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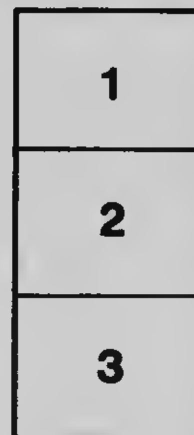

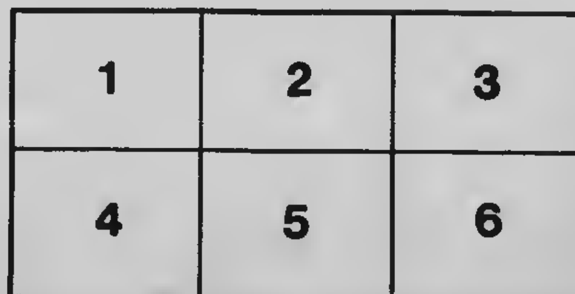

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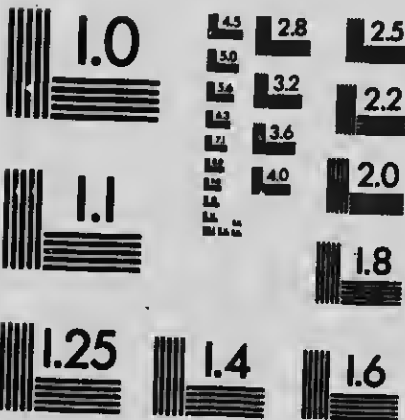

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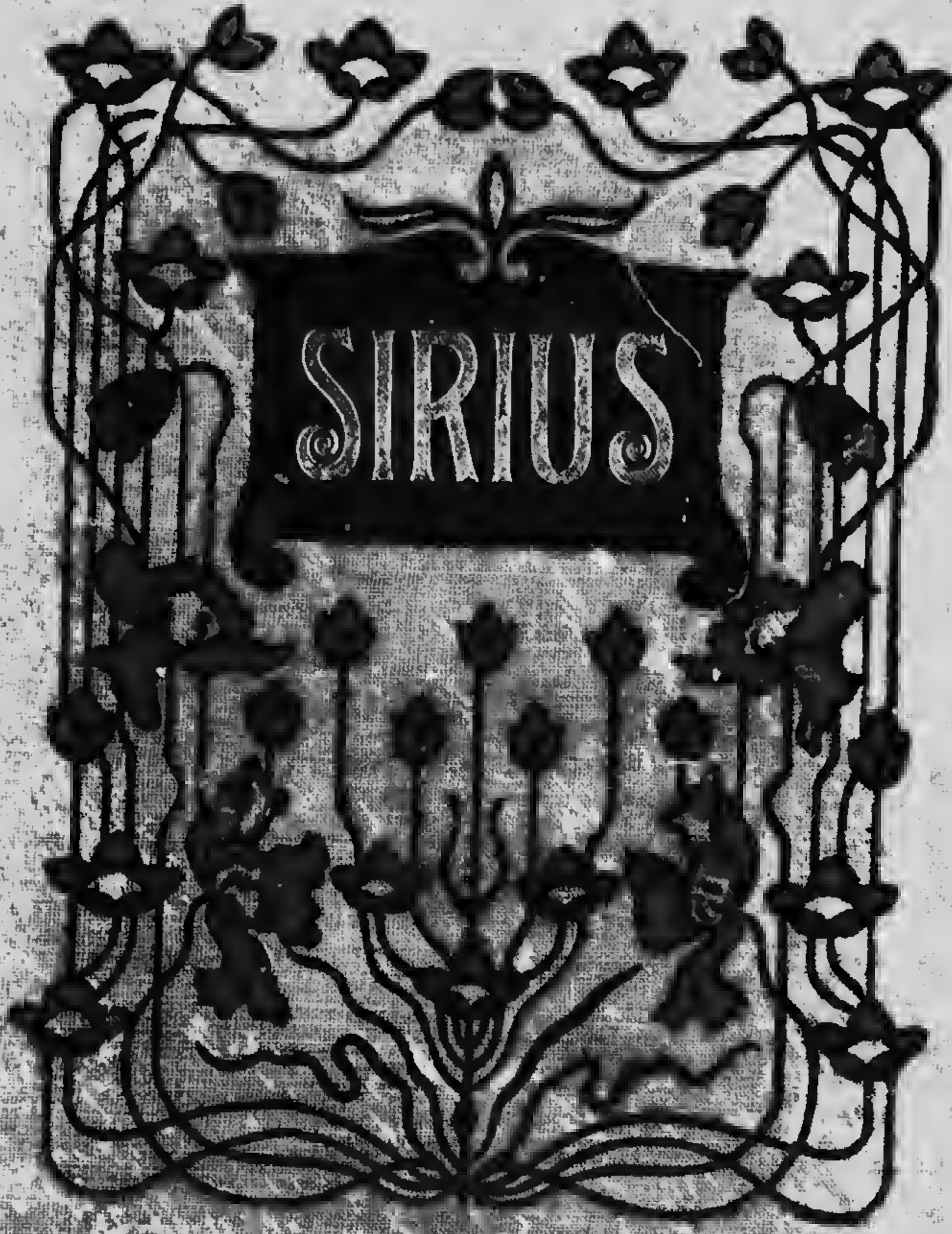

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SIRIUS

SIRIUS

A Volume of Fiction

BY ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER,
AUTHOR OF CONCERNING ISABEL CARNABY,
A DOUBLE THREAD, THE FARRINGDONS,
CUPID'S GARDEN, ETC.

TORONTO
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SIRIUS

SIRIUS

CHAPTER I

"It's a pity that you can't fancy him, Phyllis," said Gladys Winterton with a sigh; "he would be such a suitable husband for you."

"I should hate what is called a 'suitable' husband," replied her sister Phyllis scornfully. "Think of taking a husband as you would take Bovril, or Somatose, or Peptonized Cocoa—simply because he 'suited' you!"

"Well, I should prefer a suitable husband myself."

"Of course you would, because there is no romance about you, and the greater the unsuitability the greater the romance. Do you suppose that Romeo and Juliet would ever have become a classic, if the Montagus and the Capulets had walked home together from church every Sunday morning, and dined at each other's houses in a friendly way once a fortnight? Or that King Cophetua's name would be a household word, if he had taken to wife an eligible princess from the next-door kingdom?"

But the sensible Gladys stuck to her own opinion. "Oh! that sort of thing is all very well in books; but you don't get half as much fun out of the trousseau and the wedding-presents in an unsuitable marriage as you

do in a suitable one. And the presents aren't so expensive, either," she added as an afterthought.

"Who cares about the trousseau and the presents, you silly, as compared with the man?"

"They don't do instead of him, of course—at least, I suppose they wouldn't—but they are very nice as well, don't you think?"

"No, I don't: to me love is the only important thing, and nothing else matters at all. If I loved a man I should be happy with him in West Kensington and penury; and if I didn't love him I should be bored to death in luxury and Park Lane."

"Well, Phil, if love is your special line, surely Ambrose Maxwell is an adequate husband; for no man could be more devoted to a girl than he is to you."

Phyllis shrugged her shoulders. "Oh! I know that well enough: it isn't he who falls short—it is I. He adores me, I am fully aware; but I don't adore him, and that is the head and front of his offending."

"That isn't his fault."

"You stupid child, who blames people less for a thing because it isn't their fault? If people irritate me, the fact that they can't help it only serves to irritate me the more. It is so feeble and inefficient not to be able to help things."

"Still a husband who adored one would be rather nice, I think," wistfully remarked Gladys, who was the plain sister, and had had the measure of life meted out to her accordingly.

"Not if you didn't adore him: the fonder he was of you the more he'd bore you. Oh! it would simply bore me to death to be married to a man who wore no

halo of romance, and who was clothed in no glamour of idealism. Think what it would be to see a man as he actually is, and to see him three hundred and sixty-five days out of every year!"

"Of course, the less money a man had, the more love you'd want; I can see that: but if he'd plenty of money and a good position, I should have thought that a little love would go a long way."

"The longer way it went, the better I should be pleased; for I should want it to get out of my way altogether."

Gladys sighed again: "Well, it seems no use arguing with you; but if you don't take care you'll go through the wood, and have to put up with the proverbial crooked stick in the end."

"I shan't care. I'd rather have a stick that was crooked in my own particular style of crookedness, than a foot-rule carved according to other people's idea of straightness."

Whereupon Phyllis went out of the room, leaving Gladys to meditate upon that insoluble problem as to why, as the Spanish proverb puts it, heaven so persistently sends almonds to those who have no teeth. Now she would have accepted, with a hearty vote of thanks, all the good things which Ambrose Maxwell laid at her sister's feet, and which Phyllis declined to pick up. It did seem hard, therefore, that the oblation was poured out at Phyllis's feet and not at hers. If Phyllis had taken the goods that the gods bestowed, Gladys would have looked on at her sister's superior luck without a touch of envy; but she could not help hankering after the crumbs which dropped so continually from Phyllis's

better furnished table, and whereof nobody had apparently any advantage at all.

Ambrose Maxwell had been in love with Phyllis Winterton ever since he had met her at the county ball three years ago. In the beginning her beauty had struck him and captivated his fancy; and afterward her wit and high spirits had riveted the chains. But perhaps the thing about her which charmed him most, was her perfect, her exuberant, health. The interesting-invalid type of heroine has gone out of fashion nowadays—the sort of woman who enveloped herself in a shawl, and was wafted heavenward on smelling salts: now, the attractive woman has a sound body for casket to her sound mind, and she never owns that she is ill until she is well-nigh dead. Delicacy is as antiquated as chignons and crinolines; and the Lydia Languishes of to-day are surrounded by trained nurses instead of by adoring swains. Perhaps the pendulum—as is the way of pendulums—has swung too far in the opposite direction: perhaps the modern woman's defiance and disregard of anything in the form of delicacy, is sometimes suicidal in its tendency: nevertheless no one can deny that the error is on the right side; and that the woman of to-day, who laughs and dances so that the world may catch no glimpse of the fox gnawing at her vitals, is a finer creature than her grandmother who openly succumbed to megrims, vapours, and the like. At any rate so Ambrose Maxwell thought; and the majority of his contemporaries are of the same opinion.

It was at her coming-out ball that Ambrose fell in love with Phyllis Winterton; and ever since then he had wooed her persistently, in spite of the indifference with

which she looked upon his suit. Over and over again he had asked her to marry him; and over and over again she had refused. He was an excellent match for her in every way: good-looking and of average intelligence, with a fine estate which marched with her father's. The whole county approved the union, and greatly blamed Phyllis for being an obstacle in the way of it. Even so pretty a girl as herself was hardly likely to do better; and as Ambrose was only six years her senior, there was no inequality anywhere. It seemed to be one of those marriages which, according to tradition, are made in heaven, but not carried out on earth—the fate of other arrangements besides matrimonial ones. If only earth would second heaven's resolutions, what a much more comfortable earth it would be! But earth is too fond of passing amendments, as they say in the House of Commons, when heaven's bills are brought before it—an amendment being always an alteration very much for the worse.

In spite of Phyllis Winterton's coldness, Ambrose did not lose hope; he kept assuring himself that such faithfulness as his was bound to win her love in time—and there is no doubt that constancy is an enormously powerful factor in the compelling of a woman's love. But the gods saw otherwise (as the gods have a way of seeing), and did not try Ambrose Maxwell's patience too far.

Phyllis was one of those women who are endowed with a great fund of romance. The ordinary attractions of what people call "a comfortable settling in life" did not appeal to her. She felt she must love, as such women can love; and, given this, she thought she was

practically independent of outside things. To every character one thing is needful; but the things needful vary with the characters. It is well for those who are ordained by nature to choose the better part: but it is extremely ill for those who—being made, by no fault of their own, of coarser and commoner material—choose the good part while they are hankering after some lower thing: not after some evil thing, be it understood—the deliberate choice of an evil thing must always be accounted sin: but woe to those who, being made of second-rate material, choose the best instead of the second-best, given always that the second-best, as its name implies, is also good, but in a lesser degree! The great thing in life is to recognize one's own limitations, and arrange one's lot—as far as in one lies—accordingly.

The woman to whom love is of supreme importance is undoubtedly a finer creature than her sister, to whom rank and wealth more powerfully appeal; and she will become finer still if she follows her heaven-sent instincts, and develops more fully the better part of her nature, by leaving the comfortable high-road of life for the ladder which is set up from earth to heaven. But her sister will not, therefore, do well to follow her example. On the contrary, it is a fatal mistake for a second-best woman —an admirable creature in her way, though not the highest—to make, out of a sense of duty, the choice which nature dictated to her more spiritual fellow-traveller. For her, the comfortable high-road is the proper place; her feet are not formed to tread in the footsteps of angels, and her head grows dizzy as she scales the celestial stairway. Let her then realize, before it is too late, that she is neither poetic nor ideal, and that it is in

the comfortable and the prosaic that her true happiness lies. Much has been said and written of the tragedy which underlies the life of the romantic idealist, who sins against her own idealism, and gains the whole world in exchange for the soul with which God has endowed her—the soul which was made of better material than ordinary, and meant for higher things: but not enough notice has been taken of that other tragedy—whereof there are scores in this world—when the woman with a second-class soul chooses, from principle, the highest path, and finds it too hard for her. For her there is no admiration, no sympathy: instead of praising her for her choice and pitying her for her inability to live up to it, men and women condemn her for so far falling short of the ideal she once misguidedly set up.

Of a truth, it is sad to see the heavenly vision, and afterward to be disobedient unto it; and such as do this are worthy of blame. But should not a lesser meed of censure be bestowed upon those who see no visions of angels, and yet endeavour, though in vain, to walk in the more excellent way? Is not their failure to be pitied rather than condemned? To Moses, who had stood beside the burning bush, there was no terror in the wilderness or on the desolate shores of the Red Sea: but the common people, who had but followed at his bidding, prayed to be let alone in order that they might serve the Egyptians once more, and go back into slavery. And the God, Who had made them, did not punish them for this: He went before them, and the Angel of His Presence saved them, and led them through the midst of the sea upon the dry ground. And, further, it is written that at last the people entered into the prom-

ised land—the common people who had hankered after the flesh-pots of Egypt and bowed down before the golden calf; but Moses, who had heard the voice of God and been disobedient to it, saw only the land of Caanan with his eyes, but was not permitted to go over thither. Which things are an allegory.

CHAPTER II

"I HATE that dog of the Strangeways," Phyllis said one day to Ambrose, who had overtaken her on her way home from the village.

"Do you? I am so sorry the brute annoys you, and I would soon relieve you of his presence if I could; but I spoke about him to Strangeways the other day—told him how the animal hangs about the road and snaps at passers-by—and Strangeways did not take it at all nicely."

"How horrid of him! But people nearly always are sensitive about their dogs, somehow, just as they are about their children and their bicycles. I have noticed that if you tell people that their bicycles make a noise, those people are your enemies for life, just as they are if you say that one of their horses is a roarer. I wonder why it is considered such a disgrace for anything belonging to you to make a noise."

"I can't tell why, but it is. I have known a life-long friendship completely broken because a man complained that his next-door neighbour's electric-light machine—dynamo, or whatever they call the thing—was not abso-

lutely silent. As a matter of fact, the concern seemed to be a cross between a thunderstorm and an earthquake; but its possessor had convinced himself that it was the embodiment of silence, and could forgive no one for disputing this tenet."

"Telling people that any of their possessions make a noise seems to be on a par with telling them that they themselves snore; and that is an insult which blood will not wipe out," said Phyllis.

"And they don't enjoy it if you mention that you find an incessant cough on their part in any degree breaks the thread of your meditations," Ambrose added.

"Ah! we are, after all, only ostriches of a smaller growth; we bury our heads in the sand, and think nobody has any idea that we've got colds in them."

They walked on in silence for a time, and then Ambrose said suddenly: "Phyllis, I wish you could marry me. Can't you, dear?"

Phyllis shook her head. "I don't love you, you see; that's the bother."

"I know; but surely I love you so much that it is enough for both."

"No, your love for me wouldn't be enough to interest me and keep me amused. Don't you understand? To be loved by a person whom you don't love in return, is duller than playing double-dummy whist, or learning the alto of a part-song when there is nobody to take the treble."

"But, my dear, I love you so much."

Phyllis felt distinctly irritated; why couldn't he understand? "I know you do—that is what I keep saying; but your love for me only bores me as long as I

don't love you in return. I know it is horrid of me to say this," she added by way of apology, seeing how white his face grew at her words; "but you don't seem to understand, unless I am positively brutal."

Still Ambrose persisted: "But I would make you so happy—and I could do that, Phyllis, I am sure I could. You should have everything you wanted all your life, and I would never bother you to love me if you didn't want to; it would be enough—more than enough—for me to be allowed to love you."

"But it wouldn't be enough for me. And I don't want to have everything I want; nice women never do; they only want the man they love to have everything he wants."

"My dear, I don't wish you to be as nice as all that."

"Well, I am; I can't help it. And it isn't really niceness at all; it is just the way you're made. It wouldn't make me happy just to be happy; it would only make me happy to know that I was making somebody else happy—somebody whom I loved better than I love myself. Don't you see?"

But Ambrose, it is to be feared, did not see. He could not understand why his love should not satisfy Phyllis—with so much of worldly advantage thrown in as he was prepared to give her. Even Phyllis herself did not quite understand this: she only knew that it was so; that she was so made that nothing but love could satisfy her—love given, that is, not merely love received. It is delightful to be loved, as everybody knows; but to love brings the greater happiness.

While the two were thus pondering over the perversity of human nature in general and Phyllis Win-

terton's in particular, the Strangeways' dog turned into the high road from a lane, and came running toward them.

"There's that brute again!" exclaimed Ambrose. "What a nuisance the creature is!"

"He looks rather funny to-day," Phyllis rejoined. "See how his tongue is lolling out, and how queerly he runs."

"I don't like the looks of him at all. I shall have to speak to Strangeways again pretty sharply, whether he likes it or whether he doesn't."

As the dog drew nearer it was obvious that there was something very wrong with him indeed. Phyllis felt dreadfully frightened, and Ambrose distinctly uncomfortable; and they could not get out of his way, as there was no opening in the hedge on either side. When he was close to them something in Phyllis's appearance seemed to excite his ire, for he suddenly stood stock still, and then made a rush at her.

But Ambrose was too quick for him. When the infuriated animal was close to the girl, Maxwell stooped down and seized him by the throat, and held him there in spite of all his struggles. Phyllis shrieked aloud for help, and in a few seconds some labourers from an adjoining field rushed to their rescue and beat out the creature's brains with their spades; but not before Ambrose's right hand had been badly bitten in his encounter with the mad dog.

Phyllis was trembling all over. "Oh! you're hurt," she cried, as soon as she was able to speak. "Whatever can I do for you?"

"Never mind me," said Ambrose in a soothing tone,

though his face was very pale; "I'm all right. But I think I'll go straight home and get a horse and then ride to the doctor's, so that he can deal with the [illegible]ng without any loss of time."

"Yes—go, go; don't waste a minute."

"But are you sure that you are fit to walk the rest of the way home by yourself?"

"Of course I am. Please don't worry about me, but look after yourself and your poor hand."

"I say, one of you fellows see that Miss Winterton gets safely home, and another of you run on to my place and tell them to saddle a horse for me at once; I'll be up there almost as soon as you are," Maxwell said, throwing with his unwounded hand a few shillings to the assembled men.

They immediately obeyed his bidding, and he and Phyllis parted, but not before he had seen a look in her eyes which he had never seen before—a look which he considered amply repaid him for all that he was suffering or was going to suffer.

Ambrose Maxwell's heroic deed caused quite a sensation in the neighbourhood; and the public admiration for and sympathy with him increased when it was known that the local doctor considered the wound of so serious a nature that he had ordered Maxwell to go off at once to Paris to be under Pasteur for the course of inoculation.

Phyllis heard of this fiat on the very day of the catastrophe. Her father went to inquire after Ambrose and learn what the local doctor had said, and it was he who brought back the news that Maxwell was starting for Paris that night.

Without a moment's delay Phyllis slipped out of the room and out of the house, and hurried as fast as her feet could carry her to Maxwell Grange. She felt she must see Ambrose before he went and thank him for what he had done. And she did not only want to thank him: there was another feeling than gratitude now in the girl's heart. The sight of Ambrose in mortal danger, and for her sake, had done what all his wealth and position and personal charm and devotion to herself had failed to do. It had made her suddenly love the man —love him with a passionate intensity which astonished even herself. Her whole being—her whole attitude toward him—had been completely transformed by his unselfish heroism. He had been ready to give his life for her, and in return she was ready to give the rest of her life to him. The love she had waited for had come at last, and now she was convinced that Ambrose Maxwell would satisfy her completely as long as they two should live.

"Mr. Maxwell was upstairs packing," the butler said when she arrived at the front door, so she was shown into the library to wait for Ambrose. He answered her summons at once, and came downstairs as fast as he could.

"Miss Winterton—Phyllis, this is indeed good of you!" he exclaimed, meeting her with outstretched hand; and, although his face was drawn with pain and with undefined fear, nothing could wipe out of his eyes the gladness which Phyllis had called into them by her coming.

She kept his hand in hers, and looked up into his face. "I have come to thank you for saving my life,"

she said; "but I have come for more than that—I have come to give you the life which you have saved, and to tell you that at last I love you."

Ambrose drew her into his arms, and covered her face with kisses. "My darling—my own darling—do you really love me at last—after all these years?"

"Yes—I do, I do; and now I shall always love you."

"Then mine enemy's dog was in reality my friend, and the dog-star my guiding planet. I must have been born under Sirius, and he has brought me luck."

Phyllis shuddered. "Oh! don't talk of that dreadful beast," she cried. "It is agony to me to know that you are suffering—and for me."

"But, my dearest, don't you know that the fact that I am suffering for your sweet sake takes all the sting out of the pain? Sweetheart, suffering ceases to be suffering when it is borne for you; it becomes joy."

Phyllis clung to him, weeping. "Oh! how good you are, how good you are! How shall I ever be able to repay your goodness to me?"

"By loving me, dear, and becoming my wife if I live; and by loving and remembering me if I die."

"You mustn't die, Ambrose, you mustn't die. I couldn't live without you now."

"I don't want to die, dear love, heaven knows; and it is because I don't want to die that I am off to Paris to-night."

"Then marry me at once and take me with you; and let me, and me only, look after you and nurse you. Nobody could take such care of you as I could, because nobody loves you a quarter as much."

Ambrose stroked her curly hair tenderly. "My

own darling, do you think I would accept such a sacrifice at your dear hands? No—a thousand times no! But I'll tell you what I will do: I will test your love by asking you to wait a year for me."

"A thousand years if you like."

"You see, dear, I shall go through Pasteur's course of treatment at once; and after that I feel I must wait a year to make sure that I am quite safe, and that there is for certain no more danger of hydrophobia. Then, if I am all right, I will beg you on my knees to marry me, and the sooner the better."

"Let me marry you as soon as you come back from Paris," Phyllis besought, clinging to him, "so that I can be with you all that year to comfort and cheer you, and to keep you from growing anxious and morbid."

But Ambrose stood firm. "No, Phyllis; if I have to die a horrible death, let me die alone, and not bring a heavier shadow on your young life than there need be. But wait for me that one year, sweetheart; won't you?"

"All the years of my life if it is necessary. There will never be any other man for me but you."

And then, after another passionate embrace, the lovers parted, as it was time for Ambrose to start upon his gruesome journey.

CHAPTER III

WHILE Ambrose Maxwell was in Paris, Phyllis wrote to him every day those charming first-love-letters, which are generally, from a literary point of view, the

best things that a woman ever does write. And they cheered Ambrose wonderfully, with their girlish gossip and their shy avowals of love; as indeed they ought to have done, since they took up all Phyllis's thoughts and more than half her time. When she was not actually engaged in writing to her lover she was thinking over what she was going to write to him; and as soon as she had posted one day's letter, she straightway began to compose the next.

She had been an unconscionable time in falling in love; but, having at last succeeded in doing so, she had done it thoroughly, which is not unusually the case with the women whose wooing has been long in doing. She was intensely grateful to Ambrose as well as being devotedly attached to him; but, for all that, she hardly realized how sore was the trial through which he was now passing—an experience specially painful to a man endowed with so much physical vitality, and in whom the life of the body was so strong.

There is no doubt that our own flesh is dearer to some of us than to others. Even though "there was never yet philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently," the toothache does not afflict all alike. One man—be he philosopher or not—can bear it with a very fair show of equanimity, if at the same time fortune is smiling upon him in other ways; while to another man bodily anguish takes all the joy out of life, even if his heart's desire be at that moment within his grasp. And the advantage is not all on the side of the former; for he will always require more than mere physical well-being to make him happy; while, given health and an outdoor life, the cup of the latter will be filled to overflowing.

The intellectual man, to whom the ills of the flesh are not of such vital importance compared with other things, knows nothing of that exuberant thrill of pure joy in the bare fact of being alive, which is so common to his more material brethren, and than which, perhaps, there is no more glorious feeling on earth—that passionate delight in mere existence which makes us to understand why once the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy.

Even in these effete modern days of over-civilization, the old Greek joy in life remains in some men and women, who are not the least happy among the children of men; and it is such as these that keep the earth from growing too introspective and morbid and moribund in her old age. The man of letters may look down from his intellectual eminence upon the sportsman—the girl-graduate may despise her simpler sister who stays at home "to watch the corn grow and the blossoms set;" yet let them both remember that nature as well as science is a handmaid of the Most High, and has her secrets which she will disclose to none but her worshippers; and let them also remember, as they sit in their musty world of men-made books and breathe the dust of the ages, that long before a single book was penned or a single science formulated, God gathered the waters together and called them seas, and He made the dry land appear and bring forth the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, and saw that both were good; and the evening and the morning were the third day.

Ambrose Maxwell was the type of man to whom the body must always be of more importance than the

mind—with whom physical infirmity would completely cancel any amount of intellectual pleasure. And who shall dare to blame him for this? Did not the most subtle of created beings say of the upright and perfect man, "Put forth Thine Hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy Face"? And does not the enemy, who has been planning man's undoing with unceasing vigilance throughout the ages, know more about that strange thing we call human nature than do hyper-modern scientists (so called) who uphold that there is no such thing as physical pain—that it is a mere fiction of the imagination? Satan knew better than this, when he prayed God to put forth His Hand and touch Job's bone and flesh: S. Paul knew better than this, when he passed triumphantly through perils of waters and perils in the wilderness and perils among false brethren, and yet thrice besought the Lord that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him: and the Angel of the Apocalypse knew better than this, when the Great Voice cried out of heaven that in the new heaven and the new earth there should be no more pain. It would hardly be necessary for Almighty Power to make all things new, and begin the great work of creation over again, if the former things which are to pass away were nothing but figments of human imagination; surely a less fundamental remedy would be sufficient for evils which do not really exist.

When Maxwell came home after his visit to Paris, Phyllis was shocked to see the change the last few weeks had wrought in him. His usual high spirits had totally disappeared, and his vitality seemed to be at its lowest ebb; even his good looks had suffered temporary eclipse

from the cloud which was overshadowing him. Although the doctors had assured him that, humanly speaking, the danger was over and he had nothing to fear, their words brought no comfort to his soul. He had never known a day's illness in his life, and therefore anything connected with bodily sickness was peculiarly repellent to him, as it is to all perfectly healthy organisms. And the ordeal through which he was passing was extremely trying even to the nerves of the bravest man. Of sudden danger and death he had no fear; when the dog flew at Phyllis, his arm was strong and his eye steady in seizing the brute and keeping it at bay; but this shadowy, intangible, overhanging dread was a different thing, and was sapping his very life.

At first Phyllis's devotion to him knew no bounds. Times without end she went over in her own mind what he had suffered and was still suffering on her behalf; and times without end she assured herself that her entire life would not be long enough in which to repay the debt she owed to him. The tragedy of the situation appealed strongly to her imagination. All her life she had hungered and thirsted for romance, and now at last she had attained her heart's desire. She had hardly time to pity her lover's present sorrow, she was so busy thinking of the joy preparing for him when his self-enforced year of probation should be over. What an ideal wife she would be to him, and how perfectly happy they would be together! Yes, she said to herself, she had been right all along—hers was a nature which could be satisfied with nothing short of the best; the second-best had no power to content her. So she raised her pæan that she had been accounted worthy to attain unto

the highest that life has to offer; and—in her heart of hearts—she applauded the accuracy of that Almighty Wisdom Which had perceived that she was indeed worthy to be thus accounted.

But upon Ambrose's present suffering, as compared with her own future happiness, she did not dwell overmuch. It is so difficult to eliminate the thought of self from even one's most exalted moments. In the very ecstasy of transfiguration—on the highest summit of the mountain—we are all too ready to exclaim, "It is good for *us* to be here!"; too apt to turn from the glory which is being revealed to notice the effect which its revelation is having upon ourselves. So with us too, as with the Apostles of old, it comes to pass that we are led down again into the valley, where much people meet us with their evil spirits and their want of faith and their disputations as to which shall be greatest; and there we are bidden once more to humble ourselves, and to see how poor a thing is the human nature which we share with our fellows at the foot of the hill, unless it be glorified and sanctified by that Divine Nature which transfigured it upon the mountain top.

So the weeks and the months of the year of probation rolled on, and each day found Phyllis more radiantly happy, and Ambrose more profoundly depressed. At first she was very patient with him, and tried all her pretty arts to woo him back into the light; but as her efforts met with repeated failure, her patience began to fall short, and she experienced a not altogether unjustifiable irritation against him for so persistently looking on the dark side of things, and refusing to avail himself of the comfort afforded by the doctors' repeated assur-

ances that in his case Pasteur's treatment had evidently been successful. He did not believe the doctors; Phyllis could see that, and it vexed her to watch him deliberately making himself ill when, if he would only allow it, he was in perfect health. He never complained; he was not the man to do that; but his depression was so profound, and his self-absorption so great, that she could not help but find him a sorry companion. In vain she tried to interest him in the local gossip that used to amuse him in times past; in vain she endeavoured to recall him to that delightful world of sport which until now had equally engrossed herself and him; he listened with the utmost courtesy to what she said, but evidently his thoughts were far away all the time. Neither he nor she had ever cared much for books, so books were no resource to them just then; and poor Phyllis was often at her wits' end as to what to talk about with her melancholy lover.

After a time she could no longer disguise it from herself that her affection was beginning to wane. Love can generally survive a short attack, be it never so sharp; but it is only love of the finest quality that endureth all things for any length of time, and yet never faileth. She hated herself, and was heartily ashamed of her gross ingratitude; nevertheless the horrible fact remained that Ambrose was fast degenerating from a pleasure into a duty. She made a point of seeing him every day, but if by any accident she was prevented from carrying out this programme, there was a half-holiday sort of feeling in the air which filled her with remorse.

At last her mental discomfort was so great that she

appealed to her sister—that frequent refuge for the distressed among feminine souls.

"Gladys, do you think it is possible to over-estimate the staying-power of love?"

"Oh dear! yes; it is possible to exaggerate and over-estimate anything. However strong a thing may be, it loses all its strength if you pretend it is stronger than it really is."

"Men's love for us seems to go deeper than ours for them," said Phyllis, with the effective sigh of a pretty woman; "at least, it stands more without smashing."

"It stands more in a certain direction, and less in another."

"As for instance?"

"It will bear big things better than little things. I believe that there are lots of men who, if the necessity arises, will literally lay down their lives for the woman they love; but I don't believe there ever lived a man whose love could stand the test of matching wool. However much a man may adore a woman to begin with, he'll adore her the less if she gives him a skein of wool, and tells him to go into town and match it exactly."

Phyllis nodded. "That's true; and yet a woman will match the exact shade without suffering any diminution in her affection thereby."

"Of course she will. Why, we even do things like that for each other—let alone for men—without liking each other any the less in consequence; at least, not much the less."

"So we ought, for it seems that the big things are too much for us."

Gladys looked very wise. "I always knew that big things would be too much for me, so I never bothered about them."

"But I did. I thought that I was the type of woman who was made for big things, and whom small things would never satisfy."

"I know you did; but I knew you better."

"Why on earth didn't you tell me so?" And poor Phyllis fairly groaned.

"I did; I kept telling you so over and over again, but you never believed me. There are heaps of women like you who think that they are made of better material than their fellows, and that their spirits are 'finely touched to fine issues'; but they aren't, you know—nothing of the kind."

"Oh dear, oh dear! Then don't you believe that any women are as nice as I used to think I was?"

"Some; but precious few."

"Well, Gladys dear, at any rate it isn't our fault that we're not perfect."

"No; but it was your fault believing that you were, and acting on the belief."

Phyllis fairly wrung her hands.

"I've no patience," Gladys continued, "with the sentimental, romantic sort of women, who are always crying out for some great thing whereby to show mankind how exquisitely refined and tender and superior they are. The world is full of them. They are waiting for some fairy prince to come and awaken them from the stupor of misunderstanding into which (according to their own ideas) their family circle has cast them. It never seems to occur to them that even if the fairy

prince came he would want a fairy princess, and so in no circumstances would have anything to do with them."

"I thought I was a fairy princess," was Phyllis's confession.

"I know you did, and Ambrose Maxwell thought so too. And now you see what a pair of sillies you were! I feel like old Mrs. Burslem, who had a row with her whole household and told me afterward, 'I sent for my servants and I said to them, "You are all of you a couple of noodles!"' I am inclined to speak to the world of men and women, with you and Ambrose at their head, and say to them, 'You are all of you a couple of noodles!'"

"But what can I do now? I suppose I must go on with my engagement?"

"Of course you must. Being common delf, and yet having played the part of porcelain, you must now go on playing the part of porcelain till the end of the chapter. There is no honourable alternative that I can see."

"But, Gladys dear, he is so dull." Phyllis's eyes were beseeching in their expression.

"It was on your behalf that he became dull."

"And he is so depressing—so dreadfully depressing."

But Gladys was inexorable. "It was saving your life that depressed him."

"I know, I know. But now that my love is dying, my debt of gratitude to him galls me more and more. Can't you understand? I could bear it better if his misery had been caused by somebody else; but now I hate myself for having been the cause of such misery—and I hate him for making me hate myself—and I hate my-

self still more for being such an ungrateful brute as to hate him. And there we are!"

"Still, having ruined his health and spoiled his life, I don't see how you can break his heart as well."

"I know I can't; it would be too cruel—too disgraceful. Oh! Gladys, I'd give anything if only I could love him again—anything. But I can't; and that's the tragedy of it all. If you don't love a person, nothing can make you love them, you know."

"You loved him once; just after the accident."

"I know I did; I adored him. Then I thought my love was of the best quality and could stand any strain. Now I see that it wasn't."

Gladys was silent for a moment; then she said, "I can't help feeling sorry for you both. It is terrible for him to have given you everything—including life itself—and to receive nothing in return; and it is hard for you, too, to realize that you have been weighed in the balances, in accordance with your own desires, and have been found so sadly wanting."

"Yes, that's just it. I asked to be weighed according to troy weights and measures, as the precious metals are weighed; and now I find that avoirdupois was good enough for me. He will be disappointed in me, I know; but not more so than I am in myself; that would be impossible."

"But you must go on with it."

"Yes, I must; if I failed him now, after what he has done for me, I should be the most despicable woman that ever lived. Nevertheless, I can't help wanting to hit him when he sits with that gloomy look upon his face, taking no notice of anything; and the fact that the

gloomy look was imprinted there on my account, and as the sign and seal of my deliverance, doesn't make my desire to hit any the less, and it's no use pretending that it does."

"But, Phyllis, after all he has done and suffered for you, you'll marry him?"

Phyllis thought for a moment. "Yes, I'll marry him; but I expect I shall end by hitting him all the same."

"I believe you would have liked him better in the long run if he had let the dog bite you, and then walked beside you to your grave, smiling cheerfully and making merry by the way."

"I verily believe I should."

"Yet you thought you were the ideal type of woman!" And Gladys laughed.

"Yes, I thought I was the ideal type of woman." And Phyllis sighed.

