt. Besides, if he did so after to-day, what would Miss de Kay think of him? . . .

At dinner he presented to the analyst symptoms even more acute; for to silence was added an obvious struggle in the brain. He ate hardly anything; and when he did eat it seemed mere absence of mind—a matter without system, interest, or object.

The Squire was more puzzled, and more hopeful.

For one thing he had seen his son hasten out to overtake the lagging postman with a letter. And of course he could not know that it was addressed, not to any neighbour's house, but to a mean street of East London, in the name of a Rev. Philip Barnet.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORKING OF THE CURE

How does one decide ; how definitely strike out on a new phase of life ?

There are some splendid people who manage their existence like a game of chess, and never make a move without calculating ever so far forward ; but most men are content to drift and wait until they see a rock, when all their energies are given to the task of shoving themselves off from it, and so avoiding shipwreck of their lives.

Of this last class it may be roughly said, that when they decide on a new tack, it is only because they have been bluffed by Fortune. They go along in the old, known direction, until a sudden combination of unexpected forces throws them out of it ; and really there seems less energy required for persevering in the new course than for winning their way right back to the old. So that their whole chart is altered, and those who watch—yes, and sometimes even they themselves—express not a little wonder at their enterprise.

So it was with Humphry, a man neither strong nor weak above the average of mortals.

Normally, for all his theories, he would have done what thousands of the cleverest young Britons are

content to do—worked for a set term of years, and then retired upon a comfortable allowance. He had got into the I. C. S. by much expenditure of time and money; he had been in India for a few years, and it was only logical to wait now for his pension, the best part of the whole business. But then had come the first unexpected force; his father's urgent demand that he should return and act as overseer to the Priory. A little grumbling, followed by something very near to acquiescence in the new direction, and then—Miss de Kay.

He did not see, now, how he could draw back.

After all, why should he?

Humphry Scott-Mahon would certainly not have admitted that there had been any bluff about the matter. He wanted to be free; he wished to help the poor to realize themselves. Well, wouldn't this new scheme mean doing both? . . .

Besides, there was Phil Barnet's letter. He had written off to him at once, and possibly, in his enthusiasm and dawning sense of freedom, he had written as though things were more settled than was the case in fact.

Anyhow, here was old Phil's letter, and he seemed to think that the whole matter had gone far beyond the province of debate.

"MY DEAR 'HUMPY' (so it ran)

"Your funny little bent-up writing came as quite a vision from the past, and you can't imagine how it brought, into my little slummy digs here, the memory of the jolly old days in those College rooms, when we used to rag you about that—and other things! Well it's only six or seven years ago, but it seems ages,

doesn't it? I am forty-five, I'm sure! I thought *you* were in India, working for a thankless Civil Service, and gradually turning black! As for me, I'm not at St. Stephen's any longer, but some one brought your letter in, on his way to work, and I'm still among these poor devils of distressed East Enders, so that is the chief point.

"My dear fellow, *yes!* . . . of course you could 'do something.' Any one who wants to *can* do lots here, even if he hasn't got a penny. But, as a matter of fact, you write just at the very moment when somebody like you is wanted. You say you have about six hundred pounds which is your own, and that after your bare living you'd have the rest to work with, 'if it would be any use.' Well, as it happens, it would be of every use possible. Last winter I was asked by some of the better class and more Christian residents in the district, if I couldn't see my way to open a boys' club in a very poor and low neighbourhood here, near the Docks. I got a building on a five-year lease, and even got some books and things together; but then nobody could find the money to run it with, and *I'd* spent everything, and there was nobody—except incompetent people—even to look after it, and so I got discouraged. I've not been able to sub-let the place, and there it is. So you see we only need a missionary and funds: and here, by a sort of miracle, they both appear! I wish you'd come down and see for yourself; but I can guarantee that if you want to work down here, and you say you've no experience, you'll never get a better chance, and *I'll* show you the ropes. So come along! I must go out now—this is a busy time for us—but I write at once, in case you should have other irons in the fire.

"More later, but hoping to see you soon, and the sooner the better,

"Yours ever,

"P. A. BARNET."

"P.S. Honestly, I can assure you that *no district in London* needs the work more."

Of this letter, "more Christian" had been scored out, as though not likely to appeal, and "devils of" inserted, as more probable.

Somehow or other, in the postscript and in other places, despite the laboriously gay and reminiscent opening, Humphry could not quite trace that cheery and light-hearted Phil who saw the fun in all extremes; who took nothing seriously; whose crowning paradox seemed, to Balliol, to have lain in the fact of his ordination.

Still, the chief thing was that fate had provided just the very chance he needed, and that it would be rough on Barnet if he took some other. The natural course seemed, after lunch, to set out for the Dower House. Miss de Kay appeared to know about these things, and she had asked him specially to let her hear about "the parson's" letter. . . .

Eleanor, in fact, was vastly interested and delighted. Once again she vowed that this was just the very thing, and she was quite inclined to agree with Mr. Scott-Mahon's parson that there was something almost miraculous about the chance. Humphry was touched and flattered by the keenness that she showed about the whole matter, and the fact that they were conspirators, private from everybody, lent a new warmth to the interview, and made each more genial towards the other.

"Of course you'll take his offer?" she concluded, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. Whatever her interest of the moment—suffrages or something else—she was always a marvellous worker, for the first few weeks.

Humphry was a little less whole-hearted. It had occurred to him, in this two-day interval, that he had left his father rather selfishly out of the question; and now he tried to make Eleanor appreciate that point of view.

"Oh," she exclaimed, less sympathetic in a moment, almost with some of the old scorn; "you really *can't* be expected to consider him! If sons and daughters were bound by duty to stay at home and look after their parents' interests, what'd be happening to their own—or to the business of the world? Besides, he easily can get a real steward, who'll soon save his pay."

Humphry, of course, did not fail to be persuaded. He had only marshalled his objections because he was certain that she would overthrow them; a vicarious and generally accepted manner of appeasing one's own scruples. He went back from the fourth meeting with Miss de Kay a little uneasy in his mind, but fired with the resolve to give his still speculative father a full indication of his purpose. He would be free—at last!

The Priory at Burcot might have fallen upon evil days, so far as money went, and what of old had been spent in luxury might now be needed to keep the big place even whole, but, at least, the Squire was determined that the laxity of modern manners should not enter in the train of poverty. The gay parties that had been wont to fill the great dining-room were possible no longer, but even though only he and his son sat under

the old ancestors, these should not look down on anything unworthy. Humble the food, maybe, but it should be borne in on ancestral silver; and if, in place of pompous footmen, a humble parlour-maid held the vast dishes properly up at the level of her face, that fact could make no difference to anybody not afflicted with a very cruel sense of humour. In dress, too, he kept to old traditions, and no informal rounded jackets were allowed to oust the pomp of the tailcoat; whilst after they had reached that last course which should be dessert, but generally was meat, no modern tablecloth was permitted to spoil the mellow wood's reflection of the good red wine, that Burcot's cellars still so loyally provided. This squire was of the fine old order: without seeming ridiculous, he could combine poverty with pomp, and yet lose neither dignity nor self-respect.

To-night, when Sarah duly had removed the cloth from a table pathetically large for its two patrons, Mr. Scott-Mahon, with his accustomed gesture of hostile invitation, made a mystical half-circle with the cut decanter and passed the port to Humphry, on his right.

"Some of the old '47," he said, as usual, with a venial pride, at which his son, who could never light on any other answer, said just "Yes," and then there was the customary silence. Never a man of many words, the Squire believed that to speak for speech's sake, when one had port before one, was a nasty modernism and not far removed from sacrilege. Every night he raised his glass solemnly towards the candelabra, gazing with reverent appreciation into its red depths, nor did he consider that to smack his lips in gratitude was a plebeian trick.

Humphry waited till this formula had been accomplished, and then he knew that his moment had arrived. He had left to him the few minutes whilst he smoked a cigarette—innovation scorned by the old man, forbidden his cigar—and then his father, nowadays, went to his room, not to be seen again until the next day. Certainly this matter would not bear another night's consideration, and Humphry therefore got it off his mind at once.

"I had a good long talk with that Miss de Kay, this afternoon," he took as a smooth launching of the business.

"Ah?" said his father, ambiguously, not a little amused and delighted at the prospect of revelations, possibly half-unconscious, from this son whom he never could quite help regarding as something of a prig. But that was the modern way; young men now were so superior and old. When he thought of his own flirtations—by gad, but young men *were* young, in the good old days! . . . "And is she as original as everybody says?"

Humphry laughed, the unnatural laugh of a man who is leading the conversation round to a planned end.

"I don't know. It'd be rather vain to say so, wouldn't it?—as I found her views were almost exactly the same as my own!"

Here the Squire chuckled merrily, not so much at Humphry's joke, as because this rapid avowal of similarity in tastes made it clear to him that his deep-laid scheme had gone all right. The cure had worked; he had shown this bored Humphry something in the County which was not beneath him!

"According to Lady Hill," he answered, "who told

me all about her, she has views on everything, and they are all a little odd. I hope you will not be backing her up on the platforms of these suffragettes!" and he laughed again, more cheery than Humphry had seen him since their re-union. A sudden stab went through the son; was it fair to do what he was just about to do? Then he remembered his own, and Miss de Kay's, gospel of Self, and saw that it would be preposterous to give up everything for the mere sake of sentiment.

That is the worst of self-fulfilment; it calls for so much sacrifice of others.

"We didn't get on to that sort of thing," he made reply; "we were talking about the poverty in the East End, and the poor beggars who never get a chance to do anything at all."

"Poor fellows! Poor fellows!" said the old man, with real sympathy. "And the more that the land-owners are crushed out of existence, the more their labourers are driven to the cities. It is a hideous problem; a most hideous problem."

Humphry was encouraged beyond hope. "Do you know, father," he started boldly, "I've always felt it terribly, even in the old days, before I went out, and you know, I don't feel—what Miss de Kay was saying made me feel that I've no right to be hanging about here; I'm young, and free, and I ought to be helping."

The Squire's complacency died in a manner almost comical, if it had not been rather tragic.

"You—helping!" he stammered out. "But *you're* not free, my boy; you're 'helping' me."

"Oh, I'm afraid I'm not much use that way," said Humphry, nervously. "I wasn't made to be a steward. Besides, you easily could get a fellow who would do it

properly. Everybody swindles me. He would save the screw in no time."

A very pained expression came over the old man's face; he looked straight at his boy, and for one moment Humphry dreaded that he would break the bounds of all reserve, and say that he was wanted, not as steward, but as son.

The appeal was never made in words; but both knew that it was spoken in the heart; and among the sacrifices of self-fulfilment must stand the fact that it was cruelly ignored.

The old man sat gazing at his son in silence. This was the boy that he had reared, so proudly, to be squire when he was gone!

Humphry dropped his eyes in shame; and presently his father spoke again, in thick tones, strange to him.

"But the place, Humphry—you will have—I shall not be able to be here much longer. You will have to get used to managing the place."

Humphry forced the matter back on to the plane of business. This was common-sense, and it was ridiculous to decline into sentiment!

"You see," he said in a prosaic voice, "that's really another reason for having a real steward who could run the place. Suppose I get keen on the work down there, and find I'm really doing good and wanted there——"

The squire's eyes narrowed and his whole face grew tense, as though in agony of body. His mind, that had begun to rust, resumed its work at a terrific strain, and he met this last argument with a quick counterstroke.

"You're wanted *here*, Humphry," he said, and there was pathos in the cry. "Don't you see, you've got your duty to do here, much more than there? You've got to

keep Burcot together ; and I hope soon you'll marry, and carry on our family, and—— ”

“ Is it all worth while ? ” asked Humphry.

Out it slipped before he really knew. It summed up all his thought of the last weeks, and would not be withheld. Was it worth while—the slaving and the saving, all to keep up the old place, to carry the old family one stage nearer its inevitable end ?

Upon his father its effect was terrible.

For one ghastly moment Humphry, full of remorse, thought that he had had some kind of seizure. He sank back into his chair and a hideous pallor came over his face. His son did not dare ask whether he was ill. His one thought was to undo the ill that he so stupidly had done.

“ No, I didn't mean *that*, ” came the futile apology ; but it was waved aside with a fine gesture.

“ It's—it's all right, old man, ” said the Squire, very slowly and with a great effort, as though something in his throat impeded speech. “ I—I quite see. I'm not so—selfish as you fancy. I quite understand. I know you have your own ideas. All this ” (and he waved his hand as if to indicate the Priory at large)—“ it's not enough for you. You have—ambitions. ”

Humphry vainly tried to stop him, to retract, to say that he would not leave Burcot ; but it was all in vain, and he found himself motioned into silence.

“ You need not explain, ” his father said, with some of his old firmness. “ I quite understand. I know I ought not to have brought you back from India. It was selfish, that ; but—I did it for the best. Oh, you needn't tell me, my boy. I know you're willing, even now, to give up everything and stay here ; you wouldn't be your mother's son if you were not ; but I won't hear of it. I

—I will be frank with you, Humphry. I see that you have this mad scheme upon your brain. Sooner or later, you'll—you'll go away and do it; and I'd rather it was now. That will be better for Burcot, the family, and every one."

Humphry, who had objected to sentiment, found himself, so soon as logic took its place, growing sensibly less penitent and tender. There was, under his father's speech, an insinuation that he could not stomach.

"You mean, in fact," he said almost warmly, "that a short experience of this 'mad scheme' will sicken me, and I'd better get the mania over immediately? That's what you mean by its being 'better for every one.'" He had always felt that his father thought he had got nothing in him.

The Squire rose from his seat, with a dignity none the less for being tremulous, and according to his nightly wont invited Humphry by dumb show to have another glass of port.

"No, thank you, father," answered Humphry, calmed at once by the power of a formula; and he, too, got up from his chair.

His father walked rather more shakily than usual towards the door, and when he reached it, turned and spoke in level, if dull, tones.

"At any rate, Humphry," he said, "you and I will not quarrel about this. There is no need to. *You* wish to go and help the East-Enders, and *I* wish you to go. The matter is therefore settled, and I hope that you will be able to make satisfactory arrangements."

It was no part of an argument: it was the final announcement of an old-fashioned parent, partaking largely of the order of a king.

Humphry, in any case, would probably have said no

more, but his father made certain by dropping back once more into the evening's routine.

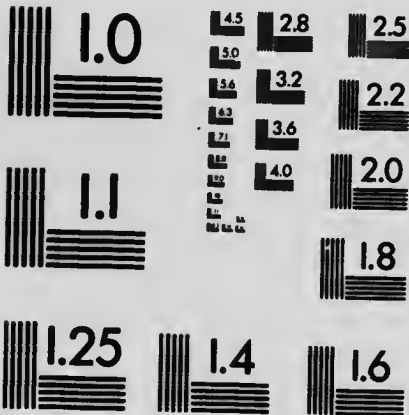
"Good-night, my boy," he said, trying to reach the tones in which he had said it every day till now; "and will *you* ring the bell?"

He had gone, to leave Humphry curiously without elation over an undoubted victory.



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CHAPTER VII

THE KNIGHT DRIVES OUT

EVERY one agreed that young Mr. Scott-Mahon must be—well, a little queer, to say the least of it. What on earth, otherwise, should suddenly induce him to leave that lovely Priory, and all the nice new friends he was just making in the County, to go and work among those dreadful, dirty people in the East of London (for whom, of course, one was intensely sorry, all the same)? Really, as a topic, the absurdity of his behaviour came near to eclipsing the originality of Miss de Kay—except that she proved herself yet more extraordinary by being the one person to say that he was doing the right thing. Every one else agreed in sympathizing with the Squire, and all, like the last named, were quite confident that Humphry would not persevere for long in his preposterous idea.

“Of course,” said Lady Hill to any one who asked her views, “clever young men nowadays pick up all *kinds* of odd theories at those universities they go to—I believe quite a lot of the very best born ones are Socialists!—and Mr. Scott-Mahon wants to put one of them into practice. Poor boy!” she went on, with a sigh that was not very full of tears, “one fears he will have a hideous disillusionment. They tell me those people are not at *all* grateful to any one who tries to

help them ; and the places where they live are terribly depressing."

As to Humphry himself, he was full of keenness, burning to get free from all the smirking inquiries of the people whom he met, and to embark upon his actual enterprise. Perhaps, left to himself, he never would have got so near to it ; but Miss de Kay—Phil Barnet—even his father—everybody seemed to take it for granted that he meant to go ! . . . And, after all, he wanted to—there was no doubt of that. At last there was spread before him, seemingly within his grasp, his life-ambition of free scope to work out his own destiny, unfettered either by ties of filial duty or by a red-tape government ; free scope, no less, to help others to get free. As to that filial duty, when any qualms disturbed him he remembered the strange, old-time firmness with which his father had waved aside any later attempts on his part at renunciation. The old man, in fact, summoning the whole force of his subtlety (that had so failed in the great "cure"), was making one last effort for the Priory's dear sake. All his old cronies told him that the boy's mad notion would not last ; that he would soon be back. Well, if so, it was better far that the experiment should be made at once ; and he must try to keep the place till Humphry came back to his senses.

Eleanor now saw her convert almost daily, and in the hold that she had over him, gratified two instincts which lie deep in nearly every woman : the mother and the angler. Certainly, she was not so banal as to enjoy the mere conquest of a man, and more certainly she did not wish to marry him, when caught (what less original or sphinx-like ?). These were human attributes that would assert themselves when she was tired with standing in the limelight ; but she would not have been a

woman had she not found a secret joy, a curious elation, in the feeling that she had the power to play on a man's heart, to change, so it seemed, the melody of his whole life. Fish or instrument of music—what does it matter? He was *her's*; to do with as she liked. In an expressive phrase, he was "her man." And revelling in this new sense of power, she felt it due to her own pride that Humphry should go through with the idea which she imagined that she had inspired in him.

"I thought we *agreed*," she said, when he brought up once again that matter of his father, "you can't afford to think of him. Your life is yours, just as his has belonged to him. *He* chose the Priory as his career; but you can choose your own."

All the old arguments were dug out, with full use of that subtle "we," and finally she ended: "So of course you must go, whatever he may say. Besides, he *wants* you to." Which certainly was quite conclusive.

Humphry, with so many forces impelling him, and none restraining, could with difficulty bear the essential delay. He wrote at once to Philip Barnet, saying that he was utterly delighted with this bit of luck; of course he'd come and try his hand; was hugely keen to start; and didn't see the point of wasting time over preliminary inspections of the club-house.

He was quite willing to take old P.'s word, even if he *was* a parson (this was a pleasantry that the recipient did not appreciate), and he gave him full leave to take everything as settled, and let 'p at once. In fact, if Phil would fix a day—he agreed about the sooner the better, for home reasons—he would come along and start the job immediately, so long as he could get him "digs." To-morrow, if he liked to wire!

Philip, of course, did nothing so indecently out of

order as that ; but by return of post he sent a long letter, wherein he thanked his "old friend" most effusively, apparently putting Humphry's offer somehow down to friendship, and said that he thought Monday would be an excellent time to begin their "work"—or rather that would mean Tuesday ; but they could talk on Monday, when he was free till 6 p.m. (Communion Class). On Sunday he never got a moment to himself, so he thought Monday the first day, and that would suit most admirably. He had therefore taken Humphry at his word and got some "digs." for him ; quite decent—for those parts, of course ; but he must not expect too much. If he came by an early afternoon train, he would meet him and pilot him along, and he looked forward to seeing him again, and thought it was most splendid of him to come down and help the work, and so would lots of others in the district.

In this way, just one week elapsed, no more, between that tea-party at which Humphry had been moved to his experiment and the other to which he went for purposes of saying good-bye to the girl who had inspired it.

"And you're really off, to-morrow?" she said, as they shook hands. "Can't we be unsociable for a bit, and get a little chat? There's such a lot to talk about!"

They were unsociable, and got their little chat, upon a sofa well away at the less inhabited end of the long room. They chatted whilst many a new-comer was announced ; but if anybody asked for Eleanor, her mother said, "Oh, *she* is over there!" as though one never knew what she would do ; and when she was duly seen, added ever so slyly, "You see, he's really off to the East End to-morrow!" and gasped expansively. In her eyes, this romantic business lent even Eleanor a novel interest.

As a matter of fact, of course, their conversation had practically no romance in it at all. It was, to an extreme degree, what moderns like to call platonic. Eleanor's great charm in the whole business had been, to Humphry, that he could talk to her of his real feelings, without the curiously antique sex-formalities that bar intelligent conversation between young men and women in highly civilized societies. He had realized quite soon, under her sure guidance, that she did not want flattery, whilst she had come to see that he did not desire to flatter. They understood each other thoroughly, or thought they did, and so they could speak—to use a phrase on which might hang a whole sermon about the social relation of the sexes—just like man and man. Each accepted what the other said as meaning simply that, without suspecting that it masked a motive.

Only, when tea appeared, and it seemed necessary once more to be social, the personal note intruded, and with it more of tenderness. The mere fact of their isolation from the room at large (a thing to be dared only by Eleanor, of the whole County, without scandal); her use of that word “we,” which seemed to bind them in the enterprise; the whole mad surge of friendship grown from enmity in one short week—here was enough excuse for any man, except St. Antony.

“Then I *really* shan't see you again,” said Humphry, sentimentally, “except out there?” He indicated with a nod the little knot of tea-drinkers, as though they had been savage beasts in an arena.

“Not if you really can't stay on to supper,” came the rather prosy answer.

“I'm afraid I must get back, or my father'll be hurt.”

“Then I'm afraid it is good-bye—except out there!”

at which she laughed ; he had already told her how he dreaded every one's inquiries.

Humphry looked very serious. "Well, I can't ever try to tell you how grateful I am," he said with an awkwardness not existent whilst they were on the other plane. "You've made me do what I'm sure I was always meant to do ; cut myself off from Burcot, and just be—myself. And—doesn't it seem funny?—it all started from your despising me. Jove, I did feel an awkward fool, those first two times we met !"

There is certainly a pleasure in admitting how impossible one used to be, because beneath it all there lies the assumption that one is now at least more probable. Eleanor, however, was not the person to indulge such vanities.

"It was rather fun," she said, with off-hand gaiety and doubtful consequence.

Humphry, in his new mood, did not feel satisfied entirely. "But you don't think I've quite lost everything under county 'dulness,' now," he asked, "do you? You think rather more of me than at our first meeting?"

"Really," she answered, "I'm not sure that I do if you can ask such questions! Please don't be so elementary ; there *is* a science, even in angling for compliments!"

"But I don't *want* compliments," answered Humphry, more earnest and elementary than ever ; "I only want the truth, and that's what you have always given me. You know quite well that it was only *your* scorn made me want to do this ; and now I'm doing it, I want to feel honestly—that you think rather more of me?"

"Of course I do," she said breezily, but with a certain

discomfort ; it was not her way to let men get at such close quarters, so that she felt a tyro in this sort of conflict.

"*How much more?*" asked Humphry, leaning towards her, but with a wary eye on the tea-drinkers.

She laughed uneasily. "Well," she said, "isn't that rather more a question I could answer when you've done it?"

"And when I *have?*" persevered Humphry, with a sigh at woman's cruelty.

"Well, I shall feel then that you've done something—you yourself; and no woman could ever think much of a man who merely lived upon his birthright." She said this very seriously, as though applying a last spur; but in the same moment, obviously determined not to open any way for sentiment, she got up briskly, and said, "Now, even *I* really can't be rude one instant longer!"

And greatly discouraged, like a victim hurled to the lions without his hoped-for solace of a smile from two dark eyes, Humphry followed her across the hall, to face the questions of the busy-bodies.

These were of a quality so virulent, a quantity so altogether shameless, that knowing himself not likely to get any more from Eleanor "out here," and equally aware that he must not stay late, he made packing his excuse more early than was necessary, and so evaded some of his tormentors.

"Good-bye," said Eleanor; "I hope the club will be a huge success, and you must let us know." That was all, and for once Humphry did not appreciate that small word "us." He thirsted for a "me."

Late that night, alone in his room, he sat gazing out upon the moonlit park, reflecting how cruel she

had been to him; a curiously fatal thing for an imaginative man to do when he is thirty.

The more he brooded on this point, far too unsettled for any thought of sleep, the more he decided that she might have said just a little more to cheer upon his none too easy way a man who—who loved her. . . .

Yes—loved her; that was why he wanted—always had wanted—her praise, because he loved her. . . . Had he ever cared what other women thought of him? He had not. Why? Because he had not loved, before. . . .

There was no doubt about it, none! He loved her. . . .

Soon he found that he was saying to himself, "God, but I *do* love her!" and was rather surprised to realize that while his lips still harped on that, his mind had run away to quite another topic—freedom.

But, after all, that was a part of it. He must be free, and she it was who had lent him the strength to cut his bonds; who would fortify him whilst he worked for the liberty of others. That, of course, explained his thoughts!

So Humphry's mind wrestled with the future, wondering if he were wise, half dreading failure down there in the slums; and his lips mechanically murmured his great love. But all the while his eyes were gazing out across the moonlit park, and presently that gripped the whole of him. His lips stopped moving, and his weary brain ceased thinking, or worked dreamily on what his eyes were seeing.

The whole spirit of the Priory seemed shut in the tableau spread before him: its grandeur, its mystery, its pathos. The silence of the night had fallen, everything was hushed, and a frosty moon shone coldly on

the long avenue of yews that carried a grass-avenue downwards to the lake, gleaming pale and white in the distance, like a small strip of glass. It was a time of silence, rest, and shadows. Everything seemed great, significant; even the ill-trimmed shrubs had gained a certain dignity; the moon—shameless idealist—knew how to give the old ragged garden back its former pomp, and in her hours of power, at least, the Priory was what it used to be. Forgotten poverty, neglect, and taxes—forgotten all that Progress had achieved. Burcot remembered nothing save the fact that it was Burcot, triumphing by sense of space; peerless even in its disarray; challenging the world for beauty—under a soft light.

Humphry, drinking in the wonder and the peace of it, found his brain fill with sentimental memories. How many childish joys, how many little tragedies, had been set here; how much the dear old place must always mean to him! Now, even, when everything seemed shifting, the calm repose of that loved w could soothe him, exposing the pettiness of earthly things, almost like some glimpse of eternity itself—could show the meanness of ambition. . . .

Suddenly he realized whither he was tending—had already tended—and with an effort, like a man under some weird spell, he drew his eyes away from that emasculating vista. Dazed and half asleep, he found that it was close on midnight, and ignoring the need to pack, which had served usefully as an excuse, got into bed with the last thought that the more he left to do next day, the less time there would be for the dreaded farewell.

As a matter of known fact, the things most dreaded commonly do not occur (a thought which, but for man's

poor logic, would certainly kill Worry, and when the moment came, his father manfully upheld that dumb reserve which had been made a great ideal to him as schoolboy, sixty years before. That he felt much, hoped much, could be guessed from his long hand-shake and the obvious effort to keep silent; but nothing was expressed in words.

"Good-bye, my boy. Good-bye." "Good-bye, father" — and the luggage-cart, such mean equipage for so grand a mansion, had started on his journey this adventurer, who set out into the unknown, like knights of old, inspired by the hope of a rewarding glance from his stern lady. Winter had provided of its best, and Burcet's park, decked out in silver, looked hardly less wonderful than under last night's moon; but Humphry, hardened by the daylight, could leave, without regret and scarcely with a farewell glance, the lawns and gardens that he had come privately to look upon as fetters; that he had come socially to hate as a part of the great injustice.

PART II
ENDEAVOUR

CHAPTER VIII

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

THE true lover of London would certainly not admit it as a limitation that frost in the shires should only too often mean fog in his dear city. He does not forget that cheery tap of a good heel upon the gleaming lane, those silver webs that sparkle on the hedge, the energy which breathes in the brisk air: but he remembers equally those lights that peer out through the gloom, those figures that bulk up in startling vastness and are gone, the whole Romance of London in a fog. He can well believe that men upon the country roads, swinging along good-humouredly in the crisp air, will sing out "Nice change," or "Jolly morning," to chance passers-by in a totally un-British manner; but he knows that, in the streets, every one except the busy people (and busy people do not count to the true Londoner, unless as local colour)—everybody will be genial, some from the cheery pessimism that links fellows in disaster, but others from a reckless sort of joy in so fine a specimen of something that their city can do well. Down in the tubes, where these things do not matter, strangers will foregather amicably, comparing notes of how it was in their respective suburbs, and each declaring loyally that it was darker in his own. He will rejoice, too, in a superior way over the poor aliens who do not, like

himself, know London by an instinct, but need the help of a name-plate: and he will wink back at the cabby whose fare grows purple at delay, for after all it is very comical to be in a hurry during fog. Above all, however, he will look forward to the hour when work is done and he is snugly in his room, where firelight gleams on all his treasures, and in place of the low boom of traffic, he hears cries and shouts and horses' hoofs that scrape on gravel. Possibly a crash or sudden jar may tempt him, now and then, to lay his book down, rise from his armchair, draw the thick curtains, and gaze almost proudly out at the confusion and the yellow gloom, with all that satisfaction which belongs to one who from land's safety watches others tempest-tossed on a great sea. . . .

Humphry, unhappily, was not a lover of the City; and it was thus without any symptom of delight that, as he drew nearer London, he realized the probability of finding it in a thick fog. Again and again the sun blinked weakly behind great scuds of low smoke-made clouds; again and again emerged triumphant, so that the travelers began to hope. But on the hoardings, which spoil journeys as a pleasure but presumably sell some one's pills, little notices foretold that there were nearly thirty miles as yet; and scarcely ten of them were past before the sun finally abandoned an unequal conflict and in luridly red anger withdrew behind a bank of fog, to which the anxious eye could find no end. On dashed the train in quite a reckless British manner, until a detonator on the line startled all its occupants who boasted nerves, and brought it to a stop abruptly at a place where those who peered out anxiously could trace no vestige of a station. Soon, a possible inrush of smuts and noxious air seemed less of an evil than

curiosity left unappeased, especially to those who love a grievance; and, curiously hollow in the cold, grey silence, the sound of lowered windows and "I say, guard!" ran along the train. The guard could say scarcely anything of value in return. The signals were against them—that was all. There might have been a breakdown on the line; he did not know. Probably not; these fogs put all the trains out of their running. How long would they be there? Well, really, now, what was the use of asking him? (this far less pleasantly). He wasn't a prophet, was he? It wasn't his fault either, was it? . . . So those who loved a grievance put their heads back, saying it was scandalous and they had got appointments; whilst others hastily moved the dialogue to some more soothing topic.

Humphry was not of those with grievances: he had a sense of humour. But, none the less, he also had got his appointment, and rather awkwardly, because Philip Barnet, never considering this possibility, had failed to give him the address of the lodgings to which he had promised to escort him. With growing anxiety he kept consulting his watch. Already they were due in London, and still there was no sign of movement, or none that could be seriously reckoned. Occasionally, some one shouted, a signal-wire creaked gloomily, the whistle blew, and on the engine crawled, for possibly two miles—or less. The fog had certainly put one train effectively out of its running.

Five o'clock, and they were due in at 3.25!

Humphry, very cold, with all his newspapers long since exhausted, sat huddled in a stupidly light great-coat, enduring the slow ebb of his hopes and ambitions. He wanted nothing, except to get out of this beastly carriage! There was no way of telling where they

were by now, and he had gloomily resigned himself to long hours more, when he was surprised, not by a slowing of the train, for that was usual, but by its sequel, a long row of lights, fantastically dim, and white faces that peered in at the windows in search of likely-looking passengers. They had arrived!

There was something almost cheery, by comparison, about the terminus, and Humphry, further heartened by this unexpected reprieve, had just decided that Philip's absence would not pain him much, and he should spend the night snugly at his favourite hotel, when—*bang* came a hand upon his back; and when he turned angrily, he found that he must readjust his face for the welcome due to an old friend.

"You splendid man!" he cried, as genially as he could; "I'd given you up, naturally, and was just going off to an hotel."

"Why, of course I waited," answered Philip; "but we shall have to hustle." He drew out his watch. "I shall just have time to pilot you as far as Fenchurch Street, and then I shall have to dash off for my Class. But that's all on my way."

"Fenchurch Street?" said Humphry, in dull protest, as the porter wheeled away his luggage.

"Underground," the pilot answered.

Humphry abominated subterranean trains. Like all who only visit London, he did his travelling above-ground; and for to-day, in any case, he had his fill of gloom and rancid air.

"Why not take a taxi?" he asked, in a lordly manner, totally forgetting his new *rôle*. "It wouldn't cost much, and it would be quicker."

"My dear fellow," answered Philip, with some condescension, as to one who only knew the central square

of London's patchwork, "we are miles and *miles* away from home, and besides there's a black fog, and all the traffic's absolutely stopped. All the same," he said, "I think it's not so thick, quite, as it was. It's horribly bad luck, though."

"Never mind," said Humphry, cheerily. As they groped their way down the ill-lit stairs, perhaps he thought regretfully of his hotel, but it was good of old Phil to have waited, and he must be genial to him.

His own impulse would certainly have been to spend the minutes of their journey in taking up the threads of Friendship by reminiscences of the old days, leaving their business till the morrow's talk. But Philip apparently thought that anything of such importance could not wait, and as the train rattled swiftly through its endless tunnel, he bent his head very near to Humphry's, and told him all the latest details of their enterprise. He spoke very earnestly, in a voice only to be described by the one word, official. He had taken third-class tickets, to Humphry's surprise and secret horror (why, he had his sticks and umbrella with him!), and two burly workmen seemed to find some amusement in the parson and the toff who were whispering together. Humphry suddenly gathered that they thought he was part of a Mission in some way, and, for a keen individualist, got very red by reason of their false suspicions.

On the whole, it was rather a relief when he was in a taxi, and had said good-bye to Philip. This last had protested that it was still possible to save time and money by getting another train from Fenchurch Street to West India Docks, where he would find some one to carry his baggage up to 19, Mercer Street, but had not

pressed the matter far, when he saw that his friend had his own notions as to London travel.

"You'd rather risk a taxi? All right, then! A taxi, please, yes, if there's one about." And when the lovely yellow suit-cases were all packed away, "Well, I'm awfully sorry I've got to desert you, but Mrs. Crump will see to you all right. Her husband was verger at my church, until he died. Good-bye, old man, until to-morrow—early!"

"Good-bye, old fellow, and thanks awfully." Probably he would be more in the mood for Phil to-morrow, and when there were no workmen watching. Somehow or other, he had rather grated on him, in the train just now. Of course, one wanted to help these poor devils in the East, was awfully keen to do anything one could, but that was no reason to talk about "the cause."

The fog certainly had lifted not a little, and Humphry, soothed by the easy motion, began to look curiously about him. Now that he came to think of it, he was not sure that he had ever gone very far eastward of the Bank, and as under a gentle breeze the darkness cleared away and the lamps showed outlines clearly, he gazed around almost like a tourist in some foreign country.

This was a new London, and just as he had felt self-conscious in the train with Philip, the knowledge came to him that he was somehow out of place in it.

The fog was passing, and if it had conquered daylight, there remained a conquest for the lamps. Humphry, at corners where traffic's reorganizing called for a delay, became all too aware that he was fully visible. From carts or 'bus-tops people nudged each other and gazed down with obvious amusement. For a while he wondered why, and then he noticed that his

was the sole taxi in these poorer regions. Presently, too, a sharp-eyed urchin from a van declared loudly to his mate that the blooming torf was paying five and eightpence for his ride, and then Humphry, who had not noticed the costliness of his delays, became horribly aware that he was doing the wrong thing, no less blatantly than one who should wear flannel trousers and a cap in Bond Street. He also grew conscious, to an uncomfortable degree, of his radiantly new suit-cases, flat and shiry, which led another ragamuffin to the plausible suggestion that he was an appendage of some circus, and indeed, to be exact, nothing less glorious than Lord George Sanger his most noble self.

However, here at length, after much turning off the main artery into yet meaner and still meaner streets, and not a little asking of the way by a totally lost driver—here at length was number nineteen, Mercer Street; a squalid little house that formed the junction of two rows depressing in their hideous monotony. A couple of roughs, leaning dejectedly against a public-house, had ambled after the car in answer to some secret gesture of its driver, and now stood, without even the surliest of touches to their caps, ready to deal with the beautiful suit-cases.

Humphry, absurdly sensitive by now, and noticing a group of interested children hurrying towards him, hastily pulled the bell. It was set high in the door-post, a fact that puzzled him, until he got to know the infants of the East.

Presently, but not too soon, a maid appeared, and—her nerves perhaps shattered by the fog—opened the door cautiously for some two inches, through which she gaped with interest. Apparently her worst fears were realized, for with an inarticulate "Oh!" and not even

waiting to close the door, she hurried off into the darkness, an odour of which floated out to Humphry through the chink. Still, preferring anything to the gaze of a fast-gathering crowd, he pushed the door open and went in.

Half a minute passed, and then, with much stumbling and heavy breathing, Mrs. Crump emerged up the back stairs. She carried in her hand a lamp, which showed her to be a cheery-faced, honest-looking woman of some fifty years.

"Mr. Scott-Ma-hon?" she said, wiping her hands on an apron that would be white when it was washed.

Humphry neither denied it nor amended her pronunciation.

"I was just tidyin' up a bit like, Mr. Scott-Ma-hon," she said. And then, abruptly, "'Ave you paid the porter?" Her patrons mostly did not ride in carriages.

Humphry faced the crowd and paid the chauffeur, who looked curiously at him, wondering what his game was, coming to a house like this. By a nod, he gave permission to the roughs to bring his luggage, and then hastily returned to the landlady, hoping that she might not hear the taxi start.

Still carrying her lamp, she led the way upstairs, with voluble talk about the fog, her busy day, and the late Mr. Crump, what had been Mr. Barnet's verger. On the second floor she stopped, sighed relief, and threw open a small door.

"This is *your* little room, Mr. Scott-Ma-hon," she said breezily, though with a slight note of defensive arrogance, as though she dared him to say anything against it; and then, possibly fearing that he might, "I dessay you'll be wantin' to get strite, like." She put the lamp down, and went out.

Eyes and nose had just time to drink in a few details of the cheerless room, when the roughs entered, clearly amused at so much luggage, of such gorgeous kind, coming to this humble lodging. Like the taxi-driver, they stared at this odd bloke in the grand clothes, and annoyed him by wanting to know where, exactly, he would like each suit-case put. They then said that the stairs were steep, with a truculence which, on his producing two shillings, turned into a gratitude not very far remote from pity.

Left alone Humphry's first movement was towards the window, which he threw violently open. Then he turned round and faced the room that was to be his, with the self-control of a man who prefers to realize the worst and front it at the start.

From door almost to window stretched a narrow bed that, to judge from marks on the drab, time-worn carpet, had once stood out into the centre of the room. But this was now a bed-sitting apartment, and so the pride of place was held by a round table, on the red cloth of which the landlady had left her lamp. A yellow dressing-table, with its top converted into a wash-stand, made up the furniture, except for two cane-bottomed chairs, on one of which it clearly was not well to sit, and a sofa, upon which, as on the bed, there was a patch-work coverlet. The room, however, was not bare, for, quite apart from ornaments, mainly in the shape of nude babies and clothed animals, there was a picture, in full colour, of Queen Victoria, to say nothing of a few cathedrals gummed on plush-framed glass, and a large quantity of texts.

At these last Humphry found himself gazing, one by one, in mechanical depression. They were all of the same shape, and roughly of the same design, a

coincidence explained by the fact that they belonged to the "Year's Watchword Series (Printed in Austria)."

"After Our Ability (Nehem. v. 8)" had been, so it appeared, the watchword for 1899, whilst in 1905 it had been, "By Faith (Rom. i. 17)." In 1907 the compiler had decided on a question, and the year's watchword ran, "What Hast Thou Done? (Gen. iv. 10)." They were all there, for the last fifteen years.

Humphry sat down, in a dazed way, on the bed—at the window end. Tired, cold, hungry, and discouraged, he was at the stage when a comatic vagueness takes the place of thought. He sat there, gazing out dully at the sordid room, for possibly ten minutes; and suddenly awoke to find himself repeating, over and over again, "After Our Ability."

That amused him, and he decided, with a laugh which startled him, that he would send the proprietors of the "Y.W. Series (P.I.A.)" some fresh and much more baffling watchwords. Already he could think of "Assuredly," "By Whom," and there were probably some others. . . .

A sudden mistrust of his resting-place surged over him, and with a memory of Swiss hotels, he threw the bedclothes back, as though, if only he were quick enough, he would find some enormous and decisive beast in ambush; but there was nothing there. Mended the sheets might be, and frayed around the edges, but they were absolutely spotless.

He was hysterical; the place was nothing like so horrible as he imagined. Why, Mr. Crump had been a verger—till he died!

And remembering how large a testimonial to the house that fact had been for both Philip and the landlady, Humphry recovered some of his balance and good

spirits. At any rate, he could stay here one night : to-morrow he would hunt about. Meanwhile, the first thing was obviously food ; and, not waiting to unpack, he took up his stick, coat, and bowler, and tip-toed as softly as he could down the dark, twisting staircase that was somehow so eloquent of beetles.

Only when he got outside did it occur to him that he knew nothing as to where people dined in these parts. Of course, on second thoughts, there wouldn't be a place at all. Well—it was not a good start for his economical New Life ; but he must just dine in the West End, and take another taxi. That was the first thing to do.

The first thing, really, was to find it. The fog, by now, was nothing but a memory, and all too clearly did the elementary little street lamps display the barrenness of those uninspired houses which they illuminated. Looking either way, Humphry could see nothing but costers' carts, women huddled in their shawls, men who slouched about with seeming lack of purpose, and children making their own paradise of Fancy in the fog-slimed roadway. Clearly these were backwaters, and in despair of finding his way out, he asked for "a main street," vaguely, from the most respectable stranger that the moment offered. Following his directions, he reached at length the High Street, a causeway rather ironically named, which he recognized as portion of his former route.

But here, too, there were no taxi-cabs ; not even the spurned hansoms.

For Humphry Scott-Mahon, as for many like him, London till now had been bounded by the ends of those main channels, which cut it like a hot cross bun. He had never gone much further than Tussaud's to the North or the Tate Gallery upon the South, whilst on

the other line, the Bank and Shepherd's Bush had stood as twin poles of his exploration. He had travelled, eaten, lived, first class. He had thought vaguely of the poorer quarters; but it had not occurred to him that there were whole regions of this city where cabs were little needed, for the plain reason that no one had the cash for anything beyond necessities. Now he learnt this, as men mostly learn, by suffering; and very unwillingly dived into the hated but most useful Underground. He felt quite learned in the ways of the East-enders, as without having to say, "Where do you go to?" he asked for a first-class to Fenchurch Street; and it was rather a pity that he should have to spoil it by asking from which side he started.

At Fenchurch Street, in any case, he was once more in his element. Here was civilization, here a row of taxi-cabs! Humphry, feeling that life was not after all a total blank, leant back on the cushions and lit a cigar, as he was whirled along to Hatchett's.

Yes, there was good old Piccadilly Circus—splendid!—with its gay lights, all the mellower for a small remnant of the fog. Then dinner, music, people, coffee and liqueur, with another cigar—oh yes, he was perfectly all right, by now!

Afterwards, with a nervous look at his watch, he strolled down Piccadilly, drawn once again, after his plunge into the gloom of Eastern London, by the bright light and animation of the West. And just as he was drawing near, he heard his name spoken, and turned round to find a superb person in full evening dress and a fur coat, regarding him in astonishment. A moment's hesitation; then he knew him as an old school friend.

"Why, it's you!" he cried, not able to recall the name. "Well, I *am* blowed!"

"I thought you were in India, Mahon," said the other; "and here you are, rioting in Piccadilly."

Humphry became suddenly conscious of his serge. "Not exactly rioting!" he said, with an explanatory glance.

"Well, what then?" asked his friend (was it Brown, or Jones, or something of that sort?), who had secretly been wondering to see Mahon, always said to be a huge swell, in day clothes at such a time and place.

Humphry told him briefly of his new vocation.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the superb person, in astonishment. "What a rum development for *you*! That'll be a bit dire, won't it? Aren't the houses, and everything, absolutely ghastly?"

A chill memory of his room came over Humphry; but it is only human to defend even one's own club, when any one attacks it.

"No," he said, "I don't see why; I think it's going to be jolly interesting."

"Well, there's no accounting for taste, is there? Glad it isn't me, though! Good luck, anyhow. . . . I'm meeting a party at the Criterion. Seen the show? No? Well, good-bye, old man. I hope you'll like it down there in the slums," and with a cheery wave of a gloved hand, the superb person had gone. He was not due at the Criterion, but neither could Mahon promise the sort of entertainment for which he had put on full evening dress. Quite a good sportsman in the old days; but what did one talk about, or do, with a fellow who got serious and went and did things down in the East End?

Humphry, for his part, was well content to let him go. He had served his purpose, as a friend in loneliness, and Humphry had no wish to spend the evening

with him. Besides, he had no key, and must be early back. Gad, it was nine o'clock already. And so—on this mad first night of his New Life!—he hailed yet another taxi; but, fearing to shock the verger's widow, instructed the driver to drop him at the spot where, three hours ago, he had dived down into the Underground. Then he settled himself to enjoy the night air on his face.

As the lights faded, and the streets got narrower, his spirits sank. His old mood seized hold of him, and when he was set down at the station, he felt like one re-entering a prison. For one second, he nearly mutinied: *why should he?* Why not call the taxi back; stay at his hotel; and let Barnet know to-morrow that he had abandoned the idea? . . .

Then he remembered his father's triumph, the County's joy, and—Eleanor. He watched the taxi whizz away; and then, not without nervousness, walked swiftly home through back streets now deserted save by a few drunkards and mysterious figures that skulked ominously, to his strange eyes, in the dark corners.

His room was certainly less fusty by now, and as he entered it, he said again that he could easily survive one night. None the less, he could not resist another swoop upon the bedclothes—with no more result. Then, utterly worn out, he sank upon the rough chair which stood by the window, and looked out at the night. That was a trick of his, wherever he might be; and he had no thought of a contrast with the night before.

Around him upon every side were walls, outhouses, chimney-pots. Below there stretched a narrow patch, intended doubtless for a garden, but used obviously as a scrap-heap. The moon, which had won a late innings, threw a clear gleam on old pans, empty cases, a broken

cycle, and probably a few dead cats. No light could act here as idealist. Yesterday, the moon had glorified neglected gardens into a heaven of romance ; to-night it lent the final touch of chill grimness to this hell of sordid poverty. From somewhere near there still came the hum of a machine, and some of the neighbours were clearly eating late of Irish stew.

Humphry, drawn to investigate further by the instinct that makes a man bite on his aching tooth, leant outwards, and became conscious that he was of interest to an elderly Jewess, preparing for bed in a window curiously near.

He hurriedly drew back into his room.

The whole thing was ugly. That summed his complaint.

He realized suddenly that he loved Beauty. It was not, naturally, a thing one talked about, but all his life, he saw now, he had worshipped Beauty. That was the charm of Burcot ; that was why he loved liberty, because servitude was ugly ; that was why he loved Eleanor ; and that was why, with a soul-torturing hatred, he hated this East End.

The gentle-born, the educated, can bear hardship with no less bravery than the most humble ; it has been proved a thousand times, in the wild places of the world ; but they cannot endure this murder in the soul that London's poor are asked to suffer.

Humphry drew back with a shudder. He had seen poverty, out in the Orient, as a side-show ; but now he saw it face to face, and not the worst of it—"quite decent digs, for here"—and it was Ugliness itself. Nothing of beauty had a share in it ; no trees, no air, no space, no colour : and that the same moon should shine on it as shone upon the empty breadth of

Burcot, only seemed to make the whole injustice more abominable.

With a shudder of absolute depression he drew back into the room, fastened the grimy lace again across his window, and—very cautiously—prepared to go to bed.

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CHAPTER IX

SECOND THOUGHTS

IN the morning, everything was brighter.

Humphry, to his surprise, discovered that not only had he escaped from being bitten but, inasmuch as there is a weariness of the soul, no less than of the body, he had enjoyed an uncommonly good night. And when he awoke, the sun was filling the small room; certainly showing new grease-marks on the faded paper, but also working a miracle of cheeriness.

Lying in bed with a strange content, the fruit of drowsiness, Humphry forgot all his ideas of finding other lodgings to-day, and amused himself by planning, in a dreamy way, what steps he should take to improve the room. First of all, and at every risk of offending the late verger's memory, the Year's Watchword for 1899 must go. "After Our Ability." It seemed already writ upon his brain for life. He had even shortened it to "A.O.A.," and knew that there were fifteen letters in the thing. Yes, and he would turn the patchworks, to show the other side, unless they should be shameless enough to have no lining; nothing whatsoever could be worse than those crude colours. And whilst on that, perhaps he could induce Mrs. Crump to give him a new water-jug? The present one, apart from having a large wedge knocked out of it, was red, and stood inside a yellow

basin with a bright blue ribbon running gaily round it. Oh yes, one could easily improve the room, and he must put his photos out. . . .

He leapt from bed, and dressed with a new energy.

Breakfast, brought up by the scared maid, proved rather terrible: the bacon was thick, and the butter rancid; whilst another look from his window proved the view to be yet more repellent in the daylight.

In himself, however, the sun had restored a wider sympathy, and now instead of pitying Humphry Scott-Mahon, condemned to these surroundings for twelve hours already, he could feel sorrow for those who never had known anything more lovely. He could be sure that he was doing the right thing in trying, on however small a scale, to aid some of them to climb.

To-day, chastened by experience, he was in no mood to sneer at workers who spoke about "the cause"; his one ambition was to help it.

Philip Barnet, however, was more like him of the old times, to-day. It seemed as though he might have guessed that he had jarred, yesterday, upon his lay helper, and so had resolved to show that he still possessed a gay heart, in spite of the dark colour of his raiment. He was human!

"Well, old cock," he said, bursting in with a breeziness slightly over-done, "and how is it to-day? Had a good night? And ready to begin?"

"Rather," answered Humphry, comprehensively.

Philip looked about the room in a satisfied way. "Quite decent quarters, eh?"

"Yes," said Humphry, ashamed, and half inclined to make confession of his earlier discontent; until he had a suspicion that Philip wanted the new-come

grumble, so that he might parade himself as a hardened dweller in the slums.

And certainly his visitor's next comment rather bore out that hypothesis.

"Not exactly what you're *used* to, naturally!"

"I don't see anything the matter with them," lied Humphry, almost angrily; and after that, they talked about the Club.

"Well," said Philip, after a short while, "I don't see why, if you're game, we shouldn't walk round there and see the rooms, while I am telling you the details of the business. You see, as I was saying, one *has* to start with the children; preferably the boys, because women can deal better with the girls; and then work up to the parents."

"But it seems an awfully long time to wait," objected Humphry. "Can't one do anything with the grown-ups? . . . Look at those two fellows by the pub there. Not one small spark, not only of intelligence, but of interest, in their whole faces! It makes one sick to look at them; it's like those hideously human chimpanzees they have in circuses. Take two men like that," he went on, only, "what sort of pleasure can they find in life, except the absolutely bestial, and what sort of point can they see in the whole ugly thing, poor devils?"

This was all old to Philip; he had felt just like that, six years ago.

"Oh," he said, in an off-hand way, "the grown-ups are nearly all utterly beyond reform!"

Humphry, forgetting his objection to the more serious and orthodox Philip of last night, was rather shocked, finding something incongruous and almost cynical in a parson who could speak like that.

Philip began to jar yet more when they had got inside the building.

Five children, one of them a sturdy boy who looked as though he ought to be at school, stood by with solemn interest whilst the clergyman and his swell friend pushed at a rusty key, and finally, more or less broke their way into the humble dwelling that was grandly known as the Boys' Club.

"Note the enthusiasm of young Brick Street!" laughingly said Humphry, when they were inside.

As if to make a bad pun on his remark, the door shook at this moment beneath what was clearly a large stone, hurled from no great distance, and little feet went pattering hastily along the road outside.

Humphry was amazed; but Philip looked intensely angry. He did not care to have stones thrown—well, practically at him in a street not half a mile beyond his parish. Besides, even if they did not know him, they ought to have more reverence for his cloth. He tried to ignore the incident entirely.

"What exactly does *that* mean?" asked his tactless companion. "Doesn't Brick Street love the Club?"

"I told you," answered Philip, coldly, "it's a very rough quarter of the town, and that's why the Club is needed. Of course, all the bigger children are at school or work, but even these little beasts reflect their sentiment——"

"But we're doing it for *them*," objected Humphry. "They must see that, surely?"

Philip laughed bitterly. "That's exactly what you've got to get them to believe!"

Again that note of cynicism offended Humphry, so that by some odd topsy-turvy shifting of the

balance, he found himself preaching to the man for whom, yesterday, he had blushed as being hopelessly parsonic!

"You talk of them, Phil," he said, "as though they were dogs; you even call the children 'little beasts,' and I can't understand. Of course you've been down here for six or seven years, and know them thoroughly, and I—I've not seen anything at all yet; but somehow, I don't know, but I should have thought that either one was sorry for these people, and loved them, and wanted to help them, or else one despised and hated them, and wanted to clear out. I can't understand thinking them all beasts, and yet staying here to help them!"

"My dear Humpty," said Philip, with more earnestness, "you don't understand, because they're not like other people in the slightest; and you don't know them, as you say. It's just because they are so low that one longs to raise them; but they're not fine enough even to realize that one *does* want to help. One comes down here to gain something, somehow; why else should a toff come?—that's their one idea; so that you get nothing but suspicion or ingratitude; and how can you 'love' people who mistrust you?" His voice reflected the soul's bitterness, as he said, only half sincerely, "I've often been near to chucking it all up, and going. After all, they want to be left alone, so why should one make one's self miserable in helping them?"

"Because they're unhappy," answered Humphry.

"They're not," said Philip, quickly; "that's just the ghastly part of it—they're *not*. They've not got any feeling left in them; they're crushed, poor devils; and they're content to lie where they have fallen. I tell you, you don't understand them; you only see their

blank, dull faces, and you don't realize that they have not the enterprise for discontent. Their face reflects their soul, and there is no gratitude, no ambition, no loyalty, nothing splendid anywhere at all."

He spoke, now, without the former cynicism, in the weary tones of one beaten by an uphill climb; but Humphry, even so, could not accept his views.

"Don't you think," he said boldly, "that possibly you find them—I don't want to be offensive, old man; but don't you think, perhaps, you find them like that, because that's just how you expect to find them? After all, if you think a man's nothing but a brute, he'll probably behave like one; but if you show that you rely upon his gratitude and honour——"

"Gratitude and honour!" burst in Philip, scornfully. "Haven't I been telling you——? But what's the use? You've got the general idea. I came down like that, six years ago, full of wonderful schemes, ideals, theories; and now—I tell you, my dear fellow: just now you said I talked of them like dogs. . . . Well, if you want to know, that *is* the only way to treat them—like dogs! If you descend to their level, or loosen your grip for a moment, you don't win them; they despise you. And that's what you've got to remember here; never mind how few boys you've got (and there'll be jolly few at first); if one of them gets uppish, out he's got to go—out through the door. None of your forgiveness, or 'relying upon honour'; out he goes, with a good kick behind him. You won't lose him, never fear; a day or two, and he'll come cringing back, for all his threats and curses at the time! They haven't got the *energy* to be resentful."

Humphry felt like a youth, with justice on his side, pitted against some one who has the unfair aid of

experience and dialectic. He could only retire from the conflict with the trite remark that they would see. Certainly, he was not in the least convinced, nor did he find Philip's listless pessimism a good exchange for his light-hearted perversity of the old days; so that he was not altogether sorry when parochial duties claimed him once again.

"Well," said Philip, finally, "at any rate you've seen the place, and now 'The Missioner' has got a few hours in which to rearrange things as he likes. You can get a chop, or tea, or anything you want at the Old Crown, just round the corner, and I'll be back again by six. Then comes the great Opening!"

"I suppose you've announced it somewhere?" Humphry asked, a little vaguely.

Philip grew superior again. "Oh no, *that's* no use; you've simply got to get them in, when the time comes. Of course, I could have given it out on Sunday, but, you see, this isn't really in my parish; I was only asked to get it going, because our own was a success; and, besides, we don't want to get them from the Church here, but from here to the Church. That's the whole point of the business, isn't it?"

"How do we get them in, then?" asked Humphry, paying no heed to the final query.

"Oh, anyhow we can. There's an old piano, with 'Two sov.!' chalked upon it, out on the pavement round in Little Firth Street. That'd be a huge draw, if you can rise to it? Probably like a tin-pot, but we can't help that; we're not setting out to teach them music, and they love a row! Well, so long, old man, until six at the very latest."

As he went past the window, Humphry heard him say sternly—

"Now, then, clear away from this. It's no concern of yours;" presumably to the five infants. . . .

Well, there was a certain excitement in feeling that this small, two-storeyed, very ordinary house, curiously unlike any clubs that he had ever pictured, was his own, for purpose of experiment. He was free—glorious word!—he was free, now, to do all he could for others.

As a start, he went through Philip's small shelf-full of books, and weeded out those that were extremely sticky or too pietistic. He then, with superhuman effort and much jerking, moved the bagatelle-table into the front first-floor room. Now, there was a splendid place downstairs, where the whole length and breadth of the house had been knocked into one big room, for a piano, and he fared out to buy it. After a whole day of standing in the fog, following on twenty years of life, it was rather worse than a tin-pot; but the Judaic dealer vowed that he had several much better, and hardly dearer, if the gentleman would walk inside. The temptingly cheap tin-pot, as a fact, stood rather permanently on the kerb, and acted as a vivid sign—"Pianos Sold." Humphry, in the end, paid seven pounds for something which, at any rate, produced a tune. They might not be "setting out to teach them music," but he saw no reason for adding anything to the universal ugliness.

And at length everything was ready. He had got his chop at the Old Crown, and only waited for him of the dog-taming methods; the expert who despised the human faith of what he liked to call "The Missioner;" who found that bad music made no difference, so long as they got them to Church.

Humphry, waiting in a bare room, and remembering that view of "the whole point of the business," began

vaguely to be conscious of shackles that once more threatened his darling Liberty, and when Philip still lingered in his coming, began also to feel, with an ingratitude, perhaps, caught so soon from his environment, that he could do very happily without him.

CHAPTER X

A PREMIÈRE

PHILIP having declared the necessity for a vast fire, and at length accomplished it in fact, went out into the ill-lit street, and invited a few loitering boys to enter and "get warm." The chief result of this first effort was to endorse, quite remarkably, his earlier statements on East-End suspicion. Had Philip been known widely as a murderer they could not have shown less response to his bland invitation.

More triumphant than discouraged, he came in, and said, "I told you so."

He then decided to fall back on music.

With the door temptingly left open, he sang, to Humphry's improvised accompaniment, "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby," a general favourite at his parish concerts.

Out in the street a growing audience pushed and shoved itself backward, in the effort to keep a safe distance from the door, but no one entered. Possibly, they were more critical than the parishioners, or, as Humphry suggested, they wanted something newer and more sparkling.

"I don't know anything," said Philip. "Here, *you* do them 'The Merry Widow,' or something, and I'll vamp up some music for it."

Humphry, feeling something of an idiot, and realizing what Philip meant about the greater need for noise than music, did his best to be heard over the accompaniment through one long verse of quite a modern ditty from the Halls. Brick Street did not seem to know it, for the chorus, repeated, brought no echo from the street, except that some one banged the door to, and timid feet were heard retreating.

"It's no use," said Humphry, stopping. "They won't come in ; and I feel such a fool !"

Philip opened the door once again, at which the nervous gathering, mostly of boys, was further lessened. He smiled genially, to show that he had not come to avenge the slamming of his door.

"Why don't you come in?" he asked. "Are you nervous? We shan't eat you!" he added jocularly.

Humphry felt that he could do the whole thing ever so much better.

Philip drew back with a wave of invitation, rather like the penny showman at an old-world fair ; but, as too often happens, no one followed. They were contented with what, at no risk or charge, they could hear from the outside. Humphry's ingenious idea of going upstairs and knocking the bagatelle balls noisily about failed no less to attract, and at length, confident that sport was the ruling passion through which one might reach the heart of any boy, he came down and made an extraordinary remark to his colleague.

"I say," he exclaimed mournfully, "it's half-past eight. You'll have to box me."

Philip could not grasp the sequence of ideas, and gaped in an amusing way.

"Don't you see," said Humphry, reaching for the boxing-gloves that he had bought, as an essential part

of his equipment, "it's the one way of getting them in here? I bet, if they're boys, they'll go anywhere to see a fight."

Not waiting for an answer, but firmly taking matters into his own hands, he went to the door. There followed the usual scamper of a few timid boys. Several sturdy youths, of ages around seventeen, had sauntered up, and were watching this latest move of the adjectival sky-pilot with superior amusement. It was to these especially that Humphry threw his words of scorn.

"Well, you're a nice set of heroes, I don't think!" he exclaimed. "You'd think we were cannibals, you're so afraid of coming in. Perhaps some of you can box to make up for it"; whereat he raised the gloves. "If so, here's your chance. My pal and I are going to put them on for three rounds now, and the winner—that's *me*—will take any of you on. Now then!"

A little overdone—he was still fresh to the East End—but it succeeded. The air of mock-confidence with which he said, "That's *me*," and slapped his chest, got the first laugh that had not been against the missionaries; and so Humphry retired, drawing on his gloves with hands and teeth, in a way that promised business. A few moments' hesitation was followed by the entry of some twenty youths, who sat or stood extremely near the door. Not one of them removed his cap, and nobody stopped smoking, but they were ominously quiet, obviously waiting for developments.

"Come along right in," said Philip, genially, to Humphry's annoyance.

"Now we only want two seconds and a referee," he said hastily, as, even so soon, Philip's invitation had induced suspicion.

Much pushing followed ; everybody thrusting all the others forward and trying to keep back himself, until, in answer to Humphry's continued encouragement, there exuded from the struggling mass three sheepish lads, presumably the weakest. Encouraged by the sight of this horseplay, which did not look much like a service or anything of that sort, others came in from the street, and there ensued more fighting as to who should have the wall ; no one would move outward, and it was clear that all were prepared for such expected emergencies as sudden prayers or a collection.

But nothing of the sort occurred, and even Brick Street had to own that, so far as the first round went, these new-comers were putting up a decent sort of fight. Philip, indeed, whose boxing was a little rusty, had only looked upon the conflict as a diplomatic sham, and had not expected his adversary to hit quite so hard. When, just before time, Humphry got him a blow upon the ear that sent him sprawling on the ground, he raised himself with an indignant look that thoroughly amused the audience. There was laughter, with applause.

This drew more spectators, who had perforce to stand in front, and so roused the angry comments of smaller folk behind.

Philip, seated on a chair, and totally ignored by a timid second, who only glared when addressed, tried to pretend that he had looked so angry on purpose to delight the crowd, but also signalled to Humphry that there might easily be more pretence about the second round.

He, however, was looking at the audience, watching the scrimmage with appreciation.

"Lots of room here," he said breezily. "We shan't hit you—yet!" With which he turned away again, as

though it was of no possible interest to him whether they saw well or ill.

As the combatants stood up for their next round, a few bold fellows moved up and stood close beside the rather vaguely indicated ring: an act that forced the others, if they wished to see anything, to follow their example.

The fight had served its purpose now, and Humphry saw no reason to extend it further. To end with honours drawn at the third round was not, he guessed, a finish to the taste of Brick Street. When time seemed likely to be called, and so provide a dangerous interval, he suddenly lunged out and caught the quite abstractly scientific Philip a blow on the chin that delighted all beholders and sent its recipient gracefully upon the boards.

Philip could probably have risen before the referee, according to instructions, counted out ten seconds at a pace which occupied fifteen; but, frankly, he thought Humphry far too violent, even in a worthy cause, and as this episode clearly delighted Brick Street and drew thunders of applause, he decided it should bring the curtain down, and so lay still.

Humphry raised him, put him in his chair, and then turned to the audience, which thought that he wanted applause and gave it without stint. He was a sport—such the general decision—and he could use his fists, and he had downed the old sky-pilot proper.

"What did I tell you?" he shouted, with the old broad humour. "Now—who is the next?"

There did not seem to be one, somehow.

"What, nobody at all?"

He turned to Philip, who, having removed his gloves,

was putting on his coat, smiling all the while with an inane and obviously insincere good-humour.

"Will *you* try again, then?" he asked blandly.

That got a laugh—derisive—and Philip's features lost even the pretence of geniality; he felt that Humphry was meanly playing on the known prejudice of roughs against a cleric, to gain popularity. And, in fact, it was conscious playing to the gallery—but with a purpose.

"Well, have a shot at bagatelle, then? There's a table and some books upstairs."

But his magic had departed so soon as those two gloves were put away.

Besides, "upstairs——"!

They gazed at those few steps with all the mistrust of men asked to go into a bazaar that is "Admission Free"; knowing they will pay dearly to come out. They boggled at them like sheep before a slaughter-house. And one by one, suggesting pursuits of more hilarity, they began silently to fade away.

Humphry saw his hopes fade with them. Perhaps a club was wanted in Brick Street, but Brick Street clearly did not want it. That amiable bungler, Philip, was saying in the mildly protesting tones of a man with logic on his side, "Now you are here, you may as well *use* these nice rooms we've got ready for you." His whole attitude was of a spider plausibly haranguing flies.

There are, of course, degrees of courage even among flies, and finally about a score of boys, nudging each other and saying doubtfully that it would be a lark, arrived in a dazed state at the first landing. Now there was seen the wisdom of Philip's blazing fire. Books—no! but draughts and bagatelle were seized upon, whilst those not strong enough to get a chance at either, sat

by the fire, looked around nervously, and said that they were blowed, and it was a rum start, and they were blowed, once more, if it was not.

The two pioneers could gaze about them with a certain satisfaction. A rough crowd, certainly: not a collar anywhere: but they were orderly. Humphry felt his hopes revive.

"No smoking," said Philip sternly; and even then they only shrugged shoulders or winked, and obediently put their quenched fag-ends away inside their caps.

Philip crossed to Humphry. "We must get their caps off next."

"Why? What difference does it make? In time they'll do it from respect; till then, surely, it means absolutely nothing."

"Very well." The answer was not very gracious. Of course, it was Humphry's club, not his; and if a fellow would not take advice . . .

But then his mind was drawn from caps to something of far greater import. "I say!" he said, in tones of one who makes a ridiculous discovery, "we've got all these chaps here together and we've never found out one most vital point."

"What's that?"

"Why, we've never found out their religion!"

Philip stepped back to notice the effect on Humphry, who remained curiously undismayed.

"Does it make any difference?" he asked again.

"Of course it does, my dear fellow. They may be anything."

"Does it much matter *what* they are? We want to make them decent citizens, that's all. It's only a mercy if they believe anything at all, yet."

"In any case," replied the other, with finality, "you

simply can't mix them, possibly. Apart from all the trouble it would make among the parents——"

"It seems to me great rubbish," argued Humphry, warmly.

"It may ; and I'm sorry, if so ; but I honestly know better, about this. At any rate, as a clergyman, *I* can't have anything to do with this place, unless all the boys are Protestant ; you must see that. Of course, if you prefer——"

When it was reduced to that, only one thing appeared possible to say, and Humphry said it.

"How will you get at it ?" he added.

Philip, with pen and paper, raised his voice and so broke up the peaceful scene.

"I'm very sorry to interrupt you," he said, "but I want to take your names."

With a curious docility, that Humphry could not understand without accepting some of his friend's doctrines, they came forward to the table, one by one. Philip asked each his name, his age, and his religion.

The last question proved easily the hardest. None of them, now they came to think of it, was quite sure who exactly the parson bloke *was*. They rather liked the fire, and bagatelle was certainly approved in Brick Street. It would be annoying not to be allowed inside again—there might be some more fighting—but it was very difficult to guess the answer ; and as the business was all carried out in whispers, the first from each of the three variously occupied groups had to strike out a line for himself ; and each, from a shrewd but mistaken estimate of social enterprise among the various churches, hit on a reply that did not meet with satisfaction. Two others who had not fully grasped instructions murmured to them, also avowed that they were Roman Catholics,

Regretfully, they were informed that this Club was reserved for Protestants. The one who decided that he was a Christian, also failed to satisfy the examiner. As each failure left the Club and clattered downstairs, there was hearty merriment, with many personal remarks, from the survivors. Philip, so far as entertainment went, need not have made apologies for interruption. At last, he was a real success.

He could not, himself, see why the rejection of these boys should please the others so enormously. Probably mere callousness—unless it was the bitterness of sect? None was sorrier than himself that they could not be allowed to remain.

But there was consolation, for even as he ended his examination, there entered, rather nervously, nothing less triumphant than three new candidates, and all with real conviction declared that they were Protestant. Their arrival was greeted with applause and laughter even more pronounced. And when another trio lurched in, with abashed faces modestly turned groundwards, the merriment was doubled.

Philip's face grew red with anger and self-consciousness. He did not see how he could throw everybody out, and after all, there was no rowdyism, merely laughing; but he did not think that they should laugh at such a moment.

Humphry, of course, realized the joke. Perhaps he had been more interested in the types of boyhood than his expert colleague. At any rate, the interchange of scarves and caps, conveniently lowered, could not blind him to the similarity of the six rejected Romans and the six accepted Anglicans; but he said nothing. He was glad that the boys were thoroughly enjoying something. He caught the happy eye of one, and only

just refrained from winking solemnly. Out of idle curiosity, he looked over Philip's shoulder to see the new names of the protean six. One of them was "Adam Phœnix."

Philip shut up his little book, well satisfied, and gave his attention to the boys, a little more noisy and restive since his interruption. They must not be allowed to get beyond control! He repressed a lot of petty joking, and showed them that they were playing all wrong. One or two of them he stopped from swearing, and another had his wet boots on the iron fender. Club life seemed to be one long, tremendous Thou Shalt Not; and it is hard for boys who have once been noisily happy to relapse again into a boring quiet. It seemed that they could not do anything. Why, you mustn't even chuck a draught at coves that you found swindling!

Brick Street started to weary of this Pleasant Evening.

It was certainly more fun when Bill Cairns was found putting the bagatelle scorer back ten places, just to get a longer game.

"Out you go, sir!" cried Philip, instantly. "Don't argue; out you go, and you won't come in here for three more nights."

Bill, cowed by a raised arm of menace and the thing's strangeness, duly went; but those who had been playing with him also left, thundering incoherent threats, and asking all the rest to follow, and be sports.

Humphry's instinct rose superior to the other's knowledge, and he took matters into his own hands. Sooner than be left alone, he would empty the club-room himself.

"Closing-time!" he said briskly; 'as it's our first day. Open seven o'clock to-morrow night; and some of you sportsmen see if you can't bring along a champion boxer. Otherwise, I shan't tank very much of *Brick Street*!"

CHAPTER XI

ENTER ROSA

THE one really dull form of work is that which seems ridiculously simple. If hard work has never killed any one, the same possibly cannot be said of the work which is easy. The man whose whole day is spent in the unmeaning labour of making one small part in a cheap toy, the woman who exists by cutting seeds for a deceitful raspberry jam—these are the poor toilers who go under. It is the heart, and not the body, that is broken, finally, by the routine of work.

Humphry, who so lately had revolted from the whole setting and atmosphere of his new task, decided that it was intensely interesting.

After the experience of only one night, he could not say that he had any definite attitude towards these boys. He was all too conscious that, apart from having won some small approval whilst he boxed, he had been absolutely thrust out of their fellowship. They had not spoken to him, had not made even any rough attempt at thanks. There was the fire or bagatelle; there was the mug who had provided them; and they sat, well apart from him, watching till he showed his hand and they could know his game.

No, personally these lads only stood to him as so many stubborn little idiots, on whom he must somehow

force the realization that he had come down here to work only for their good ; and that was exactly where the fascination lay. Humphry was obsessed with the spirit of the fight.

Impatient for the evening, he rather wondered what one did all day, when one lived in these parts ? Philip, of course, was busy with the duties of his church, and as the lodgings did not tempt him to stay in, he wandered out into the streets. These were even less attractive ; and in the end, from the mere lack of any other object, he leapt upon a motor-bus that promised finally to reach the Bank. After a surprisingly short journey, he found himself in a new world of shops that dealt in luxuries and things of beauty ; a world wherein he rambled aimlessly, always with fresh contrasts taking his mind back to that more sordid other world, and racking it with a vain search for some effective remedy. His thoughts were full of nothing else. Eleanor, after all, had placed the subject there ; so, possibly, she would not have complained to know that in so brief a time it had left hardly any room for her ?

Eventually, the wish to be in the fight once more proved overpowering, and having gulped down an early tea, that was scarcely an hygienic substitute for his missed dinner, he hastened back to Brick Street and the Club. There was, of course, nothing that could be done until the opening hour, but he found sufficient amusement in putting a chair here, and then moving it back there ; getting the same pleasure as a woman in her new drawing-room, or Baby with his latest toy.

The enjoyment perhaps was beginning to wear rather thin at last, when a knock upon the street door promised an opportune diversion.

Humphry, coming downstairs with some of the joy

felt by a shopman who welcomes his first customer, thought to himself, half-way, "Perhaps it's Philip?" and did not feel half the elation that should surge across a man who gets his helper, unexpectedly, an hour and a half before his proper time.

But when he opened the door, prepared to smile surprised delight, and rather dreading the next ninety minutes, he was confronted with quite a different figure.

On the step there stood a gaunt man of something over thirty years, in an overcoat that wavered between green and black, a soft collar, and a grey squash hat. He had rather wild eyes, a sad mouth, and his hair grew long behind, but in a rat-like, undecorative manner. The general impression was of a man whose outward ill-grace was redeemed by an enthusiasm from within. He obviously did not care about appearances, but his face hinted that he felt deeply as to larger things; and about him as a whole there was the vague suggestion that he was holding himself in from an outburst which he might afterwards regret.

"Mr. Scott-Mahon, I hoped that I might find you in just now," he said, with unpunctuated haste, as though reciting a preconcerted speech. He adopted Mrs. Crump's pronunciation of the name.

Humphry's mind, trained to convention, did not like the man's appearance, but intuition told him that he might be trusted; and he held the door wide open, with a gesture that said, "Won't you enter?" He could not think of any fitting words.

The stranger swept his hat off with much pomp, and entered.

"I am Mr. Paston," he said, with proud assurance. "'*Mat*' Paston," he added, as though that must tell everything. "I and a few other gentlemen and ladies

conduct the Boys' Guild here in Medlar Lane. There is also a Girls' branch. I dare say you have heard of us."

He stared at his host, a look in his mad eyes that almost seemed to dare him to deny it; and Humphry tried to be as polite as he could with the facts to hand, that he had only just come from the Shires, that the fame of the Medlar Lane Boys' Guild had not reached him there, that he was very glad to hear of it, and felt sure that it was doing a good work.

Mat Paston grew no whit less stern at this, and merely waved his hand at random, when Humphry asked him whether he would not sit down.

"I have heard about your work here from one of my lads," he said, in a regal way, "and thought I would come round and call upon you, Mr. Scott-Mahon. It seems to me that we should be affiliated."

Humphry was not at all sure what this meant, exactly, and merely thanked Mr. Paston for the kind suggestion.

"I suppose," said the other, "you are quite new to—this sort of thing?" Whereat he swept an explanatory hand around the room, and gazed at his host's blue serge and stiff collar with an ill-hid scorn, that finally made Humphry feel himself the one who was preposterously dressed.

"I'm working with Barnet," he said, with an odd sense of discomfort.

Mr. Paston sniffed. "The Reverend Barnet?" he inquired. "Then you are Church?"

"No," answered Humphry, more and more uneasy. "No; I just want to help—every one." For the moment he felt curiously ineffective.

"We are *social*," said Mr. Paston. "We put morals above sects, though we are Christian, of course. Our

aim is to raise the poor and help the fallen; to give them the joy of life, that has been so long held back from them; to get them their proper share in the world's wealth; to teach them as how the earth is the Lord's, for *all* men to enjoy; to take away from him that hath; to break down oppression; to reconcile equality with liberty, and to force the Midases of this world to have all things in common with their poorer brethren."

Whilst he gave out this strange salad of catch-phrases, the odd light began to glint yet more strongly than before; the gentle mouth was contorted in a wolf-like snarl; his voice rose higher and higher; he waved his arms; the man stood forth as a fanatic. It seemed as if, at any moment, That which he held back might gain control and topple down the walls of reason, so long weakened by the pressure of injustice. And then suddenly, with a bitter little laugh, perhaps meant for apology, he stopped, and his whole aspect changed.

"Perhaps you would like to see the Guild, Mr. Scott-Mahon?" he said, with the old mild aloofness. Only in a slight emphasis upon the name did he betray a vestige of the class-hatred that just now had almost overmastered him. "That was why I came in. There is no call to waste time with my own views; but I should be very glad to show you our building, with a view to affiliation."

On the way to Medlar Lane he explained more fully the precise nature of this ceremony, which seemed essential owing to "the thousand pities of any appearance of rivalry among us in this neighbourhood, who are trying to raise the condition of the poor."

Humphry, not certain yet whether they were trying to raise the poor exactly in the same direction, threw

everything upon his colleague, and said that he could settle nothing definite except with Mr. Barnet (he had rapidly picked up that "Mr."); a decision that made a still greater coldness between him and Mat Paston, who obviously walked with him only at a great self-sacrifice and some control of his real sentiments. Clearly, he regarded Mr. Scott-Mahon as not appreciably above the average level of the upper classes.

And Humphry, as they walked silently along, began to wonder whether their affiliation was not merely a name for his own suppression. Why should any one suspect a rivalry? In any case, as an advocate of Freedom, he was not inclined to pledge himself to any further union, until he was certain that his views coincided absolutely with those of the suggested colleague. At present, things did not point much in that direction.

A first glance at the Guild, too, did not help them.

The premises were much bigger and more elaborate than the modest house in Brick Street ("The new Guild House," said Mr. Paston, as they entered, "was built in 1904, entirely from voluntary subscriptions"), but the whole aspect of it was gloomy and austere. The place struck chill on Humphry, with an indefinable suggestion of village schools, or something, at any rate, supported by a corporation. Of personality there was not anywhere a trace. Everything seemed negative, cold, uninviting, ugly. A large bare room on the first floor was furnished as a reading-room and library; but so far as a casual look could guide this visitor, the books and papers were either extremely anarchistic or of the sort that is technically known as "For Home Reading." In this odd Guild, the *Christian Herald* lay down amicably with the *Clarion*. Upstairs again, a yet larger room, vast enough to be known as a Hall, was decorated

in pale pink distemper, with brown key-pattern stencilled as a frieze upon it; above which the roof ended in a triangular arrangement of light pitch-pine wood. Everything was beautifully clean, with the spotlessness of a workhouse or a prison. At either end, two iron pipes, descending from a high point in the wall, led one's eye to stoves contrived in such a way that they gave heat, without showing the fire.

Very proudly, as though realizing how superior this all was to his aristocratic friend's humble Club, which he had not even asked to see, Mat Paston led Humphry through the whole building, explaining just how they used each part of it, and giving him a rough syllabus of lectures or debates.

As they got back to the first room, the street door opened and there entered listlessly a woman, plucking in a weary, automatic way at her hat-pin, even while she crossed the threshold.

"Good evening, Miss Brown," said Mat Paston, in business-like tones.

She swung round, and flushed timidly when she caught sight of a stranger. She let go of her hat-pin, hurriedly, rather as though she had been caught with powder-puff in hand.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Paston." As she spoke, she gazed at him with a look of devotion, almost worship. Clearly, she thought Mr. Paston a great man. Humphry's first impression was of a good, ineffective little creature of probably, say, twenty-seven; a girl whose lot should surely have been cast in gentler spheres; and he wondered what place exactly she filled in this rough gallery.

He had not long for guessing. "This," said Mat Paston, with quite a new soapiness about his voice,

"this is Miss Brown—Miss *Rosa* Brown" (that, too, sounded as though it should mean ever so much more than merely Brown). "She is, one might almost say, my right-hand here. In fact, she has started the Girls' Guild almost on her own initiative." Then turning to Miss Brown, who appeared more retiring and miserable than ever after so much praise, he said, "This is Mr. Scott-Mahon, an *Oxford* gentleman, who has come down to help the work. We very much hope that the Guild and his Club may be affiliated shortly."

The scorn on that word "*Oxford*" was inimitable. Humphry was just debating what answer he could make when Miss Brown, who possibly was not so nervous as she looked, almost surprised him by a question.

"Where is your Club, Mr. Scott-Mahon?" She spoke very mildly, and she followed Mr. Paston's lead in her pronunciation of the name; but her voice was pleasantly musical, and somehow, though she said so little more than was polite, she really seemed to feel some interest.

"Quite near here," he said,—"in Brick Street. But I dare say you don't know it?"

"Brick Street," she echoed reflectively. "No, I don't think I do." There was an odd, rather attractive melancholy in her voice, even when she spoke of trifles.

But that seemed almost to bring the conversation to its end. Normally, of course, Humphry would have remarked on the difficulty of finding one's way about, or the curious names they gave to streets, or anything at all, as men do in society; but he could no longer remain unaware of the grim attitude with which Mat Paston listened to this trifling interchange of courtesies. During its brief progress, his air of suppressed antagonism gave way, almost sensibly, to something

far less negative. He made no effort to join in ; indeed, seemed anxious to emphasize the fact that he had been left out. He was a man of no small magnetism, and he managed to distil in this little room the atmosphere of an indignant husband who confronts a villainous philanderer. Perhaps Mat Paston did not like Oxford gentlemen to speak at all to his young ladies ?

So that a very awkward silence followed, and Humphry had decided that it was time to say good-bye, when Miss Brown, whose shrinking looks must certainly belie her courage, said in quite ordinary tones, "Do you find it hard to get the people in, at all ?" Either she was blissfully unaware of Mr. Paston's glowering rage, or else she rather liked to stir it.

"We've only been open for one night," said Humphry, who found himself forced, very unwillingly, to embark on a long explanation, "and we boldly put up a notice 'Boys' Club,' so as to limit our efforts at first. But we got any number of them in, and they sat playing bagatelle and draughts, as happy as anything."

"That was good," said Miss Brown, with appreciation.

"It was *bad*," broke in Mat Paston, thundering in upon the peaceful scene with all the eddy of a swollen flood that suddenly has burst its dam ; "bad, and bad all through ; and you know it no less than me. Anyone could get them in, if he gave drinks and fags all round." With which epigram he subsided ominously, as though even that had done him good, but he was capable of more.

"Drinks are not *quite* the same as bagatelle, are they ?" said Miss Brown, soothingly, but also with a little of rebuke. She seemed in a way astonished at her boldness, and Humphry somehow arrived at the

idea that she had let a general deference to Mat Paston be changed into protest, for once, by such curious rudeness— an unoffending stranger.

But he was not likely to allow a woman to take up his cudgels for him, and was opening his mouth in self-defence, when Mat Paston no less explosively broke out again.

"Bagatelle and draughts!" he cried. "What does that mean but waste of time and gambling? Oh yes, they'll do *that*—if that's what you've come down to teach 'em! But ask them to think, ask them to learn, ask them to pray, ask them to be Christian and help others—and what then? Is *that* what you're come down to teach them—bagatelle and draughts!—over the heads of us as has been working for high objects here for years?" His whole body was trembling with emotion, and he paid no heed to grammar.