CHAPTER IV

THE year of probation was nearly at an end, and yet Ambrose Maxwell's spirits did not improve. In spite of the doctor's repeated assurances that all was well with him—in spite of the fact that there were no signs of any poison in his blood, although almost a year had elapsed since the dog bit him—the young man's melancholy increased rather than abated. Was it possible that Phyllis's attempts to hide from him the waning of her affections, were after all in vain; and that he suspected the pitiless truth that he had indeed risked all for nought,

and that Phyllis was again as indifferent to him as she was before he had lain down his life for her?

At last the crisis arrived.

One never-to-be-forgotten day Ambrose came to see his promised bride with a look on his face that had never been there before—the look of a man who has borne as much as he can bear, and has resolved at all costs to end a misery which has gone beyond his powers of endurance.

"Phyllis," he said, "I have come to release you from your bond: the engagement between us must be broken off."

For one brief moment a feeling of intense relief flooded the girl's soul; then her better nature reasserted itself, and she began to experience an agony of pity for the unhappy man before her. So it had come at last, she said to herself; the doctors were wrong after all, and Ambrose had been right in his conviction that the taint left in his blood by the mad dog would eventually show itself. And, with her intense compassion, a faint shadow of her former love for him returned to her heart.

"Ambrose, I will never leave you," she said, laying her hand upon his arm; "whatever happens I will stay by your side to help and comfort you."

It is wonderful how in moments of strong emotion the best that there is in us rises to the surface.

Maxwell shook off the caressing little hand. "Don't touch me, Phyllis! I'm not fit for you to touch me."

"My dear, my dear, how can you say such things? Wasn't it for me that you ran into such fearful danger? And am I the one to turn from you when I see you suffering for my sake?"

"I know! I know! It is that which makes it so terrible to me. When I realize how you love me, I feel that my agony is greater than I can bear." And Ambrose sank into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Phyllis stroked his hair tenderly; her heart was overflowing with pity to see the strong man brought so low. "I could not help loving you when I saw you ready literally to lay down your life for me; no woman could have helped it then."

"Oh, I know! Do you think it is necessary to tell me that? Haven't I seen your goodness to me ever since it happened, your patience with my irritability and my gloomy moods? My dear, believe me, not a scrap of it all has been lost upon me. You have been a perfect angel, and no one knows it better than I."

Phyllis's conscience smote her cruelly; it is when we are most completely trusted, that our own baseness stands out in its crudest colours. "I have been so sorry for you," she said simply, "so sorry, that I would have done anything in the world to make up to you for what I have unwittingly caused you to suffer."

"And now it is my turn to bring suffering upon you! Oh! it is cruel, cruel!" And Ambrose groaned aloud.

"My poor old boy!"

"Oh, Phyllis, if only you had not learned to love me!"

Again the girl's conscience smote her. How unselfish he was, she said to herself, and how meanly she had repaid his unselfishness! Yes, Gladys was right, she was only made of second-best material.

"Don't think of me," she said.

"But I do think of you—I can't help thinking of you—I think of you all the time, and it almost kills me to think how unhappy you will be."

For a moment Phyllis wished she had not acted her part so well. She had tried her utmost to hide from him the fact that her love was on the wane, and she had succeeded beyond her wildest expectations. But, alas! her success only made his misery the greater [illegible] that the blow had fallen. It touched her to the quick to notice how even now he thought of her rather than of himself; though surely any man might be forgiven for thinking exclusively of himself, with a ghastly death staring him in the face! Now that Phyllis realized that she was made of second-best material, she wished that Ambrose had been made of second-best material too, it would have made it easier for him to understand her. But since he did not understand her now, he never must, she decided; he must go down to his grave believing that she was as true and as noble as himself. So she pulled herself together and made a final effort to deceive him anew.

"I should have been a despicable woman if I had not loved you, Ambrose, after what happened—a despicable woman if I ever left off loving you; you know that as well as I do."

Ambrose fairly shuddered. "How can I tell you? how can I tell you?" he moaned.

"There is no need to tell me anything, dear. I understand."

Then the man looked up, and Phyllis was shocked to see the abject misery of his face. "What do you mean?" he asked hoarsely.

Phyllis tried to speak calmly, though she hated having to put the horrid thing into words. "I understand that the blow you have dreaded has fallen at last, and that the poison in your blood has shown itself. But oh! my dear, let me stand by you, and help you and comfort you until the end."

"You don't understand, my poor child, you don't understand. If it were only that, I could bear it bravely, whenever it came, but it is worse than that."

"Tell me what it is then," cried the girl in sore perplexity.

"I daren't; it will hurt you so; and I am ashamed."

Then Phyllis spoke sternly. "Tell me at once; nothing can hurt me as much as this doubt and suspense."

If possible Ambrose's face grew a shade whiter. "Yes; I will tell you the whole truth. I meant to keep it from you in order to save you pain, but I couldn't; the effort was beyond my powers."

"What is this dreadful thing that you are hiding from me? Tell me, and tell me quickly." And Phyllis's breath came in gasps.

"I will tell it all from the beginning," replied Ambrose, rising from his chair and walking up and down the room in his excitement. "I loved you with all my heart, as you know, for three years; and when the dog flew at you I was glad—yes, glad—for a chance of showing you how much I loved you."

"Yes; I understood that."

"And when I saw that the catastrophe had taught you to love me at last, I felt amply rewarded for the passing discomfort of Pasteur's treatment. I thought

I had bought cheaply such a priceless boon as your love."

"Well?" Phyllis prompted him as he paused for a moment in the telling of his story.

"But when I came back from Paris and settled down to ordinary life again, I found I had over-rated my strength of character—had over-rated, more shame to me! the power of my love for you. I had borne the shock without any trouble. I could have borne a heavier blow, had it been sharp and sudden and soon over; but the cloud hanging over me was more than I could stand. It was like the slow tortures of the Inquisition, which used to drive men mad by their very uncertainty and indefiniteness."

"I understand, Ambrose." Phyllis's face was alert with interest. "Go on."

"And day by day the horror seemed to grow; and as it grew, you got mixed up with it somehow. If I forgot it for a time, the sight of you brought it back to my mind; and so I began to want not to see you, and to feel—despise me if you will—that a day when I didn't see you was a sort of holiday."

"You mean that I depressed you, and took the joy out of your life, and became a kind of dreadful, haunting shadow."

Ambrose sank into a seat again, and buried his face in his hands. "Yes, I felt all that, to my shame! After a time I began to get my old spirits back when I was not with you, and to find life cheerful and natural again; but the moment I saw you, the shadow returned, till you became to me a sort of nightmare. And so my love lessened day by day, in spite of all my efforts to fan its

flame, and my utter self-contempt at my own fickleness."

"But why didn't you tell me this?"

"Because I didn't want to hurt you. I determined to marry you, and to devote my whole life to making you happy, without ever letting you guess that my love for you was dead. But the task proved beyond my strength. A woman might accomplish it—but not a man."

"Are you still afraid of the consequences of the dog's bite?" Phyllis found the situation absorbing rather than painful.

"No; that is the strange thing. I kept saying to myself that when I felt safe from the effects of the accident, my fear would vanish and my love for you would return. But I was wrong. I gradually ceased to have any anxiety about my own health: there was now no reason for it as I felt so well, and the doctors were so certain that I was all right; but, alas! my own assured safety brought no renewal of my love. On the contrary, I shrank from you more and more, as one would shrink from the memory of a horrible dream that was over and done with, and that one wished to forget. And, if I feel toward you like that, it would be cruel to you to marry you: I should only make you as miserable as I should be myself."

Phyllis stood up, and drew herself to her full height. "Ambrose," she said, "you needn't be unhappy about this. My love for you is dead, too; but I intended to go on pretending it wasn't, for your sake; just as you meant to go on pretending for mine. Thank heaven we have both found out our mistake before it is too late!"

"*Your* love dead, too?" But there was relief as well as astonishment in the man's voice.

"Yes; just after the accident I loved you with my whole heart, and I thought my love was so great that it could stand any strain. But it couldn't. The strain of your long-drawn-out depression and anxiety proved too much for it; so it died, as yours did."

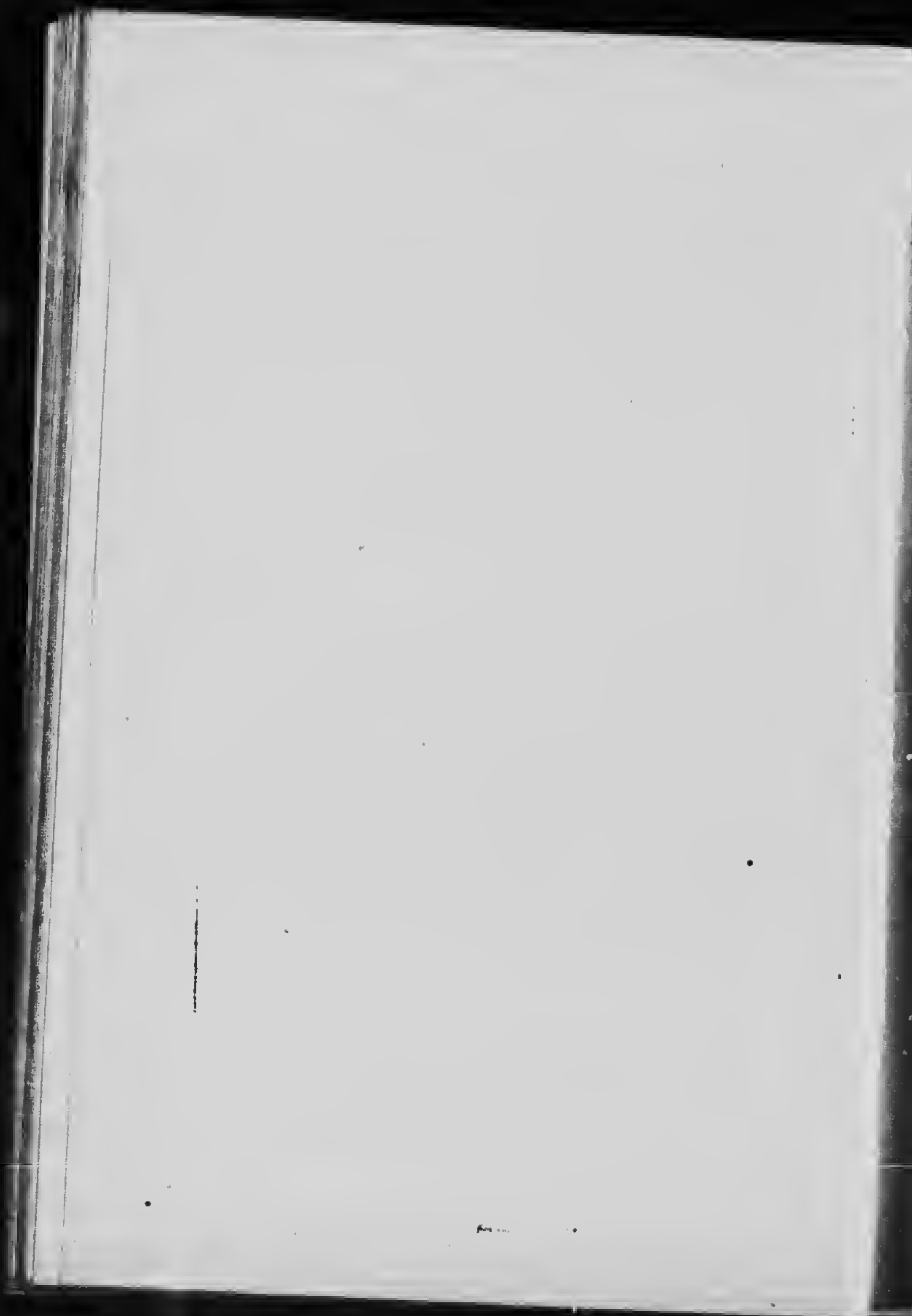
"Good heavens, Phyllis! we have both done the same thing, and fallen into the same error."

"Yes; we each thought that our love for the other was of the finest quality, and could be submitted to the severest test. But when it was put into the furnace it proved itself no silver tried by fire, but merely mediocre electro-plate."

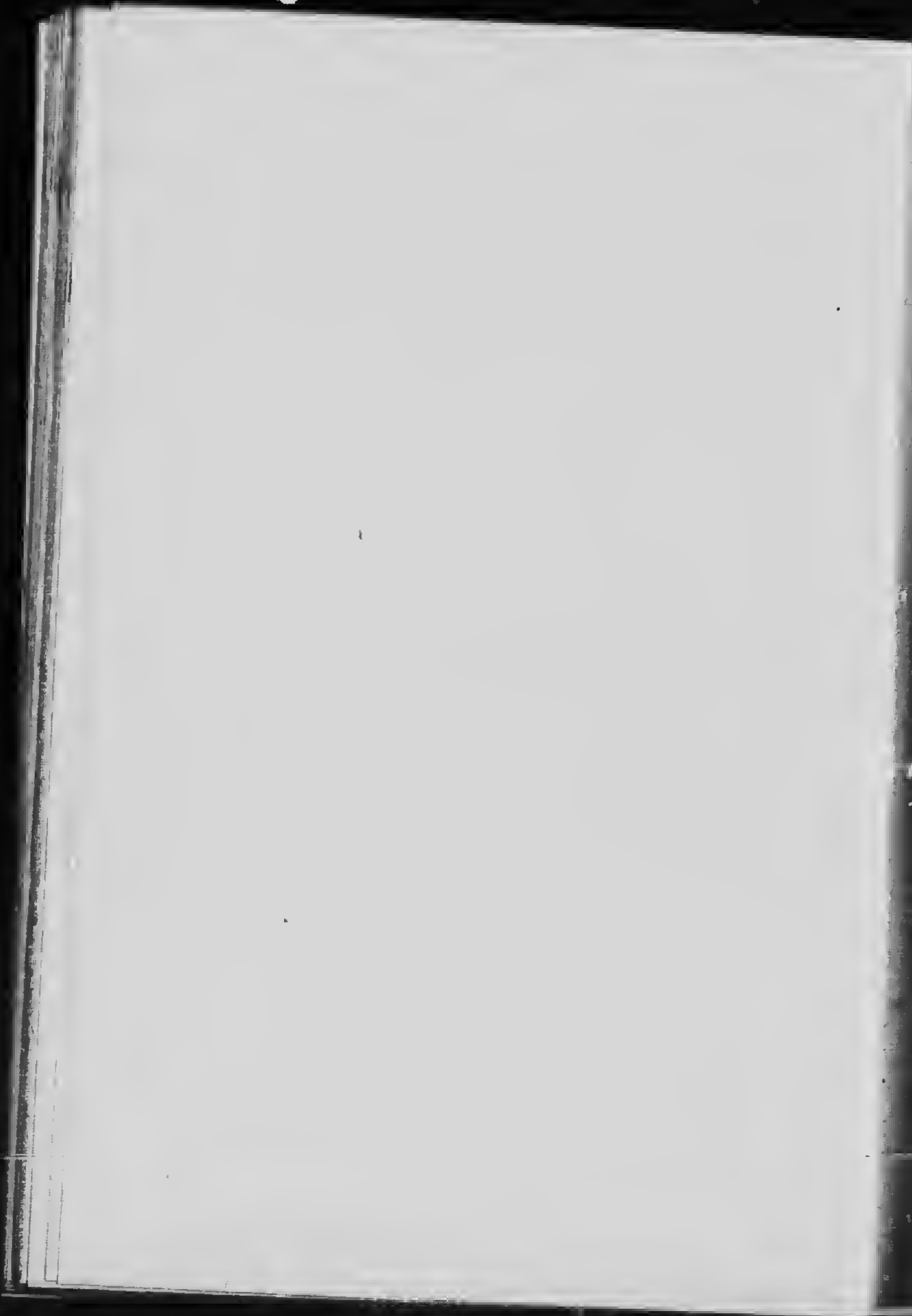
Ambrose was silent for a moment; then he said, "Are you sure that your love for me is really dead, Phyllis? You are not deceiving me so as to make things easier for me?"

"No; I swear to you that my love for you is as dead as is yours for me—dead of over-strain and over-pressure, the usual modern early death. So let us bury our two loves side by side, and never tell anybody that they were made of such very inferior material."

Ambrose raised her hand to his lips in token of his gratitude: "Certainly; *de mortuis nil nisi bonum.*"



THE SHEPHERD GUIDE



THE SHEPHERD GUIDE

THEY were married at a registry-office for fear of seeming to support, even negatively, a superstition (so they called it) which had over-run the earth for nineteen centuries; and which—in spite of all they, and such as they, had done to stem the tide—was steadily flowing instead of ebbing. So the registrar was witness to those plighted vows, which they refused to flatter the Church by swearing in her presence; and then Arnold Firth, and Sophy, his wife, repaired to Scotland for their honeymoon.

They were an extremely advanced young couple. They wrote articles in magazines for the undoing of that God Whom the Christian world for centuries has worshipped; and they never lost an opportunity of refuting that Creed which has been handed down to men from the Apostles. Also they had both taken honours in the schools of Cambridge; so that naturally it was difficult for them to believe that anything in the form of knowledge was as yet unexplored by them, or anything in the shape of truth as yet hidden from their eyes.

They were not, perhaps, absorbingly in love with each other: they were not the sort of people who know what absorbing love means; but each felt sure that the other was a sure stepping-stone to higher things of a worldly nature—and that conviction is not altogether an inefficient substitute when affection of a more romantic

nature is lacking. Arnold meant to go into Parliament and there make a name for himself; and he knew no one more fitted to help her husband in the upward struggle than Sophy Pilkington. Sophy, likewise, was ambitious; and scented from afar that social battle which begins with a mere skirmish in the shape of a countess's reception, and finds its crown of victory in an invitation to dine with a duchess. There are many such recruits in the great warfare of Society—recruits who first pitch their tents in the wilds of Kensington, and finally stand upon the battlements of Mayfair. What they undergo between the two extremes, no one but themselves can fathom; their hearts alone know the bitterness of the many snubs they have received, and the much dirt they have eaten; and a stranger may not intermeddle with the joy they experience when at last they climb the delectable mountains of success, and find themselves denizens of that promised land which lies to the immediate east of Park Lane.

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Firth travelled by easy stages to a comfortable hotel in a small village at the foot of a big mountain. The hotel was full of visitors, and the Firths were not exclusive: on the contrary, they were always ready to let the light of their deeper knowledge so shine upon their inferior fellow-men, that the latter might see for themselves how effete and antedated was a belief in the resurrection of the dead, or a faith in the world to come. Among their co-tourists there was one to whom they felt they had a special mission—a bustling little man who "travelled" for a firm devoted to the manufacture of cloth goods; but just now he was taking his holiday. His name was Silas Tod, and his local hab-

itation was in Manchester. His chosen form of worship was that of Methodism, and his office in his church that of a local preacher.

Now Silas Tod was as ready to teach men the truth as the Firths were to teach them falsehood; and, although the bride and bridegroom naturally looked down from a social and intellectual eminence upon the little commercial traveller, they condescended to deny his assertions and refute his arguments with a force and irritation which were an unconscious flattery to the power of Mr. Silas Tod—or, rather, not to the power of the little man himself, but to the vitality of the truths which he was as anxious to preach, as they were to deny, in and out of season.

"You say you don't believe in the power of prayer," he remarked one day, *à propos* of a sneer of Arnold's.

"Naturally, considering that I don't believe there is anybody to pray to."

"Well, I'll just tell you——" And Mr. Tod strung off a list of signal answers to petitions which had come within the scope of his immediate notice.

"Very interesting," Arnold said quietly when he had finished; "very interesting indeed. It is always strange how, when once one is imbued with a fixed idea, coincidence invariably lends a helping hand to the delusion."

"Bless my soul! Mr. Firth, those aren't coincidences I've just been telling you about; they're straightforward answers to straightforward prayers."

"My husband and I call them coincidences," interpolated Mrs. Firth.

"Well, then, if you do, all I can say is that you're a sight more superstitious than I gave you credit for.

It seems to me that it wouldn't surprise you at all if folks wrote answering your letters before you'd written them: that, according to you, would be quite natural; but when you write a letter to a friend and get an answer by return of post, it is beyond your belief that he himself should have replied. My word, but you have got a funny idea as to what is likely and what isn't!"

"But if I wrote to a friend who existed only in my own imagination, I shouldn't expect to get an answer to my letters," argued Sophy.

"If you did get answers to such letters, I bet you'd soon jump to the conclusion that there *was* a real man of that name, whether you knew him or whether you didn't; else how could the letters have got answered at all? And if you believed that the imaginary chap had answered them—well, I should say, begging your pardon, that you *were* pretty green!"

So the argument went on day after day. Silas Tod was never tired of trying to convert the agnostic couple; and Arnold and his wife never wearied of endeavouring to loosen the commercial traveller's hold upon things spiritual. Sophy Firth and her husband were really very happy in their own way just then. They did not indulge much in senseless reiterations as to the depth of their mutual affection, as less modern and enlightened lovers might have done; but they talked continually of the great things they were going to accomplish together, and the social triumphs they meant to achieve. They also laughed a great deal at Mr. Tod and all like-minded enthusiasts. What was the use, they wondered, of laying themselves under an eternal obligation to an imaginary

Deity, when their own right hands and their unaided brains were capable of getting to themselves the victory?

"If men and women would only take the trouble to help themselves instead of sitting still and wishing for miracles to be wrought on their behalf, the *raison d'être* for a God would not exist," Arnold said one day to his wife.

She fully agreed with him. "You are quite right; faith is only another name foi spiritual pauperization. I can not understand how people can prefer living on the charity, so to speak, of a Being they call God, to working for themselves, and being indebted to nothing but their own efforts for success. Even if I believed in the existence of a God—which I don't—I own I shouldn't like to be as dependent upon Him as the people called Christians are; it seems to me an attitude somewhat wanting in dignity and self-respect."

"That is exactly what I think. Christianity seems to me to be in direct opposition to Individualism; and, paradoxical as it may sound, it is in Individualism that the salvation of the race lies."

Thus these young people rooted and established one another still more firmly in their unbelief.

One morning Arnold and Sophy decided to spend the day on the mountain. It was one of those lovely autumn mornings when it seems as if summer had left something behind her, and had come back to look for it—misty at first, and then breaking out into cloudless sunshine. So the pair took their lunch with them, and set out for a good day's climbing. It really was glorious weather, and yet with just that sharpness in the air which made fatigue an impossibility. They had a delightful

morning; and found a sheltered little hollow in the heart of the hills where they sat down and ate their lunch, and talked of the happy future stretching out before them.

When they had eaten the last crumb (it was a hungry day), and Arnold had peacefully smoked a pipe, Sophy suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, how dull it is getting! Do you think it is going to rain?"

Arnold looked lazily up at the sky. "Rain? Not it. Whoever heard of rain on such a day as this, and with the glass as high as it can be? It's only a little mountain mist; that's all."

"Still, I think we'd better be starting down the hill again before it gets worse, don't you? We don't want to be lost in the fog."

"All right, then." And Arnold slowly hoisted himself up from the ground, and followed his wife out of the little nook where they had been sitting.

But great was their consternation to find all the valley beneath them hidden in a dense white mist. The view, which had been so clear just before lunch, had completely vanished; and nothing was to be seen but rolling billows of the white fog, creeping up gradually nearer to their feet like a rising tide, and gradually obliterating, in its progress, every landmark whereby they could tell which way they ought to go.

"Good heavens! we're in a nasty hole," exclaimed Arnold; "I don't know my way very well about this mountain even in broad daylight, and with a fog like this I am completely at sea. Have you any idea, Sophy, which was the way we came?"

Sophy shook her head: one might as well have tried

to find out a track across the ocean, as to discover a trail across that pathless waste of fog.

"It is getting thicker and thicker every minute," she said, "and coming higher up the mountain."

"I am afraid it is."

And it was; for the little island of green, on which the pair stood, was growing smaller and smaller with amazing rapidity.

Sophy looked at her husband with fear in her eyes. "Oh, Arnold, what shall we do?"

"That is just what I don't know, my dear."

"I was talking to one of the mountain shepherds only yesterday," Sophy went on, "and he told me what fearful fogs they sometimes have here at this time of year. He said they often last for days and days."

"Good gracious! And we have nothing to eat."

After a pause, during which the waves of fog rose higher and higher, Arnold said, "Did the shepherd tell you what he did when he was caught in one of them?"

"He said he did not mind much, because all the shepherds knew the mountains so well that they could find their way blindfold; in fact they often have to go out in the fog to look for missing sheep and lambs, which might otherwise fall down precipices and be killed; but visitors, he said, were sometimes lost in the fog and never found alive, as they either died of starvation or else fell down over the cliffs." And Sophy shuddered.

"I wish to goodness we could see one of these shepherd-chaps!"

"So do I; he'd be able to guide us safely into the valley again."

An hour passed which seemed like twelve. Arnold

and his wife did not talk much; they now and then made futile attempts to keep up each other's spirits, but with sorry success. Then suddenly Sophy exclaimed:

"Look, Arnold, look! There is one of the shepherds coming toward us!"

And surely enough a dark figure was seen looming through the mist. Arnold and Sophy managed by shouting to attract its attention, and it came in their direction; but alas! when it approached near enough to be recognized, it was no mountain shepherd in search of a lost sheep but Silas Tod in a like plight with themselves. Nevertheless, he was better than nobody, even though he was as much at sea as they; and the two hailed him with delight.

They found that he, knowing the district better than they did, took a more serious view of the situation. These dense fogs generally lasted for days at this season of the year; and although a search-party was bound to come from the hotel for them, it was a hundred chances to one that it would find them in such an exceptionally impenetrable mist as this.

"We are in the Lord's Hands," Silas said solemnly, "if He will, He is able to deliver us."

"And if not?" asked Arnold with a harsh laugh.

"We are still in His Hands."

"Well, anyhow, He seems to have forgotten you this time, Mr. Tod," cried Sophy Firth, with the flippancy of fear, "or else you have strayed beyond His reach."

Silas smiled. "I could hardly do that, Mrs. Firth, even if I tried: in His Hand are all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills is His also."

"Then aren't you frightened?"

"What time I am afraid I will put my trust in Thee. No, Mrs. Firth, I'm not frightened. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him; and I know that He will never leave me nor forsake me."

"Well, He seems to have left you and forsaken you now," persisted Sophy.

"Not He, Mrs. Firth, not He!"

"Do you mean to say that you think He will save us yet?"

"If it is His Will; and if it is His Will that we should never go down from this mountain-top alive, it will still be all right. He knows best, and I can trust Him."

"I thought you had a widowed mother entirely dependent on you," Arnold interpolated; "you told me so yesterday."

"So I have, and I'm her only child."

"Then what will she do if the God, Whom you so ignorantly worship, sees fit to let you starve to death here and now?"

"That is God's business, Mr. Firth, not mine. You can be sure that the work you leave to Him will never be jumbled or neglected or half done, as our work generally is; and if He sees fit to take me away from mother, He'll just look after her Himself—that's what He'll do, so I don't worry about that."

And as he thus gave a reason for the hope that was in him, the soul of Silas Tod shone through the outer covering of his small and commonplace body, and transfigured the whole man. He no longer seemed provincial and insignificant; he looked rather like a prince who had power with God and had prevailed.

After that the three crouched down under the shelter of the rock where Arnold and Sophy had lunched, as it seemed a century ago, and there was silence for a time. The fog grew denser and denser, and wrapped them round as with a clinging cerement: and the night fell.

So he would never rise in the world and go into Parliament and become a great man, Arnold thought to himself: it had only been a dream. Instead of that, he and Sophy would be buried side by side in the little churchyard in the valley; and the Fable men call Christianity would flow on unchecked by them, and would delude the world after they two were dead as it had deluded the world before they were born. Yes; the Galilean had conquered again, as He had always conquered. It was strange how the influence of a Man, Who had died a malefactor's death close on two thousand years ago, should defy principalities and powers, and outlive the centuries—passing strange! Suppose that there was something in the legend after all; and that he, Arnold Firth, and such as he, had been the fools, instead of the innumerable followers of the crucified Galilean. Well, he should soon know for certain; by this time to-morrow he would have solved for himself the Great Mystery, and have proved whether he had spent his life in refuting an effete superstition, or whether he had defied the living God. And if the latter alternative were the correct one——? Arnold shuddered as the shroud of vapour enfolded him still more closely.

Sophy, too, meditated in her heart as the slow night-hours dragged on. So her castles in the air were but castles in the air after all; she would never be a great lady and go to Court with a train and feathers, as she

had so often pictured herself doing: instead, she would have to stand before a King greater than any earthly monarch—at least so people were always saying, and she was beginning to think that perhaps they were right. She remembered hearing or reading a story once about a man who appeared at that Court without a wedding garment, and was therefore cast into outer darkness; and she herself had no wedding garment ready if—by some strange chance—the legend proved true and she needed one: that she knew well enough. She had spent her days in cultivating her mind and adorning her body, but her soul was starved and bare. And as the night wore on she grew frightened—frightened of the terror that walked in the darkness all round her; and still more frightened of that Unknown God to Whom she had raised no altar, and Whom she had openly denied before men. Of course Arnold might be right, and there might be no God to judge both quick and dead at all; and if so, why need she fear? But the death that crept nearer and nearer to her with stealthy footsteps, gave the lie to this; there was a God in heaven—she knew it now—and she had been at war with Him all her life. Now it was His turn to take vengeance and to repay.

Silas Tod was sitting quietly in the darkness, praying to himself, when Sophy suddenly said:

"I'm frightened—I'm awfully frightened! Mr. Tod, won't you pray for us?"

"Of course I will, Mrs. Firth. In fact I've been doing so all the time."

And then Silas knelt upon the heather and offered up his simple petition:

"Dear Lord, we are Thy sheep, lost upon the moun-

tains, and there is no man to tell us whither to go. Good Shepherd, seek Thy sheep, we beseech Thee. If it be Thy Will, lead us in safety down again into the valley, and give us length of days wherein to serve and praise Thee; and if it be Thy Will that we should die upon the mount and that no man should know our sepulchre, then lead our souls upward out of this present darkness into Thy marvellous light; and grant that in that light those of us whose eyes have hitherto been holden, shall see light. Hear us, we beseech Thee O Lord, not for our own sakes, but for the sake of that Good Shepherd Who laid down His Life for the sheep. Amen."

There was silence after Silas had ended his prayer—silence and a strange peace. Sophy's agony of terror had vanished, and another calm than that of despair had slipped into Arnold's soul. They could give no reason for this. Perhaps it was the coma of death benumbing their senses with its merciful stupor; or perhaps——

Suddenly Arnold exclaimed, "Listen, I hear the bleating of a lamb!"

The others listened breathlessly, and sure enough there was the faint cry.

"Please God, the shepherd may come to look for it, and find us as well as it!" Silas said.

"There he is, there he is!" cried Sophy joyfully, as a faint light gleamed through the fog.

They shouted to attract attention; then the bleating grew louder as the light drew nearer, and a figure loomed in the mist. Evidently the shepherd had found the lost lamb, and was now carrying it homeward on his shoulder; but though they called to him he did not apparently hear their cries, for he never turned his head.

"He can't hear us," Silas said, "sound carries badly in a fog like this. But if we follow him we shall be all right; he'll know his way down into the valley right enough."

So the three lost travellers followed the shepherd's retreating form as fast as they could. He knew the way, as Silas said; and before long they found themselves upon the mountain path up which they had climbed the preceding day. On they went, with the shepherd's guiding light in front, until they heard a noise of men's voices and saw torches gleaming in the mist; it was a search party from the village looking for them. Just then the fog lifted a little, and a cheer rose from the crowd of seekers as the forms of the belated travellers burst upon their view.

"Thank God we are saved!" exclaimed Silas, as the hotel-keeper hastened to meet them.

And both Arnold and Sophy echoed, "Thank God!"

"We have been searching for you ever since nightfall," the innkeeper said. "You have given us a terrible fright."

"We have given ourselves a fright too," replied Tod.

"It is hopeless to be lost on the mountains in a fog like this, for no one except one of the shepherds who live here could possibly find the way down into the valley again. You were lucky to fall in with one, for you'd never have been saved without him; this fog will last for three or four days, and by then no one could have helped you."

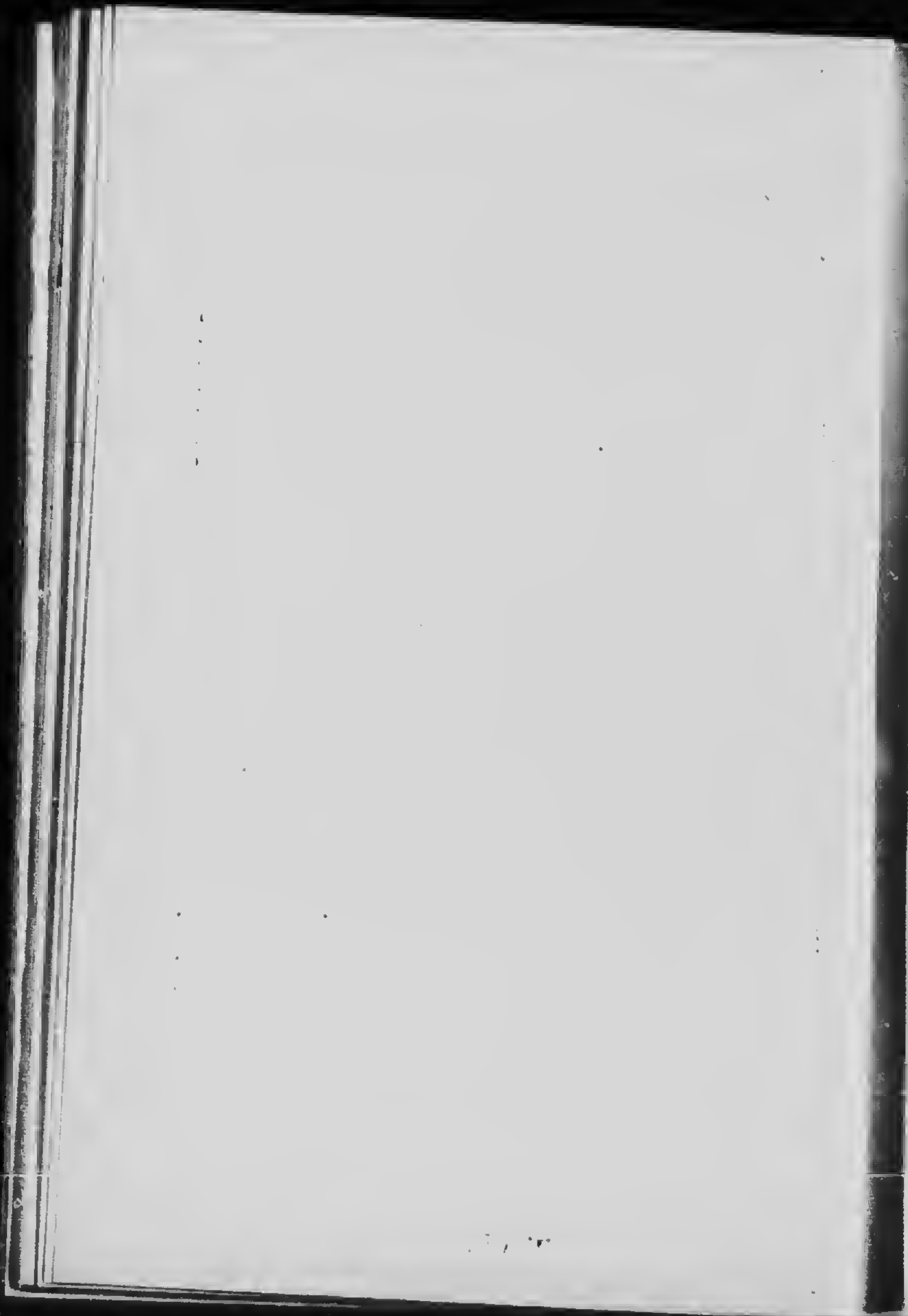
"Where is he?" asked Sophy, looking round; "we must see him and thank him for saving our lives." But the shepherd was nowhere to be seen.

"Where can he have gone to?" exclaimed Arnold. "I saw him in front of us only three minutes ago."

"It is very funny," said the innkeeper; "for we all distinctly saw four figures coming down through the fog, and yet now there are only three."

Silas Tod raised his hat reverently. "And the form of the Fourth was like the Son of God," he said.

DIAVOLA



DIAVOLA

CHAPTER I

"YOU'LL go to Mrs. Selby's dance, won't you, Austin? Just to please me, you know."

"I am not sure about that, Josephine. In the first place, I hate dances; and, in the second, my mother does not wish me to go; and I always please her when I can, because she has so few pleasures—her lameness cuts her off from everything cheerful."

"But you like to please me too, don't you?"

"You know I do, Josephine," replied the young clergyman.

"Well, you see, it is like this," argued his *fiancée;* "your mother is bound to go on liking you, whether you please her or whether you don't; it would be a sin against all Christian doctrines and all natural laws if she left off; she would be a disgrace to the whole parish, and a blot upon the mother's meeting, and a scandal to the Church of England. What will become of us all if the mothers of our clergy turn out to be whited sepulchres?"

Austin Laurence smiled. "How absurd you are!" he said.

"But, on the other hand," continued Josephine, "I am bound by no Christian doctrines nor natural laws to go on liking you if you vex me. The Church of Eng-

land would not turn a hair if I jilted you to-morrow; and the mother's meeting would consider it almost a means of grace, it would afford food for such long and interesting conversation."

"It would indeed!"

"Therefore it is as plain as a mathematical sum, or problem, or whatever you call the thing: if Mrs. Laurence's liking for you is independent of circumstances, and mine is not, then circumstances should lend their help to the cultivation of mine rather than hers. Don't you see?"

"Of course I do, darling, being something of a mathematician myself; but I also see that your premises are wrong."

"I shall have a notice-board put up—*Mathematicians are requested to keep off my premises*," remarked Josephine, in parenthesis.

"Don't interrupt me when I am explaining problems to you; it is very rude."

"All right—go ahead. What is wrong with my premises, Mr. Mathematician?"

"This: you would not leave off liking me even if I did vex you, any more than my mother would. I've more faith in you than you have in yourself."

"Don't have too much faith in me, dear boy. Indulge in as much hope and charity as you like, but be sparing with the faith part of the business."

"But you will always stick to me, won't you, Jo dear?" asked the young man, wistfully.

"How can I tell? 'We know what we are, but we know not what we may be,' as Ophelia—in spite of her brain affection—so wisely remarked. It seems to me as

silly to promise never to get tired of a person, as to promise never to grow stout, or never to have the toothache."

"Oh, Jo, what a horrid thing to say!"

"It isn't horrid; it is simply true that it is absurd to make promises about things that we have no control over. Of course it would be nice always to be fond of the same person, just as it would be nice never to grow stout, or never to have the toothache; but the niceness of a thing doesn't alter its impossibility," persisted the girl.

Austin smiled in spite of himself.

"I'm afraid that your promises are even more unsatisfactory than your premises," he remarked.

"They are about the same—I got them to match each other," laughed she.

"Yet," said the young man, growing grave again, "it would be nice to hear you promise that you would always care for me. I believe some women make promises like that—and keep them."

"Oh! those are the women that people call 'sweet creatures.' If you like that sort of thing you should have put your money on that sort of a woman. I have no patience with men who fall in love with amusing girls, and then grumble because they don't find them soothing; it is like buying diamonds, and then crying because you can't make them up into flannel petticoats."

"Perhaps I may settle down with a 'sweet creature' yet; there is time still for me to change my mind, according to your late improving remarks."

Josephine shook her head.

"No, there isn't," she said with conviction. "You know that girls are made of—

"'Sugar and spice
And all that's nice';

but if a man has once tasted the second receipt, he will never be contented with the first. At dinner you can not go back to the sweets after you have enjoyed the savouries."

"No; but we can go on to our desserts."

"Pooh! if you only get your desserts in the way of wives you'll most of you be very badly off. You, for instance, would get some horrid, unselfish, little woman, with a meek and quiet spirit."

"I've no doubt she'd be very affectionate, and make me extremely happy," argued Austin.

"She'd be spoony—that's what she'd be," retorted Josephine. "Like Mrs. Anselm, your vicar's wife, who never speaks to her husband without taking his arm, or putting her hand on his shoulder; just as if she were a telephone and couldn't make him hear until the wires were joined."

"What a lovely idea!" cried Austin, laughing.

"I always expect her, when she comes fussing into the parish room, to say, 'Put me on to No. 777'; I then picture you, or the village schoolmaster, taking her hand and placing it on Mr. Anselm's shoulder, when she cries, 'Are you there?' and he shouts, 'Yes,' and they begin to converse in approved telephonic fashion."

"You are awfully amusing, Jo!" said her lover, approvingly. "I confess that sugar would be a little sickly and tame after such spice as you provide."

"I'm not as amusing with you as I ought to be, Austin," said Josephine, with a sigh; "in fact, not as amus-

ing as I am with other men. The sad fact is that I am too fond of you to be brilliant."

"But you are brilliant with me."

"Pooh! that is nothing to what I can be. My temptation is to be melting rather than brilliant when I am with you; and one can't be melting and brilliant at once, unless one is a stick of sealing-wax."

"Well, anyway you satisfy me. I couldn't imagine any one's being more adorable than you are."

"When I am with you," continued Josephine gravely, "I am impelled by an uncontrollable impulse to ask you idiotic questions—whereof I know the answers to begin with—over and over again; this is not brilliant conversation: also to recall to your memory episodes in our early acquaintance which are not really worth remembering at all, much less talking about; this is not brilliant conversation: also to examine you as to your possible behaviour under a combination of absurd and impossible circumstances; this also is not brilliant conversation."

"It is awfully jolly and interesting though," cried Austin loyally.

"I could have talked like that had I been a little dressmaker and you a draper's assistant; in fact, that is how we should have talked. And now is all our cleverness and culture and finish to go for nothing, Austin? I am ashamed of us!"

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, my dear. It is merely a proof that we are all pretty much alike inside. We resemble Fox's umbrellas—no difference as to frames, but only as to covers."

"I think, somehow," remarked Josephine seriously,

"that the draper's assistant would come to Mrs. Selby's dance if the little dressmaker wanted him to do so."

"I am certain of it, poor beggar!"

"I notice, my dear Austin, that you are always amenable to reason when I am with you; but when the influence of my presence is removed there are few things that you would not be capable of. If it wasn't for me you might become a socialist, or a poet, or a missionary, or something of that kind, at any moment."

"Might I?"

"Don't become a missionary, dear boy; you are

> "'A creature not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food,'

and your too appreciative flock might dine off their shepherd. And then what would become of me, when the only man I ever loved had been inwardly digested?"

"Couldn't you get on without me, Jo?" asked the young man tenderly.

"Not a single moment. Like the man who said that all time not spent in hunting was lost, so I feel that all time is lost which is not spent with you."

"You think too well of me, dear."

"Oh! no, I don't. I merely think you a greater ornament to the Christian Church than the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"But you *know* I'm not, whatever you may *think*."

"Pooh! I can prove the accuracy of my proposition, mathematics being, as you noticed just now, my strong point. You are more important than the rest of the world put together; the rest of the world put together are more important that the Pope or the Archbishop;

therefore the Pope and the Archbishop are less important than you; things which are more important than the same thing being more important than one another. Q. E. D."

"Admirably worked out," cried Austin with dclight.

"You'll go to Mrs. Selby's dance, like a good boy, won't you, dear?" coaxed Josephine.

"I suppose so, as you have set your heart upon it. But I say, Jo," added the young man, looking at his watch, "I must say goodbye this very minute, or I shall be too late for evensong."

"I wish that watches and clocks didn't tell the time —life would be so much less complex if they didn't," said Josephine pensively.

"The maker of my mother's drawing-room clock apparently agreed with you."

"I know. A hopeless mass of flowers and mythology effectually conceals the shining hour, and the chimes do not always strictly confine themselves to the truth."

"They do not, most learned judge—most wise young woman. But if you will bear in mind that they always strike eleven at a quarter before three, and calculate accordingly, all will yet be well," called out the retrcating Austin.

And so the two lovers went their respective ways; she feeling that her afternoon had been pleasantly and profitably spent, and he wishing that being engaged did not take up so large a share of a busy man's time.

CHAPTER II

It was the day after Mrs. Selby's dance, and Josephine Crawley was sobbing her heart out in Mrs. Laurence's drawing-room.

"Oh! Mrs. Laurence," she cried in her anguish, "Austin will never forgive me as long as he lives; my life is spoiled, and my heart is broken."

The tall figure in the arm-chair made no movement of sympathy toward the weeping girl, as the cold voice responded, "But, my dear Josephine, it was so inexcusably stupid of you to tell a lie about the thing! You must have known that the truth, however unpleasant, is as the very apple of Austin's eye. The more disagreeable the truth the more he delights in it; just as the more unpalatable is an *hors d'œuvre* the more fashionable is the dinner which it precedes. For my part I enjoy agreeable lies, and I encourage the people who deal in them; but my son has simpler tastes."

"Yet, on the other hand, if I had said that I let Captain Tarletan kiss me at Mrs. Selby's dance, Austin would have been furious. You know he would."

"But he himself *saw* you and Captain Tarletan kissing each other in the conservatory, as I understand. I don't so much blame you for letting the man kiss you as for letting Austin see him do it; that seems to me a piece of inexplicable carelessness."

But Josephine only sobbed.

"Considering that you know as well as I do," continued Mrs. Laurence in her calm, cutting voice, "that Austin is a sort of Liebig's Extract of King Arthur and

George Washington in his passion for the truth—considering also that he had caught you in the act, and that a lie was therefore useless—I can not imagine what possessed you to tell him one, and say that you were not there. A lie is always wrong, and generally ineffective."

"I can not go over all that again," replied Josephine, "and, as I said before, the confession of the crime would have disgusted Austin no less than the denial of it."

"That is so," agreed Austin's mother. "You certainly were in an awkward position, with the deep sea in front of you and the arch-enemy to your rearward. Men are very like children; they always want something to amuse them, and nearly always something to drink—and it is equally unwise to tell them what is true and what isn't."

"Austin is so hard on me!" cried the girl.

"There is nothing in the world so hard as successful virtue," replied Mrs. Laurence; "the nether millstone is as a pillow compared with it. My son's sense of duty has always been as irritating to his friends as a mustard plaster, while his conscience is so abnormally enlarged that I should think it would finally be made into a sort of spiritual *pâté de foie gras*, for angelic consumption."

"I admire Austin's conscience," cried Josephine, taking up the cudgels on her lover's behalf; "I think it is splendid to give up everything for one's principles, as he does."

Mrs. Laurence smiled. "He calls them principles, but they are really only prejudices," she remarked; "but it is easy to confound the two, and I believe it affords as much pleasure to die for the one as for the other

to the martyr himself. To the onlooking amphitheatre, however, it makes the whole difference between tragedy and burlesque."

"How can you say such cruel things?"

"Easily, my dear child. As you will doubtless discover, my son's conscience, when in full working order, is apt to prick others as well as himself, and this prick inoculates them with feelings of absolute cruelty toward him. His conscience is peculiarly active and lively just now, I regret to say: machinery in motion always gives me a headache."

"You don't love Austin as I do," said Josephine resentfully, "and you never in the least understand him."

"Of course, I don't understand him, my dear. I never tried to. And, as I perceive that a clearer comprehension of his underlying excellences does not apparently confer increased happiness on the beholder, I trust that my inward eye may never be unsealed. And I don't love him more than I think it proper for a woman to love her elder and only surviving child. It isn't my way to love people—it bores me to do so. I never loved my husband; I did not see the necessity for so doing."

"But I thought you loved Claude, your second son?"

Mrs. Laurence winced. "Yes, I loved Claude, but he was a bad son to me, and then he died; so it would have been better for me if I hadn't loved him. It is a mistake to love anybody; it is like smoking cigarettes, it may do you harm and it can not possibly do you good."

"No, no," cried the girl, "surely not."

"It is. I have proved it. But I can not blame myself

for loving Claude, he was so bright and handsome, and sunny, and such a nice change from the faultless, self-righteous Austin. Like a Bank Holiday just after a Sunday, don't you know?"

"I can not bear to hear you speak like that of Austin. He is the best man in the world, and could make a really good and useful woman of me, if only he would let me sit at his feet and learn of him. But if he washes his hands of me I can't sit at his feet, you see," sighed the girl ruefully.

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Laurence, with her bitter smile; "though sitting at Austin's feet would have anything but a beneficial effect upon me. Whenever he advocates a course of conduct, the exactly opposite direction seems to me the only traversable country."

"Oh, Mrs. Laurence!"

"It is a fact. I never had the slightest homicidal tendencies till I once heard Austin preach a sermon on the Sixth Commandment. Then it was all I could do to keep myself from slaying everybody I happened to meet. He has one admirable discourse on the Sins of the Tongue—I daresay you have heard it—and to that sermon I always feel indebted for the unblunted sharpness of my conversational powers."

Josephine rose to go. It was one thing to be excommunicated from the shrine where she had hitherto adored, but it was another to hear that shrine openly profaned, and this latter was more than she could bear.

"Well, all I know is," she said, "that if Austin throws me over now, and refuses to forgive me, I shall never be good myself or put any faith in good people again; and you can tell him so. Goodbye, Mrs. Lau-

rence. I know you will do your best to put matters straight for me."

And Mrs. Laurence, in spite of her bitter words, did her best to induce her ascetic young son to forgive the girl whom he loved. But in vain. She did all that she could, both for Josephine's sake, that the girl should not lose a good husband; and for her own, that her son should not lose a rich wife. But the two considerations were alike powerless to touch the pure and narrow soul of Austin Laurence.

Mrs. Laurence, the widow of an officer in the Indian Army, had been left with her two little sons in straitened circumstances. She was a brave woman, albeit a bitter one, and succeeded in giving her children a good education. Austin, the elder, was a morbid, introspective boy, with a passion for righteousness. When he grew to manhood he took Holy Orders, and became in due time the curate of Sunningly, where he made a nice little home for his mother; and there it was that he fell in love with, and became engaged to, Josephine Crawley, the sister-heiress of old Colonel Lumley's young wife. Claude, the second son of the house of Laurence, was neither morbid nor introspective, and showed a blameworthy indifference toward the things which belonged to his peace. His life was such that "nothing became him like the leaving of it;" and, to all save his mother, its brevity was its only recommendation. He died of fever in India.

Fate appeared to be smiling benignly on the curate of Sunningly and his approaching union with the Squire's rich sister-in-law, when the ill-starred dance at the Selby's turned her smiles into frowns. Austin went

to the party because Josephine wished him to go, but such frivolities had no charms for him, and he was horribly bored. During the first part of the evening he felt a latent irritation against both Josephine and Mrs. Selby, as the joint causes of his misery; but, alas! his smouldering irritation became more than latent when he came upon two people kissing each other in the dim (but not religious) light of the conservatory; and perceived, to his horror, that these twain were Captain Tarleton and Josephine Crawley.

As soon as he could get speech with her, Austin summarily charged Josephine with her indiscreet behaviour. At first the girl vehemently denied that she had ever entered the conservatory during the whole evening; but, finding that these protestations merely increased her lover's anger against her, she withdrew her denial of the charge and begged for forgiveness. But the stern young priest was as adamant.

"I can forgive you, Josephine, after a fashion," he said, "but I can not take you back into my heart. I loved you and trusted you with my whole soul."

"And can you never love me and trust me again?" cried Josephine, with bitter weeping.

"Never, as long as I live. I didn't want to love you, Josephine. I had no love in my life, and I was afraid of it. My mother and my brother never cared for me, and my father died while I was yet a very young child, but I daresay had he lived he would have despised me too."

"No, no; nobody could have despised you, Austin."

The young man smiled bitterly. "Nobody? Why, my own mother takes no trouble to conceal her contempt, and my brother jeered at me from his cradle. My

lot has not been a happy one, but at least it has had the advantage of teaching me not to be conceited. Therefore, Josephine, I tried not to love you, because I knew well enough that there was nothing in a dull, commonplace man like myself to attract a brilliant woman such as you are."

"But you did attract me, Austin, from the very first. I liked you as soon as I saw you."

"I daresay I did very well as a plaything. Even a poor curate's heart is worth breaking, just for practice, though a negligible quantity in the more important affairs of life."

"Austin, it is cruel to speak to me like that!"

"And wasn't it cruel of you to flash into my dreary, loveless lot, and make me love you, whether I would or no? Wasn't it cruel to teach me all the unimagined happiness that was possible in this life, only to prove that for me it was a hopeless dream? Wasn't it cruel to be all the world to me for a time, and then to throw me on one side when you had the chance of amusing yourself with a more fashionable and attractive man?"

"Oh, Austin, Austin! have some mercy upon me. It is your profession to teach people how to save their souls alive, and mine will never be saved if you cast me off like this. I can not be good or do good apart from you."

"I owe a duty to myself as well as to you, Josephine; and *I* can only be good and do good apart from you, now that I know your words and kisses are alike false. My life was wretched enough, heaven knows, before I ever loved you, it is a thousand times more wretched now that I have loved and lost you; but it would be ten thousand times more wretched were I to go on loving you

after I had learnt how false you are. Plucking out one's right eye is not an agreeable operation, but there is a worse alternative, you know, than entering into life maimed."

So it was in vain that poor Josephine humbled herself before her justly offended lover, and showed him that not only the happiness of her heart, but also the salvation of her soul, depended upon his pardon; and equally in vain did his mother point out to him that he was too intolerant of the young girl's frivolity, and too indifferent to the young girl's fortune. Austin Laurence had a high ideal, and lived up to it; and to such souls as failed where he succeeded, he showed neither patience nor pity.

After he had broken off his engagement, the conditions of life in Sunningly were not so easy to the young curate as heretofore, so he left the country and took a curacy in London. Before many years had passed the quondam curate of Sunningly was one of the most popular and powerful preachers in town, and the vicar of a large and important parish. When his mother died he turned the vicarage into a sort of Church House, where he trained young souls—as ardent and self-denying as himself—in the work which he so passionately loved. No man in London preached more fearlessly or worked more unflaggingly than Austin Laurence; and, when he happened to recall Josephine Crawley, which was but seldom, it was with a psalm of thanksgiving that he had possessed the courage and the consistency to put her once and for all out of his life, and so had prevented domestic joys and sorrows from ever thrusting themselves between himself and his work.

CHAPTER III

WHO was the author of Diavola?

That was the question which all London was asking, and which no one, in London or out of it, answered.

Diavola was the cleverest and the wickedest book of the season, and had taken the clever and the wicked world by storm. Nearly every one read it, and nearly every one was the worse for reading it; and still the authorship remained a mystery, though the pernicious influence of the author spread far and wide.

Upon this unknown writer the great preacher, Austin Laurence, poured forth the vials of his righteous indignation, and felt that he did well to be angry. He read the book because every one read it; but, unlike the majority of its readers, the stern young prophet did not assimilate the insidious poison which its brilliant epigrams and finished periods breathed forth; for he was strong enough—owing to the singleness of his eye and the purity of his heart—to resist the defilement of even such subtle pitch as that concealed in the fascinating pages of Diavola. But none the less did Laurence recognize the incalculable harm which such a publication was bound to effect, and against the author of this dangerous work he put forth all his strength. He forbade the young men under his charge so much as to look into the book; and he made an *auto da fe* of every copy that came in his way, regardless of its ownership. Moreover, he lifted up his voice in public, and preached against Diavola as against one of the most penetrating instruments of the powers of darkness; and from his pulpit he

hurled his anathemas at the unknown writer who had thus dared to instil such deadly poison into the hearts and minds of his fellows. It is a terrible thing to lay a curse on any living soul, but Austin Laurence was young enough and bold enough to do terrible things; and on one memorable Sunday—when he had made the hearts of them that heard him melt like wax at the burning words which fell from his lips—he raised his right arm in the face of his congregation, and called heaven to witness that he cursed the author of Diavola.

In the midst of Laurence's fierce crusade against spiritual wickedness in general and the teachings of Diavola in particular, he was one day surprised to receive a visit from Mrs. Lumley, the wife of the Squire of Sunningly, about whom he had heard nothing for several years. Austin was not the type of cleric whom sentimental women delight to honour as the repository of all their semi-hysterical doubts and difficulties, and for whom they manufacture innumerable cushions and slippers; he was made of too stern stuff to be appealed to by either fancy work or fancy religion. Therefore, he waited with some impatience for his fair visitor to explain her reasons for taking up his already overcrowded time.

"I know you are awfully busy with good works and services and things, Mr. Laurence," began Mrs. Lumley apologetically, "so I won't detain you for more than half a minute; but there is something that I must say to you."

The young priest merely bowed his head and waited; he knew by bitter experience that a feminine half-minute is often as a thousand years to the waiting victim, and

he also knew that a woman has the inalienable last word all the sooner if the man does not speak at all.

"It is about my sister Josephine," continued the lady hurriedly; "of course you remember her?"

"Certainly I do," replied Austin; but he did not think it necessary to add how very rarely nowadays he recalled the memory of his faithless love.

"I have only just found out why your engagement with her was broken off, and I want to explain."

"There is not the slightest need to explain anything now, Mrs. Lumley," said Austin, smiling; "in fact, such an explanation would be as much out of date as a discussion as to who wrote the Letters of Junius, or on which side of Whitehall Charles the First was beheaded."

"But I must explain—I can't rest till I do. I have only just discovered that you quarrelled with Josephine because you fancied you saw Captain Tarletan kiss her at Mrs. Selby's dance. You were mistaken. It was I whom you saw in the conservatory with Frank Tarletan."

"You?"

"Yes, I; but Josephine and I were so awfully alike in those days, don't you know?" continued Mrs. Lumley, growing nervous as Austin's brow darkened, "that we were constantly being taken for one another. On that particular night, too, we were both dressed in white satin. I remember those gowns perfectly, because I had mine dyed afterward and made into a tea-gown. It dyed extremely well—a lovely apple-green—and I think it would have been the prettiest tea-gown I ever saw if my maid hadn't cut it a little too short in the waist," added the lady, growing retrospective and therefore garrulous.

Laurence looked cold and stern.

"Why didn't your sister tell me the truth at the time?" he asked.

"She did tell you a part of the truth, you know, and you were too high-and-mighty to believe her. She swore to you that she had never entered the conservatory at all that night, and no more she had. But she wouldn't tell you that it was I whom you had seen, because she knew what a row my husband would have made if he had heard of it. He was dreadfully fussy about things like that."

"And rightly so!" thundered Austin.

For the first time in his life he began to be angry with himself, and consequently felt the necessity of punishing some one else severely.

"Of course," Mrs. Lumley agreed pacifically. "But Frank and I at that time were both extremely young and extremely foolish. Naturally, if I had had any idea that the thing would get Josephine into trouble, I should have spoken right out, and braved my dear old Colonel's justifiable wrath. But Jo was better and cleverer than I was, and always took the burdens off my shoulders; so I never bothered my head about her affairs—I felt she was able to take care of herself."

"Women are very selfish!" exclaimed Austin judicially.

"Some are, but not all. If my sister had been a little more selfish she wouldn't have lost her heart's desire. I have only just found out that that nonsense between me and Frank Tarletan was what really estranged you and Josephine; so I have come to tell you how frightfully sorry I am, and to ask you to forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive, Mrs. Lumley, for I am convinced that your sister and I could never have been happy together. My love for her was a midsummer madness; when I was with her I was fairly intoxicated by her wonderful fascination, and completely lost my head."

"Josephine had a tremendous charm for some people," remarked Mrs. Lumley musingly. "I am better-looking than she is, actually, but she was always more attractive. I wonder how she does it."

"You see, I am not a marrying man," continued Austin, not heeding her interruption. "After the first intoxication was over, I should again have returned to my work, and found it my greatest interest; and domestic life might have interfered with it and worried me. But, by the way, how is your sister? Well and happy, I trust."

"I am afraid that she is neither," sighed Mrs. Lumley. "She married Sir George Serracold a year ago, but it is not at all a happy marriage. I think she only cared for his title and he for her money. But I mustn't waste your valuable time any longer."

And with a hasty adieu, Mrs. Lumley withdrew.

Austin Laurence went back to his interrupted duties, wondering why on earth the Colonel's wife had thought fit to hinder him for such a thing as this. True, he had believed himself to be broken-hearted ten years ago, when his engagement ended, and when he was so bitterly—and, as he now learned, unjustly—disappointed in Josephine Crawley. He had likewise believed himself to be heart-broken thirty years ago, when he lost the elephant out of his Noah's Ark; but if any one had stopped him now in his busy life to inform him that he need fret

no longer, as the elephant had been found in the old compound at Lahore, he would have felt much the same toward that messenger as he felt toward Mrs. Lumley.

His day of small things was over, he said to himself; he had outgrown alike the elephant and Josephine.

CHAPTER IV

"Do you know, Lady Serracold, that this is the third time I have picked up your dinner-napkin since we sat down, and we are only at the first *entrée*? The dinner is as yet young, but I, alas! am not."

Lady Serracold laughed.

"I am so sorry, Major Newdigate. I seem to be a sliding scale; I haven't the faintest idea what that means, but it sounds income-taxy and death-dutiful."

"Pray don't regret the circumstance, my dear lady; it is a pleasure for me to do anything for you, and in this case the pleasure is so intense as to be 'almost pain.' But don't you think it would be a good plan if I sat under the table and kept throwing it back?"

"I daresay it would; and you would look rather nice crouching under the shadow of the table-cloth, and hurling defiance and a dinner-napkin at me. A sort of companion study to Ajax defying the Lightning, don't you know."

"But it might slightly interfere with the thread of conversation if Ajax were hiding under the table and the lightning dining above it. It is bad enough below

the salt, but still worse below the table, I should imagine."

"Oh! it wouldn't interfere with my conversation in the least," her ladyship assured him: "you see I have always to talk down to you, and you have to look up to me, wherever we may happen to be placed at table."

"That is so; nevertheless, continual dinner-napkin-hunts in the middle of a substantial meal are things which wither me and stale my infinite variety. So if you continue to be a sliding-scale, I think I should prefer to sit under the table and dine off meat-lozenges."

"Did you ever eat a meat-lozenge, Major Newdigate?"

"Once; it was made of horseflesh, I believe, to judge from the taste, and not very fresh at that."

"It was high horse, I expect: an animal better for riding than eating," remarked Lady Serracold.

Major Newdigate smiled. "A very happy supposition," he said; "and *à propos de bottes* (I don't know the French for meat-lozenges), have you read Diavola?"

"Yes, I have read it," replied the lady; "but I don't know what to think about it."

"It is a marvellously clever book, and extremely unpleasant. But in spite of its unpleasantness I think it is the most fascinating book I ever read—and the most dangerous."

"Have they found out yet who the author is?"

"I believe they have."

"How very interesting! Do tell me, as I am consumed with curiosity on the subject."

"I hear it is a parson somewhere in the East End," replied Major Newdigate.

"A parson! why, it isn't the sort of book that a clergyman would write," exclaimed Lady Serracold, with surprise.

"Don't be too sure of that! those parson chaps are cleverer than you think," the major assured her, "and this is a specially clever one. His name is Laurence—Austin Laurence—and he is one of the best preachers in London."

Lady Serracold's face lost its usual mocking expression, and became extremely interested.

"Did you ever hear him?" she asked.

"Once; and it was the best sermon I ever heard in my life. It kept thrilling all down your back like an electric battery, don't you know, and made you want to dash out of church, and become a martyr or a missionary, or something, before you had your lunch."

"I know."

"And then he had such a fine voice and read the prayers so awfully well," continued the major enthusiastically; "you felt it quite a pleasure to keep the Commandments, he put them to you so nicely; and he is such a good-looking chap into the bargain."

"Yes, he is extremely handsome; or, at any rate, he used to be in the days when I knew him. But I thought that he hated Diavola, and had cursed the author of it from the pulpit."

"So he did; but that was just his sharpness. He knew well enough that public condemnation of a thing is about the best advertisement that thing can have; and he was cute enough to advertise his own book in that particular way. It was far more effective and original

than telling every railway passenger in England not to worry, but to read Diavola!"

"I don't believe it!" said Lady Serracold, with some warmth. "Austin Laurence is the last man to do such a thing as that."

The major raised his eyebrows.

"My dear Lady Serracold, I am old enough to have learnt that the last person who would do such a thing is invariably the person by whom that thing is done. It is as inevitable as the occurrence of the unexpected. But of course if Mr. Laurence is a friend of yours——"

"He is not a friend of mine," interrupted Lady Serracold hastily. "I don't know him at all now; but in the days when I believed in anything I believed in him. So he is interesting to me as the monument of a forgotten faith—like Stonehenge or the Parthenon, don't you know?" Her ladyship was herself again.

"And what was he like in the days when you believed in things?" asked Major Newdigate with some curiosity.

"Very upright, and very cold, and very hard, and very narrow."

"I see; more like Stonehenge than the Parthenon," murmured the major.

Lady Serracold laughed, and continued her description:

"He was an extremely improving person, even in his young days; and he was always dressed in a little brief authority; and he lived entirely upon mint, anise, and cumin."

"And was he given to falling in love? Some curates are, you know."

"Merely as a recreation; love was to him what football is to some men, and whist to others."

"What an admirable and withal wise young man! But you do not seem fully to appreciate his merits, Lady Serracold."

"I hardly ever think of him; but when I do, it is with respect. As I told you, it is ages since I saw him; but even now I feel I could hang wreaths upon him once a year, as if he were a statue or a tombstone."

And then the conversation drifted into other channels.

How the rumour first got wind nobody knew; but the generally-received opinion was that the popular preacher, Austin Laurence, was the anonymous author of Diavola. And it was an opinion which had many and divers supporters: for the world did not love the eloquent young prophet, who had so fearlessly denounced it and all that appertained to it; and was thankful for an excuse to turn again and rend him. At first Austin laughed the vile calumny to scorn, and scouted the idea that any one could believe so monstrous a lie; but after a time it dawned upon him that people did believe it, and that consequently his popularity and—still worse—his influence were on the wane. Valiantly the young priest faced the calumniating world, and defied it; but the lie gained ground all the same, and, like the grain of mustard seed, grew so rapidly and to such huge dimensions, that all those little birds who carry round the gossip, joyfully made their nests in the branches of it. At last the report became such a scandal that his bishop spoke to Laurence on the subject, and told the young vicar that it was his duty either to prove the falsity of the charge, or else

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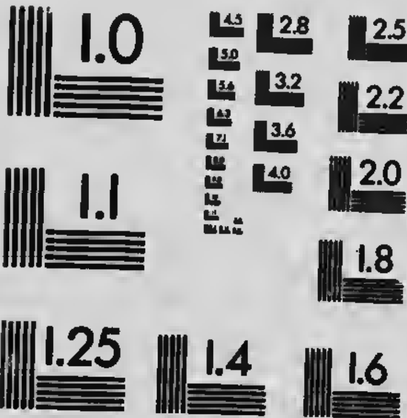

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to retire from the headship of his church-house. Austin's pride was so wounded by this that he declined to justify himself in any way, and at once dismissed all the curates and lay-helpers committed to his charge; and not long after this he resigned his living also, without deigning to offer any explanation. Foolish, doubtless, but natural in a man of his sensitive temperament; for to persons of his type of mind, cutting off their noses to spite their faces, becomes almost as inevitable an operation as vaccination. Although Laurence was hurt to the quick by the thought that the people with whom and for whom he had worked could believe him guilty of this thing, he could not but perceive that much in Diavola savoured of his style, and that the manner was his, though the matter was unspeakably abhorrent to him. The voice that spake was Jacob's, but the hands were the hands of Esau; and he longed to discover the name of the traitor who had thus borrowed his touch and taken away his blessing. One thought alone upheld Austin Laurence in the valley of humiliation through which he was travelling, namely the consciousness that, though all men spoke evil of him, in the sight of heaven he was guiltless of the sin laid to his charge. Nevertheless the iron entered into his soul when he saw himself held up to scorn by a merciless press, and his testimony to the truth sneered at as a cunning advertisement to draw attention to the book he had pretended to denounce. In addition to his other sorrows, poverty soon stared Laurence in the face; for as in the time of his prosperity he had given away all that he had, so he had laid up no treasure for himself against the day of adversity. Of the mammon of unrighteousness he had never made friends;

and now that he had failed, its habitations were not open to him. But the end was not yet.

Strangely enough the memory of Josephine haunted him in these dark days as it had not haunted him for years. Now that he was cut off from his former multifarious duties, he had time to remember that she had not kissed Captain Tarletan after all, and that the real Josephine and the ideal Josephine were again reunited in one person. All the old feelings, which had lain stagnant for years, came over him, like accumulated interest in the savings-bank, which increases all the more quickly when not applied for; and he remembered with tenderness the old days at Sunningly. He realized, with distressing clearness, that Josephine would never have believed a word against him, whatever the world might say; and he could not help smiling as he imagined the extremely vigorous and injudicious epithets she would have applied to all those (not even excluding the bishop) who had leagued themselves together against him. He also wondered why it had not occurred to him to kick Captain Tarletan on that memorable evening in the conservatory; and he blamed himself for the omission. He would not actually have kicked the man, he decided—it would have degraded his cloth to do so; but it degraded his manhood not to have wanted to do so, and for this he thought scorn of himself. It also distressed Austin to recall how Mrs. Lumley had told him that Josephine's marriage was not a happy one: and then he wanted to kick Sir George Serracold for not making her happy: and then he wanted to kick himself for having made her so dreadfully unhappy all those years ago: and then he wondered if she were much altered, and if the curly wisp of hair, that

used to stray across her forehead at Sunningly, continued to stray in London over the same delightful ground. And then he thought of how happy they might have been together if he had not been such a self-righteous, conceited young ass; and with all his thinking he never once thought of the fact that if he had married Josephine, he would never have been as miserably poor as he was now. Josephine's money had ever been a negligible quantity in his estimate of her.

One memorable day, as Laurence was sitting alone in his wretched little lodging, a letter was brought to him, addressed in a well-remembered hand. He broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"AUSTIN LAURENCE,—I am a dying woman, so they tell me, and am going to the south of France to die decently and in order, and as a fashionable woman should. And there is something that I must tell you before I go. It was I who wrote Diavola. Perhaps you are shocked at this—you were so easily shocked in the old days, you know; but it was you who rendered me capable of writing such a book, and I want you to have the full credit of your handiwork. I was a good woman when I was engaged to you—I should have been a still better one had you married me. But you were stern and hard and cold; and though you walked humbly, you did not love mercy. You flung me away from you when you imagined that I had fallen short of your ideal and proved myself an unworthy helpmeet for such a piece of perfection as yourself; and when I prayed for pardon, you hardened your heart against me. Your charge was, as you now know, an unfounded one—but that is imma-

terial; that you judged me unjustly was merely your ignorance, and therefore pardonable; that you could judge any one so unmercifully was your sin, and for this you must answer. You made religion so hideous to me that I put it far from me, and for this you must some day give an account. My life has been neither happy nor profitable; but had you been less hard to me, it might have been better. You have made me such as I am; and, such as I am, I have written Diavola. I hear that people say it is in your style: I caught the tricks of your style in the days when I loved you so well, and strove to mould my character upon yours. I also hear that the suspicion that you are the author has ruined you; therefore I have left you a large legacy in my will, for I do not wish you to want bread because of me, though I trust that leanness withal may be sent into your soul. I hope that you will remember as long as you live—and perchance afterward—that your self-righteousness doomed a fellow-creature to perdition. You solemnly cursed the author who poisoned men's minds by the teachings of Diavola: take heed that your curse does not fall on your own head, because you did this thing, and because you had no pity. I have nothing more to say to you, Austin Laurence, the only man whom I ever loved. The life which you spoiled is nearly over, and the soul is departing which you refused to save alive. I do not care; for you rendered them both alike worthless to me long ago.