Humphry, attacked on his convictions, saw no reason to be silent. "Yes," he said, very quietly; "as you ask me, Mr. Paston, that *is* what I've come down to teach them—or a part of it. I've come down to teach them to be happy. I've come down to bring a little beauty, if I can, into their ugly lives—and that's more than you ever will, with all the books and papers that you've got up there. *You* want to make them discontented, to force them up into places they're not fit to fill; I'm going to make them contented, if I can, and fit them to fill the places they've got to—yes, and to realize that no work is low, if you only do it decently——"

"And so," sneered Mat Paston, unable to control himself a moment longer, "you start by teaching them to waste time and to gamble!"

"They *didn't* gamble," said Humphry, far more warmly; "or if they did, they won't in a few weeks.

They were just happy and contented, and they were doing no harm. That's something, isn't it? The rest will come with time. Later, they'll learn to be unselfish and charitable—Christian, if you prefer the word—learn to be sportsmen——” He broke off, and, thoroughly heated by the man's insolence, added in a mere spirit of bravado, “Shall I tell you something else that we did there last night? We *boxed*.”

Mat Paston had fallen into a new attitude of cold reserve; and, leaning back upon a table, looked at Humphry rather in the scornful, analytic manner that is associated with the first Napoleon. “I am not surprised to hear it,” he said, in a slow, oracular way of speaking. “Gambling and brutality are close allied.”

Clearly, by now he was more shocked in the abstract than annoyed in person. One does not argue with a pig, however much one may deplore its attitude to life.

“*Sport* and brutality,” said Humphry, “are utterly apart: they're opposites. . . . I want to teach these boys that one can fight a man and still be friends; that you can have an enemy and still play the game. All they're going to ‘learn’ from me is to be decent citizens, believing in themselves and others. I hope they learn the same from you; but as we're arguing about our systems, I will tell you one more thing beside happiness that I want to bring down to them here; that *you* can never bring them in this Guild of yours—and that is Beauty. You're a reformer, Mr. Paston? Very well. Then shall I tell you what's the matter with this pitiful East End? There isn't any beauty in it anywhere. The streets, the houses, the people, their amusements—everything in it is ugly.”

“You've got a big task, Mr. Scott-Mahon,” he sneered, ever grimmer and more quiet.

"You can't alter that, I know," said Humphry, passionately, his blood all thrilling with enthusiasm for his subject, "but you *can* bring a little beauty into their lives in some other ways. You can make their club-room beautiful; and when I've saved some more, I mean to do it. You can show them what the joy of colour means—a thing they never see,—and above everything you can show them the beauty of the soul; none of your discontent and envy of the other half, but that inner nobility which triumphs over outward things, and can make a prisoner in his narrow cell happier than any king upon his throne."

He suddenly realized that the cadence of words had carried him away as in the old debating days: and rightly guessed that his opponent's repartee to this flowery speech would be a properly contemptuous silence.

And as he stood there, suffering the reaction that sincerity brings to all except the very strong, he heard a low voice, almost a whisper, yet full of intensity, upon his right.

"Oh, but how *splendid!*"

In his duel of theories, he had lost all memory of Miss Brown. He turned his head now, and met her eyes, fixed in a rapt way upon his face. She stood almost as though in an ecstasy, with the look of spiritual admiration that she had turned upon Mat Paston at her entry; but that look many times intensified. It almost seemed that the words she had heard were like some glorious vision suddenly spread out before her: her lips were opened, her head raised, and she looked in some odd way transfigured. For one instant Humphry had a glimpse of quite another person from the timid girl who had stood so lately in her

place; a glimpse, perhaps, of that very beauty in the soul of which he had but now been speaking.

Then she seemed to realize that she was gazing at a stranger; the glory faded, and she was once more—ineffectual!

"I hope," she said, less impulsively and in the old, plaintive way, "that you'll succeed in carrying out your wonderful ideas."

Mat Paston turned upon her with an indescribable air of domination.

"Wonderful, indeed!" he said. "Extraordinary—to those who can see their real meaning! . . . I fancy, Miss Brown, that your girls will be arriving?"

The effect upon Miss Brown, just now so valorous, was startling.

The last trace of any exaltation vanished; an expression of extreme penitence usurped its place; and she turned upon Mat Paston a look that reminded Humphry only of the dumb, forgiving remorse shown by a dog which, under great temptation, has done wrong and been most justly punished. With her head bowed in what seemed almost shame and self-contempt, she left the room, not even nodding good-bye to the man for whose views she had, just now, expressed such obvious appreciation. Humphry could not help thinking how Eleanor de Kay would have dealt with this rude swine's remark.

Mat Paston, with a final smile of powerful assurance, relaxed from the Napoleonic attitude.

"Just now, Mr. Scott-Mahon," he said, with a deliberation which succeeded in annoying Humphry, "there was some talk about affiliation——"

"Purely on *your* part." Humphry lost no time in dragging out the bludgeon.

"You probably realize," the other went on, just as though he had not felt it, "that any such idea is quite impossible. You have said your say, and I know what you think of me. You might like now to hear my views on your ridiculous ideals? That sort of poetic stuff—beauty and what not—may be all right up at Oxford, but let me tell you, it won't wash in the East End, and I consider you a dangerous reactionary, and as such, I must request you to be kind enough, in future, to refrain from entering this building."

Humphry went to the door, opened it, and paused. "Certainly," he said, "with pleasure; I do not like the colour of your walls."

It was distinctly cheap, but he could not resist; and the fact that it smelt of Oxford would, he knew, increase the anger of its hearer.

Humphry walked back through the slums, missing all the ugliness that he disliked; his whole perception taken up by thought.

Opposition, as so often, had forced him to tabulate his views in a more concrete form than they had ever occupied before. He knew, now, what he wished to do. But—was it just what Philip wanted? Well, if it wasn't . . . he must stand alone!

But inasmuch as some encouragement comes as a welcome prop, even to those who have this last ambition, Humphry felt a strange elation in reflecting on the enthusiasm of Miss Brown. Obviously a girl without very strong opinions of her own, and a bit ready to be carried off her feet by others. . . . Probably thought that anarchical rotter, Paston, no end of a big thinker. . . . Rather discounted her appreciation, that. Still . . .

Still, in short, man being human, it *is* something

to inspire evident rapture in any one—even if it is only a timid and ineffective creature, who does not know what individuality implies!

And as Humphry, tossing his swift thought hither and thither, drew near to the Club House, his eyes suddenly drank in the most amazing of all sights possible; a vast and surging crowd that stood and waited by the still barred door.

This was too splendid! So the Club's fame had already travelled?

He looked at his watch, and saw that it was nearly seven; Philip would be waiting for him, anxiously. He quickened his pace, and genial'y pushed his way through the thick gathering.

Obedient to the notice, they were mostly boys, or at the utmost, youths; but close by the door, and towering above them all, there stood a burly animal of probably some nineteen years, broad-shouldered and coarse-faced, who looked into Humphry's eyes at their own height, with a slow glance of surly interest, which as his gaze went lower, changed into the happy smile of one who knows that he has taken up an easy business.

He needed no explaining, this inmate of Brick Street.

He was The Champion!

CHAPTER XII

"QUEENSBERRY RULES"

FORMALITIES were over; and, stripped of their coats, the Brick Street champion and Humphry faced each other.

So far as courtesies of the ring went, there had not been a vast amount of pomp. A boy who obtruded himself to the extent of saying gleefully to Humphry that 'ere was Joe, wot'd taike 'im on, if that was all 'e wanted, found himself promptly drawn in as the great Joe's second; and another, even less willingly, was made to stand in the same relation towards Humphry. Philip, with not a little booing and some comments about his being t' other bloke's pal, elected himself referee. But never mind: Joe would soon show them what was what!

Perhaps in his remark of the night before about not thinking very much of Brick Street, Humphry had underrated the strength of local patriotism. At all events, as he looked around the room, he could see that Brick Street was far from regarding this as a mere friendly sporting match. Mat Paston, noting the keen eyes of those present, might justly have snarled out, "Brutality!" The whole atmosphere of the room hinted at animosity and partisanship. This was no crowd that had come to witness a display of skill. Joe

was a great hero in these parts—why, he had been in prison, three months; yes, and for an attack (successful) upon a policeman!—and his admirers had come now to see him add more laurels to his brow. They were half excited and half entertained. The idea of this bloke coming down here and wanting to fight Joe, of everybody, all for nuffink, afforded them extreme amusement, and they looked forward to a free evening, both bloodthirsty and jolly.

Joe himself, who looked more preposterously solid than ever, now that his great chest swelled out his rough flannel shirt, gazed scornfully at the gloves, as though disdaining such soft innovations; put them on, with gestures that amused the crowd; stared in surprise at his rival's outstretched hand, and just touched it in a casual way; then leapt heavily back and worked his hands up and down in a business-like manner, which told Humphry in a moment that even if he were a good fighter, he knew nothing about boxing.

Frankly, Humphry was relieved.

In this sensation there was neither cowardice nor vanity. In the old days when he boxed for his university, he had often met his match, and could take punishment as well as any one; but this was essentially a contest with a purpose. He knew very well that defeat would soon leave him alone in the club-room, with nothing but the echoes of derisive laughter, whilst victory might gain admiration and the influence that follows in its train. And as he watched Joe, sawing his gloves up and down before his chin, warily seeking the chance to use his crushing force and guilelessly leaving himself open to a body-blow, he realized that now the cards were his to play.

But how to play them? A swift knock-out might

only lead to wreckage of the room for though grown men had been turned angrily away, many of those present were well on in their teens, fellows made powerful with years of work, and it was a rough crowd to tackle. But, on the other hand, delay was no less perilous. He knew that if his adversary managed somehow to get one blow straight in from his shoulder, the ten seconds allowed would be inadequate for convalescence.

And now, to huge applause, Joe dashed tempestuously on him. The moment for theories was over.

Humphry, scornfully calm in the face of such direct attack, moved his head quietly a few inches to the left, and as an eddy of wasted force went close beside his ear, thoughtfully stopped the further useless progress of Joe's devilish face by a left-hander on the chin, gentle enough, and yet nicely calculated, that rattled his teeth and generally gave to thought. He had not worried about his defence.

As he staggered back, hands anywhere, Humphry omitted to follow his advantage.

A hush, abrupt and shocked, fell on the room.

Joe, angry at his failure, and still more furious because even his small knowledge told him that he had been open to a knock-out blow and been reprieved by the toff's mercy, rushed with an audible snarl at his opponent. When his blows seemed everywhere to meet nothing except gloves or air, so that a few laughs came from his fickle supporters, he grew more frantic, for he was used to rapid victories; and caring for nothing except that, forgetting any rules that he might possibly have known, he suddenly took an obviously easy chance, and landed a blow, luckily with nothing like its full

effect, where Humphry had no guard, generously well below an imaginary belt.

Utterly bereft of wind, Humphry tottered back and dropped his hands, prepared to double up in helpless agony.

Huge was the applause of Brick Street. Joe, smiling in calm triumph after storm, prepared deliberately to place the final blow.

Philip dashed out from the vague ring-side, and violently drew him back. There was a tornado of hisses, boos, cat-calls, remarks, and Joe threateningly raised his gloves.

"Wotd'yerthinkyerplayin'at?" he asked huskily, as though the thing had been one word.

"Foul!" exclaimed the referee. "That was a foul."

"'Oo's foul?" threatened Joe, who clearly saw the chance of a more certain victory. "'Oo are you a-callin' foul?"

"That was a foul blow," said Philip, with judicial calm, "below the belt—and you're disqualified."

Joe stood back with the sarcastic smile of one who knows that he is in the right, until another storm of hissing and the rest had died away.

"Oh, I'm 'disqualified,' *am* I?" he asked ironically. "Well, what about 'im?" and he pointed at Humphry, now bent in the immemorial attitude of those who have lost the necessary air. "A fight's a fight, and that bloke's done for, so I tells yer stright."

At the end of the wild applause which greeted this remark, Humphry managed to get himself erect, and came into the argument. Here was his first chance to teach the East End what sport meant, and that one "could have an enemy, but yet play the game"! Philip, he thought, was doing the thing clumsily.

"That's all right," he said to Joe. "You *got* me, straight enough! Only, you see, the rules don't allow that blow. Below-the-belt hits are against the rules."

"'Oo's blawsted rules?" retorted Joe; only he used another adjective.

"The Marquis of Queensberry's," said Humphry, with a quiet smile of triumph.

"Damn yer marquises!" cried Joe, who possibly was one of Paston's converts. "A fight's a fight, says I, and we don't want no bloomin' talk."

The attitude of his satellites became distinctly menacing. "That's right!" "'It 'im, Joe!" "Dot the parson!"—these were the mildest of the encouraging directions that he got.

"It's only a sporting match," said the jejune Philip. "You and he aren't *enemies*."

But Joe was not to be persuaded about that. "A fight's a fight," he said again, "and damn yer marquises and rules!"

Humphry's mind was working rapidly. He saw that from the first the sympathies of the whole audience had been with Joe, and now that was more true than ever. The whole affair had been one big mistake. These boys had not been educated up to Sport. In their crude ring, which was the street, a fight was verily a fight, and any blow would do to master a threatening policeman. Now, unless something was done soon, a riot would ensue, and with it the closing of the Brick Street Club. Ergo, obviously, something must be done.

He postponed for a while the idea of teaching these boys the precise meaning of Sport, and fell back on something more easy to be understood, more elemental.

"Very well," he said, to Philip's horror, and not totally to Joe's delight, "a fight's a fight, and we'll

damn rules, as you politely put it. The marquises don't matter! Come along, we'll finish, anyhow; a sort of hit-as-hit-can—nothing barred!"

Thunders of appreciation followed. This was what they *did* call Sport!

Joe, still murmuring, and clearly not as satisfied as everybody else, got back into the centre of the room.

"I say, be careful," whispered Philip anxiously to Humphry as they crossed.

He had seen too much of the East End to care vastly about this new contest of hit-as-hit-can.

But Humphry was not for taking any risks. Once more he waited until Joe, resolved to use his famed sledge-hammer punch, dashed in upon him; and then the same thing happened—except that he did not worry to moderate his blow.

The feet of Joe seemed literally to rise up in the air, with such a smash did he come down upon the floor. Somehow or other he had left his chin uncovered once again.

A more ghastly silence than before obsessed the audience. There was no vestige of applause. These fellows only clapped when they were pleased; but that shocked stillness was the victor's highest tribute. He had beaten—*Joe!*

A limp and useless mass of flesh and gristle it was that he carried to a chair. Joe's second gazed upon his champion with horror, and it was the two toffs who fanned him with a handkerchief, sprayed water, and did all the things that are done to a boxer in this grim circumstance. After an abnormally long interval of coma he sprang up from the chair with an abrupt briskness which suggested that he might have crawled up some long time ago.

He turned round upon Humphry. "I s'pose yer think yer *some one* now?" he sneered at him.

This was mere impertinence, admitting only of one answer here—the obvious.

"I think I'm a better man than *you*!" said Humphry, genially, and so got a titter, which sent Joe beyond control.

"Ho, yer does, does yer?" he said angrily. "Well, 'spose we tries without the blawsted gloves!"

These last had been removed during the lengthy rest, and now he held near Humphry's face a great red fist, scarcely less enormous, but probably far harder, than a four-ounce glove.

"It'd only hurt your chin more, I'm afraid," laughed Humphry, in a friendly way. Another big success.

Philip thought that this was cheap. "This isn't a prize-ring or a sporting club, you must remember," he put in to Joe. "It is a boys' club."

Joe, at least, was not afraid of the sky-pilot, and told him so with a few random adjectives, wanting to know what call *he* had to shove his nose into the business, and offering, for quite a reasonable sum, to punch it. "Boys' clubs" he liked. As though they wanted—well, what *he* called it—down in Brick Street!

Joe frankly was passing the limits of endurance.

"Exit!" cried Philip, suddenly, and opened the street-door.

It was a code-word given to Humphry for use upon emergencies, and its meaning became obvious to everybody in a moment. The three or four small boys who stood before the door gave way to Philip, not understanding why he opened it. The road was clear. Hey, presto! Philip's arm around his waist, Humphry's iron

grip upon his neck, Philip's boot behind his trousers—and Joe was sitting in the mud of Brick Street.

Philip stood, hand upon the latch, ready for action if a dash were made; but Joe, hurling out awful threats and swear-words, went off along the road, inviting all his pals to follow.

"Well, the fight's over," cheerily said Humphry, "so all who want to, had better clear off! There are books and draughts and things and a fire upstairs for any one who's nothing else to do."

Clearly most of them had something else to do. They trooped out silently, like men at the end of a theatrical performance. It might be guessed from their demeanour that only Humphry's tact, and possibly his obvious strength, kept them from showing actively a disapproval which they felt. When the outward crush was over, there were left, some rather shamefaced, and others clearly reckoning on fun, about twenty-five boys, who apparently were anxious to remain. Humphry was honestly pleased to recognize two, at least, of last night's patrons, and nodded to them in a friendly manner; but they only looked miserable, and turned away. They were all, in fact, clearly a little nervous as to whether they were doing the wise thing in staying.

Philip this time set up his little bureau at the bottom of the stairs, so that rejected candidates might be spared a tantalizing vision of the promised land; but every one by now knew the real answer, and not a single boy was turned away.

The evening was very much like that which went before it. Again there was a certain amount of horse-play, seemingly harmless to the tyro Humphry, but sternly put down by his more expert colleague, because

"it didn't do to let them once get out of hand, and they were just as happy quiet, when they got used to it."

Also there was one ejection. A tall, pale youth, with meek, shifty eyes and a black smudge across his nose, was discovered putting a bagatelle ball in his pocket, and was told by Philip that they wanted none of his hooligan, police-court tricks in there.

"'Oo's a 'ooligan?" (so ran the dialogue, according to an old-time formula).

"Just understand," replied Philip, in his best manner, "that we're not going to have you in this Club unless you behave decently."

The meek eyes apparently belied the youth's real nature, for he suddenly waxed truculent. "You an' yer decency! 'Oo *are* yer, anywiy? 'Oo d'yer think yer talkin' to—wot? D'yer think I joined yer bloomin' 'Club' to be sworn at like a bloomin' school-kid?"

He stopped to take breath, and began again. "Lor blime!" he said, comprehensively; but that was a mere prelude. He had begun to detail the various heads under which, so to speak, he was lor-blimed, when Humphry, scenting trouble, strolled across to him.

"Hallo!" he said; "what's the matter with this sportsman?"

Some of the boys laughed, and he of the smudge burst out angrily: "Wha's the *matter* with me? Tha's good, mates!" He here indulged in a false merriment, and then summed up his grievances, much as before. Shortly, the point was that he didn't want nobody a-talking at him; he was a man, and, to put it bluntly, he did not care for discipline.

Humphry listened gravely and in silence. "Well," he said, when it was over, "this is a Club, not a prison. *You* came in of your own will, and no one wants to

keep you here unless you like it. There's the way down to the door. But if you want to stay, you'll have to keep the rules, see? That's just all."

Indeed, it was the first good thing that he would teach them, this Obedience, and the lanky boy, confronted with such plain reasoning, could find no answer. The room's sympathy swerved round against him.

Unluckily, Philip, anxious to improve the occasion with a show of force, put in, "Yes, and if you don't keep them, you'll find the way down pretty quickly, see?"

In a moment the youth was all aflame again. "Ho!" he snorted; "and 'oo's goin' to do it, eh? Not you, at any rate, for *all* yer pulpit jaw!"

Philip gave the fatal sign, and Humphry could not very well refuse assistance. The smudged one was still expressing his opinion on sky-pilots when he landed in the street.

After that, the night was peaceful. Those who remained were small and rather terrorized by what had befallen others stronger than themselves. Philip controlled them easily, and got no repartees.

None the less, Humphry was scarcely satisfied with the result of this second evening. A bigger muster, certainly, but with what end? They had driven many out, as enemies, and those who remained, so far as he saw, could not have found much pleasure in anything, except in disobeying Philip.

Further, when the Club shut for the evening, the members coming out were booed as blacklegs, whilst Philip and Humphry met with a worse storm of censure, and as they passed down the street, stones buzzed rather ineffectively about their ears. The youth with the smudged face was visible as leader of the demonstration.

"This *always* happens at first," said Philip, cheerily.

"They can't believe we're doing it for *them*. But they'll come back, and be all the more submissive for it, afterwards."

Humphry said nothing; he was deep in thought, and he continued thinking long after Philip had branched off up the side street that led to his Vicarage.

Suddenly, as he walked slowly along, brooding on this sign of their unpopularity and wondering whether it was necessary, he was conscious that another little group of boys in heated conclave was before him. They stood by a corner, under the flickering lights of a gin-palace, and Humphry with a warm flush of discomfort saw, in their midst, the towering form of Joe. The gas-jets lit up a very sullen face indeed.

It was too late to turn back without seeming to have played the coward, for at the same moment that he saw he knew that he was seen. But none of the hisses that he dreaded came. On the contrary, it seemed as though his advent was rather a shock to this gathering, thus clearly shown as a conspiracy. Joe and his crowd had methods subtler, further reaching, than mere boos and pebbles; this was only a war-council. Very ill at ease, they nudged each other, ceased their loud talking and gesticulating, pretended to be separating, whilst one or two especially bad actors overdid the thing by touching their caps as Humphry passed, a courtesy which he most amiably returned.

Joe made no movement whatsoever. Where he was, under the gas-flares, leaning back upon the wall, with both hands in his pockets—there he stayed. Many of the others, with feigned nonchalance, had broken from the group, and strolled into the road. A broad strip of the pavement was now clear, and Humphry thus walked close beside his rival.

Joe, even more nervous still, scowled out into vacancy.

Humphry was almost past, when some devilry impelled him to break the silence and goad his foe with a piece of sarcastic geniality, as if to show that he was not afraid of their revenge.

"'Night, Joe," he said, in an off-hand way. "If there's any swelling, try raw meat !"

Joe's satellites were utterly astounded. Secretly, they even felt a little admiration. Only by a crushing retort, by rank defiance, could Joe regain his sovereignty.

For some moments he glared furiously at the man who passed him, as though feeling that violence alone could satisfy as answer. Then prudence, maybe, triumphed, and his lips began to move.

His court eagerly leaned forward for the repartee, and Humphry slackened his pace slightly, not to miss it.

"Don't 'ave too *much* of it," Joe muttered darkly.

CHAPTER XIII

PICNIC

NEXT morning, when Humphry called at the Club, from which he still found it impossible to keep away, there met his eyes the astounding sight of two letters, obviously pushed beneath the door.

His first idea was that they might be challenges or hideous threats from Joe and his associates; but whilst still withdrawing the key, he saw that one of them was stamped. He picked up the other in amusement; but that too bore a stamp, and he had just begun to speculate on the strange, rather shaky writing, when he noticed that the first was from Lady de Kay, and tore it open, very eagerly.

"MY DEAR MR. SCOTT-MAHON,

"You told us that you should be genuinely offended if we did not let you know, the very first time we were up in London, and come and see your Club. Perhaps you didn't realise how soon that might be! Nor did *we*; but some time some business, that only takes a few minutes, drags me to town on Monday; so Eleanor is coming, too, for some shopping in the morning; and as we never believe in half measures, we are stopping the night and going to a theatre!! We should think it a *great* treat, if we might come and call on you in the

afternoon. But I know that it is shockingly soon, and you can hardly have even settled in, yet! We're so interested, as you know, that we should like to see even the *beginning* of your work; but if you would rather we came later on, I rely on you to say so honestly. We shall quite understand. Eleanor sends so many messages, that I have quite forgotten them! You must forgive this very short letter, as there are so many things to arrange for Monday, at very short notice.

"Yours always sincerely,

"LYDIA DE KAY."

Humphry was delighted; for if it is pleasant to have a new toy, how much more splendid showing it! It would be wonderful, taking the de Kays, of every one, round the whole place; and he very nearly kissed the bit where Eleanor sent all those jolly messages. He felt rather cross, though, with vague old Lady de Kay; so like her to forget them all! Probably too busy, really?

Science, which gradually robs a progressive world of all its privacy, has not yet perfected "wireless" between even the most sympathetic lovers; so that he could not hear Eleanor, in answer to her mother's query, say heedlessly, "Messages? Oh, just the ordinary, I suppose; best wishes, and that sort of thing! . . ."

It was quite a long time before he remembered that there was a second letter.

This was obviously from a stranger, for it was addressed—

"—— Scott-Mahan, Esq.,
The new Club,
Brick Street,
E."

He opened the envelope with quite a feeling of excitement, and read the letter hastily.

"DEAR MR. SCOTT-MAHAN (it ran),

"You will be very surprised to get this letter, but I have been feeling more and more that I must write to you and explain—or try to—Mr. Paston's behaviour to you to-day. I'm afraid that you must have thought him abominably rude, and I'm so sorry that he gave you such a wrong impression, because he is really a *most* charitable and broad-minded man, and he really *does* do such a lot of good among the poor, down here. I'm sure that if he really understood your ideals, he would be the first to want to help them, because his one idea in life is to help the condition of the lower classes, and he gives all his time and energy to it in the most wonderful way.

"I feel that I haven't at all expressed what I meant to say, but perhaps you will understand I didn't want you to think that the Guild as a whole looked on you as a 'reactionary' or 'dangerous' at all, and Mr. Paston tells me he refused affiliation on those grounds. Everything that you said about Beauty and the need for it down here, struck me as so hideously true. I don't think I ever realized it, but that *is* what they never see, poor people, and if you can bring it to them, you will be doing a wonderful work. So please understand that *really* Mr. Paston and the rest of us who are working here all want to help each other; so that if ever your Club wants anything—I mean, extra chairs for concerts, and that sort of thing—you must *not* feel afraid to ask us because of to-day. So far as I go, I should always be only too glad to help it in any way, not that I am

able to do much ; and I am sure Mr. Paston will see your point, later.

"I am very inclined to tear this all up, but I think you may guess what I've tried to say.

"Yours very truly,

"ROSA BROWN."

Humphry read this through again, and at first he duly got the amusement which he had expected from his unknown correspondent. There was something very humorous about Miss Brown explaining Mr. Paston's charity and breadth of mind. Humphry also smiled appreciatively at her naïve idea that he was passing sleepless nights because of what the Guild had thought about him, and he was properly relieved to learn that *she* did not think him dangerous at all! There was something pricelessly simple and childlike about the tone of her whole letter. . . .

But somehow, after a little, he began to feel rather a cad for having laughed at her. After all, she had meant it very well ; and on second thoughts, it was rather splendid of a girl to take all that trouble to defend a man, even if it was only a rotter like Mat Paston. He grew to think rather more of "the timid little girl," as he had called her mentally. And in fact, when he came to balance it all up, it had been very decent of her to mind whether a stranger was or was not unhappy as to what the precious Guild had thought about him. Yes, it was jolly good-natured of the little girl, and he had been a swine to laugh at her for it, especially as she was so sympathetic about his theories.

So that in a condescending sort of way he quite swung round in his opinion of her letter, and when he

sat down to answer it, felt that he must write something friendly in return.

Lady de Kay's had been comparatively easy. He had suggested tea at Mercer Street (where Mrs. Crump had promised him the use of her "best parlour" for his guests), and then they could go round to see the Club. The sole difficulty was about messages to Eleanor. He could not say he had forgotten them! It really *was* hard, because Lady de Kay had given him no lead; and in the end he ignominiously fell back on "greatest haste for country post," and left the business out entirely.

But this letter to Miss Brown, which began by appearing so simple, ended by seeming exactly the reverse.

"DEAR MISS BROWN" (he wrote, in a sudden dash of valour),—

"Thank you very much for your letter. It was kind of you to think about explaining Mr. Paston's behaviour,"—

Here he stopped to look critically at it, and the thing appeared intensely stiff and heavy, in some way. He began by cutting out the last three words; an emendation which he followed up by altering the first "very" into "so." Then, inspired by the self-satisfaction which resulted, he plunged with quite a splash into the necessary falsehood—

"but I can assure you that it was not needed. I quite realize that Mr. Paston and I have different theories socially and politically (though they are not so different as he thinks), and I was, of course, very blunt in expressing mine. In fact, any unpleasantness there

may have been, was just as much my fault as his, and I feel that the only person who ought really to apologize is myself, for having made a scene while you were there!

"Thank you, too, for your offer about chairs, etc., which I certainly shall not forget, though of course I should not like to avail myself of it if Mr. Paston continues to disapprove of the work that I hope to do here. As to your offer of personal help, I am extremely grateful to you. You have already helped a great deal, of course, by your sympathy with my ideas,—the first sympathy with them in fact, that I have met, down here,"—

Before the ink was dry on those last words between the dashes, he had crossed them out of the rough copy. He then raised his pen and poised it in a threatening manner over the sentence immediately before them. "You have already helped . . ."—that was putting it on a bit thick, you know!

And yet—she *had*. Philip; Mat Paston; every one sneered at him as a mad idealist when he held forth on Beauty, Honour, Trust, or Loyalty; but she had understood. She who had worked among them, she who was Mat Paston's avowed right hand, she did not think it mad; she called it splendid. And by that one word, by her look, she had given him the breath of encouragement, which even the blazing furnace of Enthusiasm needs, if it is not to die down into Disillusion.

He took out her letter and read it through again, without a smile upon his face. *She* had not been afraid of putting it on thick! She had tried to set him at his ease; to make him feel that even Paston did not really think him a reactionary; to let him know that she

admired his views. And was he to snub her by a formal letter of bald acknowledgment and thanks?

Humphry, like most men of wide sympathy, was curiously intuitive at moments; and whilst he hesitated, there came to him something almost like a vision. He could imagine, could very nearly see, this girl who was so odd a compound of impulse and timidity, suddenly regretting the letter she had written; feeling that she ought never to have sent it; possibly rushing down to the Guild letter-box, in hopes to intercept it; finding it gone, and fearing that in her anxiety to comfort, in her desire to help, she had done something terrible . . .

Moved by a sudden impulse, he took his pen up once again, to write—

“and if you really mean that you would be willing to give me assistance, I should be more than grateful in a matter where a woman’s taste is far better than a man’s—I mean, in decoration; I want to make my Club beautiful, so far as I can, and I have wonderful ideals, but when it comes to details, no ideas! Could you ever spare a few minutes, to come round and advise me?”

Here he had to stop again. Of course, she could not come alone! Yet the word chaperon seemed to make such a business of this formal visit from a fellow-worker. Perhaps he’d better not ask her, at all? . . . But then another inspiration—

“I should much enjoy showing you and any of your friends” (ah-ha!) “the Club, and with your better experience, you could probably suggest improvements. If you are busy, please do not trouble; I shall

quite understand ; but I could always be here at any time that would suit you.

"Yours very truly,

"HUMPHRY SCOTT-MAHON."

By a strange chance, he had no sooner posted this most genial letter than he experienced all the qualms which he had pictured in Miss Brown.

He had never thought about Mat Paston ! Almost certainly, the letter would be shown to him, and if one might judge from his behaviour of last night, he would certainly read it as an underhand and aristocratic effort to steal away Miss Brown's assistance from him ; her sympathies ; if not, indeed, her very heart !

Worse still—ghastly thought !—what if Miss Brown should also read the letter in that light ?

But this last qualm was purely of the moment ; Miss Brown was not *that* sort ; and it thus occurred to Humphry Scott-Mahon twice in one day to feel himself a cad.

None the less, he waited rather nervously for her answer, growing more and more nervous of a rebuff ; even half expecting a visit from the justly incensed Mat.

He was thus far more elated than the occasion warranted, when Miss Brown's letter came, saying that she would like very much to help ; that usually she was not free till about 6 p.m., but that on Saturdays she got away at 3, and should be delighted to come round and see the Club and give what little help she could, at 4 on Saturday ; if that would suit ?

Thus Saturday found Humphry expecting a yet earlier sightseer than the de Kays with quite a thrill of expectation ; for, after all, who could possibly be

nicer to show round his Club than the sympathetic Miss Brown?—except, of course, the sympathetic Eleanor.

It also found him waiting rather anxiously ; for having realized somewhat late that he must offer her and her friend some tea, he had dashed out and madly bought edibles, teapot, kettle, china, spoons, and everything that he could think of in his hurry. From these, he had brought some home ; others had been faithfully delivered ; but one dealer proved treacherous, and neither teapot nor kettle had arrived. It was thus a question who would knock first, Miss Brown and her companion, or the boy from Robertson & Co.

Miss Brown won ; and Miss Brown without any sign of a companion.

"I hoped you were the teapot !" he said, laughing ; and then it occurred to him that this would probably embarrass her. Of course one could say that kind of thing to Eleanor ; but——

His guest, however, was possibly not so stupid as he had imagined ; for though she looked nervous, she made an answer, certainly not brilliant, but practical.

"Hasn't it come ?" she asked. "But you can make tea in the kettle just as well."

"Yes," answered Humphry ; "only, you see—I've not got a kettle either !" and then they both laughed.

That broke the ice immediately, and both quite forgot all the dull explanations that they had intended to produce, by way of showing just exactly what their letters had and had not meant. They talked about the slums, their work, and their ideals. They got on very well indeed, except that Rosa was dying for her tea, and Humphry for his teapot.

Presently there was a knock, and both pretended quite well that they had forgotten all about the missing articles.

"Oh, that must be the teapot and kettle!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, of course!" she echoed; as though she had been wondering what the knock could mean.

As a matter of fact, it meant only the kettle. Robertson's boy, very small and red, was certain that there weren't no teapot in his basket, and he would have noticed if it had dropped out.

"Well, get on back for it," said Humphry, "and buck up, too; we're in a hurry."

"Oh no," protested Rosa, with a strange firmness under her soft tones; "don't send him back; I expect he's got a long round, and the basket's heavy. Besides, as I tell you, a kettle's every bit as good as any teapot!"

"All right," laughed Humphry, "as long as you know how to make it so!"

Really, he decided that she was quite splendid about the whole affair. She had never even mentioned the fact that she had not brought anybody with her, whereas most girls either would not stir an inch without a chaperon, or else made it very clear that they were doing something wildly venturous and dimly wicked. Then, as to that teapot, lots of women would have got stuffy and rude, or said with a false smile that it really didn't matter in the least; but she seemed to think it ever such good fun, and said that she loved picnics. She knelt upon the uncarpeted floor, too, and poured the boiling water for the merest instant into a jug, whilst he dropped tea frantically into a kettle empty only for two seconds. He saw clearly enough that he should have

dropped it into a full kettle, wherein it would have floated dismally; and he admitted quite frankly that she was brilliant.

"Oh," she answered, "one gets *used* to makeshifts;" and for one moment all the animation died in her, and she was just the sad, insignificant, weary little thing that she had been when he first saw her.

Whilst they drank their tea in the bleak club-room, and talked of how to brighten it, Humphry decided that her beauty—or was "charm" the right word?—did not depend at all upon her features. In a photograph she would be plain. Yes; nor did it rely on colour. No; it was when she smiled, or even when her eyes filled with sympathy—like then! Perhaps, really, the true thing to call her was "attractive"? She had such a wonderful way of making one feel quite at home with her (except when she was over-modest, suddenly), and of making one believe that she agreed with all that you held true, and thought it wonderful. That gift, in some way, was reflected in her eyes; he thought that he had never seen eyes so tender, so full of universal love and pity. Why, she had looked at that red and unresponsive boy from Robertson's as though he had been an angel in distress! She must be very easy to impose upon! . . .

Probably, in his effort to combine analysis with dialogue, he had been staring at her; for suddenly she assumed the mien that he did not admire, looked painfully self-conscious, and became generally the "timid little girl" again.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Scott-Mahon," she said nervously, "that you must have thought me very odd to write to you?"

"Why, no, not a bit," he replied abruptly, conscious

that he had lost touch with her, and not quite able to explain the fact.

"You see," she went on, with an effort, "I felt you must be thinking such awful things of Mr. Paston, and he is really not a *bit* like that. I don't know what was the matter with him that day. Generally, although he's terribly bitter against many things that he feels wrong, he is so ready to encourage *anyone* who is trying to do good."

She paused for a moment, as though somehow entangled in her apologia, and Humphry, very ill at ease, hastened to try and avert the need for its continuation.

"I'm quite sure he does a lot himself," he said, with more tact than conviction.

"He's *wonderful*," she burst out, with that overpowering enthusiasm which he had seen before; a force that seemed to animate her with a new life from within. "It's marvellous to help a man like that; he's almost like a saint."

Humphry found himself unable to support her in this theory, and as though chilled by his embarrassed silence, she reverted to her mood of child-like *naïveté*.

"You'll think it rather curious of me to talk of him like that," she said; "but he and I have worked together for so long, and are such old friends. We were engaged once," she stuttered on, to his great misery, "and I suppose we are now, in a way, only—one never has any money, and it's all so hopeless. . . . You see, he gives all his time to the Guild for nothing, and I—my father went bankrupt when I was a child. He was the mayor of Banbury, but things went all wrong. A woman I used to know then, who writes books, is wonderfully good to me, and I typewrite her work from her dictation, and

all that. But of course it's hopeless to think of marrying, and so—he's so thoughtful, always—he said it was only fair to let me go ; and that's why he always calls me Miss Brown in front of people now ; he says that it is better."

She broke off suddenly, and laughed, as she said, "I don't know why I've told you all this, quite ; except that it saves such a lot of trouble, doesn't it, to tell people things straight away ?"

Humphry could not light upon the proper comment, but none seemed necessary. The daylight had faded, and the leaping flames of a clear winter fire threw an air of comfort and repose even upon the bare walls of this cheerless room. The scene was set well enough for confidences, and Humphry, puffing at a pipe, which she had begged him to light, because she "knew that he was longing for it," felt her inspire in him the same reciprocal feeling which had urged him in the first place to write so friendly an answer to her letter. It is an old known fact that those who give most freely gain the most. To accept her nervous little outpourings, and let her have nothing in return, seemed a most churlish way of dealing, and one most likely to humiliate her. So that before he meant to do it, or knew how he had done it, there he was—almost incredibly—telling her of how love had entered into *his* mission, and what had sent him out to help the poor.

Rosa was just as interested in that as in everything else of interest to anyone ; indeed, rather more, for her eyes lit up as she got, through the eyes of another, a glimpse of Romance in a romantic setting, such as had never entered into her drab life. Once more, the awkwardness was gone, and all became harmony again.

"You know," she said finally, when he had made the whole thing clear, "I was wondering what made you do this, and longing to ask; but I thought it would be rather rude! It seemed so funny, somehow—I don't quite know why. Of course, there are lots of Oxford men here, but they're mostly in big settlements, and working on accepted lines, you know. I couldn't see why you should leave everything. I suppose 'Burcot'—is that what you called it?—is a beautiful old place? It sounds quite wonderful."

"Yes," said Humphry; "but it's stagnation. I couldn't have stayed on there, anyhow. After all, what is one doing in the world, like that?"

Rosa was thinking deeply. "I don't believe *I* could have left it," she said slowly. "There's nothing in the world so splendid as an old English place. . . . I went to Haddon, once."

Humphry missed the pathetic bathos of that last remark.

"Oh yes, you'd have left it," he said. "Anybody would. One can't simply rest upon one's laurels; especially when they were gained about four hundred years ago, and are distinctly faded!"

"I'm afraid *I* should," she persisted, "if they were beautiful. I worship beauty, and that's why what you said about the East End struck me as so true. And it's just because you feel like that, that I think it's so wonderful of you to have left it all for *this*."

Humphry, so lately despised as idler, suddenly found himself canonized as saint! He forgot that Mat Paston stood beside himself in the calendar, and really found the preferment slightly to his taste.

No man minds the halo put upon his head by an admiring woman, so long as it is understood that he

may keep some vestige of the cloven hoof: and Rosa never took him for a prig. Whether the topic were religion, morals, or themselves, whether they were grave or earnest, they talked as people of the world; those who have probed life, found all its good, no less than all its evil, and see no sin in speaking frankly about both. This simple Miss Brown could talk, when she had lost her diffidence, and even if she had—as she declared—no education, had managed to pick up a lot of knowledge and experience.

"And Miss—de Kay," she asked, reverting once again to a subject that seemed to delight her, just as much as him, "has *she* ever worked in the East End at all?"

"No," answered Humphry; "but she and her mother are coming down on Monday, and I'm going to show them the Club."

"Oh, but how lovely for you!" she exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. "Won't she think it all wonderful, in such a short time? I *do* envy you."

Once again the warmth of her sympathy moved Humphry to an impulse.

"I say," he asked keenly, in a boyish manner, "couldn't you get off a bit earlier that day, and come along to tea at four in my rooms? The landlady's going to let me have her 'best parlour,' so it will be quite a big affair! Can't you manage it? That would be *most* jolly, and Miss de Kay would enjoy meeting you so much."

Certainly, Rosa would hugely enjoy meeting Miss de Kay; and so the party was arranged, with much expression of delight on either side.

And now Rosa, honestly, must go. She had stayed ages, she was afraid, but she *had* enjoyed herself so

much. So had Humphry. And they were both looking forward to Monday, four o'clock.

Rosa would not allow him to pilot her back to the Guild ; she was quite used to slums, and everybody knew her, thanks. So they shook hands, and Humphry, before he shut the door finally, shouted after her that he would be sure to get a teapot before Monday.

He turned back into the club-room, and found that it looked bleak and empty. He certainly must start to decorate. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

THE Great Day had arrived, and everything was ready.

Mrs. Crump had entered into the affair with verve, even to the extent of buying special flowers for the best parlour. As to this last, she announced in an appropriate whisper that it would be quite safe Mr. Scott-Mahon having the use of it for his ladies, seeing as the gentleman what had it off her never came in of an evening until six, and they would be out to the Club by then. After which she knocked in a tentative way upon its door, and after bowing her head to listen for some moments, smiled back in a reassuring way at Humphry, and entered rather timidly. Once inside, however, she became herself again, and hastily moving the glass-cased clock to a position more exactly in the mantel's centre, she turned to Humphry, and said, "*There, sir!*" as though she had performed some sort of conjuring trick and was waiting for applause.

"That would be grand, Mrs. Crump," said he. "It's a most splendid room."

It was the splendour, rather, of a bygone age; of the days when open-work covers and antimacassars reigned supreme, when oily head-marks showed upon red sofas edged with gimp, when great fat tassels hung down everywhere, and anything reputed of some value

was rapidly hid under glass. The room was on the ground-floor, looking out into the street, and its glories were veiled from pedestrians by thick lace curtains, which London's fog had dyed its favourite hue. Some flowers grew upon a table in the window, and the room's general atmosphere promised better health to them than to its human occupants.

But now the bold Humphry had let some air into the place ; flowers were everywhere ; the tea-things hid a lot of the gay chenille table-cloth ; and Humphry had begun to ask Mrs. Crump for crumpets, but hastily changed his mind and chosen tea-cakes.

Yes, everything was ready.

He had tidied up his own little room, in case they wanted to see that, and it seemed to him now that all things possible had been done to make a pleasant welcome for his guests. He sat down happily to wait for their arrival.

The nights had been so full of work, the days of thought and scheming, that, busy with new interests, he had found curiously little time to reflect on old relationships. Only now, when a meeting with Eleanor was so near, did he realize how he had been longing for it, for the chance to show her all that he had done upon her inspiration, and the much more that he soon hoped to do. He hoped she wouldn't be disappointed not to meet Philip? He had not thought of that, till now. But there was Miss Brown, anyhow, who knew so much about the work ; and she was sure to interest Eleanor. . . .

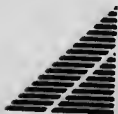
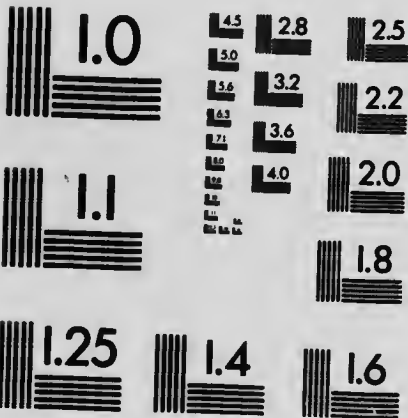
But that must be their taxi ; not many motor-cars were heard in Mercer Street !

Humphry, as he rushed eagerly to the door and wrestled with its antique lock, wished rather that they



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had come, even, in a cab. A taxi was so out of place, somehow, down here, and would only prejudice the neighbours against him as still more of a "toff." . . . Whilst he thus reasoned, a little resentful, and quite oblivious of the manner of his own arrival, the latch yielded and he hurried out, to find the taxi drawn beside the kerb and a small crowd already watching the argument in progress.

"It says Mercer St. as plain as life, Miss, and you can see it for yourself," said the chauffeur, and pointed to the corner name-plate.

"I don't think this *can* be it," protested the glorious young lady with the splendid furs, and gazed haughtily out of the window. She did not mean to get out in *this* sort of street, for nothing!

But suddenly her tone changed. "Why, there *is* Mr. Scott-Mahon, mother!" she cried; and as he came near, "How do you do? Here's mother. So we really *have* arrived! We weren't sure whether we were right?"

"Yes," said Humphry, as he held the door yet wider open for her and Lady de Kay to enter; "this is my abode—a very humble one, I'm afraid!" For the first time, he wondered whether he should have asked them down here.

"Oh, I don't think so at *all*," said Eleanor, in society tones; but Humphry noticed that she kept her smart gown very carefully away from its door-posts. This was a fact observed also by Mrs. Crump, who had hurried upstairs, and now snorted after the superior young lady. Hoity, toity! giving herself airs like that! Well, she did well, with those modern hussies of sluts, if *her* house was half so clean as 19, Mercer Street! . . .

Humphry, very much ashamed, could not resist the

disloyalty of a sly smile at the hurt landlady. He had forgotten, now, a second thing—his first suspicions of her bedclothes.

Suddenly Eleanor swung round, and very nearly detected him flagrantly in the crime.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Scott-Mahon," she exclaimed, "*do* see if you can't stop the taxi? We paid him, stupidly; and we shall never get *anything* again, down here!" Whereat Mrs. Crump, with yet another socialistic snort, went down to see about the tea-cakes.

When Humphry got back to the room, Lady de Kay was on the sofa, gazing around through a critical lorgnette, and Eleanor hastily put down a photograph.

"What an original room," she said, in amusement, which she knew that he would share. "And then I suppose you've a bedroom as well?"

"Oh no," laughed Humphry. "Nothing *half* so grand! This, even, isn't mine; I've only got a small bed-sitting-room. You see, I want every penny I can save for the Boys' Club, and things."

"Oh yes," put in Lady de Kay, "we're longing to hear all about that, afterwards!"

"*And* to see it," said Eleanor, politely. "It'll be quite an experience. You know, Mr. Scott-Mahon, I had no idea everything was so *different*, somehow, here in the East End."

At this moment, Mrs. Crump entered with the tea, and Humphry, anxious to avoid that sort of topic, asked—

"Which way did you come?"

"Oh, along the most impossibly named streets!" began Eleanor in her most amusing manner, so that Lady de Kay was quite relieved. Her daughter had seemed rather cross, so far, and she was afraid that

she meant to crush this poor, nice Mr. Scott-Mahon. But here she was, being quite gay and laying herself out to entertain. "And the names weren't a *bit* funnier than the streets; we began to think we had gone on too far, and landed in a foreign country! *Such* odd people everywhere, and nobody we asked had ever even *heard* of such a place as Mercer Street, and still we buzzed along! And the further we buzzed, the weirder and weirder the streets, the houses, *and* the people grew. I told mother it was a sort of progressive nightmare!"

Lady de Kay laughed with just as much gusto as though this sally had been new to her, and Humphry's tribute was polite.

"All the same," he could not help adding, "it is a real nightmare to some of the poorer people who never 'progress' *out* of it!"

Eleanor suddenly took up her *rôle* again; but just too late, for Mrs. Crump, all stiffness, had gone out.

"Ah, yes; I know—that's just the awful part of it; and we're so keen to hear about it afterwards."

"Meanwhile—tea!" said Humphry, in a better mood.

Lady de Kay smiled. "*Most* refreshing. And then we must hurry round at once and see your Club, or we shall owe a fortune to the taxi!"

"Not in *too* much of a hurry, I hope?" said Humphry, once more chilled. "I want a good chat first, and I've asked some one in 'o meet you; a Miss Brown, that I've met down . . . e, and who has done no end of slumming work."

"How odd it seems, meeting any one at *all* down here!" said Eleanor. "There don't seem any houses. . . . Is she at all amusing?"

Humphry had not thought of her like that. "Well,"

he answered, "we've only spoken about rather serious things; but yes, I should say she certainly has a distinct sense of humour. Only, she's a little shy at first."

"Why are people that one only meets once *invariably* 'shy at first'?" asked Eleanor. "Oh, I do *hate* shy people; they make me so nervous! You don't think she will sit like this, do you, and then upset her tea? I'm sure that I shall have hysterics." She was really in great form, and gave as good an imitation of a shy girl as was possible with the materials at her disposal.

"My dear," gasped her admiring mother, "how *can* you look so hideous!"

Humphry was just about to try and explain the coming guest more fully, when a tinkle of the bell announced that she had come; and almost immediately she entered. The first glance at her, as she came round the door, comforted a host who had begun to be a little nervous of his wisdom. She was dressed in the same old tailor-made serge dress and wore a hat which, somehow, one forgot to notice; but her eyes sparkled with excitement, as though this tea-party were quite an event to her, and she looked distinctly pretty when she smiled a welcome at her host.

Humphry made the formal introductions. Rosa, holding out a hand to Lady de Kay, suddenly realized, too late, that the elder woman had only meant to bow, and the red coursed across her cheeks. She was used to a society where friendship was less hedged with forms. And when her gaze fell on the other guest, her discomfort was finished and complete. Eleanor was dressed for shopping, in a close-fitting grey pelisse, a simple thing of double-figured guineas, to which a

big hat, a fox stole, and a vast muff with hanging tails, to match, lent the requisite Gainsborough effect. As Rosa's eye was confronted with this glory, and travelled back to Lady de Kay's jewellery and lace, her happiness fell from her, and she stood dull-eyed, humiliated, plain.

It is a very good woman indeed who can feel independent of her clothes.

"*This* is Mrs. Crump's 'best parlour,' you see, Miss Brown!" exclaimed Humphry, feeling things a little awkward.

Rosa, nervously gazing round, and long since used to dinginess or squalor, rather missed the point of his remark, and did not support the rumour of her sense for fun.

"It's a nice, big room, isn't it?" she said, with ready interest. "You ought to try and get it for yourself, some day."

Eleanor, who measured apartments by a County scale, gazed down at this odd little creature, as though from a superior height of incalculable feet. One might have thought, from her look, that she regarded such simplicity as something very near indecency. A "nice, big room," indeed! . . .

"It's extraordinarily hard to *find* a decent room down here," said Humphry, in rather awkwardly obvious defence of his new guest.

"Really?" answered Eleanor. "Everything seems different here. It's very interesting indeed." But clearly it quite failed to interest her. For the moment she was more intrigued as to this odd Miss Brown, and longed to find out everything about her. She turned to her with quite a friendly smile. "Mr. Scott-Mahon tells me you know everything about it, Miss

Brown, and do such a lot of work among the poor. Have you *always* lived down here?"

"Oh no," said Rosa, taking the query as it had been meant, without offence. "No, only for the last few years. We—we always *used* to live out in the country; at Banbury. My father was the mayor there."

Out it had come! Even before it was spoken he felt that he was dreading something; and now he knew what it had been. Yet, when she gave him that credential, on Saturday, it had not sounded terrible in any way. Now—now it made him feel warm, because—well, because he knew that the de Kays would be amused at any one who blurted out with hasty pride the fact that her father had once been—the Mayor of Banbury! And, indeed, himself even, now that he was in the proper atmosphere, he could see something ridiculous about it. Atavistic instincts murmured to him dimly that Banbury was a preposterous place of which ever to be mayor! He had never noticed, till this moment, something rather common about Miss Brown's way of speaking. . . .

"*Really?*" said Eleanor, again; and Humphry leapt up to get some one at large something or other to eat, or else to drink.

"How is your daughter's friend, Lady Hill?" he asked Lady de Kay, as he held out the cake to her, and she broke off one corner of a male-hewn slice.

"*My friend?*" interrupted Eleanor, who seemed to make much more than every fourth remark. "Why, she hates me! She's always as spiteful as she possibly can be."

"But I thought you were her *protégée?*" laughed Humphry.

"Simply because she thinks that puts me under

her, somehow, and so makes me less dangerous! You see, I'm the only person ruder than herself, and I'm not half so old. That's why she's so very 'good' to me."

"My dear!" gasped out her mother, in delighted protest.

Rosa, naturally, could not make very much of this. She found herself distinctly in the cold when these smart creatures babbled cynically of friends whom she did not know, and they seemed mostly to dislike; whilst if the now distracted host brought her into touch again by asking about some detail of her work or local life, Lady and Miss de Kay showed only so much interest as was just polite. Eleanor, at one time, started to talk with Rosa, in quite a promising manner, about the problems of poverty, much as she had talked at Burcot; but Rosa, at her ease immediately, soon exposed her, quite unconsciously, as a mere sentimental theorist, who had never even thought of practice. The proud Miss de Kay, finding herself thus coming into a lower seat than suited her peculiar position, rapidly turned to subjects of a nature flatteringly above this little Miss Brown's fuzzy and ill-coiffured head.

It was a big triangle for any man to undertake.

"Eleanor, dear," said Lady de Kay very soon indeed, in the slow, self-reproachful tones of one who breaks up a delightful party, "I'm very sorry, but——! I really think, Mr. Scott-Mahon, we *ought* to go on now and see your Boys' Club that Eleanor is so very anxious to see: otherwise we shall never get back! We're going to this lovely new thriller-play at Drury Lane, which always starts so ridiculously early."

"*And* there's the taxi!" said Eleanor. "I hope you've got your cheque-book with you, mother?"

Lady de Kay, who thought Rosa a dear, good, little

thing, was very pressing in the invitation for her to crush into their costly taxi, and so accompany them to the Club. "Ah, *do* now!" she urged, with the odd ancestral Irish taint that emerged about twice yearly in her speech, and almost hourly in her aimless good-humour. "Mr. Scott-Mahon says you know everything about the work, and I'm quite sure that *he* knows practically nothing!" At which, as though fearing that he might be hurt, she tapped his arm almost lovingly with her tortoiseshell lorgnettes.

But Rosa was firm; she had to hurry on to the Guild (which Humphry knew would not be open for an hour); and so it was quite a County load that glided in West-End manner round to Brick Street.

"What a funny little thing!" said Eleanor, with more amusement than malice, as they left the pavement. "I'm afraid we talked *much* too much about people that she didn't know?"

"I think she was quite happy," Humphry answered in politeness.

"One can see she has a happy nature," put in Lady de Kay; "but I wish she hadn't told us such depressing stories—I shall dream of them to-night!"

"She does a wonderful amount of good, they tell me," Humphry said. He felt that his guest had not been quite appreciated.

"I'm *sure* she does," cried Eleanor, with much emphasis, but no conviction.

"I thought you'd like to meet her?" The host spoke in tones so doubtful as to make the assurance nearly an apology.

"I'm afraid *she* was awfully embarrassed, poor girl!" Eleanor said. "You didn't tell us she was quite a common little thing."

"*Is she?*" answered Humphry, with superior coldness. "I don't think one notices anything like that down here." He suddenly felt quite a prig, and realized with horror that he was actually turning the tables, and snubbing—Eleanor! He lowered his tone on the instant and added, almost deprecatingly, "She doesn't drop her h's, *does she?*"

Eleanor laughed gaily. "Oh no, not that; but she's the real sort of girl who has 'been' somebody—and *ought* to be a governess! (You heard about her father, didn't you?) Poor thing! I *was* so sorry for her. I told you she would upset her cup, and she very nearly did! Mother, how *could* you be so cruel as to let her see that you weren't meaning to shake hands?"

This unwonted burst of sympathy was rather spoilt by an imitation of Miss Brown alternately protruding and retracting a most shaky finger. Even Lady de Kay could not see any real fun in this, but luckily the chill of its reception was somewhat masked by the excitement of arrival at the Club.

"Here we are!" cried Humphry, cheerily.

So assured, Eleanor did not raise the objections heard in Mercer Street; but, as she said, "How splendid!" she gazed in astonishment at the little house, outwardly much like a thousand others they had passed.

Humphry flung the door open, and invited them to enter, proudly.

"Delightful!" cried Lady de Kay, raising her glasses and peering round the ugly, cheerless room that looked so dingy in the fading light.

"Splendid!" said Eleanor again.

Humphry suddenly got a glimpse of his darling Club—the home of so much interest, such possibilities—

as it must look to them: an ordinary, small, ill-furnished room, and wondered why the devil he had brought them there.

He lit the gas, and that, mixed with daylight, seemed to render the place yet more gloomy.

"Of course, I'm going to do it all up presently," he murmured in apology.

"What fun!" said Eleanor in even tones. "I think that 'll be *quite* thrilling," and she took a hitch in her skirt, which was touching the boards.

"I'm so sorry," put in Humphry, who seemed to do nothing but apologize. "I have a woman in to sweep it every other morning, but I don't see exactly what she does for her money!"

Remembering that it had rained last night, and knowing that to wipe one's boots was not a habit of the East, he decided that he could not possibly ask the de Kays to inspect the little rooms upstairs. A pity, as they wouldn't see the bagatelle! He ought to have got old Mrs. Russell along this morning, but he had been so busy about tea.

His guests, however, appeared to imagine that there was nothing more to see, and were entirely satisfied.

"Well, I call it all *most* interesting, Mr. Scott-Mahon," said Lady de Kay, lowering her glasses with finality.

"I think it's splendid," said Eleanor. She did not seem to get beyond that adjective.

"Is it at all how you imagined?" he inquired conversationally.

"Well, *I* imagined more of a real '*club*,'" said Eleanor. She was so refreshingly outspoken.

"Do you know, Mr. Scott-Mahon," Lady de Kay broke in hurriedly, "it's very sad, and you'll think us in

a great hurry, but—I really think—if we're to get to Drury Lane——”

“Well, it *has* been so kind of you to come all that way just to see this,” said Humphry.

“Oh, but it's been most interesting—quite an experience, hasn't it, Eleanor? And besides, we came also to see *you*.” Whereat, with a very friendly smile, she held out her hand and shook his warmly. “Good-bye, and thank you so much.”

“Yes, thank you *so* much,” repeated Eleanor; “and it *has* been jolly.” She sank back on the padded seat of the taxi with the relief of a man who, after travel in strange lands and upon unfriendly seas, finds himself in a first-class carriage on the way to London and civilization. She was dying to see whether her skirt had got really stained.

“Where to?” asked Humphry.

“The Carlton Hotel, please,” beamed Lady de Kay.

“Good-bye, once more, and thank you very much.” . . . Both its occupants waving farewell—Lady de Kay in a kittenish manner with her hand, Eleanor, more statuesque, with the vast muff—their taxi leapt forward, sped by an ironic cheer from a few ragamuffins.

Humphry, standing on the kerb, was left discouraged, and with a miserable sense of failure.

The Great Day had not been at all of a success; and he went back to his little Club, feeling that the neighbours were scoffing at him for having such “toff” friends. But that was not what worried him.

Of course he saw now he had been a fool to think that two rich women, women of the world, would care to come that distance just to look at—this! He gazed at the bleak room with a lack-lustre eye, and then

laughed bitterly. Fool, indeed! What had becom.
of his old sense of humour?

He had only asked them; so ran his defence, before
himself as judge; he had only asked them because
Eleanor had been so keen. Yes, Eleanor—there lay
the sting. Lucy de Kay's effusive difference he
understood: it was Society's politeness. But Eleanor
who had inspired him; Eleanor who —

Yet when he thought of Eleanor's casual behaviour,
his feelings somehow were not those of a flouted lover.
His old emotions of misery and self-contempt, when
snubbed by her at Burcot, were his no longer. Misery
he felt; but when he remembered Eleanor with Mrs.
Crump, Eleanor with himself, Eleanor with his club-
house, Eleanor with Rosa, his prime feeling was of
resentment and—yes!—scorn.

Among the county's idlers her behaviour might pass
for originality; but here, among life's realities, it seemed
damnably like rudeness.

CHAPTER XV

OASIS

THE visit of inspection left a bitter taste with Humphry.

Eleanor, whom he had but lately thought so broad in mind, was shown in a flash to be of an appalling narrowness. It had seemed that she was of the grandeur which can overleap class barriers, and now only too clearly she proved herself of the smallness which can see no further than its own petty sphere.

Humphry, suddenly gazing down with a scornful pity on this girl to whom he had so lately looked up in reverence, was able to see from his new standpoint how sham a business that had been. Poor fool, how short a time ago had he believed that he was doing all this, like a knight of old, for Eleanor's dear sake!

Yet why "poor fool"? It was a merciful delusion, for it had sent him out to be a man, to make his life and personality. Through imagined fear of her contempt he had come to realize how utterly he scorned himself.

Now that was over. He had climbed up a ladder of which he had not realized the flimsiness; and that it had crumbled under him as he stepped from its topmost rung, could not affect the glorious truth that through it he stood now upon the heights where men could work out their own destinies, and realize themselves in freedom. *He was free!* Eleanor meant nothing to

him ; he was not pledged to her ; and no one knew of his inane fool's paradise.

The only thing was—that Miss Brown ! He wished he had not told her about Eleanor. Really, it was awkward. In his purblind enthusiasm he had spoken, he remembered with a flush of shame, almost as though they really were engaged, instead of—— But how could it matter what any one might think ? Thoughts did not bind one ; and all his ties, the tie with Eleanor no less than that which she had cut, the tie with Burcot—all of them were cut.

Yes, *he was free !* His life-ambition realized at last ! Free to develop as he wished ; free to——

The only thing was—Philip !

Philip was a little of a nuisance to one who hankered to get clear of fetters. Philip was so clinging, and had such a number of ideas. Philip thought that it was all very fine and all that, old man, but after all, unless one was eventually going to make the Club a sort of anteroom to Church——

What a fool he had been, ever to bind himself to Philip ! Why had he not been strong, dared to practise his ideals, and started a Club that was absolutely *his* ?

Still, there was Philip ; and there he seemed likely to remain.

Of course he had been right in some things : Humphry quite admitted that. He was right about their aloofness and mistrust. He was right, too, about their trying to make what they could from the Club. To give a boy a suit or to allow him credit was certainly to lose a member, for now, he would feel, when he was on the gaining side, *now* was the best time to leave ! But in this, as in so many things, Humphry wondered whether everything might not be due to the wrong

system of their Club. Perhaps a little more faith in them would make them far more worthy of it? Philip acted as a strict schoolmaster; he must expect, then, only to gain obedience by constant watching. And did not the very fact of their being, as Mat Paston crisply put it, "Church," make the boys feel that all this was merely a pleasant lure to trap them for the congregation? Yes, to a broad-minded individualist who wished to work on his own lines, Philip was decidedly a nuisance!

And now there was this business of the Harvest Festival.

Philip insisted that it was nothing of the sort. It had no connection whatever with any service of the Church. It was merely a Pleasant Evening, and it had been a great success in the Club that he used to run himself. (Humphry got rather weary of that Club, which was curiously like the "pore first 'usbing" of the lower comic papers.) Yes, it *was* late for a Harvest Festival, and that was just his point—it wasn't one! What was it? Well, it was a way of showing these boys that London did not make up all the world, or even all of England. They would have the place decorated up with fruits and corn and vegetables, and he had got a little paper, quite light, that he had read at his own old Club, where it had been a great success. After all, he supposed Humpy (by which vile name he would still call the angry Humphry) did not mean *only* to give these lads a place to sit and play in? Well, if they'd no lectures or concerts yet to give them, why not this? It might send some of them Back To The Land—who knew?—and the sight of the fruit, combined with his little lecture, would draw their minds to how much they all owed to Nature's bounty and the

great laws of creation. (Humphry here saw symptoms of a moral ending.) Besides, down at the old Club they had given all the fruit away to the lads afterwards, and that would attract a whole lot of new members. Anyhow, it wasn't all mere Utility, was it? And an evening like that, among Nature's bounty, would provide a regular oasis in their wilderness. . . .

Philip seemed rather pleased with the sound of that word "oasis," for he used it more often even than "Nature's bounty," and Humphry foresaw a good deal of them in the little paper. Still, Philip was intensely keen, so that finally he said, with what good grace he could, "All right, old fellow, then let's do it." But mentally he put the notion down as a mistake, and was certain that nobody would come to anything so childish as a Harvest Festival.

It soon appeared, however, that Philip was right once again, if at least one might judge from the popularity of the night set apart for decoration. Ten days had passed, and brought them near to the event. It had been announced that the Club would shut on Wednesday, so as to leave time to get ready for the "Harvest Gala" on Thursday.

"So you can't come and make a row *that* night," concluded Philip, with unusual geniality; "but perhaps one or two of you who are active and strong will come and give us a hand? We shall want some one to hang things up across the room, and so on."

A lot of them seemed either strong or active, for Wednesday found an almost record gathering outside the door.

"*Hallo!*" cried Humphry. "I'm afraid if you *all* help, we shall never get along; there'll be such a crush, we shan't ever move! But I don't know how to pick

out half a dozen. Here, who's good at swinging along rafters, and all that sort of thing?"

Up went practically every hand. Humphry laughed, and picked out four near to him at random. "Now, we want two strong 'uns, for real work. Don't all put your hands up, this time!"

And they did not, indeed. Humphry, knowing them, was not surprised. What did make him wonder was the fact that amongst the few who raised a grimy fist was Joe.

Humphry picked him out at once. "Oh, *you're* the man, Joe," he said, in a friendly way. "If you're game to help, you'll do for both of them!" At this they laughed, for they thought Humphry quite a humourist by now. Joe looked not too amiable, by any means—perhaps he could not—but promptly lurched forward, as though duly game.

Humphry, who had not seen him since the night of their great battle, two weeks back, was delighted, and smiled at him as he passed; but Joe, looking rather embarrassed, went inside with only just a flicker of his eye.

Certainly he helped. Equally, he threw a pear at one of his fellow workers, and got him full between the eyes; but he apologized, and gave as his excuse that it was rotten; a fact, indeed, already obvious enough.

Philip drew his colleague into a top room, by signs.

"I say, Humpy," he opened, in the familiar official whisper. "I wish you hadn't let that fellow Joe in."

Humphry was surprised. "Why, Phil, I was just going to say you were right again; we hurled him out like a dog, and he came cringing back, as though ashamed."

"Ye—es," said Philip, as though hating to abjure

the privilege of being right; "but I don't trust him, quite. He's a rough beggar, and he's too big for our crowd. How can *we* keep him in order?"

"We can't, Phil; we've just got to trust him." Here was the old argument.

"Exactly what I think you're wrong to do."

"Well," remarked Humphry, "I'm like the old lady who gave to every beggar, because she'd rather be swindled ninety-nine times than refuse some one genuine, the hundredth. So I mean to trust him."

He turned away, and went downstairs again. After all, it was *his* Club.

Rosa had offered her help directly she heard of the Gala, and Humphry rather wondered what Paston felt about these evenings when she deserted his Boys' Guild, but did not like to say anything; so gratefully accepted. Now he went down to her, and asked her what she thought about it.

She turned round, her face flushed with excitement. This was splendid—just like Christmas decorations!—and most of the effective touches had been her's.

"Oh, trust him," she said, when she heard the facts. "*Do* trust them, Mr. Scott-Mahon; don't be bullied out of that!" (She had gathered the pronunciation of his name from Philip.)

"I've been bullied too much already," remarked Humphry, half in earnest, "for a man who's mad on Liberty! The whole of this business is right against all of my ideas." It seemed quite natural to tell her things like this; she always understood, somehow.

"I know," she answered; "but, honestly, I think they will enjoy it."

Women were not admitted when the night arrived, but if Rosa could have seen the audience, she would

have felt more confident. Even Humphry repented of his grudging capitulation to Philip's scheme when he saw all these beaming faces. The room was absolutely packed. Every bench held two more boys than any manufacturer intended; those who had got only standing-room rubbed their backs against the decorations, in spite of every protest; and one or two, among them Joe, perched somehow on the window-sill.

Even Joe was grinning.

Really, it was an inspiring sight, and Humphry felt that after barely three weeks of the work it was a marvellous result. As with the village infants at a Christmas tree, nobody looked at the centre of attraction—it was as though there had not been an apple in the place; but they all whistled greetings to each other, or nudged their neighbours' backs, and the whole packed room seemed to vibrate with magnetism and excitement.

Humphry began to fear that when, so to speak, the curtain rose, their show would not live up to this keen anticipation.

And now Philip rose from out behind the sheaf of corn that had half hidden him, like Iolanthe from the waves.

This move was greeted with uproarious applause. Humphry, seated close beside the lecturer, looked smilingly, but with a little nervousness, along the room. He remembered that tense atmosphere at school, sometimes, when masters lost control, and boys reigned in their stead. He only hoped that Philip would be brief, and leave out all that bit about bounty and oasis. This was a gathering that needed tact.

He looked along especially at Joe.

Nobody, now, could call Joe taciturn or surly. His

rough-hewn face was one square mouth, from which there issued stentorian applause. He seemed to be roaring, "Oo-er! oo-er! oo-er!" but that was possibly an East-End cheer?

Philip raised his hand, in flattered protest, and smiled in a most gentle, friend-like manner.

This made Humphry yet more apprehensive; but, to his wonder, the uproar obediently died. He looked anxiously at Joe, and saw that he was picking grapes busily from the adjacent gas-bracket.

Humphry, half-amused, stared at him hard. Presently, their eyes met, and Joe with a hang-dog smirk stopped harvesting. But, presently, he saw him pocket three bananas.

Philip, happily, was nervous, and too busy with his notes, at first, to act detective. His little paper was a trifle prosy, but the bursts of applause, so noisy as to bear a hint of irony, encouraged him, and soon he was improvising happily; telling stories with morals, quite at ease, in his Pleasant Evening mood, his gaze roaming contentedly along the happy faces.

Suddenly his tone changed. Those wandering eyes had lit upon the boys who had standing room only. One hand behind the back, they were picking fruit from the decorated wainscot, and passing it generously down the rows.

"Now, listen," said Philip, very sternly. "No fruit must be picked during the address. If any boy perseveres in that, I'm afraid we shall have to eject——"

At that word, a sympathetic, comprehensive stir went round the room. The magnetism now was painful. It was as though some one had passed a message round, or given them a signal—as, in fact, was possibly the case.

Humphry, horrified at that rash threat, gazed with quick apprehension at Joe, the victim of their first ejection.

Even as he looked, Joe, exerting the full power of his lungs, blew out the gas-jet next him, and put his lips heroically near the doubtlessly hot burner. An ignorant beholder might have thought him bent on suicide.

But Humphry knew *that*, too, at school; along the study passage, in lock-ups.

"Look out, Phil! The lights!" he cried, and started up.

Too late! Joe's air was in the pipes; and as he blew, Vulcan-like, the gas-jets in the room died slowly—no, died quickly down, and flickered off evenly into extinction.

And this was not the end. Immediately, there was an uproar. Loud and clear rose Joe's triumphant "Oo-er! Oo-er! Oo-er!" and as the angry Philip moved a blind step forward, there whistled round his ears, there struck his face, the fruits, not of London, but of England and the earth. He put his arm before his eyes, and bowed beneath this proof of Nature's Bounty.

Humphry, too, was not forgotten, though he received a lesser tribute. But as, among the whirling missiles, he diagnosed not only fruit, but tins and every sort of offering, in one swift flash he understood Joe's look of yesterday, and all those happy, smiling little faces. This was The Revenge.

"The door, Phil!" he whispered, amused in spite of everything as, bent before the storm, he edged towards his friend.

Shoulder to shoulder, they pushed their way to

where a pale gleam showed beneath the door. All was darkness, and none said them nay ; but as they hurried out, wild cheers went after them, and such a volley as made all the others pale.

Humphry and Philip, the last-named furious, stood not on their dignity : they fled. If they did not actually run, they did not stop, at least, to argue. There was ever so much more harvest left—inside.

But to the missionaries, going homeward, there was wafted the sound of much jollity and boyish cheering. None, hearing that, could talk about the sad East End. They had done as Philip hoped ; they had brightened the life, decidedly, of Brick Street with a Pleasant Evening.

It was a regular Oasis.

CHAPTER XVI

HERESIES—AND SCHISMS

HUMPHRY was making a philosopher.

His first mood—of entertainment, of boyish sympathy which entered into this vast “rag”—was certainly followed by a night of discouragement and absolute despair. So this was the end of all his hopes and labours ; this was how Brick Street welcomed his attempt to bring some sunlight into it ! Philip had been right : they would not believe, these people, who seemed almost of another nation and another temper, that one was doing anything for them, and, worst of all, they were content, in a dull, miserable way. They did not want him ; they did not, obviously, want his Club. Well, then, the remedy was simple. He would go.

But in the morning all that seemed childish, weak, unmanly, and he felt ashamed. To crawl away towards the West at the first check ; to creep back to his father, and to the de Kays, admitting that he was a failure, that his ideals had been simply a “mad scheme” ? No ; he had come here to do something, and he meant to do it. He had come to help these people, and if they did not want his help, they would just have to have it ! Yes, he would fight now ; the fight against prejudice, class-barriers, and—Joe ! The thing was more worth doing, now, when it was difficult.

But he would do it in another manner.

Often and often, in life, it is some little stumble, seeming painful for the moment, that wakes a man drifting blindly towards the steep edge of an abyss. He rubs his trivial bruise, looks around, sees in a dazed way the greater peril that was imminent, and so home, by a safer road, in gratitude.

It was thus with Humphry. Brought up sharply by this sudden jar, he was able to look onward and see how near he had come to the total loss of his ideals. Trust, loyalty, or beauty: what place had there been for them in this Brick Street Club? He had tried to terrorize the boys and not to win obedience. He had taken up the bludgeon, and it had come back with violence on his own head. He had thrown Joe out, and Joe had managed to get back. He had proved nothing but a bully who had failed.

"He"? No; it was Philip. The cynicism, the theory, the Club, everything had been not his, but Philip's. He—*he*, of all men!—had let himself be dominated; argued out of his convictions. He had put trust in Beauty—but Philip had believed in Force.

Now, out of the apparent evil there loomed this enormous good; that he might rid himself of Philip, the incubus, the tactless pedagogue, the nuisance! Henceforth, he would practise his own theories; do things his own way, and get them done. Chuck-out and knock-out; all that system must be superseded. Philip had mocked at his ideals, and bent him round to the old way; but now——! The mere fact that these boys could not believe in a man doing anything for any one except himself, made him understand, more clearly than before, what a nightmare life, based upon a survival of the fittest, must have sunk them, so young, to such depths

of cynicism. Now, where before he had attempted merely to cow them and repress, "like dogs," he would set out to raise them, and to make them men. . . .

And even as, full of independence and revolt, he felt a new courage, and breathed an ampler air, seeing before him the golden avenue that led direct to victory, Mrs. Crump poked her head round the door with murmurs of a gentleman; and in came Philip. Philip very angry and determined. Well, they knew who it was, anyhow; Joe and all *his* gang. It merely meant that Mr. Joe would not be admitted ever, in the future. He had said that it was unwise, before. He had a good mind to hand the matter over to the police. What did Humphry think? "Certainly not"? Well, but if there was any serious damage——

There was no doubt whatever, as to damage.

A curious odour, as of market-gardens, met them when they entered. The door had not been locked, but nobody was there. Nor was there anything to steal; what of the harvest offerings remained was squelched upon the walls. Especially behind the spot where they had been, stains and particles of spattered fruit were everywhere. The evening's jollity had ended appropriately with a smashing of the window-glass.

Humphry, dispirited in spite of everything, went wearily upstairs. Draughtsmen and dismembered books strewed all the floor, and on its side, with one leg broken, lay the bagatelle-table, Humphry's greatest pride.

"Too bad!" said Philip angrily, stamping downstairs. "I *knew* it. The little hooligans! Humphry, in self-defence, we shall *have* to put it into the hands of the police. *There!*" he exclaimed, almost in triumph, as he investigated further, "even the piano is full of banana-skins!"

His tragic voice made Humphry laugh. "It doesn't matter," he said airily.

"No; we can have it cleaned, I dare say, and everything repaired; but it's the principle. I don't see how you're going to carry on the Club, if they once think——"

"I'm not *going* to carry the Club on," interrupted Humphry, in quiet but determined tones.

Philip was astounded. "Not—going—to carry—the Club—on? My dear fellow, you're not giving in, already? Why, we've all been through this; there's always opposition at the first, always this mistrust and the desire to swindle one for all they can. But we've got over the worst, now. Joe was a mistake, of course; but he's quits now, and you'll see he won't worry us again. Don't be discouraged, man! I know it's a bit hard, just now, but later on——"

"Oh, it's only *this* Club that I mean to drop," said Humphry. "I'm going to start another, somewhere near. I know this one'd pull round; as you say, they always do; but it was started the wrong way, and there is so much to live down in it."

Philip took this as a personal affront. "Started the wrong way?" he echoed.

"Yes; started on the supposition that they could be crushed. I dare say they can be; but we—or I—don't want to do it. God knows they're crushed enough! I want, now, to try and raise them."

"How do you propose to do it?" asked Philip, bitterly.

"The way I told you, when I first came here; by trust, and by co-operation. I'm going to treat them as though they were human, and I'm going to give them new interests, if I can. I'm not going to run the thing

as a Penitentiary ; I'm going to run it much more like a public school."

Here came Philip's chance. He was so accustomed to rebuke others that he did not relish censure. He flushed, and at Humphry's final words threw his head back in an artificial laugh.

"My *dear* chap," he said, in pity ; "don't expose your ignorance of the East End like that ! The thing is too ridiculous ; you haven't got the right material for it. You can't trust people, unless they deserve it."

"By trusting them," said Humphry, "you make them try to deserve it."

"Oh yes, of course," answered Philip, uneasily. "In *our* class—certainly. But not down here. I used to think so ; but one learns, and that's what's so discouraging. Honestly, old fellow," he said, more at ease, "all this sort of thing does you a lot of credit, but I advise you to stick to what always *has* been done, down here. It's safer to build on the system found best by men whose experience is one of years."

Humphry snorted. "Safer, possibly ; but is it better ? The people who run orphan schools have an experience of many years ; yet they still dress them all like criminals, and put them into rooms with pink dis-temper ! Why should Charity be so hideously ugly ? Why should Religion be so gloomy ? Why should death and Sunday both be things that almost every child in England dreads ? Why is black the colour that everybody connects with our Church ?"

Embarked on his pet theme, he forgot for the moment that he was talking to a clergyman.

"I don't think we need argue about that," said Philip, stiffly. "All I want to tell you is that your 'Public School' system will not wash, down here. These

fellows simply don't know what honour means, and they've no *esprit de corps* whatever."

"No," said Humphry; "that's what I am keen to give them, or part of it. And really, it's the most important part. Once they respect themselves, religion's bound to follow: they will make it for themselves, and the only *real* religion is what each makes for himself."

"There won't be any services?" asked Philip, very calm.

"Yes, if they want them; certainly. I'm not going to dictate to them; there's no merit in compulsory church-going. I don't want to bully them. I want to appeal to their better nature, and then they'll raise *themselves*."

"Hopeless idealism!" said Philip, almost with a sigh. "They've not got the initiative. . . . And naturally you won't have prayers?"

"Oh yes, certainly, in time—for those who want to pray. But no connection with the Church: that *limits* things too much."

"I'm sorry you think that," said Philip, genuinely hurt.

In a moment Humphry was all sympathy. "I say, old fellow," he cried, "I'm so sorry: you know I didn't mean it the least bit like that! I'm always forgetting that you're a parson now, and I wouldn't have said anything against the Church for anything. It's only in this job—but anyhow, old man, I hope we're good enough friends to be able to say our real thoughts. Every one thinks differently, eh? and I wasn't thinking of *you* when I said that. It's only how *can* one say one's only going to help Anglicans, when all of them want help so badly? And then the Church—it seems a sin, almost,

to spend millions on 'converting' savages, whose old faith often makes them live quite decently, and all the time down here there are these Englishmen existing in grime and ugliness, without hope or belief. But I know *you're* different: I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." He stopped, feeling that he wanted kicking.

"I'm not hurt," said Philip, with dignity, "not a bit. But of course I quite realize that if *those* are your 'real thoughts,' it's not much use my offering to help in the new enterprise; so that ends our little partnership, doesn't it? I wish our Club had been more of a success!"

There was an awkward interval, until with unaccustomed tact he said—

"Well, I am due back at the vicarage. I hope your 'Club'" (there was some irony upon this word) "will be a big success. And of course, if ever I can do anything, you'll write to me. Good-bye, old fellow."

One minute later, Humphry stood alone in his dismantled, odorous club-room, and symbolically stretched arms from which had dropped finally the last of fetters.

CHAPTER XVII

CHANGE PARTNERS

THE relation of a man towards his fellows involves a rather comic paradox. So far as he is an individual, his ambition is to stand alone; but because he is a social animal, his first instinct in any crisis is to fall back on the judgment of another. Then, so soon as things are righted, his natural independence re-asserts itself, and he owes it to his self-respect that he shall stand alone again.

The thing in this way becomes a kind of see-saw; and it is in the moments when a man is down that advice-bureaus, solicitors, fortune-tellers, Answerers to Correspondents, friends, and even ministers, gain the full scope for their varied energies.

In this way, too, it will be found that many a person, otherwise entirely sane, exhausts his lifetime in alternate ecstasies of joy at having tied himself in what the world considers a knot of the most baffling nature, and of triumph at having wriggled himself free of it by some unconscious and quite providential knack.

Humphry had extricated himself somehow from his Burcot stewardship, from Eleanor, from Philip; three ties which he now knew ought never to have been contracted. He was up at the top of the see-saw, and proceeded with feverish haste to take full toll of his position.

Within three days everything was settled—nearly. At any rate, if not a single thing was definitely fixed, negotiations had reached a point that rendered finality quite simple. He had found a splendid district for his new adventure; it on a perfectly ideal building, an old gymnasium and swimming bath; almost decided to move from Mercer Street to lodgings, far more pleasant, seen in his long wanderings; and in brief, decided—very nearly—on a dozen things.

The nuisance of this business of decision is that one finds it chill work to decide alone.

Humphry, almost certain that he had done extremely well and ought to clinch his bargains, found himself longing for advice. If he had pushed the matter home, he would have learnt that nobody could possibly dissuade him now. He was not exactly doubtful of his wisdom, but he just wanted somebody with whom to talk things over. . . . In short, and bluntly, he wanted not so much advice as approbation.

And Rosa, of course, seemed the appointed person: in her there blended the two needed qualities, experience and sympathy.

She had called at the Club, late in the day that followed the great Harvest Gala, to hear all about it, and been full of obviously genuine regret and indignation, when she found the missionary amid the squashed remnants of their decorations, making his plans to lock the Brick Street door for ever. She had, in fact, been so intense about it, and so perilously near to what he knew as "sloppiness," that he was quite relieved when he found her able also to appreciate the humour. They shared a good laugh over the repentant Joe, and not less over Nature's Bounty.