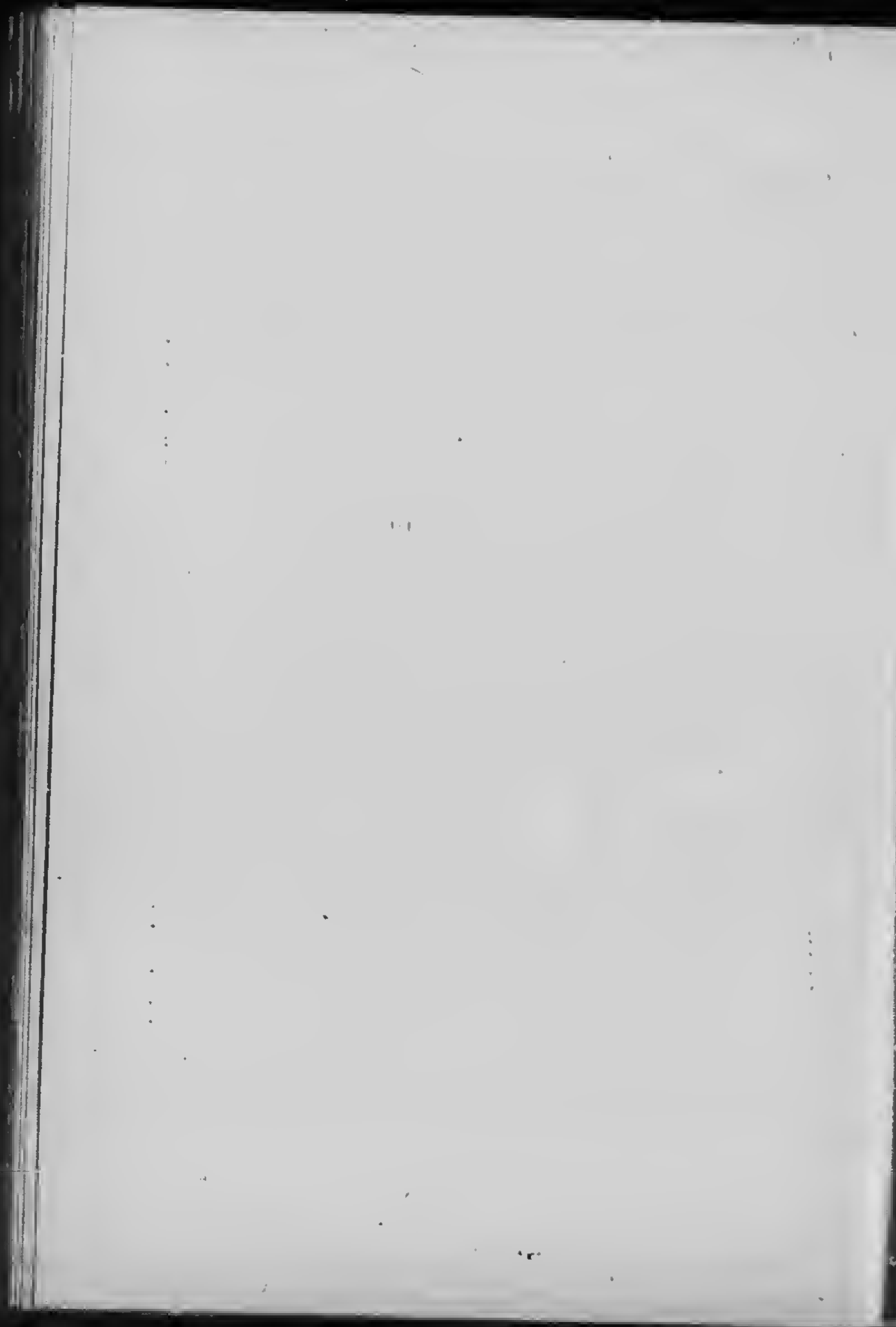
"Yours, as you made me,

"JOSEPHINE SERRACOLD."

Then at last Austin bowed his head in his hands, and knew that his cup of anguish was filled to the brim. No

longer could he stand upright in his integrity and defy the calumniating world; no longer could he raise a bold front among his fellows, and protest in his innocence; for he felt that in the sight of heaven he verily and indeed was the author of Diavola.

AN ARTISTIC NEMESIS



AN ARTISTIC NEMESIS

"SHE is a lovely girl, Tredennis; I don't know when I have seen a more attractive face."

"Yes, she is very pretty; and I also think she is one of the most interesting-looking women I have ever come across."

"Interesting—that's it; and that's the best of everything! There are scores of handsome women in the world, and ten times as many pretty ones. But the interesting women are scarce—confoundedly scarce when one is well over thirty."

Tredennis sighed. "Yes, there is a terrible sameness about women, I must confess. Their expressions are different; but what musicians would call their underlying *motif* is the same."

His brother artist laughed. "My dear fellow, there is nothing to sigh about in that. It is one of the most sustaining facts in existence; because if you once take the trouble to understand one woman thoroughly, the rest of the sex are as printed posters to you. You never have to go over the same ground again; and, as in skating and bicycling, you never forget what you have once learned."

"I am not so sure of that," doubted Will Tredennis.

"Well, I am," asseverated George Carteret.

Tredennis smoked in silence for a few minutes; then he said, "Do you know anything about the girl?"

"Only what I have learned from our excellent landlady: namely that she comes here for quiet now and then, and hates to be disturbed; and that she works very hard with her pen—too hard, I should say, for so young and delicate-looking an individual. I conclude that she is a newspaper woman, and can not afford to take a regular holiday; so comes to this cheap and out-of-the-way place for a sort of semi-detached vacation in which she works all the time."

"Poor little girl! She looks pale and overtired," said Tredennis.

Carteret laughed. "Pretty little girl, I should say! She has the most wonderful blue eyes I ever saw—the eyes of a child who has once peeped into heaven, and is now trying all she knows to get another peep; and her heart is breaking because she can not get it. I mean to paint her as the Peri entering Paradise."

"Oh, Carteret! I shouldn't do that."

"Why not, may I ask, most wise and tiresome counsellor?"

"Because she seems so young and inexperienced, and it would spoil her life if she fell in love with you. And she'd be sure to do so; your lady-sitters invariably do."

George stroked his handsome moustache with delight. "I don't know about that," he purred (but he believed it implicitly): "I suppose I'm a good-looking chap in my way, but I don't see why every woman should think so. Probably our little blue-eyed friend will be an exception."

"Not she; you won't let her be an exception. You'll

make her fall in love with you, and then you'll follow your usual programme and ride away. And what will become of the poor little girl then?"

Carteret shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, my dear fellow, and I don't care. Perhaps I shall fall in love with her."

"Not you—with a newspaper woman! You would never marry a girl without money or position, however pretty she was; you are far too consistent and devout a Mammon-worshipper for that."

"That is true. May Fate deliver me from a marriage with a woman who is nobody and has nothing! But I don't mind amusing myself with the species; they are often much more attractive than the eligible young ladies. I think I shall give those wonderful blue eyes another peep into heaven. I should like to see how they look when all the sadness has gone out of them; and that is how they will look when she sits for my Peri."

"For shame, Carteret! Would you break a woman's heart to make your picture more effective?"

"Undoubtedly so: I should feel it my duty to sacrifice a woman's feelings for my art; and when the woman is as pretty as this one the duty becomes a pleasure."

"Well, I call it a beastly shame! You would not think of playing with a smart girl in that way; then why should you with a girl who is poor and downtrodden?"

"Simply because she is poor and downtrodden. As you say, I shouldn't dare to trifle with the affections—if she had any—of a woman of fashion."

Tredennis smoked on savagely. "I am disgusted with you, Carteret. You will spoil that poor child's life. And she isn't such a child as you suppose, which makes

it all the harder for her. She is older than she looks; and so will love as a woman and not as a child."

Carteret laughed lightly. "Stuff and nonsense! It will be a pleasant holiday amusement for both the girl and me; for a summer in which one doesn't make love is a summer wasted."

"What is the girl's name?" asked Tredennis.

"Matilda Dunn, so mine hostess informed me; and I gathered from the same source that the old lady in charge of the fair Matilda—whom I take to be her maiden aunt—is known to Matilda by the absurd pet name of 'Nanty,' but to the less favoured public by the impressive cognomen of Miss Amelia Cox."

Tredennis smiled in spite of himself. "Miss Amelia Cox is a most terrible person. She is an ultra-Protestant; and the sight of the convent opposite is a source of never-failing interest and horror to her. She spoke to me to-day, while I was sketching by the stream, and enlightened me at some length as to the evils of Popery. She has—to put it mildly—an ingrained prejudice against everybody whom she happens to regard as a Jesuit; and she appears to regard as Jesuits most people who are not so wise or so fortunate as to belong to her special denomination."

"I hope the fair Matilda won't bore me to death with talking about her relations; girls of that class generally do. They tell you that 'dear mamma suffers from spasms,' and the 'dear papa is a perfect gentleman,' and things of that kind, don't you know?"

"Poor, *bourgeoise*, little Matilda! She has my heartiest sympathy," sighed Tredennis.

Carteret laughed. "I hope I sha'n't make her dis-

satisfied with the men of her own class," he remarked, with much conceit.

"I expect you will; for you really are a handsome fellow, George, though just now you are behaving like a cad."

"Rubbish! The girl ought to have your heartiest congratulations instead of your heartiest sympathy, my dear Will; for the woman to whom I am happening at the moment to make love, has, for the time being, the most delightful experience. I flatter myself that I am a past master in the art. Why, bless you, my dear fellow! if the girl has the artistic temperament—as with those eyes she is bound to have—she will enjoy the pastime as much as I shall, and it will do her no more harm."

And then the young men rose from the seat under the shadow of the inn, where they had been smoking in the summer twilight, and strolled up the hill to have a final look at the view before turning in.

George Carteret and Will Tredennis were on a sketching tour, and had stopped at Mawgan, that most picturesque of all Cornish villages. They had already been there for three days, and on the morrow Tredennis was going on to Tintagel, while Carteret meant to stay at Mawgan to make some more sketches in that delightful neighbourhood. In a week's time they were to meet again at Penzance and do the south of Cornwall together.

The only other visitors staying at the little rose-covered inn were the ladies so freely discussed by the two artists. They were right in saying that Matilda Dunn was attractive. She was tall and fair and delicate-looking, but with that capacity for hard work which only delicate-looking women possess. Miss Amelia Cox was

neither fair nor delicate-looking; but she was a cheerful, kind-hearted soul, absorbed by a passionate devotion to the girl under her charge.

The following day Tredennis left; and then Carteret devoted himself to bringing that look into Matilda's eyes which would render her fit to be the model for his Peri. It was not difficult to make friends with Miss Cox—she was only too ready to enter into sociable conversation with any one, as she found Mawgan decidedly dull; and she soon pointed out to George Carteret its obvious inferiorities, as a holiday resort, to Margate. Of Miss Cox George intended to make a stepping-stone to lead to Miss Dunn; and in a few hours he had established most friendly relations between himself and the elder of his fellow-tourists.

By tea-time Miss Cox had already treated him to short biographies of all the ministers whom she had "sat under" during the course of her earthly pilgrimage; and she had added to this semi-theological instruction much information of a more personal character. She had informed him that her departed father had, in the days of his flesh, kept a small bookseller's shop in Bloomsbury, but that he made so little profit thereby that she and her sisters had all been obliged to earn their respective livings. Some of the sisters had married and had had children; but wealth had never been an appendage of the Cox family, or of any of its collaterals. And although her surviving sisters were what Miss Amelia called "fairly comfortable in their old age," all their daughters had to work in their turn as their mothers had done before them. She even went so far after supper as to confide in George that one of her nieces, who worked

in a telegraph office, was receiving "honourable attentions" from a young man whose father owned an extensive grocery business; and the Cox family were apparently dazzled by the brilliant prospect which this opened out.

"If Maria catches that young man," concluded Maria's proud aunt, "she need never soil her fingers with work again as long as she lives, for she'll have a little servant of her own from the day she is married; take my word for it!"

Having charmed Miss Amelia, George devoted the next day to the conquest of Matilda; and was even more pleased with his success. At first the girl seemed shy, and a little in awe of him; but gradually her reserve thawed, and George found her a delightful companion. She did not talk much, but she listened attentively; and the naïve comments she made upon all that he told her, showed that there was much intelligence, and also a quaint humour, hidden away under her demure exterior. After this, the friendship between the two throve apace. At first the girl was loth to neglect her work; but soon she succumbed to Carteret's tender entreaties, and left her writing to take care of itself while she sat by him and watched him sketching.

As they thus sat together during the long summer days, George strove his utmost to captivate the girl's fancy; and gradually he was rewarded by seeing the look he longed for steal into her blue eyes. Those wonderful eyes ceased to be sad when he was there, and brightened up at the mere sound of his footstep.

Matilda did not talk of her relations, as George had feared. She was a woman of infinite tact, and she soon

learned the subjects which interested him most were the thoughts and words and works of George Carteret, Esq.; so those subjects occupied most of the conversation between them—especially as Matilda found them almost as interesting as he did.

George told her the story of his life (that is to say, his own personally compiled edition of it—the edition which he had persuaded himself was true, but which his intimate friends and relations knew to be chiefly fictitious); and confided to her his intentions of cutting out all rival artists, and of setting the Thames on fire for the warming of his own hands; and showed forth to her the utter vileness and ignorance of those beam-eyed critics, who, out of sheer jealousy, pretended that they perceived motes in his finest productions. Matilda listened with an interest that almost assumed the appearance of awe, it was so serious; and the blue eyes softened at George's autobiography, and glowed at his dreams of success, and flashed at the evil doings of the envious critics till even his egregious vanity was satisfied.

"Poor little girl! she will mope to death when I am gone," he frequently said to himself. But there was no pity mixed with the thought—nothing but vanity. He was proud to think he was writing his name so indelibly on this tender young heart that no after years would efface the scar. That scars are not unmixed joys to their possessors, did not occur to him; and he would not have cared if it had.

"Mattie," he said one morning, in his most caressing voice, "I have a favour to ask of my little queen. Do you think she will grant it to me?" He had taken to call her Mattie; he thought it a prettier name than Matilda.

The girl shyly raised her eyes to his. "It seems funny for you, who are such a great artist and such a clever man, to ask favours of me."

"You sweet, simple darling! Don't you know that beauty makes every woman such a powerful queen in her own right that all men—even the cleverest—are her subjects?" And George fairly bridled with pride as he said "even the cleverest."

"But you—you—are so different from all the rest," Matilda added timidly.

"Only in your eyes, dearest—the sweetest eyes in the whole world. I am not much better nor much worse than other men of my class."

Now George would have been mortally offended if any one else had said he was no better—and much more so if any one else had said he was no worse—than other men. But we all say things of ourselves—and of others—that we should never forgive others for saying of us.

"Do you mean that all real gentlemen are as wise and as clever and as learned as you are, Mr. Carteret!" and the sweet face grew incredulous.

"My sweetheart, how often have I told you not to say Mr. Carteret! Unless my little girl says *George*, I won't answer any of her questions."

"But I don't like to say *George* to a real gentleman. I'm sure Nanty wouldn't like me to call you that."

"Never mind Nanty—mind me. You see, I call you *Mattie*, so why shouldn't you call me *George?*"

The girl shook her head. "You don't call me *Mattie* when Nanty is by. I've noticed that."

George laughed. "What a dear little innocent it is! Well, look here, we'll make a compromise: when Nanty

is listening we'll say *Miss Dunn* and *Mr. Carteret*, and when she isn't we'll say *Mattie* and *George*. Will that do?"

"I don't know; I'm not sure that it's quite proper for me to call you *George* even when Nanty isn't listening."

"Sweetheart, don't look so distressed about it: you'll get lines across your white forehead and crowsfeet round your pretty eyes if you take trifles so much to heart. Now say *George* once, just to show that you'll do always what I want, and not what Nanty wants."

The girl looked down and was silent, making patterns on the ground with the point of her little shoe.

"Say it," persisted George.

"George," she whispered, "I don't believe there is anybody in the whole world like you."

George felt a wild longing to take her there and then in his arms and cover her face with kisses; but somehow, for all her *naïveté*, there was an innate dignity about the girl that held him back.

"And now that I have done as you bid me, tell me what is the favour you want to ask," she said.

"You know that I am going to paint a great picture for next year's Academy."

Matilda nodded. "I know: the one you read me the beautiful poem about, don't you mean?"

"Yes; and I want to make a sketch of you, so that my Peri's face may be yours. Then if my picture is a great success—as I mean it to be—it will be the triumph of your beauty and my art in one."

The girl flushed with joy, and almost held her breath. "Oh! you don't think I'm pretty enough for

that, do you?—for my face to live for ever on your canvas?"

"I do, my sweet; I think you are beautiful enough for Michael Angelo to have painted you as an angel. So you'll let me make a sketch of your head, won't you?"

"Of course I will. But it seems almost too good to be true! Nanty will be proud to see me in a picture."

"All the world will be proud of you when they see your face as I shall paint it," replied the artist grandiloquently; but Matilda gazed at him as if his utterances had been those of an inspired prophet instead of a very conceited young man.

"I shall paint you in a blue, clinging garment," continued Carteret. "A woman's clothes should always match her eyes."

"Should they? How clever you are to know all these things!"

So George made a sketch of Matilda's head, with the expression in her eyes which they wore when they caught sight of him coming toward her in the old inn garden. And because the artist in a man is something apart from the man himself, George's work was wholly good, and the face on the canvas was verily the face of an angel.

As for Matilda, she put away her writing altogether, and gave herself up entirely to the enjoyment of George's society. He was happy enough, for he was in the enviable position of people who think that they are in love and know that they are not. And because he was happy he was attractive—the two frequently go together; so he laid himself out to make the present as full, and the future as empty, as possible to the girl beside him.

Of course he told Matilda that he loved her: and of course he said he could not ask her to marry him until he had talked the matter over with his father, as he was principally dependent on that father's allowance: and of course he had no intention of doing any such thing, or of ever mentioning the name of Matilda Dunn to George Carteret *père*.

But the wondering blue eyes drank in every word he said, and there was no shadow of doubt to cloud their childlike wonder.

Mattie was very quiet the day before he left Mawgan, but she was not the sort of girl to vex a man with tears and hysterics.

"Tell me your address," she said as they walked by the stream that last evening, "so that I may know where to write to you."

But George was wary. "I can't do that, darling, for my plans are so uncertain; but I'll write to you in a couple of days, and let you know where I am and what I am going to do."

"Promise that you will write to me soon," Matilda entreated.

"I promise."

"Faithfully?"

"Yes, faithfully."

But still the sweet face looked anxious. "Will you give me your word of honour that you'll write to me by next Monday at the latest? Because to-day is only Wednesday, and it is a long time from Wednesday till Monday, you know."

"Of course I will, you silly little girl."

"Say it, then," persisted Matilda.

George laughed. How deliciously simple she was, he thought. "I give you my word of honour that I'll write to you before next Monday. There, will that do?"

Matilda gave a little sigh of pure contentment. "Yes; because real gentlemen always keep their word, don't they? At least, Nanty says they do."

George laughed again. The middle-class female mind was elementary, he decided. "Of course they do, you little Didymus of a child."

The next morning George Carteret said goodbye to Matilda and to Miss Cox, with many promises of future meetings, none of which he kept or ever meant to keep. So the girl had to take up her work again without him, and Mawgan saw him no more.

When Monday morning came, Matilda looked anxiously out for the promised letter, and again on Tuesday and Wednesday. But it never came then, nor on any following Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday.

The next spring found George Carteret on a very pinnacle of vaulting ambition, for his picture of the Peri was hung on the line, and pronounced one of the best pictures of that year's Academy. But in vain did Matilda's eyes appeal to him from the open gates of paradise. He had forgotten the girl's existence, save as the model of his Peri's face.

Early in the season there was a large ball at Lady Silverhampton's; and as George was making his way through the crowded rooms his hostess tapped him on the arm.

"Oh! Mr. Carteret, Lady Maud Duncan has asked me to present you to her. She has seen your picture, and wants to talk to you about it."

George's heart fairly swelled with pride. This, he felt, was fame; for Lady Maud Duncan was the only child and heiress of the wealthy Earl of Comleydale, and a celebrated beauty to boot, and one of the most brilliant novelists of the day into the bargain. Not to know Lady Maud was indeed to argue oneself unknown; while to be known by her was to be in Society.

Lady Silverhampton piloted George to a secluded seat in a flowery alcove, where an exquisitely-dressed young woman was sitting alone; and then pronounced the magic words of introduction and left him. His conventional bow, however, was arrested half-way; for the girl sitting on the secluded seat was none other than Matilda Dunn.

"How do you do, Mr. Carteret?" she began, with an easy assurance that had not characterized her in the Mawgan days; "I am so glad to meet you here to-night, for I have heaps of things to say to you." And she made room for him beside her on the settee.

"I don't understand," said George limply, as he sat down.

"Of course you don't. How could you? But I am going to explain."

All the starch had suddenly gone out of George; so he remained silent, and waited for further revelations.

Lady Maud continued: "You see, it is impossible for me to find time either in London or at Comleydale to write my books, we have so many visitors and know such heaps of people; so when I am working at a novel, I fly *incog.* to some remote country place, and there go on with my writing in peace. On these occasions I always

call myself Miss Matilda Dunn; and my old nurse, Amelia Cox, goes with me to take care of me."

"Oh! I see." George looked strangely ill at ease for so distinguished an artist.

Lady Maud began to laugh. "Now I am coming to the amusing part of my story. I happened to be sitting at my open window that evening at Mawgan when you confided to Mr. Tredennis your praiseworthy intention to trifle with the youthful affections of Matilda Dunn; and I thought what fun it would be to fool you to the top of your bent, and to use up all the idiotic things you might say as 'copy' for the story I was then writing. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly, thank you." Carteret's face was very white.

"At first you bored me a little, I must confess; you were so very conceited, and had to have your flattery laid on so awfully thick. But after a time I warmed to my work and immensely enjoyed hearing you make an idiot of yourself. I have so often wondered what sort of silly things silly men say to girls whom they think silly. Now I know."

George's lips trembled. "Do you think such treatment was fair, may I ask?"

Her ladyship shrugged her white shoulders. "Most certainly. You meant to make a fool of me for the sake of your picture: I meant to make a fool of you for the sake of my book: in what were we not quits?"

"Is it the custom, then, to caricature the men who love you?"

"Never—never: if I sank as low as that, I should be on a par with you, Mr. Carteret. I consider that a wom-

an who plays with a man's affection is as contemptible a creature as—the man who plays with a woman's. If I could put it stronger I would, but I can't."

George's brow was damp with misery. "I can't think how I came to be such a confounded ass."

"And I can't think how you came to be such a—confounded cad." And Lady Maud went off into a peal of silvery laughter. "It is really horrid for you," she continued, through her merriment; "I can not deny that it is. For every one will recognize you when my novel comes out—which will be in a week or two from now; and as every one will recognize me as the woman in your picture, the world will say that Mr. Carteret laid his heart at the feet of Lady Maud Duncan, and that she laughed at him. That is what the world will say, if I know anything of the world. And the world despises people who are laughed at, my dear Mr. Carteret."

George was silent: this misery was becoming almost too terrible for a vain man to bear.

"The fun of it all was," Lady Maud went on, "that you thought me so awfully young; and I blessed you for this in the midst of my disgust. As a matter of fact I am turned six-and-twenty; but with my light hair and my thinness—added to a simple and girlish toilette—your behaviour and my looking-glass tell me I can still pass for eighteen. This is very satisfactory."

"You are the most heartless woman I ever saw."

"You misjudge me; I am only taking a leaf out your book for the time being. And I'll let you into a secret; I made up my mind that if after all you repented, and wrote the letter as you had promised, I would let you down as gently as I could, and would not put you

into my novel at all. I looked out for that letter on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday; and I looked out anxiously, for I was dreadfully afraid that you would behave like a gentleman at last, and so render me incapable of making any use of one of the cleverest and most amusing character-studies I ever portrayed. But, fortunately for me, you did not disappoint me; and all the world will be laughing with me at you by this time next month."

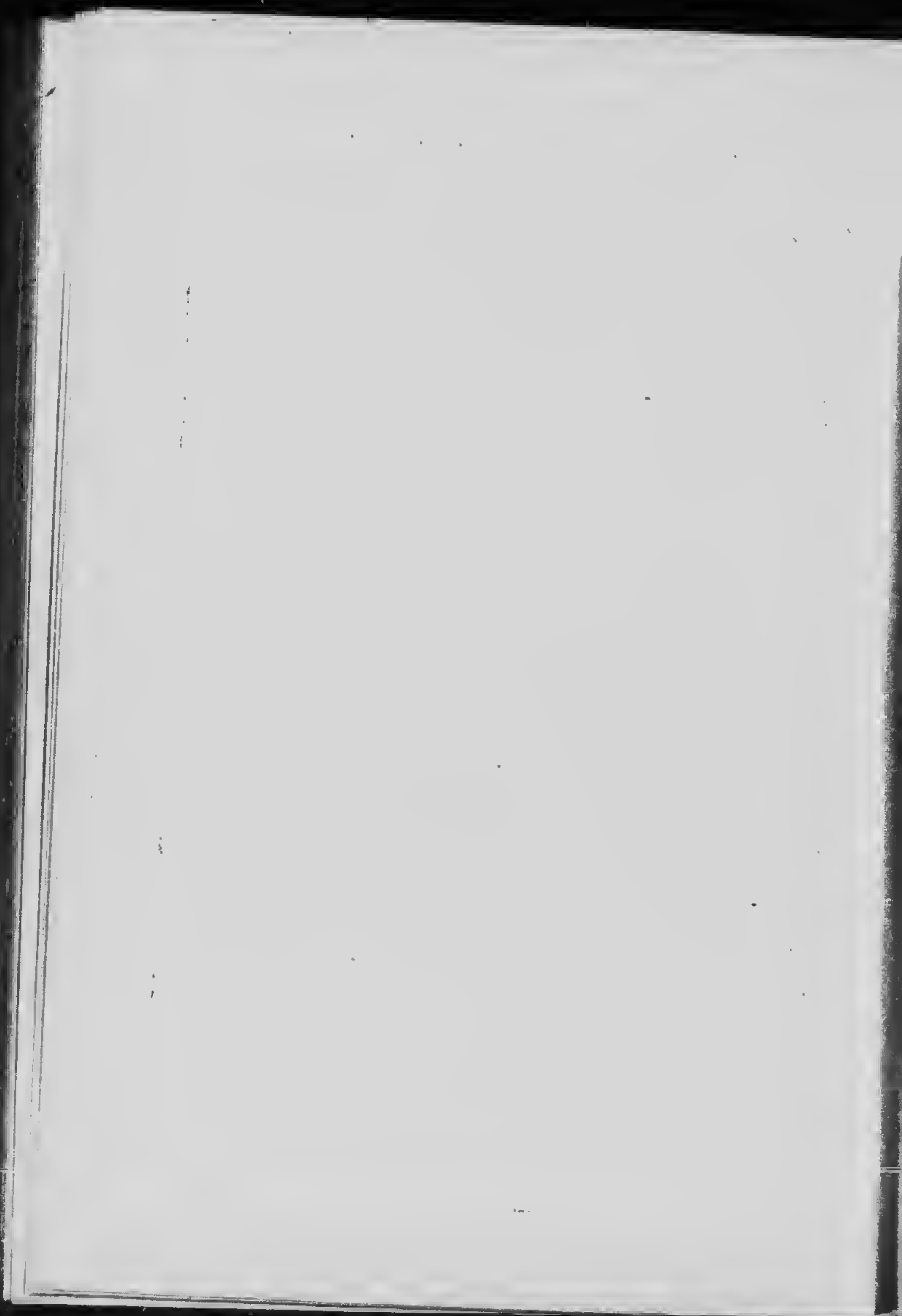
George mopped his brow with his pocket-handkerchief. He felt positively sick.

"There are just a few more things I want to say to you," Lady Maud rippled on, her voice shaking with half-suppressed mirth: "you said to Mr. Tredennis that you should never dare to trifle with the affections of a woman of fashion. You haven't. And I am sure you can't blame me for talking too much about my relations; for I never once told you that Lord Comleydale 'was a perfect gentleman,' or that my lady 'suffered from spasms.' Also I can assure you that you have not, as you feared, made me at all 'dissatisfied with the men of my own class.' Oh! it is really all too funny!" And the girl gave way to unrestrained laughter.

As for George, he was past speaking, and could only bury his face in his hands and groan.

"There is the Duke of Carnstaple looking for me," said Lady Maud, rising from her seat; "this is his dance. Goodbye, Mr. Carteret: I'm so glad to have met you again and had this nice long talk with you. And you were quite right; I have got the artistic temperament, and I enjoyed the pastime quite as much as you did—if not more."

THE HISTORY OF DELIA



THE HISTORY OF DELIA

I KNOW that it is the fashion nowadays for people to write their own lives, and to give an accurate diagnosis of all their feelings for the benefit of the world; so, as I am nothing if not modern (*fin-de-siècle* I used to call myself last year, but have discarded the expression since now it seems a century behind the time), I have decided to write my autobiography, and to give as graphic an account as in me lies of the workings of that which I am pleased to call my mind.

Nevertheless the task is not as easy as at first sight it appears. First, in describing events, it is so difficult to distinguish between what really happened, and what ought to have happened if one were writing a novel instead of a biography: in fact this difficulty is so great that few biographers succeed in overcoming it; and this is the reason why biography, as a rule, is readable. And, secondly, it is impossible to find out, to one's own satisfaction, what sort of a person oneself—the leading lady of the piece—actually is: and it is very confusing to write a book, and know so little about one's heroine. For instance, mother thinks I am a child, Mr. Satterthwaite thinks I am a girl, and I think I am a woman: and goodness knows which of us is right! It is no light matter to sit down to tell a story without even knowing what gen-

eration one's heroine belongs to. It is bad enough not to know what century one is in, which everybody was quarrelling about last year: but it is even more puzzling not to know which generation one is in—not to feel sure whether one ought to be dressing dolls, or writing love letters, or making one's will.

As for me, I feel quite an old woman—I am turned one-and-twenty—and that is why I have decided to write the story of my life; but it happens that the story of my life is the story of another person's life, and not really my story at all. However, that, I suppose, is true of everyone who—unlike the knife-grinder—has a story to tell. It is only when our stories are other people's stories that they are worth the telling—which sounds like a paradox, but is really only a platitude. Just as it is only when one has given oneself to another person, that one begins to possess one's own soul. All of which sounds very puzzling till one has learned how to do it: and then it seems the simplest thing in the world.

And this brings me to the point that my story is really Gilbert Satterthwaite's story: his life was the printed matter, and mine only the meadow of margin through which the rivulet of text meandered, as Sir Benjamin Backbite so elegantly puts it. Since Gilbert went away, the book of my life has been nothing but margin, like my good-mark book when I was a little child in the schoolroom; and a field of margin, with no rivulet of type to water it, is but a barren pasture for the reading public to browse upon. Neither is it a cheerful and salubrious site whereon to build one's dwelling-house and take up one's abode: but now I am afraid I am confusing my metaphors—a trick my tutor never could endure.

I am an only child, and it is very dull to be an only child. I think that children—like tea-things—should always be in sets. It would be absurdly inconvenient to have only one cup-and-saucer in a house: and it would be dreadfully dull for the cup-and-saucer. I often wish I'd had a brother to help me to understand Gilbert Satterthwaite; and a sister to help me to misunderstand him. It would have made everything so much more interesting and amusing. But the fact that I am an only child, and a very solitary one, leaves all the more room in my heart for the taking in of lodgers. When a family-party fills a house, there is no space for visitors: and I think hearts are a good deal like houses in this respect. Wherefore it came to pass that when once Gilbert Satterthwaite appeared above my horizon-line, he soon filled up half the landscape; so that such part of my life as he had no share in, could be put upon the point of a needle without overflowing.

Gilbert was Lady Summerford's agent, and lived alone at the agent's house—"The Agency" he used to call it—in the corner of Summerford Park. Lady Summerford herself was a very wonderful person—one of those people who seem to spend their lives in cotton-wool and tissue-paper, and to be altogether too good and too beautiful for everyday use. Wherever she went, men and women fell down and worshipped her: they instinctively gave her the best of everything, and she took it all as her right with the most gracious smile in the world. She was never too late for anything, because nothing began until she arrived; and however crowded an assembly might be when she entered, the best seat in the room was at once vacated for her use; and the per-

son who had vacated it was conscious of receiving rather than of bestowing a favour, when her ladyship sat down. Everyone with whom she was brought into contact waited upon her hand and foot, so queenly and yet lovable was she. She must have been divinely beautiful when she was young, but when I knew her she was of course getting elderly—quite thirty I should think; and Mr. Satterthwaite was still older. But I don't think age matters, if people are really nice: at least *I* don't mind it. That is to say, I don't mind it in other people: it must be rather dreadful to be thirty oneself, especially if one isn't married; though I suppose when one is actually as old as that, one ceases to care much about this world, being so busy getting ready for the next.

Mr. Satterthwaite was a very little man, almost a dwarf; and he came to be agent to his first cousin, Lady Summerford, soon after Sir Robert Summerford's death. I can't remember Sir Robert, but I have heard that he was forty years older than his wife; so he would be a great age if he had lived till now. Gilbert was very clever, and knew something about everything; and he used to give me lessons when I was a child. He was sorry for me, he said, because I seemed "so only and so lonely"; so he asked father to let me come up to The Agency and do some lessons with him. Oh, what lovely times we used to have together! All the lessons were treats, except sums; and even those weren't so bad when Mr. Satterthwaite showed me how to do them, though the answers would never come twice the same. Naturally I adored him, and admired all his characteristics, including his shortness. Even now, after all these years (it is three years and two months since I last saw him),

I despise, as coarse and elephantine, men who are bigger than he. It never struck me that he was too little—only that other men were too big: just as it never strikes the Summerford people that they are too old—only that I am too young; and I really am not, being turned one-and-twenty. I never was clever, but I worked hard to please Mr. Satterthwaite; I read all the books that he recommended, so that by the time I was seventeen I was what people call "well-informed"—a horrid word, Mr. Satterthwaite used to say.

My father and mother are the rector of Summerford. That also sounds like a paradox to those who don't know them; but the parish would understand that it is a plain statement of a very palpable fact. They are very kind to me; but their tastes rather than mine rule the establishment, two to one being a good working majority for any government—especially for a government as strong as mother. She never cared for Mr. Satterthwaite: she said that he made fun of her, and that no sound churchman would make fun of his rector's wife. Of course no ordinary sound churchman would, and of course it is always wrong to make fun of sacred things; but Gilbert's fun was the most delightful thing imaginable, and gave one a delicious feeling of being pelted with rose leaves. I used to love it when he made fun of me: but then I'm not a clergyman's wife and so there was nothing wicked in laughing at my mistakes. Mother and I never enjoy the same things; and it always strikes me as funny that father's sermons don't bore her, while Gilbert's jokes did. Yet Gilbert Satterthwaite was the one man in all the world who never could have bored anybody—at least so I should have thought: and sermons are somehow always

inclined to be boring things; especially when they come out of your own family, so that you always know beforehand the strait paths wherein the *therefores* are going to lead you, and the bypath meadows from which the *buts* are meant to warn you away.

It is a little difficult to remember at all distinctly the days when Mr. Satterthwaite was my tutor, they are so long ago. Only one or two stand out separately, and the rest run together into a sort of rose-coloured haze shot with gold, like a summer dawn. But one of the special occasions which I recall was a morning when Lady Summerford interrupted us just as we were settling down to work. She was looking lovelier than usual, in a white muslin dress trimmed with creamy lace, and a large black hat; and she had a bunch of crimson roses stuck into her black waistband. As soon as she entered (which she always did at The Agency without knocking or ringing), the expression which I used to call "the Lady Summerford look" came over Mr. Satterthwaite's face. It was such a strange look, and no one ever brought it into his face save she—a sort of shadowy veil, it seemed to be, intended to hide something underneath; though what that something was, I never could make out.

"So Gilbert is superintending your education, is he?" said her ladyship, patting my head and then sinking elegantly into an easy-chair.

"Yes," I replied somewhat shyly. Lady Summerford was so magnificent that she always made me feel plain and awkward and commonplace; and that is not a very comfortable feeling.

"Poor little girl!" she went on, with her musical

laugh; "why can't he let you play in the sunshine without troubling you with lessons? Life will bring them soon enough, and then you will have to learn them whether you will or no."

"Not necessarily," put in Gilbert. "Some people appear to skip life's lesson-book with enviable ease, and to be extraordinarily uneducated at the end of it."

Lady Summerford laughed again. "There are so few things worth learning, that it is often cleverer to skip than to read. True cleverness consists in discriminating how much may be skipped and how little need be learned—just as the most reliable memory is the one which knows exactly how little it is necessary, or even wise, to remember."

"Ah! I haven't a good memory."

I looked up at my tutor with surprise. "You?—not a good memory? Why, Mr. Satterthwaite, you never forget anything."

"I know. That is where my memory is so defective."

"You had better come to me for lessons than to him, little one. I can teach you far more things worth knowing than he can. He will only teach you the things that are not worth knowing."

I felt so angry at this that I forgot my shyness for a moment. "Oh, no! Lady Summerford, you are mistaken—isn't she?" I added, looking up into my tutor's face for confirmation.

"No: she is quite right." And his expression was more inscrutable than ever.

Lady Summerford seemed amused. "You had better change your teacher, child," she said, stretching out

a well-gloved hand caressingly, " and transfer your allegiance from my cousin to me."

" It certainly would be wise," Gilbert added.

I felt hurt and angry. " Do you mean that you want to get rid of me, and are tired of teaching anybody as stupid as I am? "

" No: I didn't mean that. It was entirely for your own sake that I was offering the advice."

Lady Summerford bent forward, her beautiful face alive with interest. " Choose between us, little Delia: which of us two will you select to be your guide, philosopher and friend? "

" Mr. Satterthwaite, of course," I said, without a moment's hesitation.

There was a second of silence; and as I turned from Mr. Satterthwaite to Lady Summerford, I remembered another occasion when they both looked exactly as they were looking now. It was one day at Summerford Hall, when her ladyship boasted that no one could induce her pet dog to leave her for an instant. Gilbert gave one low whistle, and the animal bounded off Lady Summerford's lap and ran straight to him. I had only just time to recall that incident, and feel as if this were a repetition of it, when Lady Summerford said:

" What nonsense we are talking! You will be thinking us two very silly old people, Delia."

" I could never think Mr. Satterthwaite silly," I replied; which of course I couldn't, because he never was.

" Well, I mustn't waste any more time in talking nonsense. I came here this morning, Gilbert, to tell you that I want you to ride over to Williamson's farm at once, and see him about rebuilding those cottages,"

"All right: I'll go this afternoon."

Her ladyship played absently with the white silk sunshade lying across her knees. "I think this morning would be better."

"But why? An hour or two can not make any difference in seeing about the rebuilding of cottages which have been in ruins these twelve months."

"I still think it would be better to go this morning."

"But, my dear Aurora, there is not the slightest hurry about the thing. As a matter of fact, it would do equally well if I went next week. Still I'll ride over after lunch, if you are so set on my seeing about it to-day."

Then it suddenly occurred to me that it was my lessons that were in the way. "Never mind about me, Mr. Satterthwaite, if it is I that am hindering you: I can do that Latin exercise just as well by myself." And then I couldn't repress a sigh, because people never really can do things just as well by themselves, but they often have to pretend that they can for the sake of others.

"You see, the child can do just as well without you as with you, Gilbert." I never saw Lady Summerford look sweeter than she looked at that moment.

"Oh, no! I didn't mean that," I cried: "nobody could get on as well without Mr. Satterthwaite as with him. I only meant that I didn't want to hinder him and bother him, or to interfere with his really important work."

Lady Summerford rose from her chair and drew herself up to her full height. "Well, I must go; and you had better come and have lunch up at the Hall, Gilbert,

and tell me what Williamson has decided about the cottages."

Mr. Satterthwaite also rose, and drew himself up to about three-quarters of Lady Summerford's full height. "It would be more convenient to me to go to Williamson's farm this afternoon," he said very politely: "but, as your ladyship's paid servant, I am bound to obey your ladyship's commands."

"And it would be more convenient to my ladyship for you to go this morning," she called over her shoulder, as she strolled out of the open French-window. "I shall expect you to lunch at two o'clock."

So I got a holiday that I had not bargained for.

While we were having tea one afternoon, a long time after this, mother said to father:

"You appear to me somewhat worried, William, love. Is anything wrong in the parish? Because, if so, I will put it straight at once."

"No, Selina, there is nothing wrong in the parish, as one may say" (father always qualifies his statements by expressions such as "so to speak," "as one may say," and the like: I think he feels that they somehow give him a loophole of escape when he has to explain them away afterward to mother); "but I have heard a rumour today which has caused me uneasiness—considerable uneasiness, in fact; considerable uneasiness."

It is funny how preaching becomes a habit with some men, so that they never leave it off even in their own homes.

"And what is that, love?" asked mother, with pardonable curiosity.

"I will tell you at a more convenient season, my dear;

at a more convenient season," answered father, with unpardonable caution.

"Well, William, I hope to goodness that Fred Cozens hasn't taken to drinking again, or that Emma Jane Perkins hasn't left the last situation I got for her. That's the worst of Emma Jane. She is a good servant in her way, and has plenty of work in her; but she will not settle down. And how can she expect to get first-class situations, when she never has more than a six months' reference, I should like to know?"

Dear mother has such a habit of jumping to conclusions, and such a vivid imagination. If she happens to invent a statement, and nobody happens to be at hand to contradict it, that statement at once becomes history, as far as she is concerned. Just now father was thinking of something else, and so let the Emma-Jane-Perkins conclusion pass unchallenged; whereupon mother continued:

"It is just what I expected. I told Emma Jane that I really would not give her another recommendation if she did not stay in this last place for a year at least—and I shall keep my word. She is a good enough girl I know, and an excellent daughter; and no cook of mine ever made flaky paste as well as she does, though for my part I always consider her short paste a little too rich, and I've told her so. But, as I said to her, what is the use of keeping all the Commandments from your youth up, if you don't stay long enough in one place for people to see that you keep them? I shall speak to her mother very seriously about her. I shall go and see her mother to-morrow, and point out to her how Emma Jane is ruining her life by this rolling-stone manner of going on."

By this time father's wandering attention was secured. "Emma Jane Perkins at home again, do you say, my love? Dear me, dear me, I am sorry to hear that, very sorry, very sorry indeed! I saw Mrs. Perkins only yesterday, only yesterday, my love, and she was telling me that Perkins's rheumatism was so bad that she feared he could not go on working much longer—that he would have to take sick-leave, so to speak, to take sick-leave. But she did not mention that Emma Jane was out of a place again, so let us hope that this is what one might call a false report—a smoke without any fundamental fire. Who told you that Emma Jane was at home, my love?"

"You did, William."

"I?" Father's face was blank with astonishment. Though he has been married to her for over twenty years, mother's free translations of father's statements never fail to astound him afresh.

"Yes, you, William."

"But, my dear, I never even mentioned Emma Jane Perkins's name; it never so much as entered into my thoughts, much less passed the doors of my lips."

"My dear William, you distinctly said that she was at home again, and that the reasons of her dismissal were such as you could not mention in Delia's presence. I heard you with my own ears."

Then I felt it was time for me to interfere, as I always do when I think that father and mother have played at cross questions and crooked answers long enough. I can't imagine how married couples, who have no children to interpret them to one another, get along at all; be-

cause neither of them can have a notion what the other has—or has not—said.

"It was you that brought Emma Jane into the conversation, mother. Father only said that he had heard a rumour in the village which caused him uneasiness."

"Then why on earth, William, can't you tell us straight out what the rumour is, instead of throwing suspicions on Fred Cozens and Emma Jane Perkins, and generally bearing false witness against your neighbours?"

"Because, as I have said before, my love, I must postpone my confidence to a more convenient season—a more convenient season as one may say, a more convenient season."

And then I knew that I must wait for an interview with mother alone, before my thirst for information could be slaked. Father always tells things to mother alone, and then mother invariably tells them to me; it would be against every tradition of the family for father to tell anything to mother and me *en masse;* and yet the result would be the same, and much time and breath saved. But I have noticed that this ritual obtains in other circles besides ours, so I suppose there is more in it than meets the eye; though it seems to me rather an effete custom, like locking the door of the House of Commons in the face of Black Rod. In the same way parents consider it wise to converse in cyphers in the presence of their offspring; and yet I am convinced that "the young-eyed cherubins" see through the verbal disguise long before the parental cyphcree docs.

When mother and I were alone together next morning, I asked her what father's secret was; and I felt sure

that it was a specially confidential communication, because she was so eager to divulge it that she could hardly wait to go through the customary formula of reluctance. Dear mother! she can not keep a secret; and that I think is what makes her so nice and interesting to live with. People who don't tell everything that they know, are insufferable—especially in the country.

"It is about Mr. Satterthwaite, my darling," she said at last; "and I scarcely like to tell you, it is so sad and shocking."

I felt myself turning white.

"Tell me at once, please, mother," I begged.

"Well, Delia, your father has heard upon very good authority that Gilbert Satterthwaite once served his time in gaol on a charge of forgery."

"I don't believe a word of it," I cried angrily. "Father ought to know better than to listen to such lies."

"Hush, my love, hush," said mother; "*lies* is not at all a nice word for a young girl to use; and you may rest assured that your dear father would never believe so serious a calumny until he had thoroughly sifted it."

"It is an insult to Mr. Satterthwaite to want to sift it," I retorted, "but you are always prejudiced against him because he isn't tall."

"Oh, no, my love! I should never allow so trivial a matter as mere personal appearance to influence my judgment of character. But I confess I never could have married your father if he had been a little man."

I was too angry to argue, so I snatched up my hat and rushed pell-mell to The Agency.

"Whatever is the matter, my lady of the whirlwind?"

asked Gilbert, in surprise, as I bounced into his sitting room with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Satterthwaite, horrid people are telling lies about you, and I am afraid father and mother are going to believe them."

Gilbert's face turned a shade paler, but he smiled his usual quizzical smile as he said, "Tell me, Delia, what form these terrible calumnies take."

"They actually dare to say that you were once in prison for forgery! Did you ever hear anything so wicked and absurd and altogether idiotic? Horrid spiteful beasts! I could kill them for saying such cruel, untruthful things." And then I burst into tears, I was so angry.

Mr. Satterthwaite's thin white hands stroked my ruffled hair. He had beautiful hands, and there was something wonderful in his touch—as if it could heal all sore places and straighten all crooked ones. "Poor little girl! if you take other people's troubles to heart like this, Delia, and fight their battles so valiantly, you will have no strength and no ammunition left when your own battle-time comes."

"I don't want strength and ammunition," I sobbed: "I only want to punish those loathsome fiends who dare to tell such vile falsehoods about my dear, dear tutor."

"By the way, did you believe the story, child; or did you treat it with the contempt which you apparently thought it deserved?"

"Believe it?" I cried indignantly; "of course I didn't. I don't believe you ever did anything wrong or anything foolish in your life; and I wouldn't believe it if all the world said so."

"But supposing *I* said so, Delia?"

"Then I should say you had a perfect right to do whatever you liked; and that it was a gross impertinence of anyone to presume to judge your actions."

"The Court obviously is with me. Nevertheless, my dear child, I am bound to confess that my conscience frequently accuses me of doing things both wrong and foolish; and my conscience enjoys more opportunities of arriving at the truth than you do, Delia."

"Then your conscience is a fool," I replied; "and its office—though conferring high rank—is a sinecure. Because it has no real work to do, it invents imaginary duties so as to have something to pass the time, like Miss Simpson and her Guild for Counting Lost Hairpins."

My tutor again smiled his whimsical smile; then his face became very grave as he said, "This is no laughing matter, Delia, for the report which your father heard is true—every word of it."

There was a moment's awful silence, while the earth seemed to stand still and then start again the other way round, as father always explains that it did in the affair of Hezekiah and the dial; then I burst out excitedly, "I don't believe it! You are only saying it to try me; and you needn't do that, for you know well enough that whatever you do, and whatever you say, I shall always trust you and admire you more than anybody, and think you the best and cleverest and wisest and nicest man in the whole world!"

"Thank you, little one. I thought I had gone beyond the stage of ever feeling glad or sorry any more; but your belief in me has still the power to make me happy. Therefore I owe it all the more to you to tell you

the truth; and the truth is I once spent five years in prison for forging a cheque. So, my dear pupil, you must go home, and you must not come here again until your father gives you permission, which I am bound to admit—after what he has heard—he is extremely unlikely to do; I should not do so myself, were I in his place. Our lesson times have been very pleasant ones; and though I fear I have taught you but little in them, I have learned much."

I begged and prayed Mr. Satterthwaite to let me stop on for lessons as usual, and assured him over and over again that nothing would ever make any difference in my friendship for him. But he was as adamant about my going home, and my father was as adamant about my not coming back again. So my happy lesson days were over.

After that I hardly ever saw Mr. Satterthwaite again. I don't think he could have had any idea how terribly I missed him, or he would not have cut himself off from me so entirely; but I suppose men can't feel things as much as women do, they have so much more to interest them in their lives. Still, I wonder he didn't guess how much he was to me; but I presume he never thought about it.

My father was sorely perplexed as to whether or not it was his duty to inform Lady Summerford what manner of man her agent was. It is so difficult for any one—even for a clergyman—to know exactly where influence leaves off and interference begins. Mr. Satterthwaite had told father exactly what he had told me—neither more or less—and father said he had behaved like a gentleman in quietly withdrawing his friendship from us, without

troubling us with any further explanations. But it seems to me that when a man behaves like a gentleman without making any further explanation, it sometimes comes rather hard on the woman; though I dare say I am wrong, and I am sure Mr. Satterthwaite was always right.

Father was greatly averse to doing anything which would further injure a man who had already been so sorely punished; but, on the other hand, he thought it was hardly fair to Lady Summerford to keep her in ignorance of so sinister a fact; especially as she was alone in the world, and Gilbert Satterthwaite had entire charge of her estates.

"Your father has at last spoken to Lady Summerford about Mr. Satterthwaite," said mother to me one day; "he felt it his duty to do so, though a very painful one."

"And what did she say?" I asked.

"She said she had known about it all the time; and had given her agency to her cousin in order to help him to make a fresh start in life. How good it was of a high-born, beautiful woman, like Lady Summerford, to trouble to stretch out a helping hand to a reformed little criminal and a poor relation!"

"I don't see that, mother," I cried, with some heat; "I think the boot is quite on the other leg, and that Lady Summerford was the one who received the honour in having Mr. Satterthwaite as a friend!"

"Oh, my love, what a terrible, what an almost blasphemous, thing to say! As if that unhappy little man could ever be regarded as a friend by such an aristocratic and exquisite piece of perfection as Lady Summerford."

"He was a relation," I argued.

"Only a cousin, Delia, and I consider cousinship by no means an unbreakable bond, if one wishes to break it."

I was silent but unconvinced. Of course I don't know what it feels like to be rich and beautiful: I only wish I did: but I can not conceive of any combination of financial and physical endowments which would render me insensible to such an honour as Gilbert Satterthwaite's friendship.

The years have rolled on (three of them) and I have never married. The one or two men who have fallen in love with me were too big and strong and ignorant for my taste. They didn't care a bit for books, but, as my old nurse said, "did nothing but eat and drink and play tennis all day, like the lilies of the field." And now I am twenty-one and an old maid. It seems rather dreary work being an old maid, I think, and I don't much like it as far as I have got; but perhaps it is an acquired taste and grows upon one, like Gruyère cheese or Wagner's music. I help father and mother a good deal in the parish, but somehow I don't find a parish as satisfying as an old maid ought. And I read the books that my tutor used to read, and try to be the sort of woman that he would have wished me to be if he hadn't gone away. I am not really unhappy—only a little dull: but all the time my heart feels like a house that has gone to ruin before it was finished, or like a forsaken churchyard of graves that have never been dug. It is sad enough to lose what one has once had; but the missing of what one has never possessed is a bitterer pain to bear.

Gilbert Satterthwaite came into a small fortune from a distant relative, and left Summerford about a year after father made that unfortunate discovery; and until just

lately we have heard nothing about him from that time to this. But a month ago a great event happened. Lady Summerford died.

"My dearest Delia!" exclaimed mother one day during her ladyship's illness; "what do you think occurred when your father went to see poor Lady Summerford yesterday?"

"I don't know, mother, and I could not possibly guess."

I never try to guess what mother's news is going to be; it would disappoint her so dreadfully if I guessed right, just as it disappoints people if anybody guesses the correct answer to a riddle which they have asked.

"The poor creature is dying, you know," said mother; and it struck me as very ominous to hear her describe anybody of the rank of a baronet's wife as a "poor creature": "so she sent for your father and told him she could not die comfortably without making a confession to him—a confession of a sin which she had had upon her conscience for some years."

"Fancy Lady Summerford's having a conscience at all!" I cried; "she always seemed to me too much of a fine lady for an appendage of that sort. Mr. Satterthwaite used to say that the same person rarely kept a carriage and a conscience."

"What a peculiar thing to say—so like Mr. Satterthwaite," retorted mother with marked disapproval. "I always think that remarks of that kind do so much harm among the lower classes."

"But he didn't say it to the lower classes, mother, he said it to me."

"The principle is the same, my dear; a thing which

can not be said to everybody ought not to be said to anybody, or else it is certain to do harm to somebody, and nobody can be the better for it—if not the worse," replied mother, with a certain confusion of expression, more than compensated for by the excellence of her intentions.

"But do go on about Lady Summerford," I urged.

"Well, my dear, I regret to say that the misguided woman was not so perfect as she appeared to be."

"I never did think her perfect," I interrupted.

Mother looked shocked. "Then, my love, you ought to have done so, for so attractive an appearance, coupled with such elegant manners, I never beheld before."

"But you yourself have just said that she was not as perfect as she looked."

"That, Delia, was no excuse for your not believing her perfect until you found out to the contrary. I can not bear to see the young people of the present day forming their own judgments, in the sad way that they do; and for them to be in the right when their parents are in the wrong, seems to me a distinct and reprehensible breach of the Fifth Commandment."

"Do go on about Lady Summerford, mother."

"So I will, my love, if you will not so persistently interrupt me. And that reminds me that interrupting your elders, when they are speaking, is also in a measure tampering with the Fifth Commandment."

Again I endeavoured to lure mother away from the Fifth Commandment, and this time with more success.

"But Lady Summerford?"

"Well, Delia, she told your father—and he particularly warned me not to mention it again, so see that you

don't do so, Delia—that before her marriage to Sir Robert Summerford she was miserably poor; so poor, in fact, that she could not afford to pay for her own trousseau, and actually forged the name of a miserly old uncle in order to be enabled to do so. When the fraud was discovered, she went to her cousin, Gilbert Satterthwaite, and begged him to help her. He also was very poor, and was devotedly in love with his beautiful cousin, but naturally she would not look at any man who was not well off."

"Poor Mr. Satterthwaite!" I remarked. "But he was so cool and cynical in the days when I knew him, that it is difficult to imagine him capable of falling in love with anybody."

"Ah! there is a Latin proverb to the effect that nobody is wise at all times. I have often heard your dear father quote it, but I can not myself reproduce it in the original."

"Do you mean that everybody falls in love?"

"Certainly not, my dear, certainly not," mother hastened to explain, "but some people are so foolish as to do it now and again."

"Did you and father fall in love?" I asked. But the moment the unseemly inquiry was out of my mouth, I recognized its impropriety, and would fain have recalled it. Mother looked as much shocked as I expected.

"Oh, my dear, what a question to ask! This comes of reading too many novels. Do you suppose, Delia, that a minister of the gospel would be guided thus lightly in the selection of a helpmeet suitable to his calling? I am surprised at you."

I hung my head. "Of course not," I murmured.

(When I came to think of it, it was an absurd question.) "But do go on with your story."

"Well, Gilbert Satterthwaite saw that his beautiful cousin would be ruined, and her brilliant marriage would fall through, if her crime was discovered; so he took her guilt upon himself, and allowed it to be thought that it was he who had forged the cheque. And he bore the punishment, while my lady married her rich lover and lived happily ever afterward. By the time that Gilbert's sentence had expired, old Sir Robert was dead; so Lady Summerford made her cousin her agent, to keep him from starvation."

"I wonder she did not marry him after all," I remarked.

"Oh! my love, how could that beautiful and elegant creature have married a man who had actually been in gaol?" asked mother, with an admirable sense of the fitness of things, though a somewhat perverted sense of justice.

I wasn't really surprised at mother's story, because I had felt sure all along that Mr. Satterthwaite could never have been anything but noble and true. But I couldn't help being envious of the dead woman up at the Hall, whom he had loved so perfectly, with a love which, I felt sure, would never change nor grow old, even though the object were no longer here. It is only beautiful women who are loved like that, I suppose—with a wonderful, sheltering love, which will only cling to them the more closely and wrap them round the more warmly when the world is growing cold to them because of their fading charms. If one were loved in that way, one would not mind growing old: old age would only mean the

quiet evening after the parties were all over—and with a person one really loves, one quiet evening is nicer than all the parties put together. Heigho! it must be exquisite to have a straight nose and a devoted lover: but the gods saw otherwise when my fate and features were mapped out.

Gilbert did not come to Summerford to the funeral, because Lady Summerford, according to her expressed desire, was buried among her own people in the West of England: but, after it was all over, father wrote to him asking his forgiveness for the way in which he (father) had treated him; and Gilbert sent such a nice letter in return, saying that the most exacting of mankind could hardly feel angry with his friends for believing what he himself had told them. The truth never would have been revealed by him, he added; but he was grateful to his poor cousin for clearing his name before she died.

Lady Summerford had no children; so she left the whole of her late husband's fortune and estates—over which she had absolute power—to Gilbert Satterthwaite, as a tardy reparation for the sorrow which he had endured for her. So Mr. Satterthwaite is coming back again to live at Summerford, after all these years. I wonder if he has put a book-marker in the story of our friendship, so that we can go on from exactly where we left off; or whether I shall have to begin at the beginning and read the preface of him over again. People are so different in this respect: with some, one can begin again exactly where one left off, after an interval of years; while with others, it is necessary to go through the preface afresh every morning. Time is hardly long enough for this latter species; and I doubt whether we shall

think it worth while to waste much of eternity upon them.

I ventured to write to Mr. Satterthwaite to tell him how glad I was that everything had been made plain, and that my unwavering faith in, and unbounded admiration for, my old tutor were more than justified. Of course I had never ceased to believe in him, in spite of appearances; but nevertheless it is always pleasanter to walk by sight than by faith, if one can conveniently manage it. And I also told him (though I was afraid he would laugh at me for saying it) how beautiful I thought his unchangeable devotion to his cousin had been; and how love-stories of this kind open one's eyes to the underlying romance of life, and keep one's heart young and fresh in spite of the sordidness of the working-day world. I had such a queer answer from him; this is it:—

"My dear Delia,—Many things have pleased me lately; but nothing has pleased me so much as the proof you have given me of your constant belief in your old tutor. I am glad that you always trusted me—I am still more glad that, whatever my shortcomings may be, I have never done anything which makes me unworthy of your trust. However, my dear, you think a great deal too highly of me, as you always did; so that you are certain some time or other to be disappointed in me. Your remarks about my love for my poor cousin (the most beautiful woman I have ever seen) are very pretty and very characteristic; but I greatly fear me, as far as I am concerned, I shall grievously vex the romantic side of your nature. I daresay you are right in saying that the love which bears all things and believes all things is very

fine—and that the love which never fails and never transfers itself to another object is still finer. I believe I could at one time have pleaded guilty to the former: hardly to the latter. If your ideal hero is one who can love but once and for ever, then, my dear, I'm not your man. I don't set up for being a hero—so you had better quickly pluck me from my pedestal, lest a worse thing befall me.

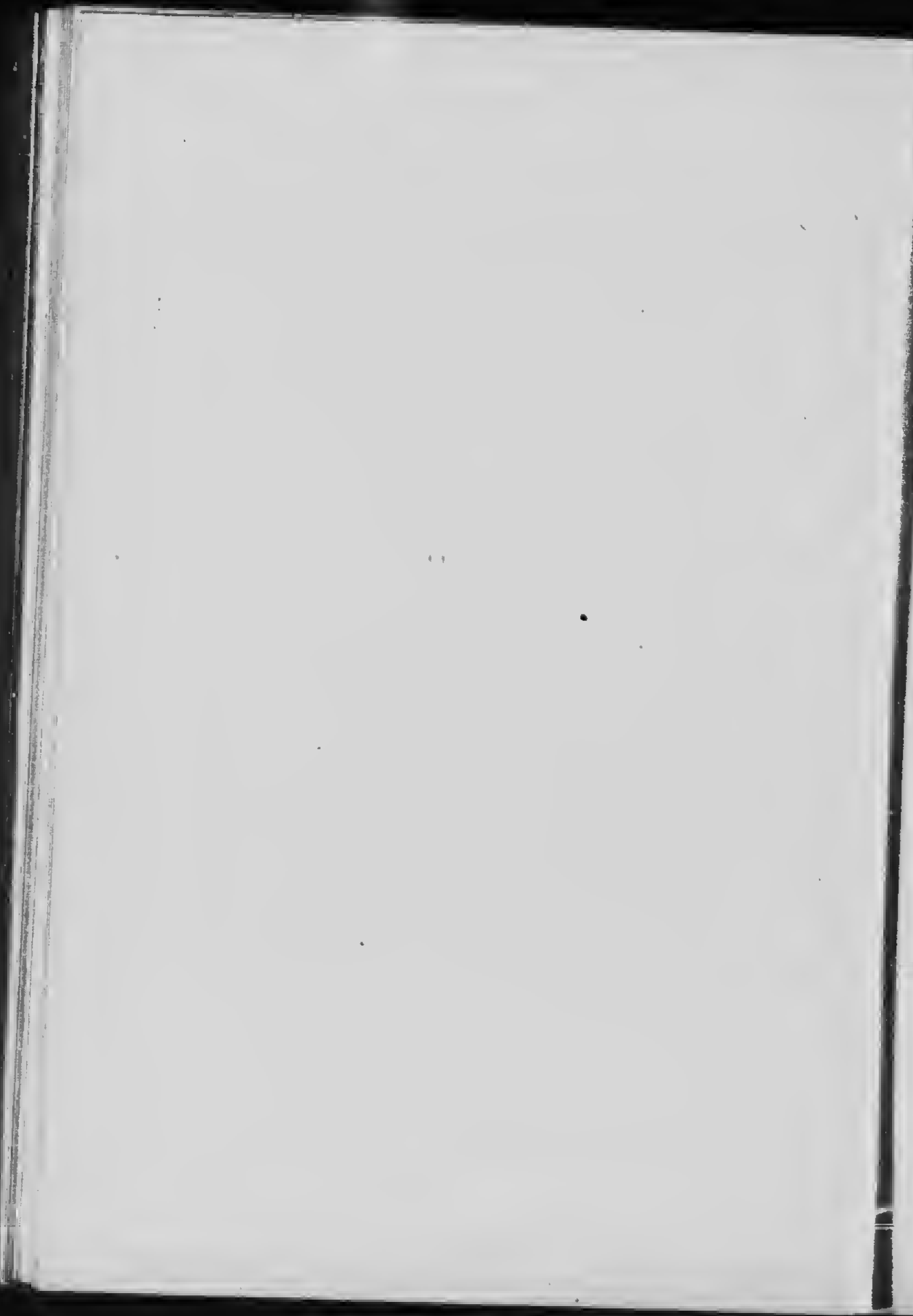
"However, I am coming down to Summerford the day after to-morrow, when I will explain this to you a little more in detail.

"Till when, believe me to remain,
"Your affectionate old tutor,
"GILBERT SATTERTHWAITE."

I wonder what Mr. Satterthwaite means by saying that I shall be disappointed in him. I am quite sure that I shall be nothing of the kind, because he is so good and true that he could never do anything unworthy of himself. Still the mere suggestion makes me a bit uncomfortable, for fear it should again mean that something is going to turn up that will spoil our friendship.

But it is no use worrying: he will explain it all to me when he comes to-morrow, and I must just wait patiently till then. One day is not long to wait, after one has waited for three years; but it seems the longest bit of the waiting, all the same.

A MINIATURE MOLOCH



A MINIATURE MOLOCH

He was small and slight and sickly-looking, while she was big and tall and strong; he was what was called "well-connected," while she was only the daughter of a provincial bookseller; he was merely capable of spending money, while she was obliged to earn it; he possessed refined sensibilities, while she owned nothing more distinguished than deep feelings; he was a scholar in the accepted sense of the word, while she was only a student of human nature; he thought that he was wiser than God, while she knew that she was infinitely more foolish than Man; in short there was every reason why Hester Murrell should bow down and worship Herbert Greene, and she did it to the fullest extent of her by no means limited powers.

Hester was a tall, gaunt, young woman, whose Scotch blood came out in her big bones, so to speak. Her nose was too big and her cheek-bones too high for a reputation for beauty to be within her reach; but Nature had been lavish toward her in one respect, namely her hair, which was of that glorious red colour popularly supposed to be the peculiar invention of Titian for private circulation in Venice. But Venice having fallen from her high estate and being no longer the metropolis of European loveliness, the gold, whereof she once made "a corner,"

has been distributed over the face of the globe; and it happened that a portion of this "red, red gold" fell to the lot of Hester Murrell, and saved her from being—as she would otherwise have been—a very ordinary-looking young woman.

She was the eldest daughter of a family of eight, who had all been born and brought up over their father's shop in the central square of an old-fashioned, provincial town; nevertheless (though Herbert Greene was constitutionally incapable of ever grasping this fact) the Murrells were true gentlepeople—that is to say, if true gentility is a synonym for high principle, culture, and refinement, and the exact opposite of everything that can be covered by that broad term "vulgarity." In religion they belonged to that most cultured and intellectual form of English Nonconformity, the Independent body, which—avoiding alike the poetry and symbolism of Anglicanism on the one hand, and the familiarity and homeliness of Methodism on the other—founds its faith on the workings of reason rather than on the beauty of ritualism or the excitement of revivalism, and worships with its intelligence rather than with its emotions. Too cold a spiritual home, perchance, for the artistic temperament, which hungers and thirsts for that other side of the breast-plate of Righteousness which men call Beauty; but a fine school for all those who inherit the stern spirit of their Puritan ancestors, and who are of one flesh with the men who fought for religious freedom at Naseby and Sedgemoor.

All the little Murrells were clever children, but Hester was the cleverest. She had been to a good school; and her father—whom she adored—had never

ceased to educate her between times; consequently, when she grew up and found that it was time for her to begin to earn her own living, she went to live in London and took to journalism, thinking it was pleasanter to teach the whole world than one family of children, governessing seeming to be the only alternative course; and she enjoyed to the full that most delightful of all professions open to women. The freedom of her life exactly suited her; and as she had never belonged to that class whose daughters are trained in the shadow of chaperonage, she did not feel that sense of loneliness which girls and women of higher rank invariably suffer when first obliged to stand by themselves.

Then came her great success. She was just twenty-seven when she wrote the novel that made her name. It would be difficult to say why Waters of Babylon took the town by storm; it dealt with life at the East End of London, but so do tens of unread stories; it grappled with several of the great social problems which were disturbing the last hours of the dying century, but so did scores of unsuccessful novels; it depicted the influence of Nonconformity upon the uneducated masses of the English people, but so do hundreds of uncut books. The scientist who can demonstrate the exact "flash-point" of the River Thames will have made a discovery which will throw all former discoveries into the shade; but at present that scientist is unborn. Each of us goes into the wilderness, staff in hand, but it is only Aaron's rod that blossoms; each of us goes forth in the morning from his father's house, but it is only Saul who is anointed king. The secret of success is as

yet the Sphinx's riddle, and is as great a mystery to those who find it as to those who fail in the search. But let those of us, who find it not, remember that even the staves which did not blossom entered as soon as Aaron's into the promised land; and let those of us, who find it, bear in mind that Saul proved himself unworthy of his sovereignty, and that the Lord rejected him from being king.

With the wonderful freemasonry which exists between all men and women who live by their pens, Hester's friends rejoiced in her triumph as if it had been their own—as, indeed, in a sense, it was. A really fine work of art belongs to the whole world, and almost as much to the many who enjoy it as to the one who created it. And the girl rejoiced in her success in a quiet way, while her somewhat reserved nature expanded in the appreciative atmosphere which surrounded her. As for the shop in the old-fashioned provincial town, it was simply illuminated by Hester's fame; while the "light that never was on sea or land" flooded the souls of the bookseller and his wife, and made them both feel young again.

Hester was hard at work on her second book when she first saw Herbert Greene. She met him at the house of a mutual friend in the country, where they were both staying for a week-end; and at once his delicate frame and peevish manner appealed to the motherly instinct hidden in the heart of the stern-looking Scotchwoman. His conversation also attracted her; for she had lived all her life in an intellectual atmosphere, and Greene was a well-read and highly-educated man.

"Did you have a pleasant journey?" she asked him

when their hostess left them alone for a few minutes after tea.

"No, a detestable one. There were some vulgar people in the carriage who disturbed me, and I do so dislike travelling with strangers."

"Do you? I like it: I always talk to them, and try to find out what sort of people they are."

Herbert raised his eyebrows. "What a peculiar taste!"

"Aren't you interested in people?" asked Hester, looking puzzled. She lived in a world where everybody was interested in everybody else.

"Not in the least. Why should I be? People always bore me; and those whom I know bore me, if possible, more than those whom I do not know."

"Then what are you interested in?"

"Nothing much: there is so little in life to interest anyone, so far as I can see."

Hester's generous soul was filled with pity. A woman with a keen sense of humour would have laughed at Herbert Greene: as a matter of fact, his was a personality that afforded a considerable amount of amusement to female beings thus endowed—he loomed so very large in his own eyes, and so very small in the eyes of everybody else. But humour was not Hester's strong point.

"Don't you care for reading?" she inquired gently.

"When I can get anything fit to read: but nobody writes anything fit to read nowadays. I enjoy Italian literature, and now and then one comes across a clever French book, but modern English fiction appears to me to be too utterly *banal* for words."

A vainer woman than Hester would have been piqued at this, for was she not one of the high-priestesses of modern English fiction? But she was too large-minded for the thought of herself to enter into the discussion.

"I am afraid that I enjoy modern English fiction," she said in a deprecating voice. "It is so much easier to understand and enter into than the literature of another age and country; at least, I find it so. But perhaps that is because I am lacking in imagination. It is difficult for me to look at anything from another person's point of view; that is where I am stupid."

"But why should you look at things from another person's point of view? It would bore me unutterably to do so," replied Herbert, who, because he was stupid, had never found out that he was. No man is stupid who knows that he is; to know oneself to be stupid is the best proof to the contrary.

Hester looked puzzled. "It is so interesting to look at things from other people's standpoints, don't you think?"

"I can not see wherein the interest lies. I am not interested in the least in other people, and still less so in their views."

In spite of their difference of opinion, however, Hester and Herbert got on very well together during that week-end in the country. She was far too humble to realize that she was actually conferring a favour in wasting her time on this bitter little man with a dried-up soul and a shrivelled mind; and he was far too conceited to imagine that this large-hearted woman of genius was in any way his intellectual equal, much less his superior.

So does compensating Nature throw in a make-weight of vanity when she is engaged in manufacturing hearts and souls below the "ordinary gentleman's size." Therefore the man patronized the woman and the woman admired the man, as befitted their respective characters: and they both enjoyed themselves in the doing of it.

On her return to town on Monday Hester had much to relate to the friend with whom she shared her little flat, Barbara Kenderdine. Barbara was better born than Hester, and had a higher opinion of herself: and, being a small woman while Hester was only a large one, was much more fitted to fight life's battles and to come out of them triumphant. To her, Hester told the story of her meeting with Herbert Greene. Half the pleasure of any treat is in the telling of it afterward; when there is no one to tell, things soon cease to be worth the telling; and Barbara sympathized with Hester's joy, and was full of interest in Hester's new friend.

"I am sure you will like him," Hester said in conclusion; "he is so highly cultured and such a thorough gentleman. I wish I had lived all my life among people like that; there is such a finish about them, somehow, which those, who have their way to make in the world, lack."