"Well, *mind* you let me know what happens," she

had said as they parted. "I shouldn't wonder if it's all for the best, as you say, and I shall be most excited to hear. But it's quite sad, all the same," she added, "to have to say good-bye to Brick Street!" and she gazed her last, almost romantically, at the little fruit-stained room, since women commonly love places less for their beauty than for their associations.

So now, when it had (very nearly) happened, it was surely natural and merely polite that he should let her know. So far their meetings had been all at Brick Street, where Rosa on her way to the Guild would drop in ever so naturally, and without any ceremonial, just to hear "how things had gone" the night before. But now, of course, she would not call at Mercer Street, and if he wished to see her he must obviously go round to the Guild. Paston was the disadvantage; that was why he had avoided it; but when he set Miss Brown in the other balance, with her experience and sympathy, he found that Paston was of little weight.

By good chance he came upon her in the first little room, where once again she was just taking off her hat. The small coincidence reminded him of that meeting, and made him wonder that it had been so short a time ago.

"I've called round," he said, "because I'm out of work! But I'm afraid Paston won't be keen to give me any!"

"Oh, don't say that," she answered. "You always think he dislikes you much more than he does. He said he was very sorry about Brick Street."

"And I'm sure he also said that he was not surprised?"

"Well," laughingly admitted Rosa, "as a matter of fact—he did!"

"I think he was about right," Humphry said, more seriously. "It was a rotten business altogether. It was a compromise, and they are bound to fail. Now he'll be able to see how my idea works, *pur et simple!*" and when they were seated in the library he told her all about his new arrangements. Of course he said, "I've got——" and spoke as though they all were definite, this man so hungry for—advice!

Rosa was delighted. Oh, but how wonderful! She knew the district, knew the very street; and it was simply *the* place of places for a Club like that. She had always been longing for somebody to start one there, she saw now, though she would never have thought of it herself. . . . And she was genuine about it all; as keen as though her whole life had never held anything else to call for her enthusiasm. She possessed what may truly count as a form of genius in women; an infinite capacity for taking interest in the interests of others.

"And I think it's splendid," she wound up, "it's being so much bigger than the other; you can do ever so much more, and of course the swimming bath will make a lovely room for concerts, etcetera." (She knew the very man to board it over, cheaply!) "Will you have room to start a Girls' Club there, do you think? Then you get the mothers, ever so much more."

Humphry shook his head, reflectively. "I don't think I feel up to tackling that, just yet." He paused for a moment, and then, half afraid that he had thrown a douche upon her scheme, he added lightly, "I won't enter into competition with *your* branch!"

"Oh, but I'd come and help, of course." She said it simply, with warm impulsiveness, as though it were the natural thing; and Humphry felt extremely

awkward. There was room, certainly, no lack of it, as she must see some day ; and she would wonder why he had refused her offer. Perhaps, even, the other self in her, that was so diffident, would suffer, thinking that she had been repelled, or—worst of all—considered forward. Yet how to tell her the true reason ? How to explain that he could not take her from Paston ? It was so vilely difficult, in these matters, to separate the person from her services ! Paston, too, might find that difficulty. With her, of course, it was a matter of enthusiasm ; a new enterprise that tempted her ; she wished, above everything, to help a weakling cause. Mat Paston's Guild was abominably prosperous, financed by socialistic millionaires and served by women who arrived in motor-cars. With her, it was the weakest that she always wished to help.

Humphry knew that he did not exaggerate Mat Paston's hatred. The man's bitterness, his loathing of the "Oxford" class, had been apparent at their only meeting. And if he had resented so much that short conversation between a stranger and his helper, what must he be thinking already ? What would he think—what say—if she transferred her help to his new Club ? Mat Paston was not, certainly, the man to choose his words.

Before Humphry there stretched the unpleasant prospect of breaking the curious romance between the stern fanatic and the girl who had called him a saint ; with, as alternative, the need to tell her, simple and natural as she was, that such an action as her helping him might possibly be misconstrued ! Either seemed equally impossible.

"That's awfully good of you, Miss Brown," he stammered out, as these thoughts whirled around his

brain ; "but really—I couldn't think—it wouldn't be fair to take your services away from here. Why, Paston himself said you were his right hand !"

Rosa laughed, almost bitterly, in a way that he had never heard before.

"Oh yes," she answered, "he says that before strangers, and I suppose I *did* start the Girls' Guild for him ; but he is always telling *me*, these days, that I am full of heresies ! It's rather hard, isn't it, because—I don't mind saying all this to you, Mr. Scott-Mahon, because you know—I told you, how much I admired him as a character, and—how things used to be. But sometimes I wonder whether—I don't know, but he seems somehow to be getting more and more extreme, and sometimes he gets so terribly excited, that I'm nervous. And you see, when he goes as far as that, it's all against my theories. I'm not a Socialist at all, really, I only want to help these poor things, down here ; and that—that's why he mistrusts me lately ; he knows that I am out of sympathy. And then, you see, when you talked about bringing Beauty and Content to them, I saw—— I've always wanted to explain, because I'm so afraid you thought—— You see, all that was just what I had always felt, and when I heard it said, I knew that it was right, and Socialism just meant Discontent. But it was horrible of me to side with you against him, and that was why I felt so terribly disloyal, and was so ashamed, that day, and I suppose no *man* would ever do it ?"

She stopped with relief, like one who has put into language something that had long been burning as a thought ; and Humphry, embarrassed by her explanation, found himself no nearer to his own.

"Oh, I don't think *that*," he answered, with a

vagueness eminently male ; "only, you see, even if you aren't in sympathy with his Guild any longer, I don't think it'd be quite fair, would it, to take you right away from it? After all, it's in a way your regiment ; you're sort of sworn to it !"

"I'm not a *bit* sworn to it," she said, with a suspicion of childish tears about her voice ; "I only go in when I like, and there are dozens of others ; but of course, I'll stick to it, and not *mind* my convictions, if it would be mean to leave ?"

So that, of course, Humphry had to explain himself over again, from the beginning ; and no less inevitably ended by accepting her offer with a delight and gratitude which he genuinely felt.

In the discussion of a hundred yet more thrilling details, which this arrangement provoked, he quite forgot to feel awkward and remorseful about Paston, until the door opened and Mat himself appeared upon the threshold. He stood and gazed with wild, piercing eyes at the very innocent tableau before him.

Rosa, in the middle of a sentence, stopped abruptly, and Humphry, very uncomfortable, half got up from his chair.

Paston, however, showed no sign of holding out his hand.

"I intrude," he said ironically, and went out.

There was a ghastly silence in the room.

"You *see*," said Humphry.

"I'm so sorry," answered Rosa, as though Paston's words had been her fault ; "but it can't alter things at all. In fact, the opposite. I think he must be going mad ; he frightens me, sometimes."

"At any rate," said Humphry, hiding his embarrassment beneath a laugh, "sane or mad, he made it pretty

obvious that I'm not wanted here, so I'm afraid decency, I must clear out! It's his place, after all."

"And when may I come and see *yours*?" asked Rosa, easily. "I am dying to, and then we can discuss what every single room shall be." She seemed, from her manner, to have forgotten all about the little scene but there was a small red patch high up on either cheek and something of reserve and an unwonted strength which showed appearances once more deceptive.

Paston, accustomed to be master, could know nothing about this, and scarcely had the street door slammed behind the visitor, when he stood once more, glaring, in the doorway.

"So we are receiving the quality?" he sneered.

She utterly ignored him, and if he had been able to read signs in faces, he would thus have left this Miss Brown, now neither timid nor yet ineffective, but using strength to hold her tongue from words for which she might afterwards be sorry.

But he believed that she was humble, ready to bow beneath the thongs of his ironic scorn, as she had bowed before.

"We're getting *up* in the world, aren't we?" he went on; and the class-hatred which obsessed him shone in every syllable.

And still Miss Brown sat silent.

His was the mind to read self-control as guilt.

"And *this* is the end of all my teaching!" he said, with a mirthless laugh.

"What do you mean by *that*, Mr. Paston?" she flashed out at that. "Whatever you may teach, or I believe, can't possibly affect the case. What call have you to come and talk to me like this? What right have you to insult my friends?"

"Never you mind about my rights, *Miss Brown*," he said. "You know my meaning well enough, unless your *friend* has blunted your intelligence." It was all so elementary and sordid.

Rosa got up with dignity. "I utterly decline to argue," she said, with an air of finality, and moved towards the door.

Mat Paston feigned amusement. "That's good," said he. "Next we shall hear of murderers who will not 'argue'!"

She turned upon him fiercely. "What do you mean?" she cried. "What do you mean by 'murderers'? I *will* argue, then! I insist upon an explanation. You know quite well there is no *question* of a crime."

He grew calmer, now that she was properly excited.

"People who believe in *Beauty*," he began, with cutting slowness, "probably have different canons!" Then suddenly his tone changed, till there was sincerity, and almost even pathos, in it. "I only hope he'll act half as fairly by you as *I* have, and that's all; I know about the likes of him!"

To Rosa's purity this insult of a dirty mind came with the impact of an actual blow, and it calmed her in a moment.

"No gentleman," she said, in a level voice, "would ever say a thing like that."

"Oh *ho!*" he gloated, joyously, loving to give pain, if only to himself; "so now we're talking about 'gentlemen'?"

Rosa did not hear his words. "Mr. Paston," she said, earnestly, "I am surprised; I thought you knew me better—and I thought that *I* knew you. You know quite well there is no question of—that sort of thing.

Mr. Scott-Mahon's views about the poor I *do* admire but——"

He broke in with another jibe. "Then you can help them *on*, now!" he cried bitingly. "You can shift your help, of course, to *his* club-house!"

"Yes," answered Rosa, with an odd sense of triumph, "*that* I *do* intend to do."

The effect upon Mat Paston was instantaneous.

His anger and his sneers fell from him. He dropped the whip of irony with which he hoped to tame this errant helper once more to docility. His whole body became limp and feeble.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" he gasped. By a strange trick of the mind, in this soul-crisis it was one of his few tags of Culture that fell from his lips.

"Rosa," he went on, brokenly, "you don't *mean* that? You ain't really going?" Now the whole veneer had vanished.

"Did you *tempt* me to stay?" asked a new, cruel Rosa, stung by the unworthiness of his insinuation.

"The toff's got hold of you?" he said slowly, almost in a whisper, like a man to whom some new fact is too terrible for comprehension.

Rosa suddenly felt pity. "I think that he is right about the poor; that's all," she said, in quite a soothing way. "I only want to start his Club, just as I started yours. It all helps the work on, doesn't it? And we shall still be—friends." That sounded so ridiculous, just now.

But Mat would not be soothed. "Money! money!" he burst out, rhetorically. "Money and position, everything comes back to that." He grew suddenly calm, and stood gazing at her in a moody way. "Even *you!*" he said, in low tones; then broke forth excitedly again,

"Money and position—that's the thing to have, that's what always wins, in *this* world! What's sincerity? What's goodness? No woman can resist a toff!"

Rosa could endure no further. "You've no right to say anything like that." She spoke with a calmness that surprised her afterwards. "You know you haven't. And I always thought you were so charitable. . . . I think you must be *mad*."

Before he realized what she was doing, she had left the room, and, in a sudden panic, was hurrying downstairs.

Mat did not try to follow her. He stood where he had been, absolutely still, by the long table; but as the door closed, it almost seemed that something snapped inside him. He staggered forward, and his right hand went out to steady him, upon the table, whilst with his left he absently pushed back a dank curl that fell across his burning forehead.

"Mad?" he muttered to himself, in a dazed manner. "My God! She's right. . . . I must be mad. . . ."

As though only then realizing what he had said and done, he dashed to the stair-head, and shouted wildly, not caring who should hear—

"Rosa . . . I didn't mean it . . . Rosa! Rosa!"

But no answer came up to him except the bang of the street-door.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHOICE

Now came the happiest time, possibly, in all the span of Humphry's life.

After all, one need be no pessimist or cynic to agree that the period of hope and of anticipation is even more blissful than that of the most absolute performance. It is wonderful to do things, certainly; but most men with ambition also own imagination. In this way, when achievement comes, it is merely to find that it has been anticipated: and the happy man, scarcely noticing what he has done or heeding the congratulations, is already deep in some yet more alluring day-dream. Why, *that* was all over, centuries ago! . . .

Humphry, building his castles with the skilful aid of Rosa, found that the occupation was entrancing. They had the power, these two, of inspiring each other with enthusiasm. When they talked of what they meant to do, they felt, they knew, that it could easily be done. The air was full of magnetism—sympathy—whatever it might be; and first one, then the other, would bring out some splendid idea, that could so easily be put in practice; until both felt that merely to wait twelve days was nothing but a form of torture.

Twelve days! That huge interval was necessary, for, quite apart from leases, and contracts, and things

that neither of them understood, there was all the boarding-over of the bath to do. As it was, both agents and carpenters looked on Humphry as a lunatic, gripped by the mania for speed, but luckily with no objection to paying for the luxury.

Twelve days! Humphry was inclined to doubt whether he ever should survive them, and nothing whatsoever could be done until they had the premises. Almost all day he hovered disconsolately around the fast disappearing bath, thus strengthening the carpenters' suspicions; and more than once, when tea-time brought the end of work, he would use the key, that was so glorious a symbol of his ownership; stumble to the gas, happily on a slot-meter principle; and take an enthusiastic Rosa through the empty rooms, whilst they discussed the glories and high uses that would presently belong to each. One day, too, she came with him to the new lodgings. She quite agreed that it would be sad to leave the most obliging Mrs. Crump; but there were certainly advantages. He would be ever so much nearer the new Club in Archer Lane; the new landlady, as a Scot, had theories upon scrubbing quite alien from the spirit of the place, and seemed indeed to spend her life upon her knees in seeking the next thing to godliness; whilst Rosa had no praise too high for the view which he would have from his window—a stretch of water; graceful masts; tall warehouses; the whole life of the Docks; a picturesque medley of browns and greys with all the dignity that even grimy Labour owns.

Mrs. Muir, with a casual glance, almost as though surprised to find that one could really see the shipping and a small peep of sunset, remarked that ladies mostly liked the view; and possibly his sister was an artist?

This remark, which chance ordained in Rosa's absence, made Humphry for the first time reflect upon the rules which normally hedge companionship between the sexes. But somehow, it seemed an insult to Rosa's sincerity to pay attention to such things as this. She was a worker, a good worker, and she wished to help him; he could not limit her by saying, "No, you mustn't see the Club, until we find a chaperon!" That was not work: it was a part in the great game Society. And as to that mad fellow, Paston, she had vowed that he did not enter into the case at all, and nobody must notice his odd ways. . . . Besides—and here was the whole point for Humphry—it was only by striking his impatience against hers, and revelling in the resultant sparks, that he could manage to endure this interval of forced inaction. Twelve whole days and nothing in the world to do!

It might be thought that this poor restless missionary without a mission would welcome short rest in the peace of Burcot. Yet it was with quite an ill grace, for one who has twelve idle days to pass, that he came to see that a week-end at the Priory was hardly less than necessary. Of the Brick Street wreckage he had, somewhat dishonestly, said nothing to his father, who therefore had no suspicion that there was an interval, but wrote: "I hoped I should have seen you before now." Clearly, nobody would see him, when once Archer Lane was opened; and whilst Humphry, knowing this, debated on his action, there came from an indignant aunt a letter in which she wrote: "We think it is a little *heartless* of you to leave your poor dear father to manage the Priory alone, and never even to go up for a *week-end*. He is very brave about it, but from his letter it seems as though you had been away for a

month, and never once gone near him? Of course, this may not be so, and I'm sure you're doing a most *noble* work among the poor, distressed slum folk; but do remember, dear Humphry, that your father is a weak old man, and that you will some day inherit his estate, and that it is scarcely fair to take the *privileges* without fulfilling the *duties*, and you would feel penitent all your life, I'm sure, if anything occurred to him while you were deserting him, as I fear you have rather done!" There were eight sides in it, and Humphry read through nearly all of them.

So there he was, presently, with a sigh and quite a feeling of having wrenched himself from something dear, jolting his way up to the solemn Priory in that most inappropriate of carts.

He had explained that he was very busy at the time, but vastly wished to see his father; and if he might come just from late on Saturday to very early upon Monday, when some most important work began——

Really, this was a well-appointed time, for nowadays the Squire was hardly seen except at meals, and he would never talk, save of generalities, before the servants. All that was personal got crushed into the half-hour that went between that pompous clearing of the table, and the old man's nightly "Will *you* ring the bell?" Of these intervals so brief a visit comprehended two.

On Saturday, indeed, nothing was said that even the parlour-maid might not have heard. Humphry, curiously strange in the evening-suit which he had left at Burcot, felt in some odd way that all this was unreal—pretence; whilst his father, eager to know whether the mad scheme had almost reached its tether, put off the fatal time of asking in hope that he might

possibly be told. He did not want to seem to beg, but in his heart there throbbed a wild belief that this visit proposed by the boy himself, might possibly herald a permanent return of the helper and companion so much needed. Surely he could not—he, a Scott-Mahon!—persevere in *that*!

And manfully he clung to universal topics, keeping however, away from politics. It was only just before he made the final wave of invitation to the port that he said something intimate.

"Well, my boy, I don't quite know what you will do to-morrow. I'm afraid Sunday is not the best time for a visit to the country, and I am not of much use to anyone these days—I'm afraid, now, I'm not even allowed my tea! . . . But perhaps you will go over to the de Kays for that?"

"Yes," answered Humphry rather dully, to the surprise of a watchful and expectant father; "I suppose I ought to call there, *oughtn't* I?"

Indeed, it was with no pleasure whatsoever that he found Lady de Kay at home next afternoon.

Of all social agonies, there is, maybe, none more intense than that of the man, not born for hypocrisy, who has to live up to a genial Past long dead. How hard he tries to be affectionate and gay! How gladly he falls back even on the lesser torture of futile reminiscences! How warmly he protests that it is jolly to have the old times all over once again; and how brokenly he totters off, vowing never to repeat them any more!

Humphry could not forget that on his last visit, so short a time ago, Lady de Kay had treated him as an old friend—almost a relative; whilst Eleanor had found in him a disciple, an admirer, and something like a rather silent but devoted lover.

To the first attitude he could still attain—a jovial old soul! But when he thought of Eleanor he was left cold, and realized that she was an idol who, only too fatally, had lost her magic.

Perhaps he had, in rather an egoistic way, exaggerated the pleasure which Eleanor could get from her ascendancy over any one specimen of the tribe *homo servilis*, for when they met she showed no desire at all to take up the episode from the point at which he, in any case, believed that they had let it drop.

"And are you still at your quaint little Club?" she asked in a bored manner.

Humphry, full of pride and excitement at first, began to tell her about the new and greater enterprise, until his interest flagged as it became clear that she was listening to him with that face of set endeavour which marks the clever people who believe that they can hear two dialogues at once.

Man is a creature without logic, so far as his emotions go; and Humphry, who lately had dreaded the need to maintain an attitude of warmth towards this Miss de Kay, found himself disappointed with her iciness. Of course, she had been cold about this East-End business when she was down there, but he imagined that she had been worrying about her dress. Surely she must be interested now! Otherwise, what became of her enthusiasm for the poor, that burning enthusiasm which had availed to set the spark in him? . . .

He could not guess, of course, that her burning enthusiasm of the moment was for a vegetarian diet. . . .

"How splendid!" she cried, in her old formula, when he had stopped abruptly with "and all that sort of thing." "I hope it will be the greatest success."

(*What* was mother saying? How stupid to tell that to Major Hamilton!) "You're *quite* lost to the County now."

Humphry laughed. "I dare say that the County doesn't notice much," he said, and added, much more seriously, "and anyhow I've found my life-work, which is something. I feel that I owe *that* to you." Here was the man who wished to keep clear of that old, loftier plane!

"Oh, don't say *that*," cried Eleanor brightly. She was too interested in what mother was saying even to absorb a compliment, and went on sparkling automatically. "The County will be furious with me, if so: '*We*' think you are too much away from us, you see, and Lady Hill intends to speak to you!"

Humphry fell in with her mood. "A terrible punishment," he said, "even for so serious an offence!" But then he insisted perversely upon seriousness, adding, "I'm sorry if they really think that, but—*you* know how much more genuine the life down there is than this existence in the County."

"Oh, yes," she said absently. What a nuisance the man was! And how *could* she manage to interrupt her mother? "Only I can't think—it's so noble of you!—I don't know how you can endure those stuffy little rooms."

"I've got new ones," he said grandly, his enthusiasm burgeoning afresh, "ever so much nicer—by the Docks. I hope, some day, you'll come and see them?" he added politely.

"We really *must* try," she said; "they sound too delightful."

But her voice made it obvious that the sound of

them was quite enough. Docks, indeed? . . . She wished for no experiments with other senses!

She began telling him about the enormous advantage of proteids, vegetables, and bloodless meat.

As he walked home that evening he was able to smile, with quite a philosophic aloofness, at the stupidity of that other Humphry Scott-Mahon, younger by a month, who had taken this counterfeit enthusiast as real, and been inspired by her to alter the whole tenour of his life. And because the change had been so absolutely for the better, there was no pain or bitterness in his amusement.

Old Mr. Scott-Mahon, deeply chagrined to find that Eleanor de Kay, instead of tying his son to the land, had spurred him forth into the slums, yet retained his confidence in her as the ultimate way out. Now that he was allowed to do so little, it gave him a sensation of activity to lie among the cushions on his sofa and feel that he was managing this obstinate cub, Humphry, and bending him, unconscious, to his will. He had put great faith, during late bouts of machination, in this interview of which he hoped to learn the import after dinner. Humphry, so ran his nice calculations, had surely seen enough of the East End to sicken him with a reformer's life; he was not built for that; yet, also, he had probably done just sufficient to prove his worth and devotion to the girl who had driven him to start on the mad business. Whereat the old man gave his knowing chuckle, and saw good in everything, reflecting that it would not have done for Miss de Kay to think that his Humphry had got nothing in him.

"Well, my boy," he said, so soon as the old table shone once more in its bare glory, "you've been missed

here, and" (this with a cunning look) "also, I think at the Dower House!" He laughed cavernally.

Humphry always resented his father being sly. "I don't think any one's missed *there* much," he said bluntly.

There was no great doubt but that Eleanor de Kay as lodestone, was a failure. The old man's castle crumbled under him, and he sank into the obvious.

"Is that all over, Humphry?" he asked, with the sympathy, not of words but of tones, that passes between men.

Humphry laughed in rather a superior manner. "Why, it never began," he said; but he betrayed himself by knowing what was meant.

"Then—are you coming back?" the Squire asked eagerly. It was not subtle; but then all his schemes had dropped to the ground with Eleanor de Kay. There was a painful note of keenness in his voice as he said, "You won't be going back to the East End, now, Humphry?"

"My dear father," said his son, as though in pity, "I tell you there's no connection whatsoever between the two things; I can't imagine what has made you think of that? Of course, I know Miss de Kay advised me to do this work, and I am grateful to her; but—that's all. We never were engaged, if that's what you mean; and we never shall be. Of *course* I've got to go back; that was what I was going to tell you about to-morrow. The old Club—the old Club was all wrong, building and everything; but now I've shut that, and I've found another, ever so much better, place, that I've got almost for nothing on a five years' lease." He spoke in the cold manner of a chairman-director submitting a report.

"A — five — years' — lease?" the Squire repeated dully.

"Yes," said Humphry, with all his old enthusiasm; "I mean to make the thing *go*, this time. It's a good building, and they've got to have it; I'm going to run the thing on my own lines, and whether they use it or not—but they *will*—there it's going to be, for those five years!"

It strengthened him to speak like that, and he could feel success within his grasp. He did not notice his father's face whilst speaking, so that when an answer came, he was surprised to hear the voice suddenly feeble; that of an old, weary man.

"But, Humphry, you—*you* wouldn't be there, all that time?"

"Why, yes, of course; I'd have to be; except for holidays," he said in the brisk manner of business, with the old dread of an emotional appeal.

But the Squire had resolved on conflict, not entreaty. This insane business had gone far enough!

"Humphry," he said, with a new firmness, "last time—when we talked of this before, I consented because—because I thought it could not last. But now, now that you talk about five years, I protest. Do you hear? I *protest*; the thing has gone too far. The whole family tells me I was weak before, but I thought—Well, that is over, but now I must be firm, and I protest. You are my son, and I cannot allow it. You must come back to the Priory, and do your duty here, as a Scott-Mahon."

Humphry sat in silence for a few moments, with a pained expression on his face. Abandon the new Club; abandon all the good that he felt certain he could do? It was unthinkable! And yet—

"Father," he said, presently, with a great compassion in his voice, "I'm sorry, very sorry, you've taken up this line. I—I can't come back to this. The family and you may think me wicked, but—I am *myself*, and I've got things I want to do. It's too much that you ask you must see that!"

"I am too old for it," his father said, as though not hearing; "and now that I cannot keep the old place going any longer, you must take it up. If you object to being steward, I could see Hobson and try to arrange——"

"It's not that," broke in Humphry. "Don't you see? You ask me to give up all my interests, my convictions, even my ambitions, everything! It isn't logical. Why should I give all that up, just for 'the place'?"

"Because it's *our* place; always has been, always *must* be," said the other, with pride thrilling in his voice; "because you're born to it, just as others have been born to the work you're wanting to do now. It's time for you to do your duty; that's why, my boy; as I've tried to do mine. Haven't I given, not a few weeks, but my whole life, to the old place; and do I complain?"

"Exactly!" broke out Humphry, overpowered by his sentiments. "And so generations yet unborn of us are to give up their whole lives for it; and why? It was all right, I know, in the old, sort of feudal, days, when we were rich and lived upon our tenants. Now they live on us; and what do we get in return? Is there respect, loyalty, or anything? You know as well as I do that the tenants are a drunken lot. We're living on a dead idea, and they despise us for it. You know as well as I do that they never pay their rent—"

they argue that they've been here since Doomsday—or if they do, they want a fortune spent upon their farms. . . . And so we go on, paying taxes out of horrible economies, and living as beggars on an income that would make us rich in a town flat. The whole thing's so preposterous. *You* may not see it, because you're used to it, but everybody else does; and why should I begin? It *is* preposterous to be the slave of an idea—mere sentiment—and soon the landowners will come to see it, and then these ruffians of farmers will starve, and serve them right! Why should you—why should I live here, saving money by having no servants, no horses, nothing that a big place wants, living like a pauper, just to keep a crowd of farmers who are socialists? I don't see why I should, when I have other things to do, and if you insist——”

He paused for a moment, as though having reached the end; but his father only sat back, drawing his thin lips tremulously into firmness, and gazing at him as at some odd, crawling animal; so that, feeling the need for further self-excuse, he started once again.

“I know you don't agree with this; you're proud of Burcot, so am I; but—*is* it worth while? It isn't logic. All these farmers are better off than us; they live in comfort; and if we said we wouldn't pinch to keep them any longer—if we shut Burcot, where would they be then? The State ought to pay, instead of taxing, you!”

He had once said that at Balliol, in a Common Room debate, and the memory now brought him to his senses. He realized with a shock what a flood of oratory he had poured out, and how cruelly he had chosen his audience. He stopped abruptly to find the old man's cold eye still upon him.

Humphry felt suddenly ashamed.

The old man paused for a while, less from malice than because he wished to be sure that his son had finished. Then he spoke with a self-control that was no less than agony.

"Of course, Humphry," he began, in a slow calm voice, under which could be heard the pulse of his excitement, "you realize that I too can fall back on 'logic.' If you refuse to help me, why should I not find some one else? The house itself is certainly entailed, but not much of my income, as you truly say, comes from it. If you intend to shut the old place up and here, despite himself, his voice grew shaky, "well, at least, do not expect *me* to pay for your 'town flat.' You're a man now, as you say, and have your own ideas, but I tell you frankly that I do not like them. So now you are able to make your own choice."

Humphry tapped his foot with impatience at what seemed to him a petty bit of spite.

"I'm sorry," he said humbly, "of course, as you said before, there's no need for a scene between us: we've our ideas, and it's a pity that they can't agree, but—I've told you already: it's no use, I can't do it, and threats like that do not affect the case at all. I've got enough—more than enough—for all I want to do. If that's the choice, I must choose anything but this, and it would be better—wouldn't it?—if we could manage to break the entail. Those things mean nothing, nowadays. Hobson, as you say, could manage it."

The Squire was sorry. In the dangerous game of threats or bluff, he had forced a decision that he did not want. He pulled himself together with an effort.

"My dear Humphry," he said, "this is ridiculous

we are both of us a trifle heated. We will discuss it fully some day, later. . . . Will you have another glass of port ? ”

But things were too extreme for even formulae to have their power ; Humphry took no notice of the invitation. “ Please let it be final,” he said, in the tones of business once more. “ There is no object in any more scenes like this, is there, and I’ve made up my mind. I’m sorry, as I say—very ; but it has just happened, somehow. There’s no use threshing it all out again. If there’s any legal business to be done, it had better be begun at once, you see. And besides, about discussing it again, I’m afraid that I must go to-morrow,—I’m sorry, but—— ”

“ Understand, then,” the Squire broke in, angrily, unable to support this calm insolence a moment longer, “ you leave this house for ever. That may mean nothing to you ; but understand, too, that not a penny which I can leave elsewhere shall come to you—— ”

“ I’ve told you already,” answered Humphry, no less excited by these threats, and with a trembling voice, “ that I don’t *want* the money. I’m happy with the money that I’ve got. I’ve found my life-work, and I’ve had the happiest weeks of my existence, and if we were millionaires instead of beggars, I should never want to return to County life with its stupid prejudices and useless existence.”

The Squire rose from his chair, pain and stiffness both forgotten ; fury incarnate, as sometimes in those early days. “ Confound you, sir ! ” he roared, his self-control all gone ; and saying what first came into his head. “ You dare to talk to me like that, you insolent young cub ? Understand that I do not intend to have it. Remember that you’re talking to your father, sir,

and understand that from this moment you are no son of mine."

With which illogical end to a speech accepted by fathers of a bygone school, he moved stiffly to the door, forgetting, for the first time in Humphry's memory, to say anything about the bell.

Custom made Humphry get up from his seat, and he was standing awkwardly by the table, when something in his father's eyes, seen only for the instant in which his bent form vanished slowly round the open door, made him realize afresh how inhuman a path the unreasonable fates have ordained for men with the laudable desire of Self-Fulfilment.

CHAPTER XIX

TWO TEAS

IT was with very different feelings that Humphry Scott-Mahon made his second entry into the East End. On his first arrival he had seen nothing but its squalor and its misery, intensified by the gloom of a cold, foggy twilight. Then it had seemed to him a problem vast to the limit of despair. Now he came back to it as a city of new hopes, and the midday sun which had just availed to pierce autumnal mists, appeared to symbolize the triumph of Endeavour. To-day it even seemed that these poor people were not so sad as he had fancied ; he saw smiles, greetings, jokes on every side, as he passed through the streets ; and when finally he reached Mrs. Crump, her beaming welcome made him almost regret that he was coming only to collect his baggage and to say good-bye.

When he got to the new lodgings, however, and found them spotlessly prepared for occupation, with wide-flung windows opening out a prospect almost Venetian in atmosphere, he felt that things were even better so. Mrs. Muir, delighted with the idea of "a permanency," who also promised to be cleanly in his ways, had made a special effort to get everything comfortable, and even bought a new pair of lace curtains.

There was an old-world flavour about these two well-lit attics that she gave him almost at the price of Mrs. Crump's one small, airless room; and with a sigh of contentment he took them to his heart straightway as Home.

Gradually, as he unpacked his boxes, and hung his scanty treasures on the wall (for which Rosa and he had chosen a quaint, old-fashioned paper) his memories of last night faded. He began to forget, or ceased to feel, the pain of this morning, when a nervous and sympathetic maid had brought back insistent news of his father's utter lack of any wish to say good-bye "unless the night had made him see things more rationally"; and thrusting all that side of his life back as dead, he looked forward to the living future, to be initiated by to-night's endeavours.

At five o'clock he was to have tea with Rosa at a humble tea-room. At five o'clock punctually she appeared, to face his reproach that he had "been there ages"; for which, however, he got neither sympathy nor admiration. Rosa truly pointed out that to be twenty minutes early is just as much unpunctuality as being twenty minutes late,—and might have added that, in a private house, it is the form more likely to make a guest unpopular.

Soon, however, she realized that he was in some trouble, and letting him tell her just so much of yesterday's events as told her everything, she promptly switched his mind off on to their new plans. Never had she been so hopeful, never so full of suggestions—she was at her best with trouble—and in five minutes quite unaware of any medicine, he was entirely cured. Full of the wish once more to be at grips with the adventure.

"Well, good-bye," she said, as they parted; "and the best of luck."

"Thank you *so* much," he answered, holding her hand for just a moment more than usual; "and you really can manage to help with the tea?"

"Of course! I wouldn't miss it for anything: I'll be there before five. I only wish I was allowed into the meeting, but I shall try to hide somewhere where I can hear."

"I'm half afraid it *may* be rough," said Humphry, doubtfully, with some half-memory of Harvest Galas. "The idea of tea to come is what will save us—if it does."

"Of *course* it will," she cried enthusiastically; "and I think your cards are splendid. But mind you give them to the proper people—not to Joe! Well, good-bye, and once more, good luck."

So they shook hands again, and Humphry fared along the byways in search of proper people, as commanded. Whilst he walked, he put his hand into his coat pocket, took out one of the printed cards which Rosa had mentioned, and looked at it with the critical doubt of an artist who cannot get quite far enough away from his own work to be altogether sure.

YOU ARE INVITED (so it went)

to

TEA

To-morrow night (Tuesday, Oct. 26),

IN THE OLD GYMNASIUM AND BATHS,

ARCHER LANE,

at 6 p.m.

No Sermon or Collection.

Walking along, with his eye fixed on this inscription he suddenly became conscious of a ragged and ill-washed urchin of small stature, who gaped upon him curiously.

At once he handed on the object that had interested him. "Here, Billy," he said, "that's for *you*."

Billy, who had been christened Alfred Diamond Jubilee Hobbs, and was used to almost anything in names, said nothing, but took the card a little nervously, and stared at it in wonder. Next, he looked at Humphry for a short time, and then back again.

As nothing further happened, Humphry presently moved on. At the street corner he turned round, and Billy was still motionless, his eyes glued on the card.

Billy would come, thought Humphry; and Billy was a proper person. He was ragged, hungry, pitiable, alone, and could not throw an apple if he tried. . . .

Later, he became less critical, and no long time was spent in handing out nearly all of his two hundred cards. Most of the recipients took them in silence, all with suspicion; not a single one said "Thank you"; and a few advised him to go on, or something similar.

Humphry was well enough content. He noted how they stood, like the initial Billy, with card in hand, looking after him in puzzled wonder, or whistling for a pal to share the fun of this rum go. Now and then such a pal had ambled after him, and cried politely "'Ere, let's 'ave one o' them, guv'nor," and taken it without a word. Humphry had met sandwich-men with boards that said, "Don't look what's on the other side," had seen the people turn, and did not doubt the

he would get his audience. He counted on the ever-green attraction of what is unknown. He knew that every one would be proudly showing, or else envying, this invitation to tea from a bloke who wasn't going to preach or ask for any money. What was his game, mates? But tea—oh yes, they would be there all right.

In fact, he came to wonder whether he had by now given out enough. There was room only for one hundred and fifty boys, to say nothing about the quantity of tea. Originally, he had allowed a margin of fifty tickets for wastage and rejection. Now, he was not sure. He took his cards out and began to count.

Ten, twenty—only thirty left.

Busy in his calculations, he became aware of somebody who passed, and grown accustomed to weigh every one as a potential guest, looked up. For one moment he wished that he had not, when he saw who was passing.

It was Joe.

They had not met, these two, since the great Gala night, and now the Brick Street champion, already surprised at the slow arrival of his foemen, the police, gazed with a hang-dog eye at Humphry, as though half ashamed. The look of hate and animosity had vanished.

Humphry, by some impulse, gave him quite a cheery smile. Now that he came to think of it, Joe had been a little bit clever; it *had* been rough luck, knocking him out like that; his "Oo-er!" had been rather perfect;—in brief, has not the ne'er-do-well his perennial attraction for the sportsman? And two men who have battled fairly can never be quite enemies.

In a moment, Joe's face changed. The shame died out of it, and its place was taken by so open, friendly, and boylike a grin as Humphry had not thought possible on that grim, rough-hewn countenance. In that moment he remembered Philip's saying, "Joe's quits now." That was what this smile expressed: equality, triumph, and possibly some small regret for having gone so far. It also whispered to Humphry that good might lurk somewhere even in this Joe.

"Hallo, Joe," he called out genially; "have you heard? The Harvest night was so successful that we're moving into bigger premises!"

The huge fellow's face was bucolic, almost dog-like, in its bewilderment, and then the hang-dog look came back.

"You're a good sport, guv, that's what you are, straight," he said, and made as if to pass along.

"Care about a card for our opening?" asked Humphry, very casually. Gone were all Rosa's warnings and every quibble about proper people. Joe in this moment had no guile in him: of so much Humphry felt quite certain; and if this marked the beginning of a gentler mood, was he to repel it? He had not come down here to benefit the saints; so that, with all the trust of his matron who preferred to be swindled ninety times than once to be cynical, he handed to the wrecker of his old Club a ticket for the tea that should initiate the new.

Joe wiped a grimy hand on trousers yet more grimy, as a mere ceremonial, and took the card. He held it gingerly between his fingers, and read it slowly to himself, with a face suddenly void of all expression.

This new move was totally beyond him. This cover was a sport, but—— Mentally, he struck himself pink,

and did all sorts of curious things. He had smashed up the whole bally show, and yet—— This bloke was a rum devil : that he was, straight. . . .

The rum devil tactfully moved on, and left Joe alone with his chaotic thoughts.

CHAPTER XX

CICERONIAN

THEY were certainly all there.

Two burly hirelings had been set by the door to bar all who had not tickets ; but it looked, at least, as though every one thought proper for a card had either come himself or handed it on to another.

Humphry had got his audience. The question, now, was what he would contrive to do with it.

They were all here for tea, these boys ; he knew that just as well as they ; and, like them, he realized that the meal was bound to come last in the programme of this evening. The prospect of it might keep them quiet for ten minutes ; twenty, if he interested them ; and in that time, he either had to grip or lose them. He could not afford to give them further teas, and they would never come without.

Prudently, he had omitted to do two things which most men would certainly have done. He had put no seats or benches in the old gymnasium (the tea was in what used to be the bath), because he guessed that they would cavil at that, thinking it too like a lecture ; and also, he had not thought too definitely what to say because he knew that the most tactful of speeches is quite useless, if the temper of one's audience is set against it.

When, sped by Rosa's nervous wishes, he entered through the door that led to the tea-room, and got up on a platform roughly made of packing-cases, he was greeted by dead silence, so far as cheering went, from the boys who stood there with caps and neck-scarves, just as in the street outside, impatient for their tea. There were a few murmurs while some explained to others, who had not met him last night, that this was the distributor of cards; and the general attitude was of an interested desire to know exactly what form of boredom they had to anticipate, as payment for their food.

It was not a friendly audience, but one prepared to listen—for a while! It also wished, against hope, to be amused, and there was quite a laugh when Humphry, mounting, put his foot right through a packing-case.

An ignorant observer, with a bias towards sentiment, would have rejoiced probably to see "happy faces, lit up with expectancy." But Humphry knew something about that, and had no delusions. He realized that his speech was not what they were looking forward to. He even gazed with apprehension at the bulging pockets of those nearer him. The ignorant observer would not have understood that glance, and might have been puzzled by four oil-lamps, hung on the wall, which supplemented quite redundantly the gas-light. . . .

"Boys," he was on the point of saying, and then mistrusted it. Nothing seemed adequate, nor did he wait to seek the fitting word. Time was everything, in this address, and he boldly leapt into the business.

"I'm not going to make a speech," he lied, without premeditation, "so don't be nervous! But I do just want to say something to you, or I shouldn't be standing you a tea."

So far, everything was well; frank and breezy, this is how the East End best tolerates a missionary; but they stood listlessly, without a leaning either way.

"You know," he went on, "there were three fellows run in, down our lane here, last week, for throwing stones, and one of them's shut up for assaulting the bobby who told them to stop. *That's* what I want to talk to you about. I think it was rough luck on them."

Often Humphry had read the trite comparison between an orator and one who plays an instrument, but now, as he paused for effect, he saw for the first time its truth. Till now, his audiences had been friendly or adverse to start with; the tune had been already fixed: but here he had indeed an instrument to play on, delicate enough; an instrument from which he had to knock what best he might. And now he knew, with elation, that he had lit on the right note, for they were interested and alert. In one moment indifference gave way to a magnetic feeling in this crowded room. Every one knew about those boys, of course; and every one agreed it was rough luck. Joe was not the only one who had a feud with the police. This was good sense, and their heads went together, with a little murmur, as all wondered what he meant to say.

"It's all wrong," Humphry proceeded, "and I want to remedy it."

That was a false note. He could feel it almost painfully. Their sympathy was gone; and worse than that, their curiosity. They knew! A bally missionary, that's what he was, who wanted them to drop their stones, and come into an evening service . . .

Humphry changed his tone at once. He did not fully analyze the error in that instant, but he realized that "I" was somehow wrong, just there.