Barbara shrugged her shoulders. "I *have* lived among such people," she said drily, "and I have often regretted that they had not even more 'finish,' as you call it—enough to finish them off altogether."

"Oh, Barbara! how can you? You see, I have been brought up among men who have had to fight the battle of life for themselves, as I myself have had to fight it,

and so the easy self-assurance of well-born people has a wonderful fascination for me. What one is not accustomed to is always attractive."

"I suppose it is; and that is the reason why I, for my part, infinitely prefer the men who achieve greatness to those who are born great, or who have greatness thrust upon them."

Hester shook her head. "I don't think I do. The men who are born great are so much more easy than the others; they have less self-consciousness and less desire for effect."

"Still, there are better things in the world than easy manners; success, for instance."

"Do you know," said Hester slowly, "I believe that failure borne with an air of indifference impresses me more than self-conscious success. It seems to be almost grander to fail and not care, than to succeed and be pleased about it."

Barbara laughed. "You dear, clever old fool! Does Mr. Greene fail and not care, I should like to know?"

"Yes; that is what attracts me to him. He seems to have done nothing, not so much because he couldn't do it as because there was nothing worth doing."

"My dear, you remind me of the saying that 'Oxford men know everything there is to be known, and Cambridge men know there is nothing worth knowing.' But can't you see that the man who fails and yet hankers after success, has still the elements of success in him; while the man who fails and is proud of his failure, will succeed neither in this life nor in any other? The former

is a king in exile, but still a king; while the latter is nothing better than a rag-and-bone man, and never will be."

Hester's face clouded. "It is so difficult to know what really is right. To me it seems so fine not even to want to win the battle of life, but to you it seems cowardly. That makes things confusing; what seems right to one seems wrong to another. Now Mr. Greene has made me feel quite ashamed of my ambition to become a great writer; yet before I met him I thought that my ambition was the very best thing in me. Oh, I wish I knew what was really right!"

Barbara sat down on the edge of the table, dangling her short legs. "My dear child, why bother about what is right or what isn't? It only leads to confusion, and sometimes to brain fever and religious monomania. Do what your instinct tells you to do, and don't burden your mind with the thought of consequences. I only do right about once in a hundred years, like the American aloe, and then I invariably regret it. I had a sad instance of this last Saturday."

"Why, what happened?"

"You know I went by train to Reading, and then up the river with some friends to Goring; and at Paddington I took a return ticket to Reading and back, as was but natural. But now nature ceases and grace comes in; for I came back the whole way from Goring by train, and actually took an extra ticket from Goring back to Reading, which was exceptionally honest of me, as you will admit."

"It was."

"So I thought; but then the trouble began. Nobody

asked for the ticket on the line; and as I didn't leave the station that nasty little ticket never left me. I had to stick it inside one glove, my return ticket being inside the other, until I felt like a cripple in splints. But the worst was yet to come. When the ticket-collector came round at Ealing he refused to receive my extra one, as it was out of his beat; and he called it an 'irregularity' and all sorts of horrid names; and the other people in the carriage looked at me suspiciously, as if travelling with two tickets was on a par with bigamy. Finally another official had to be called in, who covered me with further ignominy and confusion, and made the train ten minutes late. And when at last the affair was concluded and I was no longer under arrest, I said to my fellow-travellers, 'Let this be a warning to you all never to dabble in honesty as long as you live!' And I am sure I hope you'll profit by my experience, Hester, and never try to find out what is right. You see how it ends."

But, in spite of Barbara's advice, Hester continued to try and find out what was right, and only succeeded in mistaking it for what was wrong—a not uncommon error with those persons who are too much given to the splitting of hairs.

"I don't like your new friend," said Barbara after Herbert's first visit to the flat; "I think he is a horrid little man."

Hester looked grieved. "Oh, Barbara!"

"I do. He finds fault with everything and everybody."

"That is because he is so fastidious."

"Rubbish! It is because he is so disagreeable. He is a regular little crab. I saw a dish called *crabbe glacée*

on the menu at dinner last night. Now, Mr. Greene is what I should call *crabbe glacée*, and *crabbe glacée* is a thing I abominate."

"But, Barbara, don't you see that these very refined, sensitive natures can not be pleased as easily as we are? It is the very perfection of their taste that renders it so difficult to satisfy."

Barbara made a face. "Stuff and nonsense, my dear! Mr. Greene is perfectly satisfied with himself, and that proves that the demands of his taste are by no means exorbitant. Why, this very afternoon he said that Dicksee couldn't paint and that Du Maurier couldn't write, and that John Oliver Hobbes had no sense of humour, and that Anthony Hope didn't understand women. Yah!"

"Barbara, you are very unkind!"

"No, I'm not; it isn't unkind to remember what a man says and to quote it afterward; it is considered very complimentary. He also remarked that the poor, as a rule, have a very good time; and that he'd never known a Liberal statesman talk anything but the most arrant nonsense! Oh! none of his gems of speech were lost on me, I can assure you. I collected all the rubies and diamonds that fell from his lips (*à la* the Princess in the fairy tale), and strung them on to a bracelet, like George Herbert's Sundays—which bracelet I shall frequently in the future wear upon my sleeve for daws to peck at, if daws are so minded."

Hester, in her gentle way, still stood up for her friend. "He can not help being critical and hard to please; and if he thinks certain things, I admire him for saying them."

"My dear Hester, he can not help being a fool, I admit, but he can help showing it. Lots of men do."

It was not long before Herbert Greene and Hester Murrell fell in love with each other, according to their respective lights. She admired him because he was so utterly different from the men of her own household; and he allowed her to admire him, and found pleasure in such admiration, because she was the first woman who had been content to take him at his own valuation. For all her cleverness, Hester was singularly simple, and it never occurred to her that in any question she could possibly know better than the man whom she loved. This possibility never occurred to the man either, for the which he was to blame, and not she.

When Herbert asked her to become engaged to him, and to wait indefinitely until he should be appointed to some visionary post and so afford to marry, Hester's cup ran over, as most of our cups have a knack of doing at least once in our lives. We can not expect such glorious overflowings to last for ever; they never do; and the happiest among us are those who can find no drop of bitterness left in the dregs when the cup is empty and the time has come for washing-up. For such drops of bitterness spoil even the memory of the season of fulness, and make it to us as though it had never been.

Hester was one of those humble-minded people who consider the qualities which they possess so much less important and attractive than those which they lack; and consequently she felt a pride in the social status of her lover which her own genius had never been able to arouse in her breast. Herbert, on the contrary, considered all gifts wherein he was lacking not only undesirable

but also somewhat disgraceful, and he did all in his power to throw cold water upon the girl's literary work and to discourage her from continuing it.

"You see, Hester," he said to her one day, "it would never do for my wife to earn money by her pen. I should feel it extremely humiliating if she did. To my mind it is not dignified for a woman to do work and be paid for it; and I should never allow the woman who belonged to me to lower herself in that way."

"But it isn't money that I write for; I write for love of my art and for my work's sake."

"That is nonsense," replied Herbert coldly. "People who receive money for their work, work for money, and this is a thing which well-bred women never do."

"But you don't mind men's writing?" asked Hester humbly. "I often wonder why you don't write a book yourself, you are so very clever and know so much."

Herbert shuddered. "Heaven forbid!"

"You have learnt so much about France and French art, that I am sure the world, in turn, could learn much from you on these subjects."

"My dear Hester, do you suppose that I—with my critical taste and sensitive fastidiousness—am going to lower myself to become a teacher of men? Though I easily could if I wished."

Hester looked up at him with awe. To naturally reverent natures there is always something dangerously impressive about an iconoclast; and she had worshipped books for so long that the man who dared to despise them appeared, in her unseeing eyes, as a modern and well-tailored Marsyas challenging the very gods themselves. She never doubted that Herbert was right in condemn-

ing the art which had hitherto been the breath of her nostrils; she put away her pen from her as an accursed thing; and although she mourned in secret over the absence of the work which had hitherto been all in all to her, she regretted such mourning as an unholy hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt.

And all the time Barbara looked on and disapproved. She did not say very much. What is the good of saying much—of saying anything, in fact—to a person who happens to be in love? But she knew that the less was absorbing the greater, a trick to which the less is so sadly prone; and she also knew that there was more power of doing good in Hester's little finger than in the whole of Herbert Greene, and in all the host of uninteresting and well-behaved relations on which he so justly prided himself. She even went so far as to doubt whether a woman's genius is justified in extinguishing itself for the satisfaction of a man's mere whim; but in some things Barbara Kenderdine was what Herbert Greene called "modern to the verge of vulgarity."

If our right eye offends somebody, and we therefore pluck it out, we have no warrant for supposing that the voluntary nature of the operation will in any way act as an anæsthetic; and although Hester was proud to immolate herself and her ambition on the altar of her lover's ignorant prejudices, her soul was starved within her for the want of expression. To be filled with the power and the longing to make music or pictures or books, and not to make them, is an agony undreamed of in the philosophy of those comfortable mortals who are haunted by no visions and disturbed by no dreams; to Herbert Greene, telling a woman not to write books was exactly

the same as telling her not to wear silk petticoats, or not to eat celery in public, his theory being that women should still be "seen and not heard," as were their girl-grandmothers before them; and so he had no idea that the code of what he considered good manners was sapping Hester's life and destroying her vitality. Nevertheless it was.

When Hester had been engaged for about six months, Herbert came to her one day with an unusually heavy cloud on his always melancholy countenance.

"I am extremely worried," he began—"so much worried that it is making me positively ill."

The girl's eyes were full of sympathy. "Oh! I am so sorry, dear. Tell me what it is, and perhaps I can help you."

As in all true women, the mother-heart was strong in Hester Murrell; she never saw trouble without yearning to comfort it.

"The fact is," replied Herbert, "that some time ago a friend of mine asked me to put my name to a bill of his. I did not like to refuse him, as he was the son of a peer."

"Of course not," said Hester, with no consciousness of irony.

"And now, unfortunately, the bill has fallen due, and I am called upon to pay a thousand pounds. It places me in a most uncomfortable position. I do not like to take it out of capital, as I should never be able to replace it, and so I should reduce my already too small income for the rest of my life; and, since the less can not include the greater, it is impossible for me to pay a thousand pounds out of an income of eight

hundred a year. I really am the most unlucky of mortals!"

Had Hester been fashioned after the same pattern as Barbara, she would have asked her lover whatever possessed him to do such a foolish thing as back a bill for a friend; but Hester's was the love that believeth all thin[gs] and thinketh no evil.

"I am so sorry for you, dear," she said gently. "I wish I could help you."

"I wish to goodness you could!"

"But I don't see how I can. I can not ask father for money, for it is as much as he can do to make both ends meet with such a large family; and since I have left off writing books and only stuck to journalistic work, I have ceased to make large sums."

Herbert's face looked old with misery. "Then I shall have to take it out of capital, and that will mean a smaller income for the rest of my life. You see, I can only just manage to get along as it is, since, being a gentleman, expensive tastes are my inalienable heritage; and it seems as if the appointment, for which we are both waiting, recedes farther and farther into the dim distance."

"I am so sorry—so dreadfully sorry. How I wish I had saved all the money that I made out of Waters of Babylon, and then you could have had that! But I sent most of it home to help in the schooling of the little ones."

"But have you not anything else at hand on which you could raise money? I believe you told me once that you had written another novel called Gog and Magog, or some such absurd name: where is that?"

"I put it on one side and never published it, because

you said you didn't approve of women who wrote novels."

"No more I do; I consider them most unladylike; but that is not the question which we are now discussing. The question before us is, How can I get a thousand pounds without touching my capital?"

"I don't know, dear," replied Hester, her eyes full of tears; "I wish I did."

"I suppose you have got this Gog and Magog concern still by you?"

"Yes; the manuscript is now in my desk." And Hester did not think it necessary to add how often she had taken it out and wept over it for sorrow that this latest child of her brain was condemned never to see the light.

"Could you get money for it?"

"Of course I could, if I offered it to a publisher; but I will never do that as long as you disapprove of it."

Herbert sighed. "I am afraid I shall be compelled to put aside my prejudices for once, and not to consider my own feelings at all in the matter," he said sorrowfully, "although these prejudices and feelings are as strong as they ever were."

Hester's face grew very white; slowly his meaning began to dawn upon her. "Do you mean that you want me to offer my manuscript to a publisher, and to give you the money?" she asked bluntly.

"My dear Hester, how coarsely you put things! When shall I teach you to behave as a lady? Believe me, refinement of manner and speech is an integral part of good breeding."

"But is that what you mean?" persisted Hester.

"That certainly seems to me to be the only solution of the difficulty."

"You want me to do something which, according to your ideas, no woman ought to do?"

"I should not certainly recommend a woman of my own class to do such a thing; but, as you have done it once, I do not see how you can offer any objection to doing it again," replied Herbert, inwardly groaning over the unreasonableness of the feminine mind.

Hester's voice was strained and unnatural. "Let me be quite sure that I do not misunderstand you. You want me—the woman who has promised to be your wife—to do a thing which you consider to be unwomanly, in order that a certain pecuniary advantage may accrue to you thereby. Is that so?"

"Really, Hester, your coarseness of expression is positively vulgar. It grates upon me most terribly."

"But is that what you mean?"

"Practically it is; but no lady would have put it so brutally. Besides, you have never been shocked at the writing of books—it is only I who had been shocked on your behalf. Therefore, if I put my prejudices on one side, there is no more to be said; you have no prejudices to put on one side in this matter."

Hester held up her head proudly. "I know that; I have always thought the writing of books is the grandest profession that can be adopted by either man or woman, and I think so still."

"Then what are you looking so cross about? I confess I am surprised at your inconsistency in objecting to do a thing which, according to your ideas, is a fine thing to do. It seems to me most unreasonable, and also very

ungrateful, after I have met you half-way by disregarding for once the dictates of my own more fastidious taste."

"And I am surprised at any man's encouraging the woman he loves to do anything that he disapproves of, however absurd that disapproval may be."

"Well, it is no use our arguing upon the question. My standpoint is so different from—I might venture to say so superior to—yours that we shall never look at the matter in the same light. But I must say, once for all, that now I have removed the embargo I once laid upon your literary work, I shall think it most ungracious and ungrateful of you not to avail yourself of my indulgence."

"You need not be afraid. I shall avail myself fast enough."

Herbert's face cleared. "Then that is all right. I knew you would see the thing clearly in time. It is only your manners and your modes of expression that lack taste and breeding, my dear Hester. Your heart is invariably in the right place."

An absurd statement on the face of it, seeing that the said heart had once been given into the keeping of a Herbert Greene.

"If that is all you have to say, I think I must bid you good morning," said Hester wearily. "I have some work on hand that I must finish."

"Very well," agreed Herbert, taking up his well-brushed hat; "but do you think that any publisher will give you a thousand pounds for your book?"

"Yes, I think so, if I sell it right out and retain no rights."

The man laughed. "How ridiculously overpaid you writers are!"

And so they parted.

The next day Herbert was amazed by a visit from Barbara Kenderdine.

"You are doubtless surprised to see me," she began, handing him a cheque for a thousand pounds, "but Miss Murrell asked me to bring you this and to tell you that the engagement between herself and you is at an end."

Herbert looked annoyed; he hated to have his private affairs made public in this way. Here was another proof of Hester's want of refinement, he said to himself.

"I suppose you will take the money?" remarked Barbara tentatively.

"I have no alternative, Miss Kenderdine. I have also no alternative but to accept your friend Miss Murrell's dismissal."

"Then there is nothing left for me to do but to tell you what I think of you."

"Pray do not trouble," replied the man coldly. "I am afraid that the opinion of the modern young person has not much weight with such a man as myself."

"Probably not. Still, I am going to tell you what I think of you, not for your good, but for my own pleasure; and I think that you are the lowest, meanest, most disgusting little worm that I ever came across in the whole course of my life."

Herbert was pale with anger. "Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Perfectly; and I can assure you the fact your grandmother was an archdeacon or something, doesn't have the slightest effect on me. Grandparents never do im-

press me, somehow. My grandfather was the younger son of a Scotch peer, and he was the most disagreeable old man I ever met; he gave me a turn against grandparents as a race."

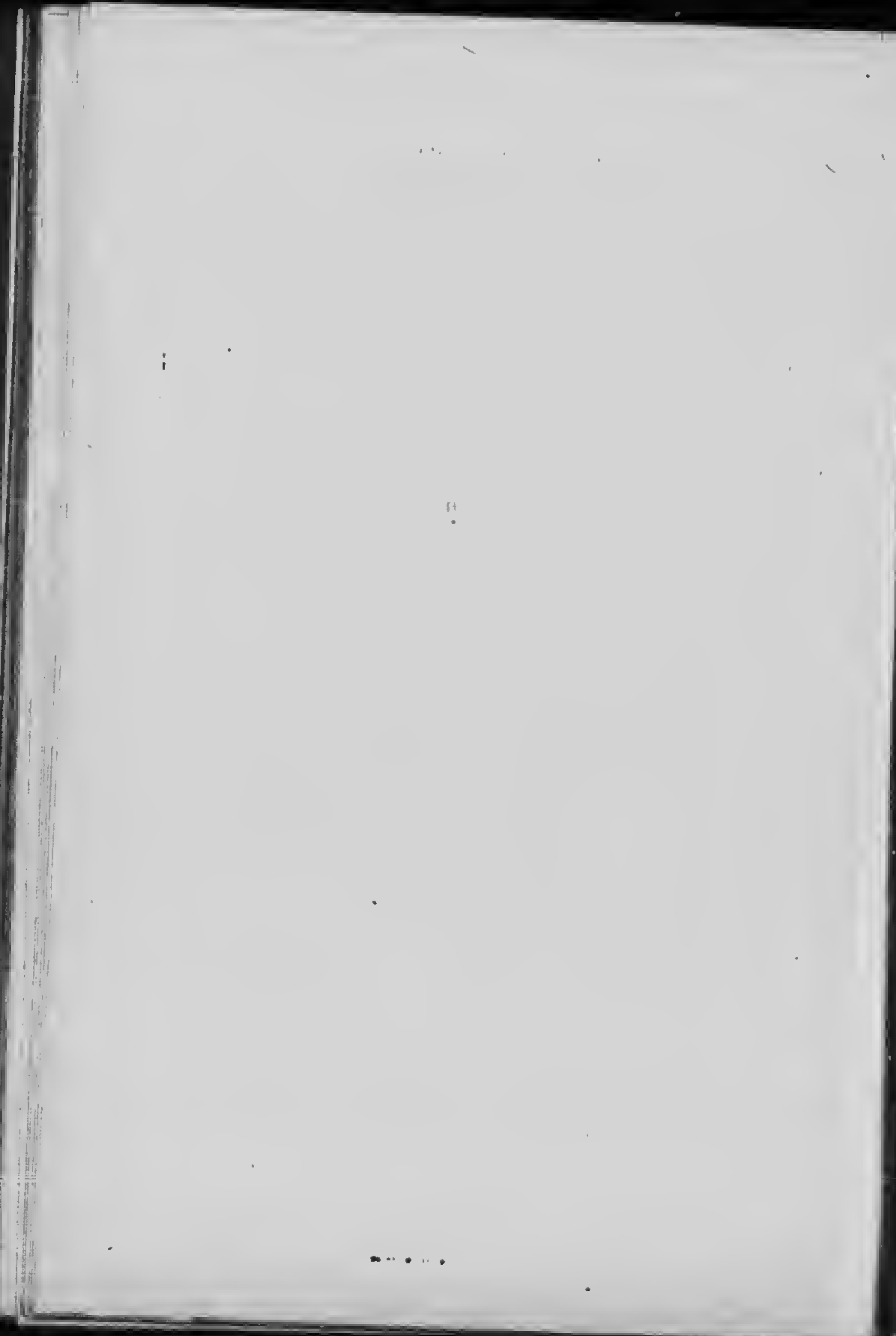
Herbert waved his hand. "Spare me these interesting family details, I beseech you."

"Certainly. I will confine my remarks to yourself, and then I will go. I consider you a vulgar little cad, and as vain as you are vulgar; and how a glorious woman and a rare genius like Hester could have been taken in by your snobbish affectations, I can not imagine. I couldn't bear you from the first—you knew so little and thought you knew so much; and your manners always were atrocious, with their patronizing assumption of superiority. But I have two pieces of advice to give you in conclusion. When next you choose a wife, select a fool, as only a fool will permanently be able to admire and unable to appreciate you; and remember in future that the possession of half-a-dozen dead grandfathers in no way absolves you from the necessity of behaving like a living gentleman."

And then she banged out of the room like a fierce young whirlwind.

Herbert sank into a chair, trembling all over. "I am thankful my engagement is broken off," he said to himself. "Hester is nice in some ways, but I never could have been happy with any one who wasn't a perfect lady."

And he sighed contentedly as he put the cheque safely into his pocket-book.



THE RING OF ELYN

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THE REV. THEOPHILUS DIXON was always an excellent man, but it was not until after his visit to Newquay that he became a powerful and popular preacher.

Up to that time his preaching was after the fashion wherein the preacher asks himself continual conundrums, and then answers them. The Reverend Theophilus always gave the right answers, it is true, but the conundrums were of the most elementary sort. Mrs. Dixon, likewise, was an admirable matron after her kind—the style of woman whereof people say that "her husband did a good day's work when he married her." She had a strong will and a small fortune of her own, and would not have felt herself blessed among women had a badly-cooked dinner appeared in her dining-room or a speck of dust in her drawing-room. She ruled her Theophilus with a kind, yet iron hand, and carried in her own mind a perfect Index Expurgatorius of the things she would not allow him to eat. Dishes she did not fancy she condemned as indigestible; pleasures she did not enjoy she censured as sinful; people she did not like she denounced as worldly; and when once Mrs. Dixon's fiat had gone forth, neither Theophilus nor the whole world could alter it.

One memorable summer the worthy couple came to

stay at that most delightful of English seaside places, Newquay, and then it was that the great change came o'er the spirit of Theophilus Dixon's dream.

"My dear," he said one afternoon, "I think it would be most enjoyable if we drove to see Crantock to-day."

"Indeed, Theophilus: and why Crantock, may I ask?"

"It is an interesting spot, my love," explained Theophilus. He was somewhat in disgrace with respect to drives, as he had taken his spouse to see Mawgan the day before—one of the most beautiful villages in England, but made hideous in the sight of Mrs. Dixon by the presence of a nunnery. The vision of this blot upon the otherwise Protestant landscape had started the excellent matron upon a fiery tirade against the conventual system, and on the way home she positively upbraided Theophilus as bitterly as if he had founded the convent himself and endowed it with her fortune, instead of—as was the case—agreeing with and applauding every word she said.

"I trust there is none of that convent rubbish at Crantock," said Mrs. Dixon gloomily, when on the morrow her husband meekly proposed a fresh excursion.

"Certainly not, my love—certainly not. I think there is nothing at Crantock that could possibly pain you. There was a very wicked city there nearly a thousand years ago, which was buried in the sand because of its sinfulness." And the little man rubbed his hands together with unction; for a visible punishment of what they called "the world," was a spectacle which always delighted Mr. and Mrs. Dixon.

The matron immediately began to thaw. Convent walls, wherein broken hearts sought rest and peace, were

things she could not understand, and therefore had no patience with; but a city which was buried in the sand because its inhabitants laughed and danced and went to theatres, was something which she could appreciate and even enjoy with a holy and chastened pleasure.

"A sort of Cornish Babylon, I suppose?" she said.

"Exactly, my love, exactly. What a wonderful gift of language you have, Mary Ann!"

"It is more than you have, Theophilus."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly; I never for a moment compared my powers with yours."

"I should like to see this Crantock place," continued Mrs. Dixon; "it is extremely instructive to study instances of the punishment of sin and frivolity, and it might prove an interesting example—if described fully and enlarged upon—in your sermon on The World, the Flesh and the Devil."

"It might, Mary Ann, and I thank you for the suggestion. As you say, there are few spectacles more elevating than the visible chastisement of frivolity. Frivolity is a thing which my soul abhors; and I have rarely seen a more shocking example of the same than Miss Drabble, who sits next me at the *table d'hôte*."

"A horrid woman, Theophilus! I wonder that you have the patience to talk to her. Why, she is as old as I am, and yet dresses and behaves like a girl of five-and-twenty. I have no patience with such folly!"

"Nor have I, my dear; it is ridiculous to see a woman of that age with the manners of a young girl. I am always so thankful that there is nothing of that kind about you, Mary Ann."

Mrs. Dixon looked pleased. It was always a great

satisfaction to her to feel that there was no nonsense about her, and she was glad to know that her Theophilus rejoiced likewise at her immunity from the follies and vanities of her sex. Nature had not made Mary Ann attractive, and she herself augmented Nature's handiwork by dressing as unbecomingly as possible, and believing that such unbecomingness was counted to her for righteousness.

During the drive Mr. Dixon was in an extremely contented mood, and therefore inclined to be loquacious.

"Look at that aged man seated at a cottage door," he pointed out to his spouse; "it is a great pity for the poor to keep their old and useless relatives with them; the workhouse is the proper place for such worn-out members of society. I have no patience with their objection to 'going into the house,' as they call it; it is far better for them to be there than living on as a burden to their family."

"You are quite right, my love—as, indeed, you always are," agreed Mrs. Dixon. "Silly sentimentality is at the root of much that is bad and troublesome in the world; if only every one had common-sense what a much better world it would be!"

"It would, indeed, Mary Ann. I never can make out why people want to be sentimental; it all appears such utter rubbish to me."

"And so it is. Look, for instance, at those two foolish young lovers, walking hand-in-hand; could anything be more idiotic? And I actually saw them kissing, just as we turned round the corner."

"Surely not, my love!" exclaimed Theophilus, look-

ing shocked. "How very unseemly! And yet the girl is such a very plain girl, too!"

"I don't see what that has to do with it," remarked Mrs. Dixon, somewhat tartly. "It is just as foolish and improper to kiss a plain girl as a pretty one."

"Of course, of course, my love," said her husband hastily, "but, as you say, one wonders that grown-up people have not more sense. The newly-married couples in our hotel, for instance, daily amaze me by the insanity of their proceedings. They are always going about hand-in-hand, and you never see them take up a book. What they can find to talk about I can not imagine, considering that they never read. I do not believe they even look at the newspapers—not the very bad and recent cases."

Mrs. Dixon smiled her broad, comfortable smile. "I think you might with advantage preach a sermon upon common-sense, my dear, and the dangers of self-deception and sentimentality."

The Reverend Theophilus beamed at the suggestion. "That is a capital idea, Mary Ann; I shall certainly adopt it. I shall take the line that common-sense is merely a form of truth, and that idealization and sentiment—as opposed to it—are therefore vanity and lies, and should be condemned as such."

"Admirable!"

"I consider all idealization unhealthy," continued Mr. Dixon, warming to his work—"unhealthy and immoral. We know that this world is a valley of tears, a desert of thorns and brambles. Is it meet, then, that we should dwell upon such poor beauty as it still retains, and elevate what is in reality a wilderness of sin into a

veritable Canaan? We know that man is but a worm of earth, whose beauty shall consume away, and whose righteousness is as filthy rags. Is it meet, then, that we should raise this fallen creature to the height of a demi-god, and allow ourselves to indulge in admiration of such feeble gifts as he still possesses?"

"Certainly not, Theophilus."

"For my part I have no patience with what is called the worship of the beautiful; it is really a form of idolatry, and should be dcnounced as such," continued the eloquent cleric. "Shall we prostratc our minds before some unworthy object, just because our eyes find that object attractive? Shall we, I say, be led away from our duty by such fleeting things as natural scenery or human affection?"

And Theophilus continued to hold forth in the same strain, till the carriage arrived at Crantock; while Mrs. Theophilus accorded to his words that warm appreciation which we all of us accord to denunciation which shoots wide of our mark; for let Theophilus call down the wrath of heaven upon the beautiful never so fiercely, not a hair of his wife's head could be injured by the fulfilment of his curses. This she knew, and, strange to say, found satisfaction in the knowledge.

After duly examining the quaint old church at Crantock, Mrs. and Mr. Dixon clambered down to the shore, and there saw the sand-hills which, according to tradition, cover the buried city. In poking about, it happened that the point of Mr. Dixon's umbrella disentombed a small object, which, on examination, turned out to be an old ring, encrusted with age, in all probability an ornament belonging to one of the women who formerly in-

habited the city. Theophilus picked it up, put it into his waistcoat pocket, and forgot all about it.

Mr. Dixon and his Mary Ann were duly refreshed by tea at a small cottage at Crantock; and, for the first time in his life during a meal, Theophilus did not think or talk about the food set before him. Instead of this he was conscious of a strange feeling of exhilaration because of the beauty around him, and a new consciousness that there was a message to him in the whisper of the south wind and the summer sea. He was so silent on the homeward drive, on account of this new joy that possessed him, that his wife remarked:

"I am afraid you are not well, Theophilus: you must have eaten something unsuitable, or you would not be so uncommunicative."

"I am quite well, thank you, Mary Ann," replied her husband; "in fact, better than I ever was in my life before. But I have been thinking that I shall never preach that sermon we were talking about on our way here."

"Why not? It promised to be a most admirable discourse."

"But its teaching would have been all wrong. It is nonsense to say that the beautiful is opposed to the true, for they are really one and the same. Look at this glorious world around us! Our appreciation of its beauties is not idolatry, but a form of religion. Some of the greatest poets that have ever lived have risen to their finest heights in describing the beauties of nature."

Mrs. Dixon sniffed. "I do not approve of poets: they are generally the most irreligious of men."

"I was referring to the authors of the Psalms and the Book of Job," remarked her husband drily.

The lady turned round and looked her unruly spouse full in the face. "I do not understand you, Theophilus."

"Possibly not. As a matter of fact, I do not think you ever did."

"Good gracious, what rubbish! Why, you are a most ordinary man."

"Precisely. A man that you could understand would be a most extraordinary one."

"Theophilus, I am certain that you have eaten something that has disagreed with you, or you would never talk in this peculiar way. It must have been the lobster at lunch."

Her husband smiled. "But, if you remember, my dear Mary Ann, you countermanded my order for lobster, and made the waiter bring me cold chicken instead. Sin intended may be as reprehensible as sin actually performed: but lobster intended can not be as indigestible as lobster actually eaten, whatever the casuists may say."

"Oh! if you begin to argue——"

"Argument was far from me, my love: I was only explaining away facts—which, being interpreted, are lobsters."

"There are those vulgar lovers again!" exclaimed Mrs. Dixon, changing the subject, like a wise woman.

But her husband winced. Suddenly he looked into Eden, and knew that the ridiculous people were not those who fed among the lilies there, and walked hand-in-hand over the enchanted ground; but those who stood jeering outside, among the thorns and thistles, and prided themselves in that they trod upon the one and lived upon the other; and he knew, further, that it was no cherubim with

fiery sword that kept him outside the garden of spices, but his own narrow and sordid little soul.

"They are not vulgar; it was we who were vulgar when we laughed at them."

"My dear Theophilus, how absurd! As if a clergyman could ever be vulgar—or a clergyman's wife! I never heard of such a thing."

"Nevertheless we were vulgar, Mary Ann. It is always vulgar to degrade what is high, or to cheapen what is valuable—especially when the high and the valuable are not for us. It strikes me that those two young people kissing in the lane were a great deal nearer heaven than we two old people driving by and sneering at them."

"But you yourself said that the girl was plain," snapped Mrs. Dixon.

"I know I did, and more fool I! I ought to have known that to each other those commonplace young folks are an ideal knight and lady; and they are probably nearer the truth than we are, after all."

Whereat Mrs. Dixon relapsed into silence, and her husband was left to his own thoughts.

At dinner Theophilus sat, as usual, next to Miss Drabble, but he no longer found her contemptible and absurd. For the first time in his life he saw the pathos of a woman's growing old before she had ever been properly young, and clinging to the skirts of a vanished spring which had passed her by without ever stopping to speak to her; and he could have wept for the pity of it.

That night he had a strange dream. Hitherto he had never dreamt of anything more exciting than churchwardens; but now he thought he was standing on the shore

at Crantock, and beside him stood a beautiful, dark-haired woman in the dress of ten centuries ago.

"My name is Elyn," she said, "and I lived in the city which was buried in the sand; and because I knew that love and beauty are the two best things in life, the wickedness of the city had no power to hurt me. Before he went away to fight the heathen, my lover gave me a ring; and it is still given to me to teach all that I have learned to whosoever owns that ring."

"And what became of your lover?" asked Theophilus.

"He was warned in a dream that destruction would come upon the city because of its sin; and he travelled night and day to save me. But just as we were fleeing hand-in-hand to a place of refuge, the sand-storm came upon us and we were buried with the rest."

"It seemed a pity, lady, that your lover came to warn you; otherwise you need not both have perished."

The dream-maiden smiled. "I see you have much to learn, Theophilus," she said. "My lover was but a rough warrior; yet, methinks, he knew more about life and death and love than you, a Christian priest, know."

And when Theophilus Dixon looked at his ring in the morning light, he found these words roughly engraven inside of it: "Mark to Elyn."

So it came to pass that the spirit of the Cornish maiden abode with Theophilus Dixon, and taught him that love and beauty are the two best things in life. And because he knew this he became a great preacher, and men came from far and near to hear his wisdom and to seek his counsel. Many fat livings were offered to him; but he accepted a poor one in a crowded manufacturing

town, and there he learnt to see the ideal in human nature, and, seeing, to cultivate it. Because he interpreted to them the dreams of their youth and the messages of the world around them, great men loved him, and would have given him high rank had he allowed it; but he preferred to live and work among the poor. This self-abnegation was undoubtedly trying to Mrs. Dixon, whose soul was always athirst for glory and honour; but she prided herself upon being "a good wife," and therefore obeying her husband meekly when she perceived that resistance was futile; and, further, upon being "a good manager," and therefore making the poverty chosen by Theophilus as little uncomfortable as possible.

Still the dream-maiden visited Theophilus, and showed him the beauty and the pathos of the things men call common, until he learned to discover heroes disguised as copying-clerks, and angels hidden under the guise of seamstresses. At first Mary Ann, and her way of measuring men and things, sorely tried him; it was so small and smug and self-satisfied. Excellence was invisible to her, it seemed, unless clothed in velvets and satins; and no amount of love, he thought, could flavour to her taste a dinner of herbs. But, as he continued to wear the ring of Elyn, his irritation against his wife was gradually drowned in his pity for her; and he yearned to teach her what he had learned, and to show her what he had seen; and at last this desire grew so strong within him that he longed to give the ring to Mary Ann, although he held it his chiefest treasure.

Once in a dream he said to Elyn:

"Lady, if I give the ring to my wife, shall I lose my

hold upon the hearts of men, and no longer help and guide them with my spoken words?"

"I can not tell," she answered; "but I shall no longer be able to teach you aught: I only speak to the one who has my ring."

"And if I part with the ring shall I fall back into mediocrity and obscurity?"

"I fear it."

"Nevertheless," sighed Theophilus, "I would sacrifice all that I have, if only I could open the eyes of my wife to the glory and beauty around her. Can I be happy, even in such a world of light and love as this, while the shades of the prison-house still shut her in?"

"And yet you never loved her," answered the Cornish girl. "You married her because she held sound doctrines and a little money; there was no romance in your heart for her, even in your youth."

"I know it," said the man; "but I love her now. The depth of love is measured by the one who feels it—not by the one who inspires it; and now I see the finer points of her nature as I never saw them when she and I were young."

The dream-maiden only smiled.

"Moreover," continued Theophilus, "are not her limitations more my fault than her own? In every woman's soul—even the most practical—there is a spark of romance when she is young; but what there was in the heart of Mary Ann I carefully stamped out with my senseless chatter about common-sense, and my worse than senseless blindness to the meaning and beauty of life."

"You have learnt much, Theophilus."

"True; and my wife must learn it also. As I helped to close her eyes, let me also help to open them."

"Even if the opening cost you your fame as a man and your success as a preacher?"

"Even then."

"And even if you know not that your loss will prove her gain—for I can only teach those who are willing and able to learn."

"Even then I will try."