"I'll tell you why I say it's all wrong," he went on. "They weren't doing any harm. They weren't smashing anything. They weren't even hurting the police." (This was better; and a little laugh went round.) "They were only having a bit of fun—just in the street instead of in their own backyard; and now one of them's in prison as a criminal." (Murmurs here of execration.) "If he'd been in his own yard, of course, it would have been all right; but I expect they were turned out. I expect mother was doing the week's washing, or the baby had the croup or something, and they'd nowhere else where they could play."

He had them now. They listened. This bloke knew what he was saying, though they could not guess what he was driving at. And that is why they listened.

Now for that old, rejected hint of a reform, put into its new shape!

"I've been wondering you fellows don't alter this. I've been living down here for a bit, you see—away in Mercer Street—and I can't make out why you don't start a Club here of your own, as lots of other districts have? It's not difficult, you know, and it'd be nice on a wet night, and you wouldn't have the coppers in as members."

This got a laugh, which gave him time to gather courage for the hardest bit of all. But he was confident. He *had* them!

"That's why I got you all along to-night," he said; "so that you could talk it over. Why, if we all met in the street like this, we'd be run in, probably, by now! That's why you want a building, first of all. You'd have to get a barn or something—this old place would do" (whereat he waved his hand, and every one looked up, as though they had not noticed where they were

before). "It isn't lovely, no; but it keeps rain out all right, and you'd have a good big fire, and pictures, Christmas number plates, and all that sort of thing; so it'd be a good enough place to sit in, eh? Not that you'd be wanting to sit all the time. We'd"—he trembled as he changed the person; but nobody appeared to notice—"we'd get some draughts and dominoes, and all that sort of thing, and possibly a billiard-table, when we got a little richer. Anyhow, a pair or two of boxing-gloves, and then, instead of chucking stones at one another, we'd soon see! Then we could put a rope across that beam" (and once more every one looked up, in a dull way), "or even some rings, and a trapeze, if the L.C.C. would let us" (yet more laughter). "I think they would, too; the place was built for a gymnasium, wasn't it?"

Decidedly, they were quite keen, by now. One or two larger boys, already old in cynicism, sneered audibly, waiting for the pill behind this jam; but the eyes of the juniors gleamed at the prospect of so wonderful a haunt, as variant from street or home. Humphry proceeded to elaborate, with confidence.

"Then we'd get up a football team, and see if we didn't knock out all the Lads' Brigades and Guilds and all the lot of them; and in the summer every one would save up just a bit each week and we'd go off for our holiday to a camp somewhere by the sea."

And now they were enthusiastic. Even the cynics could not resist that sea-side camp. They would sit out quite a lot of services for that!

Humphry felt that the next step was possible.

In a few minutes more they would remember tea. At present, he knew—he could almost feel—they were in sympathy with him, and wanted that Club at almost

any sacrifice whatever. He had warmed them to the needed pitch ; now was the moment for cold water.

"Of course, that's all very well," he said ; and as he spoke, their faces clouded ; "but we're not millionaires, are we ? If we could get Pierpont Morgan as a member, I dare say we could start like that right off !" (There was no laughter in them, now.) "As it is, we must go gradually. But the fire and the pictures and the boxing-gloves are cheap. I dare say all of you could spare a weekly penny or so for a subscription, and *I've* got some money."

That fatal "I" ! Suspicion was born once again.

Humphry decided that he must use force to slay it.

"I know what you fellows are saying," he remarked blandly. "You're asking where do *I* come in ; and you're not sure whether I'm going to preach two-hour sermons or make a bolt of it with all the pennies."

This was so absolutely true that they were staggered. Some laughed ; others gasped ; the rest waited for his explanation.

"Well," he said, "I don't intend to preach at all. I hope some of us will get one sermon of a Sunday, but we shan't get it here. We're not going to have any rotters in ; that doesn't do a Club much good ; but also there won't be any preaching. We might take 'Actions, not words' for our motto—but we'll see. And as to the pennies, if you'll give them, I'll give the pounds, and take this building for a year or two ; and *I* come in like this—that I've got just enough money to be well off here, but jolly poor in the West End, and I'd be comfortable down here. So that's where I

He was not sure that they were quite comfortable down here. So that's where I
but time did not allow more words.

"But, of course," he went on, skilfully a

shrewd tone of one who safeguards his own interests, "if I pay the rent, and fit the place up with some books and so on, you must give your help. I'll get a carpenter's bench in, but I shall want the carpenters. And, first of all, we'll have to brighten the place up a bit. Now, who's a good hand with the paint and white-wash? I expect some of you have worked like that, or helped, anyhow, at home. Now then, who is there?"

Of course, he did not expect that any one would volunteer; the method was too much that of revivalists who ask the penitent or saved to stand. Nobody would dare to give a sign. But he was thus hiding the bold leap by which he had presumed that they were members; and he was watching anxiously.

Some few in earnest, but most as a good joke, began to nudge some neighbour who was a known expert with the brush. They were enjoying themselves thoroughly, by now, and one or two were near hysterics with this novel game. For the first time Humphry caught sight of Joe, irrepressible as ever, busily jerking forward a youth, scarcely less burly than himself, and almost palpably a butcher.

There was, however, one boy, close up to the platform, who seemed to be an authentic painter, alike from the splashes on his clothing, the perseverance of his friends, and the manner in which he received their hints.

"Ah!" Humphry cried, encouragingly. "*You're a painter, aren't you?*" and fixed him with his eye. Great was the exultation of the friends.

"Yus," admitted the miserable suspect.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Humphry, and with great tact took no more notice, for a while, of the boy, who looked terribly ashamed. "Now we want a carpenter or two."

And in the end he had a dozen boys to help. To be more accurate, he had a dozen chosen as his helpers, for none of them had said he would. But here was Humphry's subtlety.

"I don't know that there's a seat for every one," he shouted, as they surged into the transformed bath where Rosa and the caterers had got a splendid tea arranged; "but some will have to stand! And *this* table," he said, pointing to one covered with what seemed specially entrancing cakes, "is for the helpers only. Then we can talk out plans." Only two of the elect refrained.

Humphry, having got the names of his assistants and fixed a time for starting operations, to say nothing of having made not a few tactful comments, stood and looked around the room. They ate in silence, with a blissful haste, and the whole place was full of school-treat atmosphere. He did not see among them all a single patron of the old Club; nor, indeed, had he gone Brick Street way with his cards of invitation, and slum-districts are above everything exclusive. It was new material, and as he looked on it, he thrilled with hope.

"*Excellent!*" murmured Rosa, as she passed. They had agreed that they must not exchange words in this gathering, lest a suspicious crowd should think there was conspiracy afoot. But her one word said much.

Presently she came to him again, and stopped to speak. He looked at her, and felt a sudden terror. Her face was white, and she broke out in a tragic whisper.

"I say—*Joe is here!*"

Humphry could not refrain from laughter. One or two of the boys duly looked up with mistrust. What

plans were those two murmuring? and why should he be suddenly amused?

"It's all right," he said hastily to her. "I'll tell you afterwards," and he went down the room to look at Joe.

He found him, naturally, in one of the much envied chairs, as far as he could get from Humphry's table; torn between the desire to behave decently, like a forgiven sinner, and the much stronger, indeed constitutional, tendency to make an uproar.

If it was not "Oo-er," it was something like it; but he stopped abruptly as he caught Humphry's eye, and looked pointedly away.

Humphry, quick to take a hint, walked past. Conversation, obviously, was not desired just now! Well, reflected Humphry, possibly he might have more success as they went out.

That time arrived rather sooner after the last sip of tea than is usual in other circles, where instincts like greed are masked by social pretence: and Humphry stationed himself by the door, whilst they crushed out precipitately, each clearly dreading to be last, and all a little nervous still of some ulterior motive. A few of them wished him good-night.

"Well, then," he announced, in a clear voice, "when we've all done our little bit, we'll put a notice on the door, and any one who wants to join must send his name in."

Joe, if his object were to keep free of all dialogue with his late enemy, was not strategically wise, for he wasted much time in an endeavour, only half successful, to raise a board, and see where the old bloomin' bath had been. In fact, when he got up, the room held only Humphry, Rosa, and the caterers' assistant.

"Found it?" asked Humphry, with a smile, as Joe came lurching up the room. Rosa he had sent carefully away.

Joe looked at him with some of that expression with which he had told him once "not to have too much of it," the baffled mistrust of one who does not understand, but also with a nervous geniality, which swelled into that open and incongruous smile. After which, he said—nothing at all! His smile conveyed enough; that Humphry was a rum cove, straight.

"Are *you* going to join, Joe?" Humphry inquired, in a casual way that proved the thing to be of little consequence, in either case.

And now Joe stood and reddened, and got yet more hot, and clearly was intending some remark.

It came out gradually, by instalments, and astounded Humphry. Joe supposed by any chance he didn't happen to want any one what would do odd jobs and shift heavy things about, and if so, he was free most evenings.

Humphry, all jubilation, triumph, and surprise, replied in language neither too gushing nor too chill, and fixed to-morrow night for the first bout of work. "That would be capital," he said. Joe, he added, would be a useful man, if anybody ever wanted chucking out!

Joe, with another of the smiles at this rash but totally successful joke, murmured a shy good-night, and went out, very self-conscious, into the wet street.

Rosa, who had gathered the interview's course from a distance, hurried up, radiant.

"You wonderful person!" she cried, with an admiration rare even in her. "Even *Joe*! And all that in an hour!"

Humphry, suffering the reaction, dropped into a chair and listlessly seized the cup that she held out to him.

"Yes," he replied. "But it has taken more *out* of me than three months' work."

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CHAPTER XXI

LAW AND ORDER

GRADUALLY the rather barn-like thing that had been Archer Lane Gymnasium and Baths, a failure fore-ordained, blossomed out into a dazzling beauty.

They were not very skilful workers, any of them, but Humphry's ambitions were also strictly limited. He would doubtlessly have shocked honest Ruskin, for he cared more about appearances than substance. Bright and clean, that was how he wanted this new Club. Plenty of whitewash and a lot of colour that lit well at night, formed his recipe for wakening in these boys the first barbaric sense of what is beautiful. In this way he hoped to give them a substitute for the keen, romantic joy of baiting a policeman, since what the law calls crime he saw to be just Youth's revolt against a life devoid of any colour or high lights. And if at moments there occurred some refinement in the way of decoration, which was totally beyond them, the miraculous toff, whose energy and spirit they were all coming to admire, did it all in their worktime ; and nobody suspected the assistance of a hireling.

Of course, had he liked, Humphry could easily have paid for the whole job, and got it done with more rapidity ; but this was part of the idea elaborated in long talks with his accomplice, Rosa. He did not grudge the

time so wasted, for two reasons. He knew human nature well enough to be certain that people set more value upon what they make themselves than upon what they inherit ready made. This so gorgeous Club grew under the hands of its artificers as a sort of creation of their own half-unsuspected skill, and thus the first evening's moody awkwardness soon swelled into a keen rivalry and hot enthusiasm. They arrived earlier and they worked later in proportion as the splendour of achievement grew more visible. It was a new interest, or possibly the first in their dull lives, and it gave them their initial taste of that great joy, creation. Every one was keen to see how surprised the less favoured others would be at the miracle of transformation they had wrought.

And (here was reason number two) every evening of this work, in which Humphry patently did twice as much as anybody else, brought him and his assistants more closely together. The common interest, the little jokes at each other's mistakes, the frequent accidents, his consultation of them as to future plans, all this rapidly broke down the barriers of class and prejudice. They found that he had got no cant or pride about him; noticed that he was not ashamed to soil his hands with work, and saw that he was strong. And because boys are boys, East just as much as West, that last fact went for no less, and indeed a little more, than all the others put together.

In any case, here was the important thing, that they were friends, and that already they were lovers of the Club.

Humphry was not going to open it as one against the world. He was not crawling his way into Archer Lane, an undesired reformer, nor was this a Mission

under a more jovial name. No, it was a Club, and there was to be no error about that! They had already decided that his suggestion of a small subscription was absolutely right; all, except the rotters, earned enough to spare a few pence; and, after awhile, they got so conceited that they decided not to let in any one at random. No, even those who had been at the famous tea must send their names in for a scrutiny. Humphry, much amused, agreed, and said that the ten workers had a right, he thought, to act as the committee for election. This proposal met with so immediate a success that he then added, half in jest, that he should expect them to help in keeping order, and, in fact, to keep it when he was not there. This, too, was received with great enthusiasm. Joe, most willing, boisterous, and clumsiest of workers—Joe was especially delighted.

Not so much, however, as was Humphry. The whole scheme now appeared to be in train for action. So gently had it all been done, that the very boys were altogether unaware of any engineering. This was their Club; they had helped to make it; and they had the right to rule. Humphry started in Archer Lane with a staunch bodyguard around him.

Prefects? Monitors? Præpostors? Oh dear no! Not a word of anything like that! Yet when Humphry dived from words down to realities; when, beyond everything, he remembered Philip's sneers at any idea of running a Club here on public school lines of self-rule; honestly, he hugged himself as rather clever.

For real admiration of this subtle and wonderful Humphry Scott-Mahon, he took, however, second place to Rosa.

"You know," she confessed, "when you first spoke of your theories, round in the old gloomy Guild, I thought

them splendid, as you know, but I thought they were only wonderful ideas. And now you've carried them out, really! At least, I don't see how it *can* go wrong now? Joe alone is enough to stop any wrecking *here*! It's simply wonderful; it really *is*."

"Oh, things have just come right, in a most splendid way," said Humphry, with that embarrassed mock-modesty which forms man's repartee to woman's flattery.

But he was pleased, as the man always is, deep down.

Or sometimes Rosa, whose admiration for other people's unselfish acts was only equalled by her diffidence about her own, would hark back to his noble sacrifice, when he gave up the easy life of an old English country house for Archer Lane and service to the poor.

"Well, you know, *I* was the poor up there!" laughed Humphry, in the same vein as before.

But always he was pleased, gaining that comfort which only comes from an unconscious self-complacency. Certainly, he never had thought, never would think, of himself as noble: he knew the truth too well, even if it were not an absurd way to talk of any man; but it was not unpleasant to know that she regarded him as that! And he naturally thought better of a woman who could think so well of him.

Indeed, man absorbs so much more flattery than he gives out, that a cynic might well suppose him to have placed woman on a throne, only in order that her praise of him should seem to carry royal weight!

Humphry was too keen on achievement ever to sink into cynicism's quagmire of negation, and, vastly encouraged, went about his labour with such continually

quicken energy that within two weeks of the initiatory tea, he was able to tell Rosa, still excluded rigorously, that the Club's first night had passed off quietly and with a big attendance of those ambitious to be members.

Everything had veritably "come right in a most splendid way," as will often happen, if one takes care enough with the foundations. Humphry felt at last that he had found his proper work, and began happily to scheme further elaborations, including the Girls' Club, that Rosa had agreed to manage.

Only one blot marred the splendour of his absolute contentment at this period.

Work, which beats rest and medicine alike as the best cure for worry, had almost deadened him to any scruples he had felt at leaving Burcot finally. No word had come from his father; only protests from shocked aunts and a surviving grandmother, so that he began to feel the tie was cut for ever, as was best; when, about two days after the Club's opening, just as he was setting out for the night's work, there arrived a letter in the known, shaky hand.

" . . . It is, I know," the old Squire wrote, "the tendency of the younger generation to adopt this pose of socialism. You will say it is *not* socialism. Well then, to prove *traitors to their class* and evade all their obligations. But whatever it is, and I do not wish to argue, I should have thought that you would have stopped short of this last decisive folly. I still hope that second thoughts may lead you to do so. I realize that we were both heated, when the matter was discussed, and I am therefore writing to you, now, to ask you to reconsider your decision. If you decline, I must take what steps I can for Burcot's future, and I confess I wonder sadly what will happen to the old place at my

death, but you must understand that it is you, not I, in that case, who cut the bonds between us." . . .

All the old arguments again! Weary at soul, like one reminded of a guilty something in his past, and resenting this late effort to rescind what had been finally determined with such pain, Humphry let the note drop, unfinished, from a listless hand, and sat thinking, vaguely.

Why was there this sort of curse upon him, that kept him from doing what he wished with his own life except at the cost of feeling a bad son and—"a traitor to his class"? Why, at every turn of his career, India no less than the East End, did this white elephant of a house appear to trample on all his ambitions? . . .

He sat there, taking no account of time, brooding over shapeless grievances, feeding on injustice, and wishing such a fate to Burcot as would have made the old Squire despair yet further of his son's piety.

And suddenly, as he lapsed deeper and deeper into that coma wherein a man may be said to hypnotize himself, there came before him a vision of the future; a vision strangely alien from the spirit of his present reverie.

He saw, or seemed to see, the Priory, vast and white, spread out under a pale moon; calm and mysterious, breathing the enchantment of all its history; in some way unutterably desolate, empty, sad, reproachful. And he knew, as though somebody had whispered it, that his father was dead, and Law had found no way to get another owner than the traitor Humphry. . . .

Bah! he was dreaming. He got up, with a sense of effort, and went to the window. But though in the distance he could see the moon shining on masts that tapered up to lanterns, nearer there were children laughing at a drunken sailor, organs, and the raucous shout

of a street-huckster ; and slowly there drew a haze across it all, until nothing was left of the whole sordid picture but the moon ; and under it, once more, there stretched the old Priory, vast and white—left desolate and crying for its master. . . .

Humphry tore himself away, as from a spell, and, with the decisive action of a man who is afraid of indecision, set out briskly for the Club.

Why, they had been let in ! He must be very late ?

He looked at his watch, and found that what had seemed five minutes, the time whilst he had wrestled with the spirit of his home, had been in very truth an hour. He was abominably late !

Well, it was better so. Sooner than he would ever have dared wilfully, he was to have a chance of seeing how the Club went on without him. Instructions had been left that, if he were late or did not appear, one of the ten elect (they had no title, except "one of you,") should get the key from the old caretaker, and so admit the members without waiting. Humphry was optimist enough to think that, later on, he would frequently be able to take a night off, even a week-end, and so encourage further the sense of responsibility and discipline on which, in this endeavour, he laid so much stress. And here was the experiment already !

The nervousness with which he realized that it had been forced on him did not decrease as he came into earshot.

From within the Club, through the street windows, there floated a sound of shouting, banging, fighting ; a medley of wild noises. It was more like a harvest gala than a decently conducted club !

Humphry dashed through the large ground-floor rooms, that had been gymnasium and bath, on to a

little cell-like place, of unknown use before, and empty now, but soon to be a library. Hence it was that all the uproar came, hither he ran at the top speed of his legs. As he sped through the recreation-rooms, those who were there stopped their pursuits and gazed after him with interest. Even whilst he ran, it occurred to him to wonder why, with such an obvious and audible attraction, they had not all rushed to the library.

But now he was there, and, flinging the door open, stood for one instant to see what was happening.

There was no lack of incident.

The rioters had split into twin groups, one crushed in either of the further corners, and the whole room was filled with the din that they combined to make. The first impression was of howling maniacs who sought stupidly to force their way through the brick angle of two walls. Inward at each corner the five or six boys surged and fought. Belts whirled through the air, directed always at the corners, fists gleamed in the half-light, and there was the thud of flesh that beat on flesh.

Humphry stood appalled at what seemed more like two foul football scrums than anything that he had ever seen.

Where were his helpers, whom he had destined for monitors?

Then the right-hand group broke out, the inward pressure yielded to a bulge, and forth there staggered a youth, hitherto invisible behind his persecutors: a youth held firm in chancery and belted with merciless severity by—Joe!

Dead in a moment were the hopes of a spectator who had thought that he could trust Joe, the reformed, to keep order in his absence.

And as he stood, sick with discouragement, too limp

to interfere, he saw among those who handed the whole business over to their champion, confident that the penalty would be exacted—among this howling crowd he saw two of his carpenters and—yes!—even the diffident and mild whitewasher.

So much for all his dreams!

Well, if it must be one against all, in spite of everything; if Philip had been right; he would not flinch. He flung himself upon the group, and caught Joe's raised belt in mid air.

"Stop that!" he exclaimed.

Joe turned upon the peacemaker, fist upraised, mad with indignation. When he saw who it was, he dropped his hands and smiled apology. But there was not a sign of guilt.

Like all around him, Joe looked merely puzzled. Only the victim seemed at all upset by this development.

Whilst Humphry, all at sea, pressed back the reproaches that had been upon his tongue, the other group broke up. The second carpenter! The glazier! . . . Every one of them a helper, and once more only the battered remnant looking miserable! . . . For one moment, as he recognized that he was free, this last had put his back against the wall, debating the question of further resistance against odds, with the dubious air of a man who feels that right may be with him, but might decidedly is not. Then, as he saw Humphry to be the cause of a release obviously unexpected, he suddenly wilted, and all his courage fell from him as he dropped guilty eyes upon the floor.

Humphry could make nothing of it all.

"What's been *happening*?" he asked helplessly of Joe.

Joe pointed with his thumbs at both of the two victims.

"They've bin a fightin' and makin' a bloomin' row, Mr. Mahon—that's what they bin doin'!" He spoke with the cold aloofness of the law. It was not he whose belt had fallen: they had sinned, and they had paid the penalty.

Then Humphry understood at last.

This was no vulgar row, whatever his ears might have told him out in Archer Lane. It was something very much more solemn.

It was the first session of his officers of law and order.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MERRY RING-TIME

THE months went past, and in them there came to those who ruled the Club a rather better grip of the monitorial system and its judicial dignity. Self-restraint was added to the virtues which they unconsciously were gaining. Fines, exclusion for set periods, and summary ejection took the place of an informal execution. Humphry alone, seldom, and only when strengthened by firm public opinion, fell back upon an orderly use of his strong right arm.

Christmas passed, and he was still there, working.

By now short absence would probably have been quite safe: more and more did Archer Lane come to rule itself as a republic: but with his departure went all initiative, and he was not yet content with mere stagnation. There were so many things to do.

Home, too, did not tempt him northwards at that season. His answer, full of sorrow and respect, had brought no further letters from the Squire. The last tie, that stern old man obviously thought, had now been severed; and Humphry knew that, at least, he would have a welcome at the Club's Christmas Dinner—if he paid for one. It proved, in fact, an evening to be remembered.

Besides, the Girls' Club, Rosa's great ambition, and

afterwards her nightly charge, was just then being organized.

This was a very humble thing indeed, housed in two rooms of moderate size, which stood as an annexe to the old baths; but it gave the boys a properly male feeling of superiority, provided Rosa with a new interest in life, brightened the existence of some ragged girls, and duly brought Humphry much more into touch with the adult inhabitants of Archer Lane and its surrounding neighbourhood.

There were lessons to be learnt here, too.

At first, when he gathered joyfully that in a certain case a home visit would be welcomed, he went round and tapped at Mrs. Atkinson's street-door. A short delay, and Mrs. Atkinson appeared. Humphry, with hat raised politely, made to enter, preparing to explain in the corridor which stood for hall.

"Outside, mister! Outside, mister!"

Firmly and gently the door closed, taking Humphry with it, and he found himself once more upon the step. He could not say that force had been employed or any rudeness brought into the matter. Mrs. Atkinson had borne herself with calm dignity, the due prerogative of a woman in the right, and rather shocked to find a man who did not realize the sanctity of home.

Later he discovered by experiment that even a tentative foot placed within the threshold was enough to invite that rebukeful, "Outside, mister!" and that even more persuasive pressure of the door. Only by standing on the pavement, and thence explaining to Mrs. Atkinson and any idle loiterers the exact purpose of one's mission there, together with what Tommy had said one might do, only so could a stranger—at any rate, a well-dressed stranger—hope to get into that most sacred passage!

But finally he had attained the East-End etiquette of paying calls; found himself welcomed with a smile, even the shake of a wet hand, hastily dabbed upon a well-used apron; and by dint of always entering into whatsoever job might be afoot, from peeling of potatoes upwards, achieved both popularity and influence. Even the husbands, when they found that he had no desire to preach, welcomed Mr. Mahon (the Scott was never heard in Archer Lane), and would argue freely upon politics, religion, education, drink, and often with effects more permanent than even Humphry knew. A lunatic perhaps (they summed him up), but harmless; and he did talk sense at times, especially if anybody was in any trouble. . . .

So time went on, filled with new interests, and everything seemed well. Already Humphry could catch glimpses in optimistic moments of a time when the Club, set going properly, with all its branches and extensions, would work almost automatically.

"If it goes how I want it to," he said to Rosa one day towards Easter, when each week showed astounding progress, "I really shan't be needed soon! The thing will run itself."

He looked around what once had been an empty little room, the scene of that riotous court-martial; now a snug library with books all round its walls and papers on a central table.

There was a note of wistfulness, almost of grievance, about this anticipation of success, and it made Rosa laugh.

"I don't believe you'll be content then!" she replied. "You've got so used to overwork that you'll resent anybody taking the weight off your shoulders! Honestly, do you think you'd ever care to stay on here as just a figure-head?"

He thought quite seriously about this new light thrown upon achievement.

"No," he said slowly, after a while. "Do you know, I believe you're right. I honestly don't think I could—it wouldn't be enough, somehow." Then he regained his usual light heart, as he said gaily, "Well, Archer Lane isn't all of London quite, is it? There's still Brick Street to tackle, for example: I feel that I funk'd there! Oh yes, when this place is set going, there'll always be new fields to conquer." And in the most absurd way possible, a great change from his recent mood, he cried, "Fresh lanes and Brick Streets new!"

But Rosa in turn was very earnest now. "Do you *really* feel equal to that—to starting everything again?" she asked, looking at him curiously.

"I'm equal to anything," he laughed. "I'm swollen-headed. I'm in the mood where I could convert Houndsditch in ten minutes. I'll start a club for murderers, and have it running in a week—if you will make the tea?"

"You're *wonderful*," said Rosa, below her breath, still looking at him in real admiration.

He laughed, and only her injured expression told him that she had not intended irony. She had been thinking of his sincere willingness to start the uphill fight again; not of the fantastic murderer's club or of a converted Jewish quarter.

"Why?" he said, serious once more. "Don't you feel that *you* could ever organize another Club again?"

"Oh yes," she answered dully. "But that's different. I—I seem sort of *made* to be down here somehow, and you could get away from all of it."

Despair and weariness drove all the animation from

her face. It was hard to believe that this was the enthusiastic Rosa of the sparkling eyes. For the first time in months Humphry saw before him the timid and ineffectual Miss Brown.

He looked at her with a sudden guilt and self-contempt. It had never occurred to him that she could possibly be tired. She had always been so full of encouragement, hope, energy—whatever he had needed—that such an idea had not seemed natural! And he had never thanked her much. She had not seemed to think her work of any value; had never seemed to realize how vastly she had helped some one striving to realize his self; and partly because those things were awkward between man and woman, he had never managed quite to tell her. She had been fulsome as to his wonderful self-sacrifice; hers he had accepted as the natural thing. Like Paston of old, he had catalogued her as a tireless worker, and so never even suspected that she could possibly be tired.

It was quite masculine, of course. Most men, if asked their favourite virtue in a woman, would reply, "Unselfishness," a fact attested by Confession Albums. The manly virtue they put down as "Strength." Weakness probably would not know how to take a sacrifice.

Humphry, brought to a late knowledge of her wonder—for what is more truly generous than to give, without letting the recipient suspect a gift?—felt all her praise of him burn like a reproach. In blind complacency he had stooped to take her homage, when all the while he should have been down upon his knees and stretching humble hands up to her. In a flash he saw her as she was, so weary, yet so tireless in well-doing; so weak, and yet so strong to help those even feebler than herself. And in that new illumination he stood out as not a very

gorgeous figure. For an instant, he wondered whether, after all, he might not have taken the wrong way; whether the true path to what he sought did not lie through self-sacrifice.

There are moments when even men feel quite ashamed of being masculine.

"I say, you've not been overworking?" Humphry asked, with a new tenderness. There was a lot packed into those few simple words.

Sympathy is just as fatal to some people as it is essential to others. Rosa, who would have worked until she fell, grasping the half-accomplished task in her limp hands; Rosa, who always loved to give, and never even thought about receiving; Rosa, who had not met with kindness for so long; Rosa struggled nobly for some moments, dropped her head upon her hands, and, very much ashamed, burst into tears.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed out. "It's silly of me. I—I *am* tired. It's all so terrible, sometimes."

Here was another moment when, more consciously, it was awkward to be masculine.

"It's all right," he murmured soothingly, getting up and leaning over her, by some vague instinct of sympathy, as though he would have touched her, had he dared. "Don't cry. You mustn't cry. You want a rest."

Then he stood erect again, and felt an ass.

But Rosa, so soon, had got control once more, and was dabbing her eyes with a rolled handkerchief, whilst she apologized.

Humphry now felt yet more awkward.

"I tell you what we'll do," he cried, upon a sudden impulse; and then, as courage failed him, "that is, if you will."

"What's that?" asked Rosa, in an odd voice that hovered between tears and interest. She put her handkerchief away, and tried to pretend that she had not been crying.

"Why, we'll both take a day off all our work on Saturday, and go somewhere jolly for a day's holiday. We can't get far," he added, suddenly depressed. "Still, there is Epping Forest, isn't there, or Richmond?"

"*Kew!*" Rosa almost shouted, proud of her great inspiration. "I've not been there for years, and all the bulbs will just be coming up." Her eyes were bright again. The cure had worked.

Yet really, even it had been a little masculine. For a woman who confesses to be tired, there are probably better cures than a ninety-minute journey, twice in one day, on jolting omnibuses, noisy railways, and the tops of trams.

But they were in a holiday mood, the mood that can strew even life's most stony path with roses all the way, and therefore yet more easily avails to hide the jerking of a motor-bus.

They thoroughly enjoyed their ride up to the Bank; they loved getting lost, when they dived underground amid subways where every corner showed a new hand pointing somewhere else; they thought the people in the tube were absolutely killing; and when they emerged at Shepherd's Bush, to find a Kew Bridge tram just starting, they dashed wildly across the road in front of motor-cars and instant death, sooner than wait two minutes for the next. Rosa, dragged upwards by a muscular conductor and thrust forward by a laughing Humphry, arrived breathless and triumphant, with her hat on one side—to find that the tram had only been moving up to its real starting-place, and

now stopped for another minute. So that, too, was enormous fun.

Nothing, in a word, avoided being fun.

Summer had apparently decided, just for once, to see what England looked like around Easter, and June's warmth lent a fuller splendour to the fresh glory of the spring. Nature seemed to spread its treasures with a haste almost visible, like some one who begins to be sure that he has somehow overslept. The whole world spoke of life, hope, promise, youth. Everything, of course, was fun.

A public which rules life by the calendar was not deceived. It might seem hot, but really they were still at the season when one needed fires; and hardly anybody thought of Kew. That was a thing one did on Sunday in the summer, when every one was there.

Rosa and Humphry, avoiding even the outside of vast, swelling greenhouses, wandered peacefully among the woods that skirt the river, a place where the sun's warmth penetrated gratefully through the thin shelter of young leaves, and everywhere there was a scent of verdant growth.

Humphry, against his will, threw out his chest and drank in the refreshing air.

"Isn't it glorious?" he exclaimed. "It reminds me of Burcot and the woods at home."

She looked at him with an amused air of reproach. "And yet you say," she answered, "that it wasn't a *bit* wonderful of you to give all that up! Really, I believe Burcot will always mean more to you than anything else in the whole world?"

"No," he said, with an unusual vehemence; "no, you're quite wrong; I loathe it, and I always shall."

Not for itself—it's perfect, that way—but for everything it represents ; the waste of it ; the horrible injustice of it all. I feel sometimes that I ought to be ashamed of having anything at all, when one sees all these people in poverty and misery, with nothing in the world to make them happy. Only the little accident of birth—no fault of mine !—and I might have had *this* sort of life instead of school, 'Varsity, and Burcot. It all seems so horribly unfair. And then to think of that great useless place eating its five thousand pounds each year for literally nothing in return ! My father's just as poor, and just as unhappy probably, as half these people here who envy him." From habit he still spoke as though he were down in the slums.

"That's where I think you are wrong," said Rosa. "I think you still look at them a little bit from the outside. You imagine yourself in their place, and still with *your* imagination ! I noticed how awkward you were—ashamed, as you said yourself, just now—when your friend, Miss de Kay, came down to Mercer Street with all those lovely furs and things ! But, you know, they didn't really envy her ; it wasn't so cruel as you thought. They mayn't have said very nice things about her, but I'm quite sure they didn't envy her !"

Somehow or other, Humphry had never imagined that Rosa could talk like this. She seemed, of a sudden, to have opened a new corner of herself, where she was seen almost contemptuously analyzing the splendid Eleanor and—Humphry ! He had always accepted her as he had seen her first ; the humble, patient doer of good works, the virtual "right hand" of a male overseer. Now he had taken her out of that setting ; and he saw her for the first time as a woman. . . .

"You don't think that they envy the rich, then?" he asked.

She smiled in really almost a superior way. "Do *we* envy dukes and duchesses and millionaires? Or do you think the small shop-keeper spends his time in envying the man who can just afford a carriage and a single horse? No; I believe every one's more or less content in his own way of life, and has the right sort of nature for it, or almost always. Otherwise, I don't see how one would believe in God."

"You mean," he asked, "that the divine mercy makes the poor without ambitions or imagination?"

Directly he had said it, he repented. A perverse instinct, possibly the fruits of Oxford cynicism, moved him always to break the tension of a serious topic by some flippancy or jejune epigram.

She looked at him in a puzzled way, with all her self-assurance gone.

"I knew you'd say something like that; men almost always do, if one is serious." She turned it off with a short laugh.

"I'm awfully sorry," exclaimed Humphry. "I didn't mean anything at all!"

Now Rosa's laughter was more genuine. "I don't think that men ever *do*," she said, wickedly; but added, in more earnest tones, and in a wonderfully abstract manner, "You see, men are so much cleverer than women, or rather so much better taught. We're hardly ever educated; unless it's to teach, or as a hobby. Men know they're cleverer, and I think they enjoy putting things in a way that will puzzle women; it makes them feel superior!"

Humphry looked intensely serious. "If you weren't

so horribly stern," he said, "I should shout 'Votes for Women!'" Then, afraid of having once more stamped on her convictions: "You aren't *really* keen on all that, are you?"

"No—not on votes; I don't think anybody is! Who wants a silly vote? But if by 'all that' you mean the whole movement, naturally I *am*."

"What do you mean by the whole movement?" asked Humphry, interested in this new Rosa.

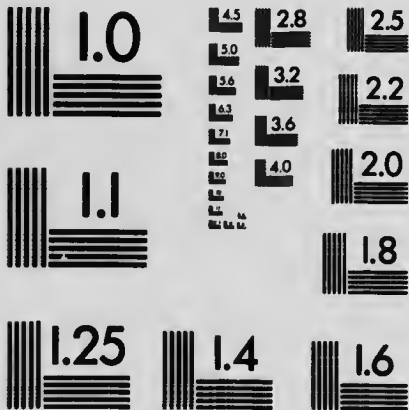
She spread her arms with a dramatic gesture that suddenly reminded him of Eleanor; but there were conviction and suffering behind her simple words, which she seemed to be choosing carefully.

"The right of a woman to live out her own life, without misunderstanding. *You* could leave your home," she went on, with the passionate note almost of a personal grievance in her tones, "and come up here, and be free to do the work you wanted to; but I—I *had* to leave home; there was no home left; and my father was a bankrupt; and I could do nothing—absolutely *nothing* that I wanted." She seemed to realize that she had drifted to autobiography, for in a calmer voice she said, "A man, once he's of age, can choose his own career, and be himself. If a woman wants to be herself, she must either marry or else get used to being told that she has 'lost her sex'! Home or husband, that's our choice, you see; and that's all right, isn't it, for any one who wants to lose her personality; but if we want to be ourselves——" Abruptly she became self-conscious, and laughing, as though half-ashamed to be so serious, remarked, "Now you're going to say something cynical!"

"No," answered Humphry, very earnest and reflective. He was thinking how ill this dilemma would



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have suited his own theories, and feeling that her argument must somewhere hold a fallacy.

But apparently she had decided that the discussion was now closed, for, even as he was about to make his answer, she burst out into a delighted exclamation. Humphry, gazing onward, saw that they were reaching the wood's end and coming out upon the open stretch where a Pagoda raises its inappropriate grandeur to the sky.

"Look!" cried Rosa. "*That's* where we must lunch! I used to be brought here, as a small child."

Now, indeed, she spoke as keenly as though she had not been much more.

An optimistic Management had brought a few tables out from their winter quarters in a modern chalet, and set them out invitingly beneath the trees. Here they sat down and ordered all the most childish delicacies, the most unfit for lunch, that they could possibly conceive. An astounded waiter presently set such as were in season and in stock before them.

"How peaceful it is here!" said Rosa, presently, when the humour of all that was over; and they fell back into a restful silence.

Humphry, looking covertly across the table, began more and more to see her as a woman; as what she had said recently—a personality. That little outbreak, so directly from her heart, with her not less genuine, but very different, breakdown of the other day, combined to make him wonder what sort of woman this might be, whom he had seemed to know so fully. . . .

Poor little girl: that was what he found himself thinking presently. Poor little girl, it had never occurred to him that she might find the world a hard

place, because she always kept so cheery; just as her tireless energy had made him sure that she could never possibly be weary.

What a selfish beast she must have thought him—until now! She had been longing for sympathy, thanks, help; and he had taken all of that from her, but given nothing in return. He had accepted her ungrudging service, used it for his own strengthening, and never even suspected that she was worn-out and might need a prop herself; poor little girl. . . .

The man whose ambition is to stand alone should avoid at all costs women who desire to lean. Humphry, softened by penitence and filled with the emotion which claims kinship with love, became unusually gentle and considerate, as they strolled off once more among the sunlit woods; whilst Rosa, blissfully content, told him more of her unfulfilled hopes, her little tragedies, in which she tried so gallantly to see the humour.

Decidedly, thought simple Humphry, she was a woman in a thousand; so brave, so unaffected, so pathetic; and far too good for that maniac, Mat Paston.

They had long reached that stage, pervious to watchful Cupid's arrows, where no names are used. He dared not call her Rosa; and he would not call her Miss Brown. But after all, what need of verbal labels, when no third person makes confusion possible? So, finding "you" quite adequate, they talked without an effort, freely, frankly, and ere long Humphry, keen to explore the new-found depths of his companion, had worked his way back to the argument abruptly ended by the sight of that incongruous Pagoda.

"But do you really think," he argued (there surely must be some way out?), "that marriage need necessarily mean giving up one's individuality? Of course, I quite

see that a woman who stays at home is bound to become just part of a circle, and have all the ideas appropriate to a daughter, and all that sort of thing! But about the other alternative—she starts fresh, if she marries, and she can choose the man, and find one who has the sense not to *want* her to be negative, as parents mostly do."

"Oh yes," said Rosa, "that's all right—if she finds him!" She tried not to speak with bitterness; but though she laughed, there was no mirth about it. How could she quite forget, even out here, all those years of loneliness, of sacrifice; that finding of the man who seemed a saint, who shared her interests; the disillusion; and then once more the solitude and toil; whilst all the time years drew her slowly on to weariness and age? So marriage was the panacea!

Humphry missed the pathos in all this, of course, and laughed. "I must say, you're not a very good canvasser for marriage!" In a blind, male way, he wondered whether she was rather off that blighter Paston? She hadn't talked about him ever, lately. . . . Well, she would probably be better off alone. . . .

Rosa seemed to have a most unhappy knack of always spoiling this discussion by interruptions, obviously accidental, but none the less effective.

"Oh, I say!" she cried now. "*Isn't* that pretty?"

It was merely the Thames, yellow with its turgid mud, spread out beneath the mellow sun of a spring afternoon, and Humphry did not feel that it quite justified her exclamation. Still, as the argument was ended, he showed his new complaisance by agreeing that it was absolutely gorgeous.

"Why don't we sit down?" he said, "and look at it a bit? You must be almost dead, after the way I've dragged you up and down!" He suddenly remembered

that this was meant to be a rest for her, and not exercise for him.

"No, I love it," she laughed; "but it *would* be rather nice to sit here a little, on that lovely bank there, if the grass is dry."

That point was tested, and they duly sat upon the gentle slope, their backs against an ample tree, and gazed out at the view, happy once more in that easy silence which proved them sympathetic with each other.

Rosa's whole being was absorbed in that idle form of reverie, possible only to the worker, which consists in a rare most delicious knowledge that one *is* idle and contented; but Humphry found himself still puzzling over her attitude to marriage, and perhaps he too was in a dreamy state, for presently he blurted out a tactless question that quite startled Rosa.

"Have you seen Paston lately?" he asked, for no reason evident.

"No," she answered, coming back to realities with something of a jar; "at least not to speak to. You see, we had a stupid scene, and—he was so extraordinary that—well, there didn't seem much point."

Humphry was surprised. "*I* never heard of that!"

"No," said Rosa, "it was all very stupid. I didn't think it was worth telling you."

"But when *was* it?" asked the relentless Humphry.

Rosa very casually answered, "Oh, months ago—somewhere before Christmas."

But for once she had not succeeded in a kind deception. Humphry, with a hideous and yet more violent pang of self-contempt, realized that what he had once dreaded shapelessly, had long ago occurred in fact. Mat Paston had, in very deed, misunderstood her enthusiasm for the work and theories of a new comer.

"Poor little girl"! The one touch of romance in a grey life, her adoration of this saintly Mat, had been wiped out, and by his own selfishness. He should, of course, have firmly refused help that was certain to involve so huge a sacrifice. He remembered, guiltily, that look which she had turned on Paston, in the moment of their meeting. That had told of a large compensation in her chill existence; and now—it was over!

Yet——

Humphry knew that he should feel sorrow as well as remorse. Yet—he did not! Instead, he was conscious of a sudden joy, as in a man who sees, contrary to hope, a road opening to some pleasant world that he had long desired.