So it came to pass that Theophilus Dixon willingly renounced the ring, which had brought him joy and peace and power and fame, in order that his wife might learn such things as belonged to her peace.

"My dear," he said, "I wish to give you the thing which I value most in life, for nothing is of real worth to me unless you also share it."

Mrs. Dixon's beady little eyes glistened.

"I refer," continued her husband, "to an ancient British ring which I found when we were at Crantock, and which I have worn ever since."

Mrs. Dixon's face fell: she had hoped for a more substantial benefit.

"And I trust," he went on, "that it will prove as precious a possession to you, Mary Ann, as it has been to me."

Theophilus did not enlarge further upon the magic merits of the ring of Elyn, for he knew that in her present state of mind his better-half was not ripe to receive such information, but would laugh it to scorn.

Mrs. Dixon took the bauble rather ungraciously.

"It isn't much to look at," she said.

"Nevertheless it is of priceless value: take my word for it."

For a week Theophilus did not refer to the subject again; then he said sadly, "I do not see you wearing the ring I gave you the other day, Mary Ann."

The lady blushed somewhat guiltily, and then replied, "The fact is, I have parted with it."

The vicar's brow grew stern. "Parted with it? What do you mean?"

"Well, Theophilus, you said it was of great value, and I felt it was a sin and shame for poor people like ourselves to indulge in costly trifles which brought us nothing in return, when we were really in want of no end of things which might almost be termed necessaries."

Theophilus grew very pale, but his wife did not notice it: she had never been a woman of quick perceptions, and she cheerfully continued, "You see, you are so much engaged with serious and spiritual matters, that I feel it incumbent upon myself to do all in my power to secure our creature comforts. Now Mr. Brookfield, your own churchwarden, is a great collector of curiosities, and when I showed him the ring he offered to give me ten pounds for it, as he wished to add it to his British collection."

"Mary Ann, Mary Ann, what have you done?"

"Nothing at all foolish, I assure you, Theophilus. You had given me the ring for my own, so I was at liberty to do what I liked with it; and I was dreadfully in need of a new Sunday mantle, and did not like to ask you for the money to buy one, as you have so many calls upon your slender means."

Theophilus groaned.

"Besides," continued his wife, "I do not think it behooves the vicar's wife to be shabbier than anybody in church outside the free seats; such shabbiness lowers the position of the whole parish, in my opinion. It is not seemly for the wives of the churchwardens to look down upon the wife of their vicar, simply because they are better dressed than she."

The vicar's smile was sorrowful, but he did not attempt to stop the torrent of conversation.

"I had seen a most elegant velvet mantle edged with bugle fringe in Padson's window, marked ten pounds," continued the lady, "so I felt that Mr. Brookfield's offer was almost a providential intimation, and that this mantle was for me. You see, it was singular that he offered me for the ring the exact price of the mantle."

"I hope the mantle will make you happy, Mary Ann, and insure you your lawful position in the congregation of the saints."

Theophilus spoke bitterly, but it was hard to reflect that he had probably given up fame and place and power in order that his wife's Sunday mantle should be equal to Mrs. Brookfield's.

"That is not all, Theophilus: you must hear the end of the story. On my way to Padson's to buy the mantle, I passed Morris the tailor's and saw a most warm and useful Inverness-cloak in the window, also marked ten pounds."

"Well?"

"And it struck me, my dear, that your overcoat had grown very thin of late, and that you looked cold and wet after you had been out in the rain. I could not bear to think of your beginning the winter with only that old

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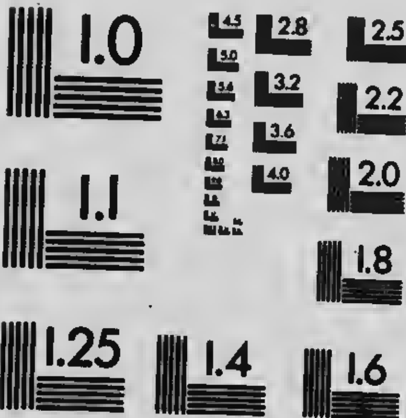

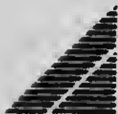

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cloak to keep the cold out, so I decided to give up the velvet mantle, and to buy the Inverness-cloak for you instead. You see, it doesn't really matter so dreadfully even if I am shabby (though I own I should like to be able to afford to dress better); but it matters dreadfully if you are wet and cold."

Theophilus wanted to thank Mary Ann, but there came such a lump in his throat that he could not speak. And while he stood silent she fetched the new garment and arrayed him therein with pride.

"Well, Theophilus, you do look nice! You always were a very handsome man, and, upon my word, you are as good-looking now as you were when you courted me."

In spite of the lump in his throat, the vicar could not help smiling. "I never was good-looking in my life; my dearest friend could not accuse me of possessing the fatal gift of beauty."

"But you were, and are, Theophilus. The very first time I met you I thought you the most distinguished-looking man I had ever seen, and I think so now."

"My dear Mary Ann!"

"That is so, my love; you are not exactly tall, you know, but you carry yourself so well; in fact I think your bearing is quite military at times. It was that which flattered me so much when you proposed to me."

Theophilus looked surprised.

"I thought you married me because you wished to be—and felt yourself fitted to be—the wife of a clergyman."

"I suppose that ought to have been my motive," replied Mrs. Dixon penitently, "but it was not. I married you because I was in love with you, Theophilus, and

I should have married you all the same if you had been a chimney-sweeper or a crossing-sweeper instead of a clergyman."

"But why did you never tell me this? I had no idea you cared for me in that way, Mary Ann."

"Oh! I was ashamed. I thought you would think me silly and sentimental, and despise me. You know you always cherished a great contempt for all kinds of folly, and it really did seem foolish for a woman of thirty to be feeling the raptures of a girl in her teens. Now, didn't it?"

"I don't think so, my dear."

"Don't you? Then I do not mind telling you that I feel now as I always felt, Theophilus, that you are the best and handsomest and cleverest and wisest man in the whole world, only I wish you would be a little more careful with your diet, as it makes me so extremely anxious about you when you eat unsuitable things. It is only in matters of diet that your wisdom is ever at fault."

"Mary Ann, what a blind idiot I have been! Can you ever forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive," replied Mrs. Dixon in surprise. "But it is such a relief to me to find that you do not think me foolish. I was afraid you would be sure to do so, if you knew how I felt about you."

The vicar's voice trembled as he said, "I can not tell you how happy you have made me; nor can I thank you enough for your love and for the handsome gift which is its expression. But I am sorry for you to lose your mantle, Mary Ann, though I am deeply touched by your unselfish thought of me." And he laid a caressing hand upon his wife's shoulder.

"Oh! my dear, my dear, what does it matter? Nothing really matters to me but your health and comfort, Theophilus."

The vicar's heart was too full to answer; but as he kissed his wife there were tears in his eyes.

The next Sunday Theophilus wore his new Inverness-cloak and preached a better sermon than he had ever preached before in his life, and the heart of Mrs. Dixon swelled with a double-barrelled pride.

As for Elyn, Theophilus saw her no more. But he did not miss her; for he had learnt that ordinary loving women are more soothing and satisfying companions than the loveliest dream-maidens, if only men have the sense to take them the right way and to make love to them sometimes.

MADAME

MADAME

"MORECOMB GRANGE is let at last," said my father, as he came into the oak parlour where mother and I were sitting at our sewing, one evening in the early seventies, just after the conclusion of the Franco-German war.

Mother and I looked up with much interest, as no event could seem insignificant in so quiet and secluded a life as ours.

"It is a dreary old place. Who has taken it, Roger?" asked my mother.

"Your ladyship is curious," said father, rubbing his hands together in his delight at tantalizing us.

"Oh! tell us, father," I cried impatiently; "we are longing to know. Please don't tease us."

"Well, then," answered my father, "as I'm strong I will be merciful, and I will not keep from you any longer the morsel of news for which I see you are both hungering. Morecomb Grange is let to a Monsieur Grammont, who has forsaken his native land since her conquest by Germany, and prefers the 'wise passiveness' of England to the wars and tumults of 'la belle France.'"

"Is he old or young? Is he married or single?" cried mother and I in a breath.

"I will tell you all I know about him if you will only give me time. He is old, and has a very beautiful

wife a great deal younger than himself, and they have no children. This is the extent of my knowledge concerning Monsieur Grammont, so don't bother me with any more questions about him, Miss Winifred."

Whereupon I, finding that no further information was forthcoming, stole away into the picture-gallery to gaze at my favourite picture, and to build castles in the air for the habitation of our new neighbours. I was quite a young girl at that time, and a very lonely young girl; for I was the only child of Sir Roger and Lady Treherne. Treherne Court lay in a very quiet locality, the only neighbouring house, Morecomb Grange, having been untenanted ever since I could remember. Consequently

> "I lived with visions for my company
> Instead of men and women, years ago."

And I think that on the whole these visions afforded me as much pleasure, and considerably less pain, than the more substantial companions of later days. So my childhood was a happy though a solitary one; and I dwelt apart in a world of my own, peopled by the creatures of my imagination.

There was one picture in the gallery at Treherne Court which took a great hold upon me, and attracted me with intense though weird fascination. It was a scene in the French Revolution. A beautiful young girl was being led to the guillotine, while an old man stopped her progress and bargained with her murderers for her life. The girl in her white gown, and the old man in his black velvet robe and skull cap, formed a marked contrast to the drunken soldiers and infuriated mob, and it was a striking picture; but it was the story connected

with it that so completely enthralled my childish imagination. Which story ran as follows:

Ursule de Brie was a daughter of the aristocracy, and one of the victims of the Reign of Terror. All her family had perished on the scaffold, and the same fate was about to be awarded to her, when a strange old man—reported to be a wizard and an astrologer—who was a friend of Robespierre's, begged for her life on scientific grounds. This terrible old man had long studied medicine, and had tortured countless living creatures in his search for knowledge. But brute beasts had failed to tell him all that he longed to know, and consequently he craved for a human victim whereby to unravel the ghastly secrets of nature. Ursule de Brie was young and strong and healthy, a subject after his own heart and ready to his hand; so he begged for her life, and the boon was granted to him. Poor Ursule was carried away to his laboratory, there to suffer a far more awful doom than the swift and sure stroke of the guillotine could have meted out. And the laboratory kept its gruesome secret, and none knew exactly how Mademoiselle de Brie had perished. It was a horrible story, and used to fill my childish mind with morbid imaginings as to what hideous torture that tenderly-nurtured girl must have endured before death mercifully ended her agonies. The very vagueness of her fate added to its horror.

But a healthier phase of life was destined to begin for me when the Grammonts came to live at Morecomb Grange. The shadowy Ursule de Brie ceased to be the central figure in the romances I loved to weave, and was gradually ousted from her place in my thoughts by the real and living charms of Madame Grammont. Even

now I could not give a cool and calm description of the mistress of Morecomb Grange; for I fell over head and ears in love with her, as young girls often do fall in love with women considerably older than themselves: and everything she said and did was illumined to my eyes by "the light that never was on sea or land." The sound of her voice and the touch of her hand made life seem to me like some lovely midsummernight's dream; and the spot where she happened to be became at once an earthly paradise. The rooms she lived in and the books she read are even now, in my eyes, unlike any other rooms and books in the whole world, so intense was the charm of her personality. And yet it is over twenty years since she was laid to rest beneath the shadow of Morecomb Church.

When Madame Grammont came to live in our neighbourhood, she was a well-preserved woman of apparently about fifty years of age; but her husband looked at least twenty years older. They had been married for more than thirty years. Madame was very tall and slight, and her dark hair was barely touched with grey. Her black eyes were wonderful, and were set off by the marble whiteness of her complexion, which never had the least tinge of colour to relieve its intense pallor. Her features were perfect in their regularity, and altogether she was a most beautiful woman.

But her manners were even more charming than her appearance. There was a stateliness of the *ancien régime* about her which was highly distinguished, and she was the perfection of a *grande dame*. To the last she was thoroughly French; and when surrounded by the wives of our county magnates, used to look like a tall white lily

in a garden of cabbage-roses. But she was a lily which could not flourish in our cold English climate; and after three winters at Morecomb Grange she slowly drooped and died, leaving me to feel that some nameless charm and graciousness had passed out of the world, and that life could never be quite the same to me again.

There are ready-made niches in one's heart that will hold almost any image, and when one idol falls out of them another is quickly found to take its place; but there are other niches made to order to fit some special figure, and when that figure is removed no other can ever fill the vacant space. The niche which Madame Grammont occupied in my heart was of the latter sort—doubtless the better sort too, but a sort that it does not do to indulge in too freely, or else as life goes on one's heart becomes nothing but a deserted temple lined with empty shrines.

How happy I was when Madame first came to Morecomb! She was then—as she always will be—my ideal of perfect womanhood, and she soon became the *première danseuse* on the stage of my girlish imagination. What long and delightful talks she and I used to have together! Their sweetness abides with me still, like the sweetness of long-dead rose-leaves. One day she rebuked me, I remember, for saying that I should hate to grow old.

"Little one," she said, stroking my hair tenderly, "there is no such thing as growing old really. How long one has lived in the world is an accident, and is of no matter to anybody. But age is a question of the character: some people do seem to begin life at fifty, while others do live for eighty years and yet are never more than eighteen. When I do meet new people, I do look to see how old they are: how long they have been walk-

ing about on the earth does not interest me in the least."

"How old am I, according to your reckoning?" I asked, laughing.

"You, my Winifred, are twenty-eight. You have only happened to live for fifteen years, I know; but you have the thoughtfulness and tenderness of a woman. When you have lived seventy years you will still be just twenty-eight."

"And what age is mother?" I further inquired.

"Ah! Lady Treherne is forty. I have no doubt that she was forty when she was quite a little girl, and trained up all her dolls most strictly in the way that they should go. I once knew a child who rose early every morning so that her dolls should have a grammar lesson before breakfast. Now she is as excellent a mother as Lady Treherne."

"And my father?"

"Your father, sweet one, is young, very young—not more than nineteen years of age, I should say."

"Yet he is really five years older than mother."

"But that is nothing, silly child! Now, my husband seems old to you, but he was just as old when I married him thirty years ago, when really he was only forty. He is no older at seventy than he was then. I once met a man who lived to be eighty-three, and yet he was never more than six. He was very lovable and very trying. I should have boxed his ears sometimes, only I was afraid of being reprimanded for cruelty to children."

"How old are you, dear Madame?" I asked, fondling her beautiful white hands.

"In my heart I am twenty, as I was at my dear old

home. But my real age—as men count age—I should be afraid to tell you, little one: you would say I was too ancient to be a friend of yours."

Whereupon I fell to kissing my adored Madame, and assuring her that if she were a hundred she would always be young and beautiful to me.

One evening, when the Grammonts were dining with us, my father and Madame quarrelled laughingly over the merits and demerits of country life: he expatiated upon the delights of rural pleasures, and she complained of their dulness.

"I do hate them," she said decidedly; "in fact, I think I do hate all the things that Wordsworth did rave about. Mountain-streams and pet lambs and weather-cocks are alike too dull for me. They one and all do bore me to death."

"You have a great dread of being bored, Madame," said my father.

"I have, indeed—it is the *bête noire* of my existence. I often think how ghastly it would be if my husband did begin to bore me: there would be no relief from him at that too dreary Morecomb."

"I hope I do not bore you, my dear?" said Monsieur Grammont smiling.

"Not yet; but you did come too near to it on that night that Mr. Grazebrook dined with us, and you did let him talk to me about potatoes."

"Did Grazebrook talk to you about potatoes?" exclaimed my father. "How exactly like him!"

"Oh! Sir Roger, he was terrible," cried Madame. "He did tell us all about his potato crops, and did call them by their names, and did prove to us which kinds

were the best, and when, and where, and why. It was most wearisome. I have the greatest respect for potatoes myself, in their proper place, but I could never be *intime* with them or call them by their Christian names. But Mr. Grazebrook seemed to make dear friends of them. Dunbar Regents and Newcastle Champions were his special favourites. I believe he could publish a Peerage of potatoes and a Landed Gentry of green peas."

"I wish I had been there," said my father, shaking with laughter. "I should have liked to see your face while the bucolic and unconscious Grazebrook held forth on his favourite subjects."

"Two of the principal things in life," continued Madame Grammont, meditatively, "are to keep one's self from *ennui* and to retain one's ideals."

"I suppose for the latter," joined in my mother, "it is necessary to marry one's first love, and have things pretty much as one wants; otherwise people become bitter and discontented, and their ideals grow sour from keeping."

"You are right, Frances," agreed my father, "I always think that disappointed people must soon become horribly disillusioned and realistic."

"Then you are quite wrong, both of you," cried our guest, with her wonted animation. "It is by *not* marrying one's first love and by *not* obtaining one's heart's desire, that one's ideals do live for ever."

"I don't see that," objected father.

"Well, then, I will just show you, Sir Roger, what I mean. Take an instance. Mary Ann, we will say, is your first love; in the days of your youth you do firmly believe that life will be a paradise if only you can marry

Mary Ann. That is your ideal of perfect felicity. You do win what you desire, and Mary Ann is yours. Then, of course, you do gradually become disillusioned, and you do discover that your goddess is but a most commonplace woman. Where is your ideal then? You have found that even Mary Ann has become *bêtise* and tiresome: so you wring your hands and cry aloud that the world is hollow and that all your dolls are stuffed with the sawdust. But suppose, on the other hand, that a cruel fate separates you from Mary Ann in the earliest days of your love-making. You do recover from the blow in time, and you do marry Eliza. It is then the *rôle* of Eliza to grow commonplace and *bêtise* and tiresome, which she does, oh, so quickly! But your ideal does remain with you all the same. You say to yourself: 'Eliza is stupid, and life is dull; but the world is not altogether hollow, for Mary Ann never was stuffed with the sawdust.' And so long as you do live you do hold fast your ideal of Mary Ann."

"Your wise saws are only rivalled by your modern instances, dear Madame," cried father. "You make me quite regret that I married my first love," he added, looking fondly across the table at my mother.

But mother only smiled.

"If, as my wife admits," said Monsieur Grammont, in his deliberate way, "our ideals soon wear out when exposed to the friction of everyday life, are we not better without such unserviceable things altogether?"

"Bah!" exclaimed Madame, shrugging her graceful shoulders. "Our boots do soon wear out, do they not? in the friction of everyday life; but is that any reason for always walking with the bare feet?"

"Certainly not, *ma chérie;* but it is a reason for preferring to be shod with solid leather, rather than with fairy glass slippers."

"That is just like Philippe!" groaned his wife. "He is so afraid of being carried away by the feelings that he never does really admire anything. I would not be so wise as he—no, not for a million francs. As for me, I do love to idealize everything and everybody. I am always raising the altars to new and unknown gods; then Philippe passes by that way, and alas! there is not one stone left upon another of my beautiful shrine."

"Then does Monsieur Grammont smash up your idols as well as his own? That is very rough on you, I think," said my father, much amused.

"Ah, but you are good to take my part like that, Sir Roger! You never did see a man with such a gift for breaking the idols as Philippe. He does prove to you, in his cold, superior way, that you are wasting your adoration on a mere stick or a stone; then you turn to your poor idol, and lo! it is all in little pieces. If ever my husband does set up an idol of his own, it will have to be made of the india-rubber, so that he can not break it; just as the destructive children do have india-rubber dolls, is it not so?"

"I have but one idol, and that is yourself, Madame," exclaimed Monsieur Grammont gallantly.

"Ah! I wonder if I am made of the india-rubber," murmured his wife. "I think it may be so, I am so elastic."

I learned a great deal from my talks with Madame Grammont. She would tell me all about her home in beautiful France, and how happy she was there in her

girlhood; and she would also tell me stories of the old French nobility, though she could hardly ever bear to mention the Revolution. She seemed to have read and thought so much about that great historical catastrophe, that the iron which had decapitated her ancestors had, in spite of the lapse of nearly a century, entered into her own soul. She came of a very noble family, but Monsieur Grammont was of *bourgeois* origin; and with all her pretty manners to her husband, I don't think Madame ever quite forgot the social disparity between them.

One summer's day, when Madame and I were walking through the picture gallery at Treherne Court, I told her the story of my favourite picture. It seemed to fascinate her as much as it did me, and for a time she gazed at it with rapt attention. Then she said: "Child, you do not tell the history aright. The old astrologer, by name Grammont, was an ancestor of my husband, and I do know the tale well."

"Oh! tell it to me, dear Madame," I cried with delight. "I have longed for years to hear more about the fate of my beautiful lady. It seems too horrible to think of her being tortured while she was still alive, and yet I want to know the truth as regards her fate."

"Tortured? She was never tortured. It is what you call a base fabrication," cried Madame with animation. "Listen, and I will tell you the story: Ursule de Brie was the only daughter of a noble family, and alas! her parents and her brothers did perish on the guillotine. She, in her turn, was going to the execution, when old Pierre Grammont (a citizen of some note and a learned man, though only *bourgeois*) begged for her life to assist him in one of his experiments of science. But he did not

desire to torture her: he was never cruel, only cold and wise, as are all the Grammonts. He did hold a theory that when any one is cast into an artificial sleep the life is suspended; and that, in consequence, such a person can exist without the food or the drink as long as the coma lasts; and can take up the thread of the life again exactly where it was dropped, though in reality the interval may have been years and years in length. For a long time old Pierre had sought in vain for a subject on whom to try this interesting experiment, for his work had come to a still-stand without one; but when human creatures were being killed like the vermin, and the blood was running like water in the streets of Paris, surely, he thought, one of these apparently worthless aristocrats might be given into his hands to do with as he thought desirable?"

"I understand," I murmured, and Madame went on:

"So Ursule de Brie was snatched from the guillotine and given to Pierre Grammont. He did not hide from her what he was going to do; but the poor girl was so utterly crushed and overwhelmed by the horrors of the weeks just passed, that she did not care what might become of her; and she did at once consent to be thrown into an artificial sleep by means of the passes and incantations of the aged astrologer. Grammont therefore made her as one dead, placed her in a leaden coffin, and buried her in a vault which he had built in his garden."

"Oh, Madame, how ghastly!"

"Shortly after this the old man died: and in his will he did command his heirs that fifty years after his death they should open the vault in the garden, and should do as it seemed good to them with the treasure they should

therein find; but he added that if they did venture to break open the vault before the fifty years had passed, they should be haunted by his curse without end. Old Grammont had told no one about his experiment, but he had written the full details on a parchment, and had buried the manuscript with Ursule de Brie."

"And did his heirs obey him?" I asked eagerly.

"Wait, and you shall hear. The Grammonts, though quite *bourgeois*, were a superstitious people, and had a great fear of incurring the curse of the old wizard; so the vault in the garden was kept religiously shut up, until the fifty years had passed away. About thirty years from the present time, a great-grandson of old Pierre's did burst open the vault, and also the leaden coffin within. Figure then his surprise to discover therein a young girl fast asleep! On opening the roll of parchment which lay upon the breast of the sleeper, he did read the story which I come from relating to you; and he also did learn by what mesmeric means the unconscious victim was to be restored to the life. Trembling with excitement, and hardly daring to hope that he would be successful, Monsieur Grammont did perform the necessary passes; and he was overpowered with the joy and amazement, when the young girl awoke from her fifty years of sleep. It did seem to her that she had only been asleep for a few hours; and her heart was still sore for the loss of those dear ones who had been dead for half a century. Monsieur Grammont did his utmost to console the stranger, who appeared young enough to be his daughter, and yet was seventy years old when first he saw her face: and, shortly afterward, he did espouse Ursule de Brie."

"And was he kind to her, Madame?" I asked with intense interest.

"*Kind* to her, child?—what a word to use with reference to the behaviour of a plebeian toward an aristocrat! He did always regard her with the most profound respect, and did deport himself toward her with the most deep reverence; and he was never unconscious of the honour he had done himself by marrying into the *haute noblesse.*"

"And was she happy with him?"

"Oh! happy enough, child, as women's happiness goes. But have you yet to learn, little one, that men can make their happiness just as they may please, while the women do have to be content with what is ready-made? And the ready-made clothes do never fit as well as those that are made to order; they are sure to give the pinch somewhere."

"What relation was this Monsieur Grammont, the great-grandson of old Pierre, to your husband, Madame?" I asked.

"They are one and the same."

"And you——" I began in breathless excitement.

"I myself was once Ursule de Brie," answered Madame.

MISS LATIMER'S LOVER

MISS LATIMER'S LOVER

Miss Anne Latimer was an old maid, according to the measure of that almost merciless of critics, the young girl; she was tired and timid and faded, and ought to have found ample satisfaction for her spinster soul in clothing clubs, and sewing parties, and such-like old-maidenly dissipations; but alas! she did not. Though she was well on her way down the shady slope of forty, she was actually guilty of the anachronism of falling in love—and for the first time, too, in her grey, uneventful life—the object of her adoration being the middle-aged organist of Marley Church, commonly called "old Harry Scott." Locked and double-locked in her own gentle heart was the secret of Anne Latimer's devotion to Mr. Scott; but she cherished it fondly nevertheless. Everything he did was clothed in a robe of heroism and surrounded by a halo of romance. The books he read and recommended became inspired volumes; the tunes he played and taught seemed variations of the music of the spheres.

Miss Latimer's daily walk and occupation was the calling of a governess; and while she instructed the vicar's little boys in the conjugating of *amo*, she construed it herself after the most approved fashion; a society beauty could not have done it better—perhaps not so well.

Miss Latimer's Lover

To the ordinary observer Harry Scott appeared to be a disagreeable, fault-finding, cynical recluse; but the gods—notably the god of love—see otherwise, and with different eyes from the ordinary observer.

"Would you believe it?" cried Madge Lacey, rushing into the vicarage schoolroom one day, "a baronet has been lost or made away with somewhere about here."

"Oh, my dear, how very shocking!" exclaimed Miss Latimer, nervously looking behind her, as if the lost baronet might be lurking somewhere in the schoolroom window-curtains, ready to pounce out at any moment: but the eyes of the little boys gleamed with unholy joy.

"What fun!" they cried as one man.

"His name is Sir Henry Denham," continued Madge, "or rather *was*, for I suppose he was murdered years ago."

The governess shuddered as she pictured the ill-fated baronet weltering in his own blue blood; but the sanguinary little boys thrilled with delight.

"Who murdered him?" they yelled in ecstasy; "do tell, Madge, there's a brick!"

"Nobody knows," replied their elder sister; "that's the mystery. Twenty years ago he disappeared, and no one has heard anything of him since."

"But why didn't they look for him twenty years ago?" inquired one of her small brothers, with some sense.

"Because they didn't want him; he wasn't a baronet then, but an unsatisfactory younger son who had lost nearly all his money, and was a disgrace and burden to his relations. So they were very glad when he disappeared, and gave them no more trouble."

"Then why are they bothering to dig the old chap up again now?"

"Because all his relations are dead, and he is heir to the title and estates; and until they can prove where and how he died, the next man can't succeed to the title or the property. They have been able to trace him as far as this part of the country; but it is so long ago since he was heard of that now nobody knows anything about him. Therefore it is presumed that he was murdered on Marley Moor by tramps, for the sake of such money or jewelry as he had about him, and that the body was thrown into one of the tarns."

"How grand!" screamed one of the little boys. "We'll go and look for the skeleton."

Skeleton-hunting seemed to their youthful and adventurous minds a sport beside which mole-catching and catapulting sank into insignificance. But Miss Latimer was "all of a tremble," as she said.

"How very, very terrible!" she murmured.

"The police are already searching the moor," said Madge, "and dragging all the pools to discover the bones; but it happened so long ago that they despaired of finding anything."

But Archie and Hughie did not despair; they decided literally to leave no stone unturned on Marley Moor until they had discovered the missing remains; and their youthful souls were filled with a fearful joy at the thought that at any moment they might chance upon a murdered baronet or a modern Eugene Aram.

Their timid little governess, however, looked at the matter in quite a different light. "It got upon her nerves," she said, and troubled her with a haunting fear.

Her peaceful home was made dreadful by visions of the lost man and his unknown murderer; and she remembered once having heard something (she could not recall what) about a baronet's "bloody hand," which memory lent additional weirdness to the state of affairs. Miss Latimer confided some of her fears to the cynical organist; but he was such a rabid socialist, and cherished so bitter a hatred against the upper classes, that he seemed to regard a baronet as better murdered than not, and could not be induced to approach the tragedy in at all a proper spirit.

"I daresay he is better dead than alive, Miss Latimer," he said gruffly. "Rich people generally are."

"Oh, Mr. Scott, what a terrible thing to say!" gasped the gentle Anne, who had all a single woman's veneration for the powers that be.

"I hate rich people," continued the blasphemous organist: "they wear gorgeous raiment, and eat indigestible things, and behave generally like blots on the face of creation."

"But," suggested Miss Latimer, timidly defying the oracle, "think of the refinement and culture of the upper classes, and what England would be without them."

"I know exactly what England would be without them; it would be like the garden of Eden in the preserpentine days. And as to their culture, my dear friend, it is all rubbish! I don't believe you could find a so-called fine lady who could spell *mattress*, or who had ever heard of the *ablative absolute*."

"Dear me, dear me, that is sad," remarked Anne, looking becomingly shocked; "but still the women of

the upper classes always seem to me such elegant creatures."

"Their elegance is all humbug, and their good manners the thinnest veneer. Their profession is to annex the purses of rich men, and their pastime to break the hearts of poor ones; though how sensible men can be fooled by the expressionless faces and empty heads, is more than I can imagine."

"But surely you admire Lady Marley? She is so lovely, and has such sweet manners."

"Hateful woman!" growled the irritated Scott. "Why, the way she patronized you the other day at the vicarage made me feel positively sick."

Anne looked amazed.

"I thought it so sweet of her to speak to me at all; and the way she praised my little pupils was most gratifying."

"Gratifying indeed! She spoke to you about Hugh and Archie exactly as she would have spoken to her poulterer's wife if the chickens at dinner had been tender. How you stood it puzzled me."

But it had not been a case of *standing it* on Anne's part. She wondered if the organist asked the flowers how they could *stand* the sunshine; but being a woman of keen perceptions, in spite of her timid ways, she never argued with a man. If a man attacked her opinions, she at once ceased to express them; if he denied her statements, she at once admitted that she must have been misinformed. After all, she felt, a man was more likely to be right than a woman, and much less likely to own that he was wrong; which showed that wisdom dwelt with Anne Latimer, although the latter possessed no

more fathers and fewer husbands than the majority of her fellow-women. She understood, further, that the woman who takes her opinions ready-made from some stronger, masculine brain, is happier than the woman who manufactures them at home out of such scanty raw material as her limited knowledge and experience of life can command; which proved that Anne Latimer's outward adorning and ornament were of the pattern recommended by apostolic advertisement; a pattern unfortunately considered somewhat out of date by the modern woman, but nevertheless infinitely more becoming than the most elaborate atrocities of post-apostolic fashion-plates.

Anne confided to Mr. Scott the fear which beset her that the baronet's ghost or his hidden murderer might waylay her on her way home from the vicarage on a winter's evening; but he relieved her spirit by assuring her that he considered either alternative highly improbable; and as the subject was evidently distasteful to him, Anne at once dropped it, though she longed to discuss more freely the horrible possibilities which the tragedy conjured up.

But though the little governess kept silence on the gruesome subject, it engrossed her thoughts night and day, and made her lonely walks from the vicarage increasingly terrible; and gradually a ghastly suspicion crept into her mind, which she tried in vain to exorcise, though she combated it as a suggestion of the evil one.

She could not help remembering that, about the time of the baronet's disappearance, Harry Scott was a penniless wayfarer, little better than a tramp, getting what odd jobs he could from any one who was kind enough

to give them to him, and being often on the verge of starvation. He was a mysterious man, and dark hints were given as to his past life; but no one knew anything authentic against him, or, indeed, about him; and since he had been appointed organist of Marley Church he had settled down into a respectable parishioner. Then Anne could not help noticing how Scott disliked any mention of the Denham mystery, and how bitter he was in his hatred of the upper classes.

All these things were against him, as the gentle little lady could not but admit in her secret soul; but the strange part of the matter was that the worse she thought of him the more she loved him. She had nearly fainted with terror at the mere possibility that Sir Henry's murderer might revisit the scene of his crime; but the moment it struck her that Mr. Scott might be he, all her fears vanished and she felt ready to defend the man she loved against the whole world. So does love make heroes and heroines, as conscience makes cowards, of us all.

But though Anne's fear *of* the murderer was gone, her fear *for* him increased day by day. Suppose the idea which had occurred to her occurred to other people also, and that Scott's crime were discovered, and that he were brought to justice and hanged. Her imagination ran riot in suggesting such contingencies, until it made her life a burden to her; for even if Scott were innocent, she felt that when once suspicion had fallen upon him the evidence would be against him, and it would be difficult for him to disprove his guilt.

For some time these doubts and fears made havoc in the soul of the gentle little governess; and at last they culminated in a visit to the mysterious organist himself.

"I have come to see you on a most delicate matter," began Anne timidly; "so delicate, in fact, that I hardly know how to begin."

The organist smiled; Miss Latimer always unconsciously aroused his sense of humour.

"Surely there is nothing that you can not say to me, Miss Latimer," he replied kindly; "we are such old and firm friends, you know."

"The fact is," stammered Anne, "that my visit has reference to the murder of Sir Henry Denham."

Scott's smile died out, and his face became very white, but he said nothing.

"Oh, I can not, can not say it!" continued poor Anne, beginning to cry, "it seems so base of me to think dreadful things about you; and yet if I don't say what I think, how can I help you?"

Still Scott was silent.

"You see I can not help remembering," sobbed the poor little woman, "that Sir Henry Denham disappeared just about the time that you were so—so——"

"So poor and unknown, you mean," said Scott, coming to her rescue; "so poor and hungry, in fact, that I would have sold my soul for a mess of pottage."

"Yes, yes; and I want to say, dear Mr. Scott, that if you think it better, under the circumstances, to go right away from Marley, I hope you will allow me to give you this, just to help you on your way. I think you should go at once; and it occurred to me that you might be short of ready money. So few rich people have enough ready money by them to start on a long journey at a minute's notice, you know. Please, please don't think me impertinent, but I do so want to help you," cried

Anne, thrusting into his hands bank-notes to the value of three hundred pounds.

The organist did not speak.

"You may wonder at my having so much money by me," explained Miss Latimer hurriedly, the tears still running down her flushed face. "But I have just taken it out of the bank to offer to you. I am so sorry that I can not afford you more, but it is all I have."

Then Scott spoke, and his voice was very husky.

"I can not take your savings, my dear friend, as some day you may want them yourself; but believe me I shall always feel a happier man, because you were so good as to offer them to me."

"Pray, pray don't hesitate to take them," cried Anne eagerly. "You see I am not really old yet—only just forty-eight—so that I shall be able to work for another twenty years at least; and in that time I could save quite sufficient to support me in my old age. I have also brought you a few trinkets which really are of no use to me, as jewelry would be quite out of place on a person of my advanced years and humble position; but you might dispose of them, you know, and make some use of the trifle that they would fetch. Oh! Mr. Scott, please do not think me forward or interfering, but you can not tell how sincerely I have your interest at heart."

Whereupon Miss Latimer poured out into the hands of the astonished organist her entire regalia; which consisted of a coral necklace, a pair of amethyst ear-rings, two jet bracelets, a cairngorm shawl-pin, three mourning rings, and an enormous brooch. This brooch resembled a gold warming-pan, and had wrought upon its centre, in

human hair, an artistic design composed of a tea-urn supported by two weeping willows, and surrounded by a wreath of sea-weed; the hair whereof these strange devices was composed having been grown upon the head of Miss Latimer's long defunct maternal uncle. But in spite of the humour of the situation, Harry Scott did not laugh; instead his eyes filled with tears as he said:

"Thank you more than I can ever say, my dear, my only friend. If I had known such unselfishness as yours years ago, I should never have been the worthless, good-for-nothing wretch that I am. Perhaps I can show my gratitude for your kindness in no better way than by accepting it; so I will take the money and the jewelry—but only as a loan. Some day you must let me repay you. In fact, the intention of repaying you will be an incentive to me to be a better man in the future than I have been in the past."