"Then—is that all—over?" he stammered out, clumsily, but with an odd thrill of excitement in his voice.

"Oh yes," she said dully. "I don't think it ever existed really. Only, I admired his work so, and—one fancies things, I suppose." She did not speak with absolute conviction, but more like one who wishes to be self-convinced; and she added, "I shouldn't really have ever told you of it; I don't know why I did. It was all over then."

"I *liked* to hear," said Humphry, with an awkward tenderness. "Besides, I did the same with you. Do you remember my telling you about—a Miss de Kay?"

"Why, yes," cried Rosa; "I met her once, don't you remember? She had such a lovely face." She was all interest and life, once more, in a moment. It seemed to give her a special joy to hear of this romantic love, that drove him out to the East End; and lately they had spoken only of their work.

"Well, *that's* all over, too," said Humphry, with a whimsical smile; "I—I think I fancied that as well. *She* never thought that it existed! I expect you noticed it that day? I felt an awful idiot, having told you . . ."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. No, I never guessed," cried Rosa. "I'm so *very* sorry."

And Cupid, after all, might never have released his shaft had not Humphry chanced to glance up at that instant, and caught in Rosa's too expressive face a look which was not altogether sorrow, or seen the swift blush that pursued it hurriedly.

Then hope and courage mixed with pity, admiration, self-contempt, with all that had been there before, to make a shy man's heart beat painfully within him. She was so wonderful—and so pathetic! Visions of marvellous work performed with her at his side always to encourage him; her constant cheeriness; her sympathy; her help;—and totally forgetting his own principles, her theories on marriage, together with the Mayor of Banbury, he was floundering amid sentences that would not form.

"I was wondering," he said timidly; "we both seem stranded somehow,—I was wondering whether——" and there he broke off, to begin afresh. "I'm sure you don't love me—I don't want you to say that yet—but—we're both alone here, aren't we, and we're doing the same work, and got the same ideas, and I was wondering—I've been wondering whether possibly we mightn't——"

She had never known that she loved him till this moment, when she saw him helpless.

She stretched her hands out and took his. "I'm *sure* we might," she said, and pressed the palm of his hand with a warmth that told him more than any words.

There was a short silence before either of them spoke again.

"You *are* a dear!" she said reflectively, with yet another pressure of his hand. "You know I love you, and I *am* so happy."

She spoke almost in patronage, with a new note.

Down among their work he had been a great man, clever, wonderful, a little bit alarming even; here, as a lover, he had shown himself nothing but a big, shy boy—and every woman loves a child.

Rosa had won her self-respect, and gained a feeling of equality; but, more than ever, she was Humphry's slave. To the woman's admiration of man's strength was added the mother's smiling pride in the dear weakness of her child.

After that, the day was yet more marvellous. Humphry came to see that he had wronged the view. As they sat there, the world forgetting, and spoke now of their love, or now of their millennial schemes, he only knew that he had won his love. He lost all memory of any actual process; failed to realize that she had helped him out; and came to look upon himself as a romantic figure, the ideal lover.

And, indeed, Rosa, with fond, strong arms around her, was well content, and asked for no fine periods of a practised Romeo. She loved his halting protestations, because they were sincere, and, above everything, because they were his.

All too soon the sun began to sink, as though aware that it had been too generous already. It was time to go. And less light-hearted, possibly, but far more happy, they set out on the long way home.

Humphry, as their journey's final stage began, and a swift motor-bus bore them past ever smaller shops,

through streets less nobly lit, began to talk eagerly of all that they would do. Together, they could change the social condition of all London! They would be millionaires on a few hundred pounds in some snug East End house! He came back to the slums, and found them lit by a strange glory; his City of New Hopes, indeed.

But Rosa, as they left the motor-bus and struck off on foot through the narrow, ill-lit byways, felt a clammy shudder of despair, a hideous nausea; revolt against a life that she knew all too well. Never had the children struck her as so tragic, with their grimy, scab-marked faces; never the drunkard that amused them so incongruous. And when she stood upon the threshold of the humble little lodging-house that had so long been Home for her, she felt a new revulsion from the place: it was as though she had been entering prison.

It is not easy for a woman who has been even to a suburban Paradise, reached by tram-cars, to re-enter the Infern.

PART III
REALIZATION

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOUSE IN A NEW RÔLE

It has been remarked by philosophers of the more tender feelings that whereas love forms a pleasant background in a man's life, it is commonly an all-absorbing foreground to the woman's.

Certainly, the new element which had come into Humphry's existence served to lend him a fresh energy, a wider interest, a keener spur to action, and a more splendid guerdon of success. Rosa, always his helper, now became his inspiration. Nothing, it seemed, could go wrong with the Club. Philip, invited to see this overthrow of all his prophecies, was clearly surprised, but saved his dignity by telling them to wait, and they would see. This, too, they did; but they saw nothing different. With every month the Club ran yet more easily, with less of outside pressure from its founders.

Humphry, intent upon the idea that this was their own Club, was careful to leave the boys alone as much as possible; but because he still found that initiative was the only quality that they would not acquire, generally arranged everything in such a way that nobody suspected it. When he dropped in, he would find them all huddled aimlessly round the fires, longing to do something, but suffering from the boyish inability to organize. There were, it is true, nearly always some at his new

billiard-table; and soon he had them all busy with books, bagatelle, or the gymnasium, in such a way that each thought he had chosen his pursuit. They did not know what they wanted; but when they got something, they were pleased!

Archer Lane Club was getting to be very grand. Off came the caps, invariably, at the door, and Joe, bloated with authority, had even set the fashion of a collar. There was a swearing-box, into which blasphemers dropped a penny, and thus swelled the fund for that great seaside camp idea. There was really quite a risk that the members would develop snobbery.

Humphry, always welcomed with the cheeriest of smiles and greetings, was naturally delighted, and helped the various boys, at home or in their work, in half a hundred different ways. More and more, too, he found that he was getting admitted into their family life, and gaining the power to influence their parents for the better, and to make them happier.

Altogether, he was as blissfully content as a man should be, with whom everything has prospered.

As to the life of the East End—he loved it.

The last thing that he ever thought of now was to make his way into his old-time haunts of Western London. Indeed, he had not any clothes for such a pilgrimage. Even the gorgeous serge and stiff butterfly-shaped collar which had so amused Mat Paston had been left at Burcot; and he was never likely to go back to reclaim them. Never a dandy, he began to appreciate his soft linen collars and easy-fitting suit, whilst he came to wonder that he could ever have been fool enough to value other people's prejudices more than his own comfort. Society had been the difficulty when he first arrived. Doctors, lawyers, clergymen—such roughly

is the roll of cultured men who settle on the east side of the Bank ; and as a rule, in the first two classes, by no means the most brilliant of their kind. Humphry, calmly surveying the departure of creases from his trousering, was more upset at the certain prospect of a rustiness which would affect the brain. He had questioned how he could reconcile this with his theories of life. Constantly to lower one's intellect to a level fitting an uneducated hearer—not so does one Realize One's Self ! But now, now there was Rosa ; and everything was different. Now all seemed finally made perfect. Quit of the need to save ; rich, for the circle in which he found himself ; master of himself ; free to achieve the life-ambition almost in his grasp, he looked back and wondered how he had endured even for a brief span that life of a steward up at Burcot. Well, now that he had found happiness and a helpmate down here, the tie with all that was severed hopelessly ; and he did not complain. He was ridiculously happy, and set out to hunt for a nice little house with every symptom of delight.

Rosa felt guilty. At first she was appropriately thrilled, for there was all the excitement of choosing a first home ; but when they had inspected two or three, all that was ideal in that notion vanished. Humphry had worked the whole thing out ; knew just how much the Club would take, and how much they might spend in rent out of their little income, so as to have "lots of margin for larks," as he put the matter. This provident idea, natural in one who knew the misery of spending everything upon one's house, did not encourage agents to offer anything of startling grandeur for the sum fixed as maximum. Rosa, after a short dream of late escape from sordid ugliness, found herself doomed once more

to gloomy rooms that looked down upon public-houses, the sole choice being which was the least gloomy of them all. Round they went, revisiting them and comparing.

And Rosa could not summon much enthusiasm in deciding; that was why she felt so guilty. For the first time one of his schemes, and a scheme so important, failed to interest her.

She wanted none of these mean houses.

That she did of dislike, when they had come back to the narrow byways, had stood as prelude to something more lasting. Rosa, now that romance had come into her life, longed to enjoy it in a proper setting. She resented all the time that Humphry gave to his work, splendid though it was, because this all meant time lost to herself. She wanted him all to herself. She wanted a lovely little house that looked out over trees. She wanted to get right away from all this grime and poverty. She wanted rest.

Before, she had endured it patiently, because that was the only way; but now——

"I think this one; don't you, Rosa, on the whole?"

Humphry's voice roused her from her reverie, and she gazed around the empty room, depressing with its faded paper and black ceiling.

"Do you, darling?" she said, trying to gain time.

It was so different from the first home which she had happily imagined.

"Of course," he added, guessing at her thoughts, "we'd do it all up beautifully with white paper and blue cushions, and—or anyhow you like." Here his invention failed. "And, you see, there are lots of rooms, and it's very cheap, and we could get it on a

nice long lease ; and I believe we could be as snug and happy here as possible."

"I'm sure we should be happy," she answered tactfully.

He missed the implication, and thought her convinced.

"Well, then, shall we settle upon this?"

"Don't you think we'd better look round a little wee bit more?" she asked, feeling unable to condemn herself to this massacre of all her hopes.

"You're such a little Jew!" he said gaily. "You're always hoping for a better bargain. And *my* one idea is to get all the business over now—the actual service is easily the worst bit of it—and settle down with little wife happily." With which irresponsible remark he kissed her lovingly, perhaps to show that he meant some of it in earnest.

Rosa gave him the smile that elders give to children beyond hope, and said—

"But do you think, Humphry, it'd be wise to saddle ourselves with a long lease?"

"Why!" he replied, still flippant. "Do you think we shall soon get tired of one another, and want two tiny separate houses?"

"How mad you are to-day," she said tenderly: "you're like a child! Of course I don't mean that. I'm sure we shan't *ever* get tired of one another." She passed her arm lovingly through his, and, greatly daring, added, "But we might get tired of the East End?"

He did not realize how much she meant. "I don't think so," he said quietly; "not so long as there are people still to help. It's so fascinating, isn't it? I don't believe that we should ever leave it: I don't think we need worry about that. I know how you love

helping people, my wonderful little Dorcas, and *I've* grown into it somehow lately. It's selfishness with me, I think—it makes me happy!"

She stood in silence. The firm purpose under his words terrified her. She had not realized till now how strongly these new interests had wound themselves about his heart, and strangled all the older instincts.

"What's she thinking about now," smiled Humphry, "that she's so serious?"

Unknowingly he always spoke to her with a note near to patronage; and even his new pet name, Dorcas, with which he teased her, hinted that to him she was still just the dear, good, little girl.

She hesitated for a while to tell him, and then in one of her impulsive moments leapt boldly at a far more daring question.

"Humphry, don't you think—now that your Club is really started, and we're going to marry, don't you think it would be silly to lose the Priory for ever?"

"The *Priory*!" he repeated, just as though the syllables meant nothing to him, and he stared blankly at her in surprise.

She felt compelled to fumble for excuses. "You see, we shouldn't *always* want to be here in the slums, should we? And even if we worked as long as we could, we shouldn't be of any use when we got really old, and then—don't you see how lovely it would be to have that marvellous old place to go to? . . . And after all," she went on, more uneasily, as he still made no answer, "after all, you dear stern old moralist, it couldn't hurt you. I know you've got a prejudice against the place, but it couldn't hurt you for it to be yours while we worked here, could it? and then—After all, it's only logic, isn't it?"

Humphry still gazed at her in silent wonder and resentment. It had never even occurred to him that she should think of leaving the East End, it was a working partnership that they had made, but Burcot——!

Yes, it was logic ; but it was not cricket.

What of those splendid plans that they had made at Kew ; those glorious forecasts of a millennium ? She had come to him as a life-partner for his life-ambition : and now before they were married, when they had been engaged for a bare month——!

He looked at her with the cold accusing anger of a man surveying some one who has made a bargain under false pretences.

Rosa at the Priory ? Rosa with the County ? He had never even thought of such a thing : and only when she suggested it, did his unimpassioned eye tell him of a sudden how utterly impossible the notion was.

"*Don't think me horrid,*" pleaded Rosa, when he still said nothing. "I can see you do, and that hurts me, Humphry. Why don't you say anything ? . . . It's *not* that I don't understand ; I do. I think it was wonderful of you to renounce the place : you know I do—I've often told you so ; but you have done it, and come here and shown how strong you are, and that you're not just trading on your birth. The Club is started, isn't it ? You said yourself that quite soon it would run automatically, and then it won't give you enough to do. And even if we start another,—I don't want you to go back to the Priory at once ; we'll live here, in this little house, and do all the good we can ;—but don't you think, dearest, it would be wise, sometime, to write a nice kind letter to your father ? I don't know why I should suggest this now, but—Humphry,

you *must* see that it's ridiculous, just because of the present, to lose your heritage for ever, and it all sounds so beautiful."

Even then Humphry said nothing for a little. It was perhaps because he feared to say too much.

"I'm sorry, Rosa," he began at length, very slowly, and still eyeing her reproachfully; "but I've thought it all out, you see, and it's really no use arguing about it. I've made my choice, between that life and this; and I have chosen—*this*." He waved his hand around the dingy little room. "It's just because Burcot's so beautiful, so fatally attractive, that I have cut myself off from it finally. We might be happy there, I know, one part of us—the part of us that worships beauty; but it's a ghastly life, we should be bored to death, frightfully hard up, and—what should we be doing? How should we be helping any one? . . . No, my dear girl," he ended, with the better temper of a man who has been convinced by his own argument that he is in the right, "don't let's talk about that any more. In any case, it's too late; I have renounced the place. That was all settled, and comfortably out of the way, before I found out how *really* to be happy," and very tactfully he sealed her lips with an adoring kiss.

None the less, when they parted, having settled nothing definite about the lease, it was with a certain coldness upon either side.

Humphry still was brooding on her change of front. He had chosen her to be his wife (so would his thoughts run, put into chill language) because she was so sensible, and saw things like himself; because she wished to help the poor, rather than just to waste time in society; because she was a splendid worker. For months he had known her like that; and now—

now that he was engaged to her, she suddenly showed herself, within a few weeks, quite another woman, a woman with ambitions for the County life. Decidedly, there was something not a little unsporting about that.

As to Rosa, she was frankly cross with Humphry.

How often, in her weary life of poverty and constant toil, had she dreamt, not daring to pray, that even in her old age she might find some splendid haven of peace, and country air, and the big spaces! Even a little cottage would have satisfied her; but because it was nothing more substantial than a dream, she had built it into an old rambling mansion, which towered over antique gardens and ancestral lawns. When things had grown too hard, when life had seemed too brutal to endure, she had retired within those crumbling walls, to find imagined peace behind them. And then through some miracle beyond belief, the shabby turrets had changed to a real house, an ancient Priory, and it was in her power to own it—only to be snatched from her grasp by the most obstinate of all idealists!

Of course, it had been wonderful of Humphry; she did not deny it; in fact, she had always told him that she thought so. Just because Burcot sounded so beautiful, had been the very reason why she admired him for renouncing it! Surely he was able to see that? She had told him once that she did not think *she* could ever have done so. Well, now that the chance offered, she saw that she had been entirely right; she knew that she could *not*.

It had been strong of Humphry, yes; it still was very strong; but there was something mulish, annoying, in such strength! He had shown what he was capable of—achieved what he desired; but now, for her sake, it

was his duty to give in. He had no right to ask her, who was so much weaker, to share his sacrifice.

No, he was obstinate, illogical; and she was disappointed. . . .

That evening she went round earlier than usual to Archer Lane, resolved to show him that he was in error, and to over-persuade him about writing to his father. At any costs she must be firm on this; it would affect the whole of both their lives, and he himself would thank her as the years went past.

Yet when she entered, saw his face lined with anxiety, and was not deceived by the feigned warmth of his greeting, her first instinct was for apology, self-vindication. Rosa was not of those who are made for firmness in the case of their own interests.

"I do hope, Humphry," she said humbly, "you didn't think me too selfish and horrible, this afternoon?"

"My dear girl," answered Humphry, "you are *never* selfish."

But men are not apt at this kind of thing, and he said it with less conviction than usually lay beneath his praise of her.

"You see," she went on, not deceived, "I don't think you quite understand, perhaps. I know I was silly to-day; I had a little of a headache; but it's all so different for you. You've only had a few months of this East-End life, and needn't stay, which makes it all so much better; but I've had—it seems eternity, and I thought I should never get away. Sometimes I used to think of moving into Bloomsbury, or somewhere; but that would have cost more, and I couldn't have afforded plays or concerts, so what should I have done of nights? And then—I don't know, but it seemed better, somehow, if I had to be poor, to be among people

even poorer, where one could help a bit, instead of being pitied. So——"

"That's just *my* argument," Humphry interrupted, with cold logic, "only you won't see it. We should be absolutely paupers up at Burcot, with everybody pitying us, and wondering that we cared to keep it up."

"Yes; but it would be so *splendid!*" she cried passionately. "Oh, of course, you can't understand that, possibly; it's just what I was saying—you're so different. You've had big apartments and lovely things, and trees and space; everything you've told me of, up there, till you're sick of it, but I—I've never had them. All my life has been struggle, struggle, struggle, ever since the smash came, when I was a child; and I'm not strong enough——"

"We shall be, you and I, together," he put in soothingly, and took her hand, as if to strengthen her.

"No," she answered, wearily, "not to go on with it for always, even with your help, my wonderful Reformer! Of course, I want to work here for a little—don't think *that*—and we're going to do marvellous things, aren't we? But think of later on—think of the time when we get old and weary, and everything is still sordid, and terrible, and hopeless, and utterly without a cure; and oh, Humphry, I'm so tired already."

Whereat, for the second time, she struggled to regain control, found no way of comfort, and broke into great painful sobs.

Humphry loathed to see her crying. Poor little thing, she had had a most ghastly time of it; and he was touched.

"There, there," he said, and kissed her, and patted her upon the back, as men have done at such a time from Adam upwards.

But every wife has learnt that what a man thinks proper, and indeed womanly, emotion, when displayed by others, will often not be tolerated in his own life-partner. Humphry, when Rosa cried before, had been intensely sorry, and exceedingly uncomfortable. This time, also, he was sorry; but for the second emotion the place of discomfort was usurped by a vague resentment.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE OTHER MAN

THE more that Humphry brooded on her conduct, the greater his resentment grew ; until Anger had strength to tear aside the veil of Admiration, and he saw Rosa as she really was.

His love for her had been protective, almost pitying. He did not know it, but all the while, unconsciously, he had looked upon her as a good little thing. *Cælum, non animum, mutant qui trans mare currunt*, the genial Horace sang ; and the old truth, now doomed to a Latin primer, holds equally of those who move to a new end of London. Humphry might adopt the East End as his home, and duly wear a flabby collar ; but County he was born, and County he would be, deep down, until the chapter's end.

"I don't think one notices that sort of thing, down here." Thus had he answered Miss de Kay, when she branded Rosa as quite a common little thing. Well, that was true ; one did not notice it at all. She did not drop her h's—that, too, he had said—and she was a most splendid worker. Also, she was sympathetic, willing, full of every pleasing instinct. She was—a good little thing !

Now, face to face with her mean change of front and odd stubbornness about that settled business of the

Priory (for so he labelled it), he looked at her for the first time without the haze thrown by emotion, and saw her as she was—or as he thought her. This very matter of letting him propose under what, anyhow, was jolly near to false pretences, rather branded her! But there was more than that. As he looked at her, now, with a cold, abstract criticism, not far from dislike, that old adjective, his first impression of her, came back to him; "ineffective." That was what she was, he saw it now; worthy, very, but quite ineffective! . . . And neither of those adjectives are frequent upon lovers' lips.

Of course, he never would have chosen her to be his wife, if he had thought of going back to Burcot. A governess—that, he remembered, had been how she had struck him first, and Eleanor de Kay had said exactly the same thing. A governess as *châtelaine* of the old Priory? . . . No; if he had wanted somebody for that position, he would have chosen a distinguished woman; one whom nobody could fail to notice, when she entered a packed room; brilliant and amusing; somebody whom he would take a pride in showing to the County. Useless she could be—for what had she to do?—but at all costs she must be showy; and Humphry did not realize that he was being cruel to Miss de Kay, when his indignant mind harked back to her, and found her infinitely more suitable for that exalted post.

He would marry Rosa, naturally; for is it not a male prerogative to throw that crumb of mingled consolation and forgiveness? Perhaps, later on, everything would be just as before; she would forget the Priory; and they would settle down to do the splendid work that they had planned.

Only—could *he* ever quite forget?

More and more, in the next days, he came to notice little peculiarities in her that never had jarred on him at all, till now. Possibly, by the side of the rough boys and parents, she had shone more radiantly than her actual brilliance could warrant? In any case, he saw now that she had extraordinary notions of how things were done in a house. Some of her suggestions for the new home (still vague in position and in date of opening) quite horrified him; and when he protested, she would fall back upon what had been the case when Father was the Mayor of Banbury. Her pride in that last fact was not by any means the only thing that would strike the County as peculiar, if he gave in to her, and took her home.

It was no very big step from thinking her words or actions inappropriate at Burcot to thinking them unpleasant in themselves. There was something rather common, now that he thought of it, about her timid, whining, voice of resignation! He observed, too, for the first time, during these days, that she spoke of buying "serviettes," and thought it would be nice if they could get a "couch" for her bedroom; about the only one she did not dignify as an "apartment." One evening, when he had made her rather late for dinner, she said that she wanted nothing but a dish of soup, and spoke of drinking it. Such were the delicate shades of class-distinction, as language proves it, which came to prey upon him, in his new mood of distant superiority.

At last, after a week of silence which grew constantly more difficult, he felt constrained to tell her. Of course, he reflected, it would have been impossible, before; but now that they were engaged to be married, things were different. No man could marry a woman who talked about "drinking" her soup!

It was, however, a yet more tremendous error that finally unloosed his tongue.

They were still searching for a house in their spare moments. Again and again he found what he thought a charming little place, but because her mind was set on bigger things, she always lit upon some detail that displeased her. He began to think her discontented and rather annoying.

"Yes, *this* is nicer, Humphry," she said, with all her old enthusiasm, when at length they were shown one which actually had a small square garden. "Think what fun it'd be to have this little piece of ground all to ourselves! We could make some tiny flower-beds, and then we'd put up a huge Jap parasol to hide us, and sit under it at night, or if any ladies called in, of an afternoon."

"I wish you wouldn't say 'ladies,' darling!" he protested. He tried to speak as nicely as he could, and smiled.

"Why not?" she asked, at a loss.

"Well," answered Humphry, lightly, "you wouldn't talk of 'gentlemen'!"

"Oh yes, I *should*," she said, ingenuously. "I always have, and you've never said anything."

This was something of a blow! "I've never heard you say it. I don't think you would?" He spoke as though appealing to her better self. "In any case, why not talk of men and women? Nobody ever says anything else."

"Mr. *Paston* always did," she cried triumphantly.

Humphry did not try to hide his scorn. "Yes, *he* did, I dare say."

It was brutal, more than he would ever have intended. Luckily he did not see the spasm of real pain that

passed across her face, and never knew how near he was to a third crying scene.

"Oh, I see," she said quite meekly. "I'll—I'll try to remember, Humphry."

After that, he told her about all her errors. Their meetings took the shape of a small school of etiquette, and he was not the gentlest of schoolmasters.

"I *asked* you not to say 'of nights,' dearest," he would say impatiently, in such a way that the last word meant absolutely nothing.

"I'm sorry," came her plaintive little cry. "I'll try to remember."

Yet really she was not so humble.

Rosa, with her wonderful capacity for self-subordination, had raised Humphry, like Mat Paston before him, to the heights of sainthood; and saints, of course, should keep rigorously to angular places like cells or stained glass windows. So long as Mr. Scott-Mahon was a missionary of fine ideals and no less wonderful performance, she worshipped him as something of another, and a higher, world. Then he left the uncomfortable places and went out to Kew. As a lover, he was less imposing. He lacked Romance. She put him down as a big boy, and loved the man whom formerly she used to reverence. As a future husband, he was yet less stately. He lacked grandeur. She wrote him down a snob, and loved him more.

It is perhaps a commentary on the sexes that whereas the discovery of weak spots in his angel of charity made him almost despise her, the knowledge that her saint was cast in plaster, not of gold, led her to value him the more.

It is rather difficult to love a saint. One worships, one adores, but he is better in his stained glass window.

Among the passions of life or knick-knacks of a drawing-room he might easily become a disillusion. And as a husband, patently, he would be quite impossible. Conceive a husband without faults; a man with nothing to reform; who never gave a woman the delight of feeling that she had improved him!

It is a popular belief that every woman loves the Great, Strong, Silent Man. And in fact, as puppet for a novel, or—even better—seen in the firm-jawed person of an actor-manager, he utterly delights the sex. But in real life——! The case is different. Poor Rochester takes a back seat, or goes out to the Colonies, which offer a fine opening to those with the capacities of strength and silence. Meanwhile, the Beautiful Heroine marries a man who says far more and probably means half as much. But that is not his great attraction. He is weak. He needs a woman's influence. He wants reforming. And because, as has been said, every woman is at heart a mother, she feels that here is the demand for her. The Great, Strong, Silent Man may be intensely handsome; but unless his silence be of the dog-like and appealing, helpless kind, he will not win the heroine. No, he is strong enough to look after himself. The garrulous weakling needs a woman's care; to use a homely phrase, he asks for mothering. And because of that idyllic element it becomes just unfair to say that every woman loves a rake. It is the child in him that calls to her, the latent innocence, which motherly care might strengthen till it crushed the bad.

Rosa was not deceived.

She saw the change in him, and knew its cause. She was all too well aware that the moment when she phrased her longing for the Priory had served for her undoing. She guessed, now, that he had always

wanted her as a mere helper, and suffered no delusions as to the motive which made him suddenly less urgent about the need to settle on a house. She had declared that she quite liked the one with that small garden, but he—he thought, all of a sudden, that it was the greatest error to decide things in a hurry! Everything was left quite vague. They drifted on, with nothing definite.

Both had found the human part under their ideal. His splendid worker was a woman who combined the ambition for a County life with talking about couches, whilst her saint was a little of a boyish snob. "A little" and "boyish," in such ways did she qualify his faults, and make them almost new attractions, just as a loving woman always has, from immemorial time. Funny old narrow-minded boy, she thought, with an odd, tender smile—the fact that he was merely human made him much more lovable!

And she was losing him.

Fool! What had the Priory been, set by the side of this? She saw now that she had only wanted it as a good background for himself; the slums had seemed so inappropriate a setting for their love. She saw now that she could be entirely happy in this East End—a nice little home, all freshly decorated and beautifully clean; their tiny garden; the quiet evenings; the interest of their common work, instead of the interminable typing—and all of it with him. Yes, that had been the real thing; Humphry, not the Priory. And now she had come near to losing both, and had a hopeless prospect of the old loneliness, grime, typing, leading her on to a destitute old age.

Rosa set herself, almost consciously, to win back the one part that mattered. She was not an intriguer born by any means, but she was desperate; and because she

was also simple, she lit upon the oldest and most dangerous weapon in woman's whole artillery—The Other Man.

She would never have reached for it, herself; but Fate, of course, put the thing into her hand and whispered subtly, "Why not use it?"

A month had passed since Rosa's fatal outburst, and Humphry, beginning to class her, like Philip of old, as a maracle that he had snapped upon himself, hesitated weakly before finally surrendering his freedom, and found a dozen small objections to the one house which struck her as possible at all. They worked together at the Club, and talked of future plans, but all the old magnetic sympathy had gone. Both felt their position false, and neither knew quite how to change it. Everything was at a standstill.

Then came Fate's big move.

Rosa, for the moment, failed to see its import.

There was a letter from Mat Paston on her table—that was all. He had gone utterly out of her life: at best, it could be only some old business of the Guild: she opened it without a shade of interest, standing listlessly, tired with the day's work, beneath the flickering gaslight in her little room.

But as she read her interest grew. There was no pleasure in her face, but first of all bewilderment; then pain; and presently she sank into a chair, and read the whole thing slowly through again. Then, still holding it, she sat and thought.

It was a strange document.

Mat, in a style compounded of pomposity and pathos, expressed first of all a quite accurate presentiment that she would get no pleasure from the sight of his handwriting. He realized that many months had passed

and it seemed years, since they last spoke together, and he did not ignore the meaning of her failure to recognize him, on casual meetings in the street "and what not." But he felt bound to write to her. Those months, he could assure her, had been months of thought and profit for him. He had thought over his conduct at their last interview, with a growing shame, and understood what she must think of him, and sent apologies "herewith."

"Rosa" (he had written, and then scored it out, though not so thickly but that she could read it still), "I think you were right; I was mad, that day; but one gets hard and bitter, and if you knew how lonely I have been, I think you might find it in you to forgive me, even now? I *do* believe you, please think that, and always did, but you know all my theories and ideas. Still, I do believe, and want you to know the same, that in helping Mr. Scott-Mahon you were thinking only of his principles, and my hatred of them should never have made me say what I did about 'toffs' and 'position,' which was unworthy of a gentleman, and I have already expressed my genuine regrets. I know it is open to you not to accept the same, but knowing your gentleness, I am daring to write to ask for it, and to ask whether our separation as workers for the cause need involve our never meeting as friends? God knows, I have been penitent and lonely enough these months, and have had my lesson. The Lord has been very good to me and I have prospered, as I will tell you if you will arrange a meeting; but everything has been of no value to me, and for a long time I have been purposing to write as herewith, and wondering only whether I had been punished enough. If you knew all, you would believe that I have been, and so extend forgiveness."

There was a postscript ending to this letter, which

closed, possibly as a confession, with the plain signature, "Mat Paston."

Rosa held it in on her lap, and thought

At first the feeling of pity mingled with a sense of guilt. It had never occurred to her that Mat Paston might not hear of her engagement. Possibly she should have told him? But that was not what chiefly gave her an uneasy conscience. He *did* believe, now, that she had been thinking only of Mr. Scott-Mahon's principles, and he apologized for his unworthy sneers about "toffs" and "position." . . . And now she was wanting to leave Humphry's principles for others to put into action, whilst he and she went off to Burcot and—position!

But soon watchful Fate, scenting an excitement, drove that uncomfortable idea out of her head, and filled its place with something far more wild and thrilling.

Poor Mat Paston, who had always patronized and bullied her, now grovelled for forgiveness! Why? Because she had refused to cringe. She had stood up to him, left him, passed him in the streets unrecognized, and now—he grovelled for forgiveness. That was so entirely like a man!

She had given herself too easily to Humphry.

Yes, she saw that, now. Man, descended directly from those warriors who snatched their wives from foemen's tents, set value upon nothing that he won without a struggle. By now, she could see, Humphry was almost regarding her as an adventuress, whose eye had been upon the Priory!

And still Fate, holding out the potent arm, whispered ever so persuasively—

"Well, why not use it?"

But Rosa only grasped it timidly, with half her mind elsewhere, as in a dream.

Her feelings were chiefly of sympathy for poor, sincere Mat Paston, as she sat down and wrote to say that naturally she would much like to call in at the Guild, and had some most important news for him, which she could better tell than write.

CHAPTER XXV

FORTUNE'S LITTLE JOKE

SHE found him very penitent, and like a scolded dog; scarcely daring to show his devotion, but yet without the skill to hide it.

He looked curiously old and haggard, so that Rosa felt a sudden stab of guilt, wondering whether she had treated him quite fairly, knowing that she still had to tell him the thing which was most difficult of all.

Each self-accused, they sought cowardly refuge in quite general topics, at first, and it was without intent that Rosa brought the conversation round to what was in the minds of both.

They were sitting in the Boys' Guild library, remembered scene of so much common effort in the days gone by, and it was almost with a twinge of pain that Rosa saw the room was different.

"You've changed the wallpaper, Mr. Paston?" she said, in a conversational manner, as they drank tea out of almost incredibly thick and rough cups of a plain white china.

"Yes," he answered, "I did that—soon after you were in here last." He paused for a moment, and then added, as though forcing himself by an effort to make a confession much against the grain, "After—after

that, I got thinking about what Mr. Scott-Mahon had said, and your agreeing with it, and that, and—well, the room *did* seem a bit gloomy, and I changed it.”

There was pathos in the way that he said this, and Rosa did not know quite what to answer.

“I’ve been thinking a good deal lately,” he went on, dully, “and it’s discouraged me. I’m not sure, Miss Brown, I was always working for the best, in those old days? I meant it for the best, God knows, but—one gets hard and bitter, and it’s difficult to realize the young ’uns don’t start off like that—thank God! I suppose we ought to make things bright and cheery for them, what we can.”

He spoke so wearily, and looked up at the hideous new wallpaper of lurid blue with such lack-lustre eyes—as though at something which might make appeal to Youth with its illusions whole—that Rosa felt her eyes fill with tears of unexpected sympathy.

“I’m so sorry,” she said, gently; “I’m afraid you’ve had a bad time,” and inwardly she blamed herself a little. It was not vanity that made her guess she still had a hard blow to deal him.

He began again, as though doggedly working through a settled programme of apology.

“I very nearly wrote to Mr. Scott-Mahon once,” he said in listless tones, “and told him I had said too much against his views on beauty, but I still don’t hold with half he does, never should, and what’s the use of a qualified withdrawal? Besides, I didn’t know how he would take it. You never know with——”

There he hurriedly broke off, like one who just in time has held aloof from a new trespass.

“He’d have been very pleased,” said Rosa, gently. “He’s often told me your views didn’t differ so much as

it seemed, that day. He's not at all the sort of man you think, I'm sure."

"He's *good*, is he?" asked Mat, not realizing what the query, here, implied.

"He's wonderful," said Rosa. "If you could see how he works, see him with the people, you would change your views. You took a prejudice against him."

However sorry for Mat, she must champion Humphry!

"*That's* right," answered Mat; and the brisk slang-phrase sounded oddly inappropriate. "It was his class; I know that; pitch into me all you like, and say it's prejudice." He waited a few moments, as though cheerfully inviting further punishment; then more deliberately, "But you know *why*, don't you, Miss Brown? You know it wasn't anything that I had against *him*; but I don't hold with such as him coming down among us. They're either traitors to their class or else they're hypocrites. The poor for themselves, is my motto, and——"

He was working himself up, and Rosa hurriedly struck in.

"Oh, don't say that, Mr. Paston. Surely a rich man can be sincere and want to help? If you saw Mr. Scott-Mahon working——"

"There I go again!" he said, half wistful but half angry, "and I was wanting to apologize! See here, Miss Brown," he added, and the more in earnest he was, the less studied his language became, "I've been wanting this long time to tell you I was sorry. You were quite right; I said what no gentleman should, and I think I must have been a little mad; but I thought I was only warning you, and then——"

"Please, please," she said, deprecatingly: "I really understand. I know you meant it well."

"There are toffs *and* toffs," growled Mat, in a grudging way. "I'm not saying but what there aren't; but how could I know about him? Still, I'm not saying I had any right—I ought to have known—and only that I was so jealous, I *did* know you were simply——"

She could hold it back no longer. Bitterly she wished, now, that she had told it him on paper; but when she was writing, it had seemed so much easier to talk.

"I've got something to tell you," she blurted out; "I said so in my letter. I want to tell it you at once, because it alters things. I should have told you sooner, only——"

"What is it? What's happened?" he asked, standing up, rigid, with a hideous expression on his face.

"You mustn't think it horrible"—in such wise did she grope her way, self-justifying—"I wanted to tell you at once, only we never met, did we, and I thought——" Then with a sudden rush, she said, "Mr. Scott-Mahon and I are going to be married."

He sank, almost fell, into his chair.

"You're marrying the toff, then?" he asked slowly, in a dazed manner.

For one instant, with her guilt and sorrow, there mingled the fear that all the old scene would occur again, and more than ever she asked herself why she had been so mad as not to let him know by post.

But Mat had no fight, no denunciation, left in him. Limp and broken, aged seemingly by years, he gazed up through black-rimmed eyes that flamed over a white face, and said, "I—I hope you'll be happy—Rosa. When—when's it to be?"

There was a pitiful effort in those words, as though he had summoned all his strength to hide his true feelings and only to say "the right thing." He was a gentleman by instinct, under everything. But in that one word "Rosa" there was more reproach than half a million of words could frame.

Rosa suddenly found great hot tears falling on her hand, and realized that she was crying.

"Mat," she said, very tenderly, "I'm so sorry ; I—I never knew—I thought——" and before she had said anything at all, emotion triumphed, and she was sobbing—she did not quite know why—sobbing with the tearless grief which seems that it must kill.

Mat Paston got up awkwardly, and put his hand very gently on her shoulder.

"Don't take on like that," he said, with a rough tenderness. "You're a good sort, though. You mustn't think of me. I'm sure he'll make you very happy."

Rosa suddenly raised a red face from the table. "I—I—feel—such a—*cad*," she sobbed out childishly, and fell forward into her bunched attitude.

"Don't say that," said Mat, calmed by the fact that he needed to be calm ; "don't say that, little girl. It's no one's fault, at all. It's merely happened. Don't take on like that."

And presently he soothed her.

They made no further mention of the subject, except that she apologized bravely, as once to Humphry, and explained that she was tired.

When they said good-bye, it was as Mr. Paston and Miss Brown. Nobody would ever have suspected that they were anything beyond friends parting after an ordinary chat, except for her red, swollen eyelids and the warm sympathy of his hand-shake.

Rosa, with the stupid tears beginning once again, turned rapidly away and walked through a haze straight to her lodgings, where she spent a miserable evening. She did not feel fit for the Club—or Humphry.

And Mat Paston went back to the library with slow and heavy steps.

Well, she had let him have her promised news; but he had not told his. She had not asked for it—thank God!

Very listlessly he took from the table a type-written letter. He had put it there, ready to show her, when the proud moment came. . . .

It was from a rich man, world-famous and self-made, a socialist, and it expressed the wish to place the Boys' Guild on "a business footing," with "invested funds adequate to provide for a fuller scope to the Guild's influence, and a fixed income, to be settled later, to relieve its director from material worries, and set him free comfortably to carry on his most necessary work."

With a smile of grim cynicism which seemed almost pleasure, such a smile as might inspire an artist who was painting Hell, he stared through senseless eyes at the letter, which had seemed to mean so much; that now meant absolutely nothing.

"Material worries"!

Suddenly he laughed.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TREASURE BEYOND PRICE

HUMPHRY was feeling rather worried about Rosa.

This was the very first night that she had failed him since the opening of her Girls' Club, and when she was not there, he realized how much she did.

These girls were very hard to manage, and he rather resented being left the task, until it occurred to him, next morning, that possibly she might be ill. Then it was that he began to worry.

Now that he came to think of it, she had confessed to being over-worked even before their trip to Kew; and she had got no rest since—except that. He had resolved, then, that she had done too much, and that he was a selfish beast, but somehow things had gone on largely as before. Now he felt a little guilty. She was so tremendously energetic, that it was almost impossible to make her take things easier. Of course, after they were married, he wouldn't let her do any more of that beastly typing, but——

In short, all casuistry notwithstanding, he felt rather guilty.

He felt, too, that he ought to go round to her digs and inquire, but she had such *extraordinary* ideas of etiquette, that she would probably ask him up to her bed-sitting-room! Still, he *did* feel that he ought to go

round. Besides, if by any chance the poor little thing should be really ill, she would want jelly, and hot soup, and grapes, and all that sort of thing.

He decided, finally, that he would satisfy his conscience and yet avoid her unconventionality, by asking after her on his way home from the Club, when she would be asleep.

Meanwhile, he certainly felt rather worried.

And then, at just the usual hour, a knock upon the door—and Rosa! Rosa, too, particularly pink and well.

"Hullo, Rosa!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "I thought you were ill."

There seemed more annoyance than joy in his tones.

"You seem quite sorry that I'm not!" she answered gaily.

And, frankly, he *was* rather angry. She might have let him know! Here had he been miserable all day, and fancying her hideously ill, when all the time she was as fit as anything!

He did not try to enter into her gay mood, but spoke as though he had a grievance.

"Well, I thought you'd either turn up, otherwise, or let me know."

Rosa looked hurt at his sternness. How his attitude had changed towards her in these last weeks!

Deeply touched by poor Mat and a love which she had thought long dead, she had forgotten, yesterday, all about the petty object that had half dictated her visit to him. Her mind was full of his sorrow and of her guilty part in it. She had resolved to tell Humphry the whole story and see if she could not reconcile these two, so that the devoted Mat might at any rate remain her friend. Perhaps, then, all would be for the best; they

might even come to work together; and full of that optimistic hope she had arrived in splendid spirits.

But now, when she recoiled almost physically from the curt and dictatorial rebuke of this man who seemed to value her so little—now, indeed, Fate was insistent at her elbow with that weapon and the murmur, "*Use it!*"

And simple Rosa, playing a desperate game, grasped it by the hilt and swung it rather clumsily.

"Perhaps I had something else to do!" she answered, slily.

The blow did not have quite its due effect. This was a mood in Rosa, this *épiéglerie*, that Humphry classed with her linguistic vulgarisms. He had often longed to ask her not to speak quite in that way; it was so like a barmaid; but had never dared. And now it irritated him, already tender.

"Oh, I didn't mean I always expected you at the Club," he said, studiously matter-of-fact; "only I think you might just let me know when you can't come?"

"Ah, but perhaps if I had told you where I was going, dear, you might have been tiresome and objected!" she said, in the same playful manner.

"Why, where *were* you?" he asked, less business-like; trying with an effort to get more in sympathy with her.

"I went to the Boys' Guild," she answered, and waited with an odd sense of triumph for his protest.

"What, Mat Paston?" he said. "Why should I object? But I thought you had quarrelled with him?"

"That was a misunderstanding," she said slowly.

He saw no special meaning in the words. "Well, that's all right, isn't it?" he announced casually. "We don't want to have a feud with him, do we?"

"It's not a question of a feud, Humphry," she said,

with elaborate emphasis, for a strong blow seemed necessary to cut through his thick armour! "But I never understood. When I told you he and I had—had a stupid scene, he only meant—— Oh, I can't explain to you, somehow; but——"

Humphry laughed easily. "My dear girl, don't you worry trying! It's all over, anyhow, long ago; and I'm not interested in Mat."

"But aren't you interested in *me*?" she asked, genuinely hurt.

"Of course I am," he answered, trying to be patient; "but I don't mind what he meant—that's all—and I don't want to know."

It was all so trivial, and he had been feeling angry when she started.

Rosa's face flushed. "Supposing it's not all over?" she asked warmly. "Supposing he *still* means it?"

"My dear Rosa," he said very coldly, "are you trying to make me jealous? If so, I refuse—with Mat Paston! I wish you wouldn't try to make a scene; it is so common."

He had felt the sting at last; and it had spurred him in the wrong direction.

For one instant she was near to dropping her two-edged weapon, and apologizing; but then a mad resolve conquered her instinctive feeling. She would fight the battle to its end. So back she pressed the tears of rage and humiliation, which fought for a way out, and when she made reply, it was with blazing eyes.

"Common!" she cried. "That's what you are always hinting at, now; that's what you think I am, I know quite well—common! Oh, *I've* noticed," she went on, as he shrugged his shoulders, "don't think that I haven't, when you told me how to speak, and

what I mustn't do, and that I shouldn't say that father was Mayor, when he *was*. I'm not good enough for you, am I? That's what it is, Humphry, and why don't you say so at once? You don't mind *what* I do—you're not 'interested'! You don't mind whether any one loves me or not; and you're not going to be 'jealous.' Of course, I see what *that* means—you don't care! Why don't you say so, and I'll go back to the Guild. Mat Paston wants me, anyhow; but I suppose *he's* 'common,' too? Perhaps he'd suit me better? Shall I go back to him?"

To Humphry it was like a revelation. He did not allow for the concentrated anger of whole weeks, the stifled protests of a bullied woman finding speech at last, and he wondered whether her timidity had been a mere pretence all through. This bitter, shrieking woman to be his wife! No; he must certainly be firm.

"My dear Rosa," he said, "I refuse to argue till you're calmer. You must see these scenes are not only vulgar, but impossible. If we're like this now, how shall we be when we're married? To-morrow, we'll talk over anything you like."

"I want my answer now," she cried. "Shall I go back to him?"

Somehow or other, now, she must force that word "no" from him. The scene was utterly against her instincts, but she had taken up the weapon, and she could not drop it now.

"We'll talk about everything to-morrow," he answered doggedly, and moved towards the little staircase.

"Humphry," she said, with slow solemnity, "if you go now, you go out of my life. I *will* not be humiliated in this way. If I'm not good enough for you—common!

—I'm going to the man who wants me. Shall I? Yes or no?"

He turned round on the bottom step.

"I've already told you, Rosa," he said, in level tones. "I utterly refuse to encourage you in such stupid melodrama. You'll see yourself, to-morrow, how absurd it is. Why should I answer? If you want to go to a man like Mat Paston—well, it's a free land, isn't it?" With a short laugh, that strove to be nonchalant, but sounded full of irony, he went slowly upstairs.

She stood motionless, staring, as though fascinated, at each movement of his feet, whilst he was gradually lost to sight.

He would turn at the corner? . . . No! . . . Then he would stop upon the landing, and shout down that she was a little goose, and of course he wanted her to stay? . . .

But neither happened. And whilst she waited, she heard him pass into the upstairs room, and slam its door with angry vehemence.

For a little while her mind was so busy that no thought emerged; but then she realized the humiliating truth—her scheme had failed. Humphry had not noticed; was *not* jealous; only called her common! . . .

She stood exactly as she had been when he left her, and, little by little, the vague sense of self-contempt grew into something definite.

She hated him!

"I hate him—I *hate* him!" she muttered to herself, excitedly, with childish impotence, too miserable for tears.

He had degraded her. That small word "no" would have made all the difference in the complexion of her little plot, which looked so petty now that it

had failed. She realized that she had tried deliberately to make him jealous—and had failed! If she had succeeded, it would not have been so bad: but now—— Yes, it was common; horribly; he had been right; and in her new abasement she suddenly saw herself, all through, playing a most ignominious rôle.

He had not loved her, ever; he had merely pitied. About their relationship there had been no equality; he was her patron, stooping down to help her! And because of that, he thought that he could bully her, correct her English, tell her she was common. She was of the Mat Paston class—one did not feel any "interest" in what such people thought! . . .

And now the expectation of Humphry's penitent return, that so lately had been a wild hope, suddenly became a nightmare.

With a hideous dread of further degradation, she tiptoed in mad but cautious haste towards the door; opened it, inch by inch, and, not daring to shut it, hurried out into the street.

Her one instinct was to gain her self-respect.

How could she have been such a fool? What must he have thought of her? Why had she never guessed, when he had spoken in that way to her? He had thrown marriage at her as a charity, to help a worthy, tired-out pauper! Only when she demanded love's bare proof, jealousy, had she found out the ignominious truth.

With the mad fury of a woman scorned, she found herself walking, quite unconsciously, towards the man who valued her—Mat Paston. She was nearly at the Guild before she realized in what direction she was going.

She stopped dead and stood for a few minutes, dazed, full beneath the lights of a low gin-shop ; so that some loafers at the corner looked at her curiously, and made their own guesses as to what was "up with her."

They were piqued yet further when the sad-looking girl moved on with startling abruptness, obviously still unaware of anybody near, and her face lit with a sudden resolution.

Rosa walked on deliberately towards the Guild.

Her lodgings seemed impossible ; she could not endure to be alone with her new knowledge. Besides, Mat Paston missed her—missed her encouragement and help—a tonic beyond price to one mortally wounded in her self-esteem.

Of course, she had no thought of going to Mat Paston for the love that Humphry had refused her ; but mankind's social nature drives the sufferer instinctively to places where he will be valued and gain sympathy. To work at the Archer Lane Club to-night was quite unthinkable, even if such an act would not be taken for dumb penitence ; and not to work at all seemed worse. Mat Paston said that he missed her help, and asked forgiveness. What more natural than to serve so many ends, by working once more at her old headquarters ?

But all this was quite shapeless, for logic was totally beyond her. She merely walked deliberately towards the Guild.

Hours surely had gone by since she had entered the little Club in Archer Lane. She expected vaguely to find the Guild in full activity ; but when she came into the first room nobody was there except a few helpers, and, utterly ignoring them, she walked past like one in a trance, straight upstairs to the library.

Mat was there—the room served as an office for him—and he was talking earnestly to three of his “young ladies.”

When the door opened, he swung round in an official manner, obviously annoyed at this interruption of his business. Then his whole face changed. First joy, then anxiety, next fear, coursed over it as he vainly tried to solve the enigma alike of her sphinx-like expression and her miraculous arrival.

“*Rosa!*” he cried, starting up. “What is it?” For a moment he forgot all about “Miss Brown” sounding better before his young ladies. She was in trouble, and she was—just Rosa, as she always had been, in his thoughts.

“I’ve come to help the Guild once more,” she said, with a calmness that astounded her, when she looked back. “I didn’t mean to interrupt your business.”

He gazed fixedly at her as if to read a secret; she smiled politely, and he was half deceived. He turned once more to his helpers, who were novices, and finished giving his instructions; but directly the door had closed behind them, he looked eagerly towards her, obviously prepared for confidences.

“You have returned,” he said dogmatically, with a note of triumph.

Rosa felt uncomfortable, beginning to question whether she had been wise to come. He seemed to read so much into that fact, and she found it hard to explain without making the thing personal.

“I want to do one more evening’s work at the old place,” she answered, with unconvincing sentiment.

He still peered at her with wild eyes, trying to read her inmost thoughts, like a relentless counsel who is prepared to judge the witness least of all by what is said.

"And Mr. Scott-Mahon," he asked, the usual irony put upon that double name. "He won't object, or throw you over for it?"

"*He* won't object!" said Rosa, bitterly.

Mat got up and walked across to her. His question had drawn forth the sort of answer that he needed.

"You're hiding something from me," he said, almost harshly, standing over her. "There's something up, and it's not fair on me to hide it." Then his mood changed, and laying his hand, as last night, almost paternally upon her shoulder, he said, with unaccustomed gentleness, "See here, Rosa—I *must* call you that, for auld lang syne?—I'm your friend; I want to help you, but how can I? It's not fair on me. It isn't like you. Tell me what is up now?"

Rosa sat looking out at space before her, with set brow. "I can't," she said, almost below her breath. "I can't tell you. It's—it's good of you to want to help, but I can't—I can't tell *you*, of every one. I'm so ashamed, so terribly ashamed."

"Why 'me of every one,' and why are you ashamed?" he asked, yet more bewildered.

"You were right." She spoke with slow deliberation as though confession must make the pain less; and she never moved the muscles of her face an inch, but still sat gazing out at vacancy. "You were absolutely right. I didn't know then, but it *was* his birth and position and the place that tempted me. I thought I loved him, but I see it now, and I am so ashamed——" Then, at length, she sunk her head, but the tears were dried at their source by the blazing fires of misery and self-contempt. "And his ideas, too, they were wonderful," she added, as though clutching eagerly at something

that made her less vile ; and she spoke, even in this moment, almost with enthusiasm.

"But—I don't understand," Mat stammered. "You still think that? Then, what——? You mean——? I don't see what has happened!"

At last he had broken in his witness.

"Oh, he has been so unkind," she cried, without reserve. "I still think his ideas are splendid, but—we never should have been engaged. We're—different. He let me see it, too, and I—I feel so *unclean*. . . . I feel he pitied me and thought I wanted him to marry me. . . . It's horrible. . . . He said that I was common . . . he kept on telling me the way I ought to speak. . . . Oh, I'm so terribly ashamed. It's all so horrible . . ."

"Poor little girl," said Mat, aloud yet to himself. "It's all been a mistake. I tried to warn you of it. You should have stuck to me ; but I know I'm not good enough, and my ideas were hard."

"Don't think that, Mat," she answered, suddenly made strong by his need for help ; "don't think it was *that*. You know—you know how I always respected you ; you're much too *good* for me ; but you know quite well it was you who said it was impossible, and so—I think I got a little tired of struggling, and it all seemed so absolutely hopeless, and—— Don't think that I deserted the Guild, or didn't value all your work—I wanted to help him in his ideals, but I hoped we should still be friends, until——"

"I know," Mat said contritely. "It was all my fault, Rosa ; I shouldn't have said that, but—I was jealous. You called me mad. Well, so I was, too—mad with jealousy."

"You mustn't blame yourself," Rosa answered. She

was calm again, and all her sorrow was for him. It was typical that she forgave, forgot the vile insinuations he had made that night.

The room seemed somehow to vibrate with the sympathy coming from her tender heart, and Mat, feeling it in every nerve, found himself thrilling with mad courage, emboldened to a question that he had never thought to ask. He must: he could not: and whilst he hesitated, some one else (it almost seemed) had spoken.

"Rosa—if it had *not* been all impossible—if we'd had money——?"

"What's the use?" asked Rosa, hopelessly. "It always *is* impossible." The tragedy of her whole life was summed in that one weary sentence.

"But if it wasn't——?" he went on keenly.

"*Don't*, Mat," she said, half tenderly, but also with impatience. "I know you mean it well, but—I am so unhappy. Don't torture me with ifs."

"Rosa," he said, as he leant close over her, speaking her name in the tones almost of a lover, "you don't understand; it means everything to me. I want to know, but—it's so difficult;" and his skill failing, he said, bluntly, "I don't know what you think of Mr. Scott-Mahon?"

"I hate him—I *hate* him," cried Rosa, passionately, just as though his name had set in motion a formula that must be spoken; then to Mat, "You don't suppose I ever want to speak to him again? He has *humiliated* me."

A wonderful joy shone in the eyes of Mat Paston, and silently he walked across to where the letter of the self-made man still lay upon his table. Then with splendid boyishness, a different person, he put it in her hand.

"I am rich," he cried, not able to wait till she had read the news, "I'm *rich*; the Lord has heard my prayers; and it all seemed too late . . . Is it? I don't know," he went on, with new awkwardness; "perhaps I'm not doing the right thing by Mr. Scott-Mahon—I don't know nothing about that, but I can't wait. Rosa, that was a mistake; we both were wrong; and now that this miracle has come to us—is it too late? Can't we forget it and be as we used to be? Marry me, Rosa? God knows, nobody has ever loved you better. . . . Answer me, Rosa. . . . You aren't angry? . . . say you'll marry me? You know I love you. . . ."

Then, whilst he gazed anxiously at her, almost in dread, she suddenly looked up at him, and her tired, swollen eyes were lit with a fresh glory, and in them he could read her answer. He took her in his arms, saying he knew not what, kissing her with a love nearly reverence; and as she felt his protection and the peace of it, out of pure happiness she began to shed quietly the blessed tears which misery had not been strong enough to bring.

"I've *prayed* for this," she heard him murmur, close beside her ear, "prayed for it night and day, my own darling, since you left me. . . . At first, I doubted God; thought Him cruel; believed He meant it; but then I came to see it was all a punishment, and I strove hard, very hard. But it was all without a will, and He has been kind to me—kinder than what I deserved. Rosa, I've been different since—since you left me. I was getting hard then—bitter—but I've been different, and everything's been worth while, just for this."

But she merely rested on his shoulder, tired out, happy to rest there, loving to feel that she was loved.

"And *now*," he went on, with the joy of a man who analyzes his contentment, "now that I have you again, I shall be given strength. You know, dear helper, I began to think that I had failed ; nothing came right ; and for why ? Because I needed *your* inspiration, and *your* help." He held her a little away from him, very gently, by the shoulders, gazing down at her as at a treasure beyond price. "But *now*," he said, with all the old ringing strength of his fanatical enthusiasm, "now I am as a giant refreshed with wine. We will go forth, you and I, to help the weak and raise the fallen ; and you will lead me with a new gentleness." Very humbly, he added, "Don't let me get bitter, Rosa."

"Darling !" she said, as sufficient protest, and kissed him very lovingly. In that moment the past had no more value than a nightmare that is gone.

"A man gets so full of ideals," he added, in better conceit already, groping for excuses, "that he gets out of touch with people. But now—it seems impossible. Yes, God has been *too* good to me, and I am almost frightened. But I must show my worthiness ; and with you by my side to help, I shall do wondrous things. To-night you will need rest ; but to-morrow—to-morrow——"

"*To-day* !" she broke in ; and she seemed transfigured by love's power and his enthusiasm into a woman full of energy and strength to labour. With a gesture she called him to the evening's work.

But suddenly, brought back to the world by that, her mind was filled with a memory of Humphry ; and she fancied him, with no helpers, at his two Clubs in Archer Lane. Life was very difficult ; no pleasure without pain ; and with a sudden cloud upon her face, she said, "Mat, I forgot. I was so happy, but——"

"You're thinking about him," he said, made more intuitive by love; "but don't you worry, that'll be right; you can send a letter and explain."

She smiled at his idea. "No, I must see him, that is only fair; but I was thinking——"

"You're *pitying* him!" he said, reading her face once again; "but that's just you! Don't pity him; he don't deserve it. You don't pity men who only value things when they have lost them. But I love you for it, my tender-hearted little Rosa;" and he kissed her, smilingly.

"I was thinking of his work," said Rosa, still unhappy.

"No," answered Mat, "after this you must think of *ours*! His is all right, but mine — *I* was getting hard and you must be the angel who will soften me!"

She laid her hand upon his sleeve, as if in deprecation of his modesty, and smiled up at him, happy once again, without a thought of Humphry; then, with new courage and fresh interest, his arm around her shoulder, they moved towards the door which led to their great work, that had been only interrupted.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SNAPPING OF CHAINS

THERE could be no doubt, now—none! Rosa was nothing but a drag. . . .

The man who wanted to be free sat despondently in his small Club-room, and saw with pitiful clearness that this woman, who was to have served as life-long help and inspiration, would always stand between him and his mission. However good the work that he was doing, there must always be a guilty feeling that he was selfish, because he was keeping a tired, unwilling helper from the rural peace that she desired. Fool! Would he never learn? He had shaken Philip off, and had straightway shackled himself with a more permanent drag—Rosa. . . .

So now, in even a worse temper, he sat and waited once again for her. He felt that he had been, perhaps, a little brutal yesterday; he had not, of course, expected her to rush away at once, like that; but he must certainly be firm, before they married.

Reconciliation; apologies on both sides; possibly another scene; almost certainly more tears, of joy or sorrow (she seemed always to be crying!)—the programme irked him, in anticipation. And all life, to his cheerless eyes, stretched onward as a long succession of episodes like this.

Decidedly, for an individualist, it is one thing to pity a poor common little girl, and quite another thing to marry her.

There she was!

With heavy feet and leaden heart he moved towards the door. In a very different spirit had he gone to answer her first knock, a few short months ago.

He forced a smile, which must not be too friendly all at once, and turned the handle. As he saw who stood upon the step, even the pretence of geniality died, on the instant.

It was not Rosa, but old Hobson.

"Good day, Mister Humphry," the family solicitor said, entering immediately and walking well into the room, as though half suspicious of a peril in delay. "I hope I shall not be disturbing you?"

His vast comfortable frame seemed to distil an extraordinary air of assurance and possession. He threw a small bundle of papers on the table in an official manner, put his top-hat beside it, and looked around through his gold pince-nez; not as though much interested, but like some one who wishes to know exactly in what sort of place he is, before embarking on important business.

All this irritated Humphry further. His father's old lawyer had never been a favourite with him; the capacity of family adviser had seemed to merge too much into that of private friend. Even in the Burcot days, he had resented what he thought Hobson's impertinence, and a late change of Master into Mister had not altered the annoying fact that this cheeky old windbag still spoke to him as Humphry! But in the County, in his own place, he was bearable. Here in London, he came as an unwelcome intruder from a Past,

thought dead ; and still worse, he came—Humphry did not doubt—as envoy, probably ambassador of peace, from a father who (he hoped) had finally disowned him.

“Not at all, Mr. Hobson.” It was a long time before he made the barely civil answer, and held out a limp hand of welcome, to his visitor.

Mr. Hobson, after a study of Humanity extended through some forty years, did not misread his manner, and having peered rather scornfully at the young man, adopted a stiff tone somewhat out of keeping with his mission.

“You will have guessed,” he said, “that my visit to you is dictated by business.”

Humphry merely nodded : he was keeping himself right away from Mr. Hobson ; crouching in ambush, ready to spring out and tear to bits the fallacy in some subtle scheme which, doubtless, the squire and his solicitor had planned together.

“I am sorry to say,” the other went on, more gently, “that business is a sad one. Your father died this morning.” He still tried to speak officially, but his voice broke on the last words. It was the sorrow of an old friend that took him ; not any sympathy for an unnatural cub of a socialistic son.

But the young man before him seemed curiously moved.

“Father—dead ?” he asked, as though unable to believe it ; and for a little, he appeared to be oblivious of his visitor, alone with a mad surge of conflicting thoughts, in which a strangely large place was claimed by an insistent Remorse.

“He died at a quarter past eleven,” came the distant-sounding voice of the old man, after what seemed an interval of hours.

Humphry's unreasoning instinct was to find relief from his own chaotic feelings in a reasonable anger against his disliked visitor. To come and blurt it out in this way, after a business-like preamble!

"Couldn't you have wired?" he said angrily. "I should have thought you might have let me know?"

"It was your father's wish," the other answered slowly. "He did not wish you to be summoned. I am sorry to have to tell you this, but I don't think that you can altogether blame him, after your own action."

Humphry made a gesture of impatience. "We needn't go into *that*, need we?—especially just now. . . . When is the funeral to be?"

"Mister Humphry," said the old man, with more feeling, "this is a very painful task for me, and nothing but my friendship and long service to your father—I regret to say that his firm wish, frequently expressed to the very end, was that you should not be present at the funeral."

There was a tense and ghastly silence for some moments.

"He said," went on Mr. Hobson, with evident pain—"he said if you did not care for him or Burcot sufficiently to go there in his lifetime, he did not wish that any false sentiment or pity should make the mere fact of his death induce you to do anything contrary to your convictions. I argued with him, often, but——"

Again a silence fell; broken abruptly by a sardonic laugh, hysterical, from Humphry. The hard old man had been himself, right to the end!

And because sons never altogether understand their fathers, this wish withered, in Humphry's heart, the sorrow and remorse that had been there, just now.

"I understand," he said, in chill, deliberate tones. "I dare say it was logical; I shall not go against his wishes. Possibly it's better. I have cut myself adrift from Burcot. There is no use in compromise." But he stared straight out before him, as though obsessed by some disturbing vision.

Mr. Hobson cleared his throat, and generally adopted a more legal attitude.

"That," he said, "is the other and less painful part of my business to-day. Under the circumstances, it seems possible to economize time and to save another interview——"

"By all means," put in Humphry, cold and business-like again.

"As you know, after your unfortunate misunderstanding with your father" (he paid no heed to the other's angry movement), "there was some talk of altering the succession, but I was forced to warn him that, as merely tenant for life, he would encounter legal difficulties; and I think—I think, Mister Humphry, that he always felt that in the end you would——"

"We needn't, surely, enter into that," said Humphry. The Lawyer, even now, was developing too much into the Friend; his business changing to a subtle plea.

"In any case," resumed Mr. Hobson, blandly, "whatever his motives, he delayed taking any definite action even about his private fortune, and no steps could be taken towards breaking the entail without your concurrence; so that I am glad to say that the Priory, as well as the late squire's personal estate, is therefore yours."

Humphry gave no signs of sharing Mr. Hobson's gladness.

"Mine?" he cried, in blank astonishment. "But I

thought—I never knew—I thought that you and he——”

“The entail, of course,” said Mr. Hobson, with gentle superiority, “could not be broken without *your* consent, Mr. Humphry. The estate—— But I need not enter into details in that matter. The point is that, whatever personal inconvenience the unfortunate misunderstanding may have caused, the succession is happily still undisturbed and goes from father to son, as I hope it always will, for many years to come.” He beamed agreeably, like the Fairy Queen, when she has brought about her happy ending.

“You mean to tell me,” asked Humphry, in a blank manner, “that I have got to *have* the place, in spite of my not wanting it? I’m just a go-between, and got to keep the Priory until my son can take it? Does this entail mean I can’t ever sell it?”

The lawyer’s friendliness, never too convincing, turned into a look of incredulity and scorn, and he spoke coldly, as though talking with an effort to the sort of person who deserved an answer far more summary and active.

“I will answer that question in two ways,” he said. “If you ask me, as your solicitor, whether you have got to retain the Priory I tell you frankly, as in my duty—*no*, you need not. On your father’s coming of age, the entail was broken, as is customary in these matters, and the estate resettled upon your father for life, then on you in tail, but in the event of your death without issue, upon his younger brother’s eldest son. This settlement involves, of course, that in the event of your dying without issue and without having disentailed the estate, your cousin Richard will become entitled to the property. As things are,

however, the property will become yours absolutely, on your executing a proper disentailing deed. Thus if you ask me on a point of law, whether you can sell the Priory, I say yes, you *can*."

"Then——" began Humphry, as he paused a moment.

"*But,*" broke in the lawyer, with much solemn emphasis, "I have now to speak as your father's friend, his trusted adviser—as I hope some day to be yours—and I say, Mister Humphry, that you will not do this thing."

"Why not? Why shouldn't I?" he asked excitedly. "I always said I should. The place has had the sacrifice of too many wasted lives already. Why should I give mine, or Richard's? Why should I waste what little money the family has got on that miserable pretence of grandeur? My father and his father liked to live there in poverty—very well; but why should *I* carry the thing on, a joke to the whole County, and——"

Mr. Hobson leapt up angrily. "You're going too far, young man," he said, beyond himself with fury. "I've spoken to you till now as your legal adviser. Now I resign that post, if only for the privilege of telling you my real opinion of your conduct. Your abominable selfishness has soured the last months of your father's life—a finer man than you will ever be, sir, let me tell you—whom you can insult while he still lies unburied——"

"And who won't let me bury him!" cried Humphry, not waiting to choose words; he never could endure reproof. "What do I owe to him, now, after that?"

"Very well, sir," shouted Mr. Hobson, not less excited by the heartless obstinacy of this whipper-snapper, whom he had always secretly despised; "very well! I have

done my duty, as a lawyer ; I have tried to do it as a friend. I have told you that the Priory is yours to sell, if you are selfish enough, for your own interests, to sacrifice the whole future of your family. *But* let me tell you, sir" (and he snatched up his hat), "that you need not trouble to send your instructions to us ; you can send them to some other firm at once. I will not waste my words on you. I wish you a very good day, sir—and I am sorry to think that you are a Scott-Mahon."

It was a very red old gentleman who walked down Archer Lane at a great pace, in the wrong direction.

Humphry did not even rise from his seat as the lawyer eddied out, but sat there, gradually cooling. First of all, he came to feel that he had been ridiculous to lose his temper with that doddering old Hobson ; and having once got his mind to the proper state of calm, he naturally found it perturbed afresh by that quite illogical remorse. He could not for a long time get away from the picture of an old man, dying all alone, in bitterness against his only son ; but finally, he made himself—the stupid, sentimental part of him—see that it had been the old man's wish. How could his banned son know that he was dying ? . . . So he began to think of Burcot.

It was decidedly annoying to have the trouble and responsibility of all this put upon him. He had thought that everything was settled long ago ; and the place would go to somebody or other, probably to that ass Richard, at his father's death. Now he had to do everything himself, and of course Aunt Jane, with that set, would say that it was all his fault ! Rosa, too—That was an enormous difficulty. He had always told her that the place was lost to him already, and this had

kept her quiet lately about the tactful letter to his father ; but now, of course——! He saw all those protests, prayers, and tears starting afresh ; offering as alternatives a return to Burcot, after all, or a life-long series of reproaches and " I told you so's " from Rosa.

Rosa—always Rosa ; everything came back to that !

And whilst he heaved the dolorous sigh of a man who sees the certain goal of his own folly, but knows that honour calls him to go through to it, there was another tap upon the door.

Rosa ! Rosa now ?

That unexpected scene had driven from his memory, all thought of the other that he so much dreaded. He still had got to face the Reconciliation !

Once more, with even less result, he tried to twist his face into a smile just friendly enough to hint at love's forgiveness, but not so genial as to imply that episodes like last night's could be safely repeated at her will.

" Well, Rosa," he said, " here you are ! " In spite of his intentions, there was a heavy note, almost of doom, about the words.

But she was in no mood to notice. Pale, miserable guilty, she said, " Well, Humphry," in a mechanical way, and hurried on into the room. Humphry, closing the door, was a prey to mixed emotions ; he dreaded the scene even more after a sight of Rosa's face, but also he felt yet more of a brute.

Probably the tender emotion showed most, when he turned towards her, for before he could reach her, almost indeed as though to stop him, she broke out impetuously into shapeless portions of a speech rehearsed in twenty different ways.

" Humphry," she said, " I can see you're going to forgive me, and say last night was all your fault. Don't

do that ; I couldn't *bear* it. I've got something—something terrible to tell you. You don't know how mean and horrible I feel, but—I was so unhappy, and you didn't seem to want me in the slightest. . . . Don't think I was pretending all this time. You won't think that, will you, ever? I *was* fond of you, and I admired your work so, and it was wonderful helping it, and so—I thought I loved you. And you—you pitied me, didn't you? We both wanted to help each other, I think ; but that was all ; and then when—when we saw more of one another and we found out the truth, and you saw I wasn't what you thought I was——”

“But I don't understand yet, Rosa,” said Humphry, almost dazed, “you see——”

“No, don't say anything,” she cried ; “you'll make it harder, and it's hard enough already. You see, you thought that I was common—oh, I'm not saying that nastily, at all—and I know you would have married me, out of kindness, and we should have been wretched ; but—— No, I can't put it how I want, to you, but—you'll think me horrible—but, Humphry, I've promised—I'm going to marry Mr. Paston, after all.”

Not at all like that had she planned to tell him the truth, but it was out at last ; and now she stood, guilty and ashamed, waiting for his reproaches ; knowing that it was indeed horrible to have made that promise to Mat before she had broken their engagement ; feeling that she deserved the epithet of common ; bravely prepared to bow before a final storm, so that she afterwards might reach the peaceful haven of true love.

But Humphry stood there, his blank face reflecting his blank mind.

Anger and elation ; jealousy, relief, equally were absent from him. This second visit had come too soon

after Mr. Hobson's: the human brain soon reaches the extremity of its endurance. He stood there, realizing what she said by now, but quite unconscious of any effect that it could exercise on him; stunned by this second sudden change in the whole architecture of his life.

"Marry Paston?" he repeated, in a strange, husky voice; and then, as though she had been asking counsel of a disinterested stranger, "Yes, I think you're wise. One has to do what one is meant to do." He did not know, exactly, why he had said that.

"Yes," said Rosa, eagerly; puzzled and frightened by his attitude, but leaping at excuse; "he and I were always meant for one another. You—you were awfully kind to me; don't think I'm not grateful; but we weren't meant to marry. He and I have everything in common, you see, and we've always lived exactly the same life. I hope some day you'll marry some one very, very nice in your own class. That was *our* mistake, wasn't it? I suppose—I didn't know it, but I suppose that lovely old place tempted me, and the position . . . ? It's no use trying to get out of your class, *is* it? But—I do hope you understand?"

A sudden dizziness seized Humphry. His face grew pale, and he put a steadying hand upon the table.

"Yes," he said, so low as scarcely to be heard. "Yes—I quite understand. Don't think I blame you—I think you're wise, but— Do you mind? I feel—I want to think— No, it's not you, but I've just heard—my father's dead, and everything's so—curious. I want to be alone with it, I think." And he dropped limply on a chair.

"Your father dead?" muttered Rosa.

She moved towards him; even her hands went out

in a small gesture of sympathy and consolation. He looked such a boy . . .

Then she remembered.

There was but one thing, now, that she could do. Very slowly and quietly, with a look of guilt, but also of most tender pity, she went out, for the last time, from the little Club which they had planned together.

Her sensitive conscience reached her, as though she had been a murderer.

He had not loved her, no ; it had indeed been a mistake ; but his father was dead, he was full of vain remorse, needed comfort, sympathy—and she had come to say that she had left him for another man ! In the hour of his need she had deserted him ; and in the meanest of all manners. With hideous shame, she remembered the motive of her new friendship with Mat ; realized that for some hours she had been engaged to both of them at once.

So that because she judged herself by the law of a pure simple heart, she seemed to be loathsome and abominable.

As she walked back to her lodgings, some inconsequent memory brought back to her guilty mind a remark that she had made, months back, to this poor broken Humphry. It was when she first offered him her help, and tried to excuse her disloyalty to Mat in praising a strange rival's views.

"I was so ashamed," she had said, "and I suppose no *man* would ever do it ?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRONGEST WINS

LITTLE by little Humphry recovered from the stupor of his over-weary nerves, and came to realize that he was free.

He was never quite certain how long he sat there, his thoughts beyond control, whirling themselves around his stagnant, unresisting brain; but there was in that interval a definite moment when he honestly believed that he was hurt at Rosa's desertion, really felt jealous of Mat Paston! It was the natural instinct, since few men care to be worsted even for a prize that they do not desire; but it endured that moment only. In the next, he realized all too fully the truth of her remark; they were not made for one another, her ways were not his; and he knew that Fate had been too kind to him. Seldom indeed does she retrieve a man's past errors for him!

And he had learnt his lesson.

He was free—not as he had thought himself more than once before, but literally free; and free he would take care, now, to remain.

Philip, within a week or two, had been succeeded by Rosa as his helper and ally, only too soon to become ambitious of being his ruler; whilst Burcot, as typified by his father and old Hobson, had been there, lurking,

all the time. But now he stood alone, and no weak sense of solitude, no longing for sympathy, should ever make him hold his hands out to the chains again. The sole way to do things just how one wished, was to do them absolutely by one's self. . . .

He got up, stiff and numb in body, but with his mind fresh and clear. A crisis had passed, and, like Nature's storm, had left everything with a fresh splendour.

Feeling that he stood upon the threshold of a new region in his life—perhaps even was about, for the first time, to live a life utterly alone—he lit his pipe, sat down in a more tempting chair beside the fire, and gave himself up contentedly to dream castles, of which he was to be sole architect.

After all—a man tended naturally to want encouragement, and then, of course, the person so encouraged began to meddle with his schemes, as Philip had, or Rosa ; but, after all, he had shown that he could get things done without anybody's help. Archer Lane Club was all his own idea ; and it was a success. The greatest proof of that lay in the fact that, by now, he was practically not needed there at all. Rosa had seemed to lack the courage for a new start ; but now—now he could go out and start other clubs like that in Archer Lane ; start them everywhere in this pitiful East End.

He was young—*young* ! Ten years only, out of a man's forty active years, had been expended, and who knew what he might not do ere he was sixty ? Scarcely a year's work done, and so much accomplished ! Surely at each step the road would show yet fewer obstacles ?

Glorious visions spread themselves before him.

He saw himself, an old man, revisiting all the Clubs

that he had started ; little breathing-spaces for Beauty, Loyalty, Trust, Colour, for everything hitherto crushed out by the fog and gloom of the great human ant-heap. Archer Lane must always be his favourite, but there would be a hundred others ! Sons and grandsons of his first members thronged around him, grasping his hand warmly, cheering the man who had brought gladness to the poor. Others went out and carried on the work themselves, until on every side there rose these little centres of healthiness and tolerance—virtue without narrowness, laughter without malice, pleasure without sin ; until Poverty had lost its sting and Discontent its victory ; until this poor, helpless East End stood out in very truth as a radiant City of New Hope. . . .

Wearied by the day's experience, his mind loosed from Reality in peering through the future, he found himself powerless to build the castles that he wished ; for while he gazed into the glowing caverns of the fire, the outline of that wondrous, sun-lit city faded, and lo ! slowly over them there formed a vision seen by him before—a great white pile, straggling in its old vastness underneath the moon ; left desolate and crying for its master. . . .

The Priory ! Just for a moment he had not remembered ; there was that annoying business to be settled first. He must find a new firm of solicitors, if that stubborn old ass Hobson really wouldn't do the job ; and then——

Was selling it really the best course to take ?

Of course, there was Richard ; he could have it, and carry the whole thing along. But Richard always seemed an awful idiot ; one couldn't fancy him at Burcot, somehow. Richard acting as head of *their* family ; of the Scott-Ma'ions—— ?

Besides, if he let Richard take the place, and so perpetuate the absurd idea of still being a great family, Aunt Jane and all those people would say that he had not acted on any sound principle; not any theory of finance or re-establishing the Scott-Mahons in that way; but merely because he had shirked his duty. And duty is a horrid word.

Yes, there were only two ways. Richard was quite out of it. One either sold the place, or else——

No, one must sell the place, or shut it, if nobody was fool enough to buy it. Then—he himself didn't want much money, but he could invest it, and gradually the Scott-Mahons might get rich again and cease to be a County joke. Yes; he had never thought of that argument before, but they might even some day be able to live at Burcot decently again. Reopen it, or buy it back, or something! Why, of course, quite apart from his own theories, it was the sound thing to do, just for the family. In fact, he really did it for the family.

The only thing was—what about the pictures? One couldn't very well sell *them*. If he could let the place, of course they could stay where they were; but who would care to rent so huge a house?

There was the old Johnny in the tight armour, that he used to love as a small kid; and there was the Puritan girl, that he preferred when he was nearing twenty; and then there was the one by Peter Lely; and all of them Scott-Mahons. It seemed a pity to sell them, somehow; and yet, what was the use of storing them? They probably would never go back to the Priory—merely rot away; and some must be worth quite a lot of money?

As for them being ancestors, that was all sentiment!

Perhaps he'd save the Puritan and the old chap in armour, just for—well, for auld lang syne ; but he would sell the rest.

He could just imagine what Aunt Jane would say. He knew exactly the voice in which she always brought out her pet catch-word—Duty !

Duty? What rubbish ! As though one could set the mere keeping-up of an old, half-shut house beside the founding of a hundred clubs, which were to flood the slums with sunshine. These people saw things in a false, County perspective. What good had all those Scott-Mahons done up there, from the first one, who got the place straight from the monks through Henry's bounty, right down to—— ?

By Jove, he had never thought of the thing quite like that. His father was the last Scott-Mahon of Burcot !

After this they would be Scott-Mahons of—well, anywhere. He would be of the East End, another might be of Belgravia ; but never any more of Burcot ! It was a rum idea, somehow.

What would those old fellows, right back there, have thought? The one in the tight armour, for example? He had given his whole life to the place, and won honour in war for the family ; then handed the Priory and its traditions down to his first son. So had the thing gone on, all through the centuries.

Man by man, they had passed along the torch ; those first Scott-Mahons blowing it ever to a bigger glory—the later sheltering its dwindled flames ; and now *he* was to be logical, and throw it down !

For one moment it seemed a big thing to do ; and in the moment following, it seemed too big.

The vision of the House had faded, but in its place

he saw the armoured warrior, with all the rest, pointing at him a finger that accused. Generations of Scott-Mahons, all in his aunt Jane's voice, cried "Duty!" to him, with insistent scorn; or so it seemed to Humphry, for Conscience has a million of disguises.

And almost blending with that word, there came, as to his ears, a sentence spoken by himself unconsciously, like some one prompted, a short time ago.

"One must do what one's meant to do," he had remarked to Rosa.

Now that sentence echoed in his ears.

The room seemed hot, now, to suffocation's limit. He put his hand up to his throat, and it touched a soft, half-inch collar.

Why, what—? He never used—his father never wore a thing like that! Had he, himself, been meant to wear it, or was it the symbol of a lower class? Had he realized himself by sinking?

He looked, in a dazed manner, round the room; and everything was strange to him, as to a man suddenly awakened from some lengthy trance. How had he come here, to this; how drifted into it?

Eleanor—Philip—all that seemed unreal; a dream of centuries ago.

Had he been meant for this? or for the Priory? One must do what one's meant to do!

This was what he liked; but—"Duty"?

If he deserted Burcot, what would happen? Would some one buy it, or would it fall into decay? Was that last fate worse than some self-made snob swaggering beneath the Scott-Mahon ancestors?

The little church, too—could one have others praying there; standing beneath the Scott-Mahon hatchments, kneeling upon the Scott-Mahons' very tombs?

No! He must shut it . . . let the old place fall gradually, brick by brick: the roof first, probably, or just one chimney: and last of all the gallant walls would crack and totter to the ground. The dear old terrace, too, and all those shaded walks would slowly close across with a triumphant lattice of wild undergrowth, and then——

Then Humphry did the most amazing thing in all his life. He never knew why, but he got up and said "Damn!" the oath of a man cornered; and he threw his loved pipe down on the grate, and stood, as though fighting with a spectre.

Damn it all! He knew the whole *time* what was right. This beastly job had been pressed into his hands, and he must see it through. He might deceive Aunt Jane, but he could not deceive himself. . . .

The House's sorcery had conquered; the spell of the old place had drawn him home.

He saw his real life mapped before him, now. The city of new hope—bah, the dream of a selfish idealist! Those fine things were for the Mat Pastons of this world; the lucky, discontented men who were born free!

No, he must go back to the Priory—the County—and there do his duty; apologize to Hobson; endure the sneers of Lady Hill; take to stiff collars and uncomfortable clothes; judge people, not by merit, but by birth; marry some one soon, an heiress, if possible, for Burcot's sake; anyhow, some one whom Everybody Knows; and settle down to be ordinary, respectable, conventional, useless, and in one word—County!

And (perhaps this was why he had said "Damn!") he knew, within himself, that because the Priory was the

Priory ; because he loved its peace and dignity ; because it had always been theirs, and was his now—he knew that he would not complain.

In this moment the last rent appeared in his ideal portrait of himself, and he saw Humphry Scott-Mahon, for what he really was.

He had seemed so interesting, so unusual ; was going to achieve such wonders ! To realize himself, to change the face of all East London, nothing was too big for him ; birth, family, heredity, convention—all those shackles must be forced asunder ; everything was possible ; and now——

One must do what one was meant to do ; and, no less than Rosa, he had tried to get out of his class. He had thought himself strong enough to stand alone, and for a little he had prospered. His father, the whole County, Aunt Jane—all these he had brushed aside, only to find himself confronted by the House, the beloved House of his spurned ancestors.

Face to face with that, his darling Logic fell away from him, and the loathed Sentiment prevailed. He knew, in a sudden flash, half scorn but half a curious peace, reflex of Burcot's immemorial calm, that he was no pioneer, no individualist, but just a stagnant, contented, typical Scott-Mahon.

* * * * *

And the County said, "I *thought* he couldn't be so stupid? Fancy giving that great place up, all for nothing ; and the perfect garden, too ! Of course, there *is* no money ; but one never knows—and he's not married yet."

"Well, *I* believe," Lady Hill would whisper, very slily, to this sort of comment, "that his return may not be quite unconnected with dear Eleanor. She's such

a little Socialist: it was all *her* idea, I always thought: and I believe he's coming back for his reward."

"Ah!" (this with approval due to a convincing theory). "Well, that's always possible. And she's a charming girl."

"She's so *original*," said Lady Hill.

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