"Just as you think best," agreed Anne; "but please believe that there is no way of laying out my money which would give me as much pleasure as spending it upon you."

"Anne, do you love me?" asked Scott suddenly.

Anne's faded face flushed all over.

"You know I do," she said simply. "How could I help it when I have seen you nearly every day for the last twenty years?"

"I am not worthy of your love, Anne," continued the organist in a broken voice; "I am not a good man and never have been. I had an unloved, an unhappy, childhood, and the iron of it entered into my soul; then poverty stepped in, and made me worse and bitterer than I was before. Your suspicion against me is a correct

one. It was I who murdered Henry Denham; but perhaps when you hear my whole story you will see that I was not without provocation, nor was I quite the bloodthirsty villain that you now suppose. But what touches me is that you love me now—since you discovered my crime, and before you hear my defence. It is such love as this that saves a man's soul alive."

"I hope it is not wicked of me to love you, dear," said Anne, smiling through her tears; "but I'm afraid I couldn't help it if it were."

"Wicked? It is divine," cried Scott. "Dear Anne, I believe I could be a good man now if you were always with me to love and to help me. Will you come away with me now as my wife, and let us begin a new life together?"

For a minute Anne hesitated. She recalled reading a story years ago called The Murderer's Bride, and how she had shuddered at it, and now she actually thought of becoming a murderer's bride herself. It was a terrible thought! But then she remembered that Harry Scott was alone and in trouble, and he wanted her; and what true woman could be proof against such an argument as that? Certainly not one of the good old sort, whose outward adorning was after the apostolic pattern.

So Anne promised to marry Harry Scott, and go away somewhere where they could begin a new life. They arranged that he should leave Marley at once and wait for her in London, where they would be married quietly by licence, so as to avoid all fuss and gossip. This plan was carried out; and a month after their momentous interview, Anne Latimer said good-bye to Marley and the vicarage boys, and met the ex-organist in a dreary

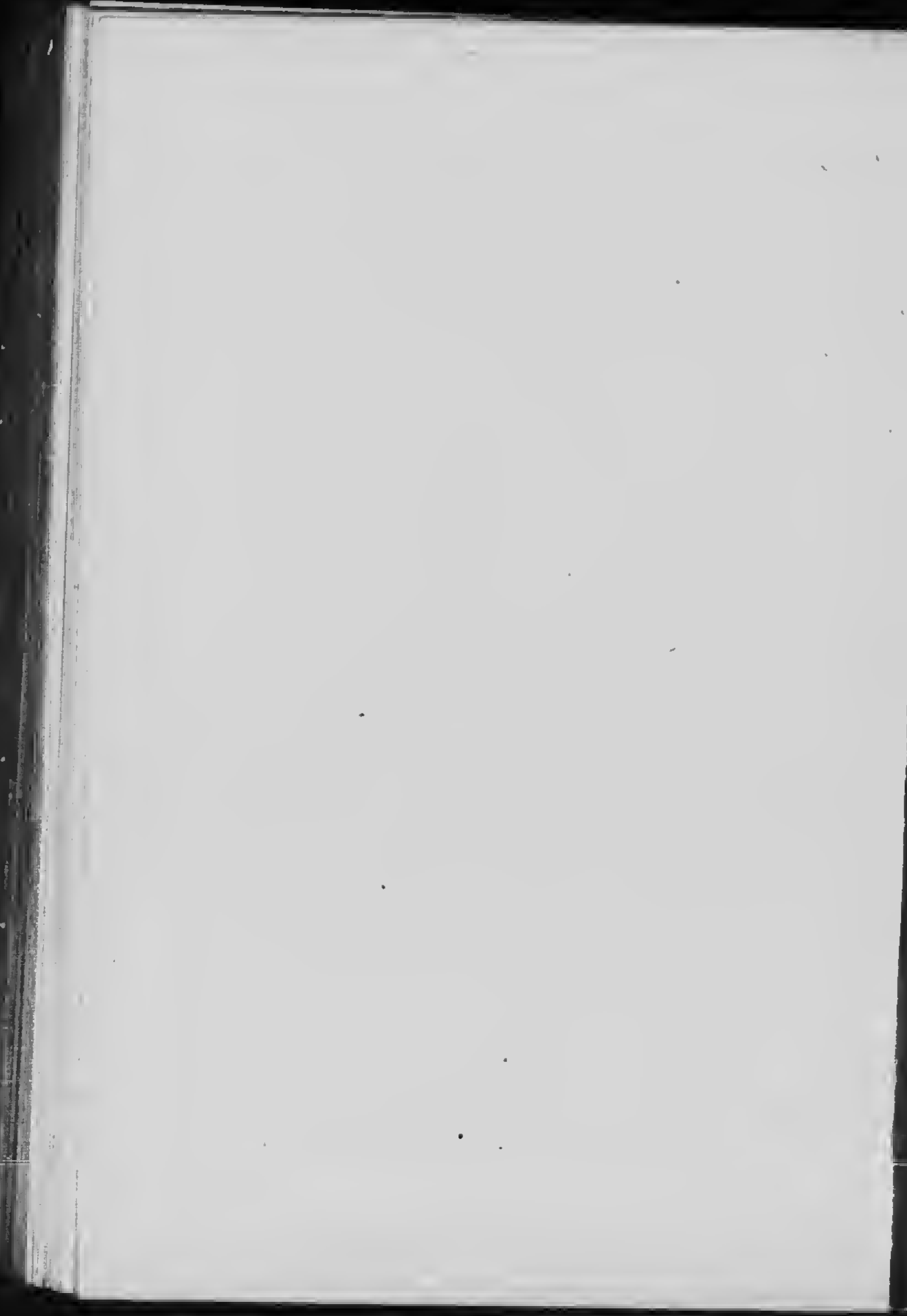
London church. A prim, legal-looking individual acted as Scott's best man; while poor Anne had nobody but the female pew-opener as her bridesmaid. It all passed off very quietly. "I, Henry Scott, took thee, Anne," in the face of all possible contingencies; and, "Anne," returned the compliment. The poor little bride was a good deal flustered when they retired to the vestry. First the clergyman and Harry signed their names, and then the legal-looking individual handed the pen to Anne, saying,

"Now it is your ladyship's turn."

"What does he mean?" she whispered to Harry with a puzzled look on her happy face.

"It is all right, dear," he answered; "you are a 'ladyship' now, you know; you are my wife, and I am Sir Henry Scott Denham."

THE WITCH'S SPELL



THE WITCH'S SPELL

Mistress McMally was a terrible woman—a hard, cruel, wicked, terrible woman. She had ruled at Castle McMally ever since her childhood; and she had ruled with a rod of iron. Her people feared her with a blind, unreasoning fear, and hated her with a blind, unreasoning hate; and none among them hated and feared her more entirely than did her forlorn young kinswoman, Flora McMally. Flora had spent as many of her twenty years as she could remember at Castle McMally; and many a time had she been punished for a childish fault by a beating from Mistress McMally herself; and many a time had she repented of such juvenile shortcomings in the dark dungeons of the castle. It had been a terrible childhood, followed by a dreary girlhood; and yet it would have been difficult to find a more beautiful form than that which was the earthly tenement of poor Flora's crushed and tortured spirit. Masses of red-gold hair crowned the queenly little head, which (if it had a fault) seemed almost too small for the tall and graceful figure; while Flora's eyes, as dark as night and as mysterious, sent a thrill through every heart which they took the trouble to look into. But these wonderful orbs had a gift above and beyond their beauty; they possessed a remarkable power of compelling whomsoever they chose to do

their bidding—a power which nowadays would be called mesmeric or hypnotic, but which then, in that wild and primitive region in the far north of Scotland, was considered as nothing less than witchcraft. Mistress Bridget McMally was fully aware of her kinswoman's weird gift, and would gladly have given the two eyes out of her own head for a pair to match Flora's; failing this, she made Flora use this power as she (Bridget) willed, and the poor girl was far too much afraid of her hard task-mistress ever to dream of disobeying her.

Now it came to pass, one bitter winter's day, that two snow-bound travellers sought shelter at Castle McMally, finding it impossible to push further through the deep drifts which threatened to bury them alive; and Mistress McMally, for a wonder, received them graciously, and set before them the best that she could offer, and pressed them to stay with her until the snow should abate and the wild roads again be traversable.

The strangers were two officers, Captain Lennox and Captain McBean; the former was as superbly handsome a young man as one could wish to see; the latter a somewhat disreputable old soldier, very much the worse for wear. Such were the travellers who claimed the hospitality of Castle McMally, and (which is not to be wondered at) both fell in love with Flora McMally at first sight. Which sudden awakening of the tender passion did not escape the lynx eye of the mistress of the castle, but served to add fuel to the already lighted fire of her hatred for, and jealousy of, her fair cousin's beauty; so the cruel woman laid her unholy plan accordingly. That snowy day which brought the two strangers to Castle McMally was the birthday of happiness to Flora;

she had never known before what it was to feel young and glad, and joyous; but by the time that she and Henry Lennox had looked into one another's eyes and listened to one another's voices for a whole winter's evening, she had formed a fairly accurate idea of what perfect happiness was like.

Flora acted as Mistress McMally's maid; and when she had concluded her duties for that night, and was ready to repair to her own little vault of a chamber, she was recalled by her cousin, who said:

"Girl, I have a task for you to perform to-morrow."

"What is it?" asked Flora, with the blind submission which it was her custom to accord to her tyrant's behests.

The sharp eyes of Bridget McMally twinkled maliciously.

"You have got to use your witch-power," she said, "and to make Captain Lennox believe that I am as beautiful as you. For he is the finest man I have ever seen, and I have made up my mind to marry him."

The wonderful black eyes grew dim with fear and horror.

"Oh! not that, not that, Cousin Bridget," cried the girl; "anything but that."

Mistress McMally laughed a dry little laugh.

Then Flora fell on her knees before her cousin, and besought her with bitter tears not to insist upon anything so cruel, so inhuman.

Mistress McMally continued to enjoy her laugh.

"You fool!" she cried, "do you think that you are going to have it all your own way, with that pretty baby-face of yours? Do you think I can not see that you have already given your silly heart to this man, and that for

the present his soft head is turned by your empty beauty? But understand that from to-morrow he is mine; and that it is you who will give me the priceless gift of your handsome lover's love. Ha! ha! ha!" and the elder woman fairly shook with her fiendish amusement.

"I will not do it!" cried Flora, defiance taking the place of despair.

"Won't you?" replied Mistress McMally. "And have you forgotten what it feels like to be flogged? and how cosy the dungeons are afterward? and how none of my people would dare to interfere if I chose to starve you to death in there? But if your memory is short, my pretty child, and has forgotten all these trifling little details, you will soon be reminded of them; and I hardly think you will ever forget them again."

The unfortunate girl trembled, and lifted tearful eyes to her tormentor's jeering face; for well she knew that her cousin's were no empty threats, but all this and more could Mistress McMally do to her, and not one of the servants would dare to interfere, or to tell afterward what diabolical cruelty had done to death this defenceless orphan. So, fixing one look of unutterable despair on Bridget's hateful face, Flora rose from her knees, feeling that resistance to that inflexible will was impossible.

"If you are so anxious to have a lover," sneered Mistress McMally, "you can turn your attention to Captain McBean. He is in love with you already, my beauty."

"I hate him," sobbed Flora, with righteous indignation; "he is a wicked, horrid, nasty old man!"

"I quite agree with you," laughed Bridget sleepily, "but you shall marry him all the same, or my name isn't Bridget McMally. You can go now," added the fiend

in woman's form, "I feel tired and drowsy, and want to go to sleep and dream about my handsome lover. So good-night, and pleasant dreams to you about Captain McBean, my sweet birdie!"

And poor Flora left her cousin's room with a tempest of silent rage in her tortured heart.

The next morning Mistress McMally was up betimes, and drove Flora downstairs before her to do her bidding. The girl had not slept at all during the night, and there were great black rings round her beautiful eyes; but what cared Bridget for the sorrows of women fairer than herself? The two cousins entered the great hall of the castle together, and Mistress McMally perceived the object of her affections seated by the fire. He rose politely at the entrance of the ladies, but Bridget did not fail to note, with a throb of anger, that though his civil words were addressed to her, his admiring eyes sought Flora.

"Do my bidding, girl," she exclaimed, below her breath; and the girl, feeling the impotence of opposition, fixed her wonderful eyes full on the innocent victim. The strong man sank back at once into his chair, and his glassy stare showed that Flora's hypnotic power had done its work. Then in a mechanical voice the younger Miss McMally proceeded to say the words which her tyrant dictated.

"You see Mistress Bridget McMally," she began, pointing to the evil-minded woman beside her.

"Yes," replied a hollow voice, most unlike the usual cheerful tones of Henry Lennox.

"She is very beautiful," continued Flora; "and you love her with all your heart. You are wild with love for

her, and you will marry her within a week from now. Do you understand?"

"I understand," answered the unearthly voice of the victim. "I love Mistress Bridget McMally with all my heart, and will marry her within a week from now."

Then Flora awoke her unconscious subject and went out of the room, leaving him and her cousin together.

For a moment the captain looked dazed, and then, as his glance fell on the woman standing beside him, an expression of such admiration animated his features as it was impossible to misread. He rose at once, and took her hand into his.

"How are you this morning, dear lady?" he inquired tenderly.

"Very well, thank you," said Bridget, with delight at this unwonted solicitation for her well-being. "And yourself, Captain?"

"Oh, I am all right," replied the soldier; "but I think our hard journey through the snow must have wearied me somewhat, for I have actually been asleep again since I came downstairs, asleep and dreaming of you," he added, gazing into the cruel face with such passionate devotion that Mistress McMally felt inclined to scream for joy at the success of her diabolical scheme.

"What did you dream about me?" asked Bridget, with an expression of such triumph as would have aroused the suspicions of any man in his senses.

"I hardly dare tell you." And the brave soldier fairly trembled with fear of his idol's displeasure.

But Mistress McMally coaxed and cajoled until she got her own way.

"Well, if you insist upon my telling you, I, whose

highest honour and happiness consist in obeying your lightest command, can not say you nay," said the captain at last. "I dreamed that I loved you madly—that you and you alone were the lady of my choice; and in my dream I swore that I would win you as my bride, and that ere many days had passed. And listen, my angel," he continued, seizing both her hands and drawing her nearer to him, "when I awoke and saw you standing beside me, I knew that my dream had come true, and that henceforth I could never find happiness apart from you. I know I am a rough soldier, dear one, unfit to mate with your sweet beauty; but won't you try to love me a little, Bridget, because I love you so much?"

Then Mistress McMally dropped her scheming head on the captain's broad shoulder, while he covered her face with kisses, and whispered in her ear such nonsense as only lovers talk. Truly Flora's spell had been all too potent for the simple-minded, unsuspecting warrior; alas for him!

Mistress Bridget was the first seriously to take up the parable again.

"Captain," she began, but was stopped by the kisses of the infatuated swain.

"Hush, hush, my pretty one!" he whispered. "You must never call me that again—you must say *Harry.*"

"Harry, then," said the young woman.

"Say, *my own dear Harry,*" commanded the bewitched wooer.

"My own dear Harry," repeated the evil-minded wretch, with infantine obedience.

"Well, sweetheart, what is it?"

"Don't you think we might have some breakfast?"

suggested the lady, who was of so greedy a nature that no love-making, be it never so charming, could stand her in stead of meat and drink.

Her lover's face fell somewhat at this mundane interruption to his day-dream, but he submitted to his lady's will.

"First tell me that you love me," he entreated.

"I love you!" shrieked Mistress McMally, flinging her snaky arms round her lover's stalwart neck in a transport of fiendish joy.

And then the twain went off to take their breakfast, and to break to the other two members of the party what they had done.

The next few days seemed to Mistress McMally and her gallant soldier to fly by on the wings of the wind; he was so completely enthralled by the spell which had been cast upon him, that he had neither eyes nor ears for any one but his Bridget; and she, who had never had a lover before in all her thirty years, was so intoxicated with joy at the sight of so brave a wooer at her feet, that she was simply beside herself with delight. But though to the seeing eye she was even more dangerous in this amorous mood than she had been in her former malicious one, the captain was blind to all her imperfections, and seemed day by day to become more infatuated. He insisted upon fixing an immediate date for the wedding, and he had no difficulty in inducing his lady-love to agree to this arrangement. In consequence of this absorption of the lovers in one another, the gentleman's brother-officer and the lady's young kinswoman were left entirely to their own or each other's devices, whichever they pleased. Captain Lennox just now had no thoughts for anything

but love-making, and Captain McBean was reduced to pretty much the same state; so the wintry days did not hang heavy on the gallant warriors' hands, nor were the gentlemen at all anxious for the imprisoning snow to melt, and so release them from their respective ladies' sides. They were happy enough, but not so Mistress McMally. She was filled with rage to think that the love and admiration, which she found so delightful and which were only hers by deceit and sorcery, were Flora's by simple right of her amiability and beauty; and she swore an oath that when once her adored lover was united to her by marriage—a bond which the withdrawal of Flora's spell would be powerless to break—she would turn the hapless girl out of her doors for ever, and never permit that beautiful face to be seen inside Castle McMally again, lest her husband's now distorted fancy should return to its first and fairer love. Wherein Mistress Bridget showed the accustomed wisdom of the serpent, unalloyed in her case by any adulteration of the harmless dove.

The wedding-day dawned; and Mistress Bridget commanded the old minister of the place, who feared her as he feared his ghostly enemy, to unite her to the man of her choice in the little chapel attached to the castle; and she further ordained, out of a spirit of fiendish cruelty, that Flora should be her bridesmaid, so that the girl might have the anguish of seeing her rich kinswoman mated to the man whom she herself loved. The bridegroom had for his best man his friend and brother-officer. Flora's face was as white as death during the strange marriage, but otherwise she made no sign of what she was feeling. When the ceremony was con-

cluded, and "I, Henry," had taken "thee, Bridget," for every vicissitude of human life, and the twain were united past all putting asunder, the bride turned round to her beautiful bridesmaid and thus addressed her:

"And now, my fair cousin, that I have secured a companion whose society is all that I could desire, I shall henceforth dispense with yours, and shall therefore expect you to leave my castle this very day. But—in that spirit of consideration which I have always shown you—I should be sorry to send you out into the world alone and unprovided for: so I will have you married at once to the gentleman who now stands beside you, so that the pleasing duty of providing for you, which has hitherto devolved upon me, will be henceforth transferred to his broader shoulders."

Flora turned if possible a shade paler than she was before, and gasped out:

"Oh, no, no! It is scandalous to dispose of me as if I were a bale of goods."

The bride took no notice of this appeal, but turned from the bridesmaid to the best man.

"This lady is as penniless as she is (according to your befooled taste) handsome. Have you any objection to wedding her here and now?"

"Not the least," laughed the captain in triumph; "in fact it is the dearest wish of my heart to do so."

"Then marry this couple at once," cried the mistress of Castle McMally to the poor little minister; and he—knowing by experience that that particular tone of her voice meant mischief—hastened to perform his tyrant's bidding.

Flora did not further rebel—what was the use when

all of them were against her?—but went through her part of the programme, looking more like an exquisite marble statue than a living woman. When the second pair were united as securely as the first had been, the elder bride again addressed the younger:

"And now, my sweet cousin, your bridegroom and yourself will make yourselves scarce as speedily as possible, for my husband and I prefer to be alone; and you doubtless will have much to say to the husband of your —can I say, *choice?*" and she laughed at her malicious little joke with a laugh that was full of triumph.

Then at last the marble statue awoke into a real woman, her face alight with scornful indignation.

"I will go willingly," she exclaimed in Gaelic, "from a house wherein I have known naught but misery all these years: but before I go I have a word to say to you, Cousin Bridget. You made my childhood miserable and my girlhood desolate by your cruel ways; and you further decided to blight my womanhood by uniting me with a man whom I had told you I loathed. What had I done that you should hate me so mercilessly and punish me so maliciously? Have I not done your bidding all these years? Then why should you ordain that so hideous a lot should be mine? But stop!"

And now—before Bridget could prevent her—Flora made the movement whereby she released from her hypnotic spell those who had lain under it. And lo! The first wedded couple gazed at each other for an instant as if transfixed; and then simultaneously exclaimed:

"You abominable fright!"

"You hideous frump!"

For the bridegroom suddenly discovered that he had

wedded an ill-favoured fury; and the bride perceived that she had married Captain Henry McBean.

"Yes," continued Flora, still in Gaelic, while the twain stood gazing at each other in horror; "it was my only escape from the cruel fate which you had devised for me, so you have no one but yourself to thank for what has happened. Was I going to sacrifice not only myself, which was a small matter, but the man whom I loved, to your diabolical device? No, a thousand times no! Therefore I made a desperate resolve. When—on that night—you said that you felt sleepy, you were really falling under my spell; and I then commanded you to love devotedly the first man whom you should see on coming downstairs next morning: and I took care that Captain Henry McBean, and not Captain Henry Lennox, was the first to meet your gaze. The rest you know, Mistress McBean."

During Flora's speech, whereof neither of the bridegrooms could understand a word, Bridget had been trembling from head to foot with baffled rage and disappointed malice; but at last she succeeded in giving utterance to the fury which possessed her.

"You minx! you wretch! you hussy!" she screamed, "how dare you trick me so? But I'll have my revenge. I'll scratch your wicked eyes out, you viper, and leave you to rot in my darkest dungeon, you ill-conditioned serpent, you——"

And she was rushing forward with claw-like fingers to put her horrible threat into execution, when Captain Lennox's strong arm held her back.

"Gently, madam—gently!" he cried; "you dare not lay a finger upon Mrs. Lennox. Remember that she is the wife of a British soldier!"

THE STORY OF MARINA

THE STORY OF MARINA

THERE was no doubt that Marina was a wonderfully beautiful woman. She somehow reminded one of the sea whence she came. Her hair was as yellow as the ribbed sea-sand; her eyes were grey-green, like the deep sea-pools; and her skin was as white as the soft sea-foam. And yet it was more than thirty years since a little baby had been washed up alive on the shore of St. Aubyn's, after a night of fearful storm and wreckage; and the childless rector had adopted her, and christened her Marina, after the sea which had brought her to him; for clue to her real name and parentage was there none, either then or ever after. The fisher-folk said that such clue was not forthcoming because Marina was one of the sea-maids, who are allowed now and then to assume mortal form for a time to allure men to their destruction. Age and death can not touch them until they fall in love with a mortal man; if the love is mutual, the man bestows his mortality (or rather his immortality) upon the sea-maid, and she receives a human soul; but if her love be unrequited, the sea-maid's spell is broken, and she is doomed to bewitch humanity no more, but to return to her own people. That was one of the legends of St. Aubyn's; and the fisher-folk firmly believed that it was fulfilled in Marina, whose beautiful face and cold heart

fostered the idea. True, she showed no signs of age as yet, and looked younger and fairer than many women ten years her junior; but well-preserved charms are not peculiar to the sea-people, and doubtless the men whose hearts she had broken (and their name was legion) had proved unlucky, and turned out badly; for to be made the sport of a heartless flirt is not conducive to a fortunate life or a prosperous career, even when the enchantress has nothing superhuman in her composition. Nevertheless, the fisher-folk of St. Aubyn's said that in all these things one could see signs that the rector's adopted daughter was no child of man, but a witch from the depths of the ocean. Marina knew perfectly well all about the superstitions attaching to her, and she rather enjoyed them than otherwise. And she sometimes wondered whimsically if there were something in them after all, and if she were indeed as heartless and soulless as they said. Certainly not one of her many lovers had ever made her heart beat for one instant the quicker, and Marina herself was surprised at her own coldness. But "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good"; and the cold wind of Marina's indifference was an unmitigated blessing to the Reverend William Winter, for, in spite of the many chances she had to leave it, it kept her at his side in the old rectory, which would have been gloomy indeed without the girl's presence—as gloomy as it was after the rector's young wife died, and before the sea gave up that treasure which was to fill the blank in William Winter's desolate heart and life—his adopted daughter Marina.

But it came to pass that Anthony Armstrong, a great scholar and an old college friend of the rector's, spent a summer at St. Aubyn's; and then everything was

changed for Marina. Armstrong was a delicate man, old enough to be her father; and was, moreover, grave and serious, well-read in all things save the lore of women's looks and women's hearts; nevertheless—though she herself failed to see the reason why, because there never is a reason for such eccentricities—the spoiled beauty fell in love with him. The whole current of Marina's thoughts was suddenly changed. Life seemed to have borrowed a deeper meaning, Nature seemed to be endowed with a fuller beauty, simply because she had learned to love Anthony Armstrong. This new feeling permeated her whole being, and so thoroughly softened and transformed the calm, self-contained woman, that she herself began to think the fishermen's tales must be true, and that Anthony had bestowed upon her the human soul which she had hitherto lacked; for she had no doubt that he loved her. Armstrong, however, was utterly unaware of the change which he had wrought in Marina, and enjoyed his friendship with and affection for her, without dreaming that an old scholar like himself could have power to attract a beautiful young woman; for, though a clever, he was also a stupid man, seeing only what was printed under his nose in capital letters; and Marina was hardly the woman to advertise her feelings in capital letters under anybody's nose. Therefore they were as a sealed book to Anthony Armstrong.

And so the sweet summer days passed by, turning the old rectory at St. Aubyn's into an earthly paradise, minus the interfering serpent; while the tree of knowledge—knowledge of the true state of affairs between Marina's heart and Anthony's—still stood untasted in the midst of the garden.

But trees of knowledge are not as a rule ordained to remain untasted for ever; and Marina's partaking of the mystic fruit fell out in this wise.

It was a hot, sultry evening late in the summer, and Anthony and Marina had gone out on the sea in a little boat in search of a breath of air; they had drifted into a conversation upon love in the abstract—a dangerously interesting subject when the concrete form is looming near.

"If I were a young man," said Anthony, "I wouldn't marry one of the fashionable girls of the period for all I was worth."

"But she would probably marry *you* for all you were worth," suggested Marina.

Armstrong laughed. "How sharp you are, child! However, I shouldn't be worth enough for it to be worth her while, and so I should find profit by losing of my purse, or rather, by the non-existence thereof."

"That," wisely remarked Marina, "would entirely depend upon how long your fashionable girl of the period had been 'out.' Have you ever attended the 'July sales' in London, when, toward the close of the summer, the prices are reduced? I think there are 'July sales' in more worlds than one, when the glory of summer is on the wane, and consequently there are 'great reductions' in price. I myself, for instance, were I a denizen of the world of fashion, should even now be ticketed with, say, one and elevenpence three-farthings, instead of my original two shillings, as I have certainly reached my July."

Armstrong looked at the laughing face as he smiled

at the audacious words; a woman with a face like that could afford to make fun of "July sales."

"Now if I can get just the article I want," continued Marina, "I am prepared to pay the full price for it, whether it is in July or December. Really good things don't grow old-fashioned—only rubbish. Which is a parable."

"But it is not always easy to find just the article one wants, is it?" asked Anthony. "Did you ever realize an ideal?"

"Yes," answered Marina, but so softly that her companion did not hear her.

"It is so difficult to realize an ideal all round," continued Armstrong, lapsing into a lecture (he was prone to lapse into lectures when not summarily prevented). "We find the perfection of one quality in one person, and of another in another, and so fail to discover an ideal unit. It was this feeling in early ages which caused the rise and spread of polytheism; if men and women could only excel in one thing at a time, said those wise old heathens, it would take an Olympus filled with gods and goddesses to represent all the virtues attainable by the human character."

"I see: one man one virtue, as the forerunner of one man one vote."

Armstrong pulled up short, looking shocked. "You make a joke of everything, Marina, and you ought not to do so."

So the lecture was taking a personal turn; Marina did not object to that so much.

"I am sorry that I have vexed you," she said meekly.

Anthony forgave the culprit on the spot. "I am

not vexed," he said (but he had been terribly near it), "I was only trying to improve your mind, my child."

"And reprove my manners," she said.

"I did not say so, or even think so. But you always misrepresent what I say, Marina, and it is not kind of you."

"If I sometimes, in my ignorance, fail to completely comprehend your occult meaning, my stupidity is my misfortune, not my fault, and ought to be pitied rather than blamed," demurely explained the young lady.

"But you do understand, and you wilfully misinterpret me—that is what I complain of," said Anthony, with some warmth.

"Well, I'd rather be a rogue than a fool any day—wouldn't you?" exclaimed the enemy, changing her front. Whereat they both laughed.

Then Marina continued more graciously: "But to return to *nos moutons;* I think it *is* possible to find all one's ideal qualities bound up in a single volume of humanity."

Her friend smiled and shook his head; he loved to listen to Marina's quaint ideas, though he hardly ever agreed with them.

"Now, I have an ideal man," she went on, "and my ideal is brave and good and true; clever and cultured in the deeper things of life, but careless of little social graces, and unlearned in the ways of the world; with the courage of a hero and the tenderness of a woman; old enough to have profited by life's experience, but not so old as to have lost the vigour and freshness of youth; outwardly so stern as to be feared, yet inwardly so gentle as to be loved."

Marina grew very pink as she said this. She was afraid that her companion would recognize his own portrait. But she need not have feared; humble-minded Anthony would as soon have confounded his photograph with the Apollo Belvedere, as perceived any resemblance between this gloriously-painted hero and himself.

"You will never find one man who combines all those virtues," he said.

"But I have found him," murmured Marina, while a wonderfully tender light shone in the grey-green eyes.

Anthony felt as if cold water had been poured down his back. So this beautiful woman, whose friendship he had valued so highly, had interests of her own into which he could not enter. Like so many of the friends of bygone years, she was about to plunge into the flowing stream of human love and happiness, and leave him, as the others had done, standing lonely upon the bank. It was hard, Anthony felt; and there came over him a rush of passionate longing for those dear old days when he, too, was counted among the doubles and not the singles. Marina interrupted his memories with a question:

"Haven't you an ideal woman?"

"Yes," replied Armstrong, his thoughts still wandering in the past.

"Then tell me what she is like," commanded the sea-queen imperiously.

Anthony obeyed her. "My ideal woman is sweet and shy and timid, with smooth dark hair and soft brown eyes." Marina looked up, astounded above measure; but Anthony continued without noticing her amazement: "More than thirty years ago I found my ideal—I, who pretend that ideals do not exist—and we were to

have been married, she and I. But she died just a week before the day that was to have been our wedding-day, and all women have been alike to me since. I do not know why I tell you this. It is more than twenty years since I spoke of it to any one; but you are so different from other people that I thought you would understand."

Marina's face had grown very white; but she was conscious of no feeling save a passion of bitter hatred for this woman who had been dead for thirty years.

"How old was she when she died?" she asked.

"Only eighteen, poor little girl!"

"Then," said Marina, with quiet scorn, "she was too young to understand such a love as yours."

"I think she understands it now," answered Anthony gently.

Marina was silent. Who was she that she dared despise a woman who had solved the two great secrets of the universe, Death and Love, thirty years ago? Wounded to the quick, she wrapped herself again in the mantle of cold cynicism, which, until she met Anthony Armstrong, had been her only wear; while he—good, stupid soul!—gazing at the proud pale face, understood why some people called Marina heartless; for surely, he thought, a tendèr and loving woman, who had found the fairy prince of her dreams, might have shown, in the midst of her own happiness, some sympathy with a friend's love-story.

During their conversation these two had not noticed that the breath of air, which they came on the water to seek, had developed into a strong wind; and even now the heavy rain began to fall, and the great storm was upon them. What a storm it was! It seemed impossible

for their little boat to live in such a sea, and yet the tiny bark held its own against the hungry waves, though the tempest seemed to increase in fury as the dark hours rolled on. Neither Anthony nor Marina spoke much, but they faced death calmly and were unafraid. At last one wave, huger and crueller than its predecessors, lifted the boat up to heaven, and then hurled it down into the depths beneath; and when the fragile bark righted itself after this tremendous shock Marina was nowhere to be seen—the great wave had carried her with it. In an agony of fear and sorrow Anthony, clinging to the side of the boat, called her name over and over again, and gazed wildly around for a glimpse of her form, that he might plunge in after her and either save her or perish in the attempt. But the shrieking storm drowned his cries, and the golden head never appeared again.

Slowly passed the dreadful summer's night, and morning light brought relief to Anthony; for some fishermen perceived his danger, and, as the storm was then abating, succeeded in bringing him safe to shore, speechless with distress and exhaustion, but not permanently any the worse for that terrible night's experience.

So ended Anthony Armstrong's summer holiday, and he went back to his work to be haunted ever after by a lovely, pale face, set in an aureole of waving yellow hair, and by an undying regret for that bright young life which had been so suddenly cut off in its noonday, while his grey head had passed through the ordeal unscathed. He often wondered how that ideal man, whom Marina had found and whose name he never knew, bore the loss of the woman who had loved him.

The rector did not long survive his adopted daughter

—life without her was so dreary that he gave it up altogether.

The tides ebbed and flowed at St. Aubyn's, but Marina's body was never washed ashore; and that, said the fisherfolk, was because she had not really been drowned, but had gone back to her own people.

HER HEART'S DESIRE

HER HEART'S DESIRE

PROLOGUE

AN angel (of those that excel in strength)
Looked down from above on the breadth and length
Of the ways of men, and he heard the cry
They raise from a world that is all awry:
"Oh! if we were happy, or rich, or great,
We would serve God well in our high estate;
But blank disappointment and black despair
Are handicaps greater than we can bear!"
And the angel said, "It is hard on these
That they can not serve God in the way they please:
If I straightened the crooked and smoothed the rough
The children of men would be righteous enough."
Then he prayed, "If only I might aspire
To give to one creature its heart's desire,
That creature would come of its own accord
With joy and thanksgiving to serve the Lord."

CHAPTER I

CONSTANCE GREY and Ethel Fisher were having tea with one of their many dearest friends, Maud Leslie.

"Yes," said Constance, "I'm glad I am engaged.

When a woman is over twenty-five, the dinners ordered by other people stick in her throat; she feels that it is high time for her to be numbered among the dinner-ordering powers. I am just the same as every other woman, and I, alas! am over twenty-five."

"That is so like Connie," murmured Maud; "she always vows she has the same thoughts and feelings as ninety-nine women out of every hundred, and that this is a comfort to her. Now it is a comfort to me to feel that I am different from other people, and that ninety-nine women out of every hundred would be utterly incapable of understanding my thoughts and feelings, even if I took the trouble to explain them."

"That's stuff," remarked Constance calmly. "Everybody is really the same as everybody else, and it is nonsense to pretend that they are not. I can't understand people who want to be peculiar. Some are so foolish that they actually like to have diseases which are unlike all other diseases, and they love to take out patents for their peculiar symptoms. Now for my part—if I must be ill—I like to have what all the world is having; it takes half the sting out of it. But you always were strained and sentimental, my dear Maud."

"You make everything so dull and commonplace," grumbled the offended Maud.

"On the contrary, I elevate the commonplace; I don't say that the beautiful is common, but that the common is beautiful—an entirely different thing. It is our most human and ordinary feelings that are the highest really—not the abnormal, melodramatic sensations, whereof we foolishly imagine we possess the copyright."

But Constance Grey's moral reflections were cut short by the footman's announcing "Major Glyn."

Miss Leslie duly welcomed the new arrival, introduced him to Ethel, and then apportioned to him a cup of tea and a seat by his *fiancée*. George Glyn was fully ten years older than Constance, but did not look it on account of his smart, soldierly bearing. He was an ordinary, brave, honourable, unintellectual English gentleman, who had retired from the army on succeeding to his uncle's estates, and had fallen over head and ears in love with brilliant Miss Grey; and Miss Grey was warmly congratulated by all her friends, in that so desirable a victim had become captive to her bow and spear; which bow and spear, her enemies added, had already seen good service, being by no means new weapons in the field.

"However did you find your way?" asked Constance pleasantly. "I made sure that you'd lose yourself in spite of all my directions."

"Oh! I managed it somehow, and got here all right."

"I feel sure that you did not inquire the way from anybody."

"No, I didn't."

"I was certain of it. Being a man, you would rather die than submit to the indignity of asking the road. I always ask everybody the road to everywhere; but I am a woman."

"Well, Connie, here I am, safe and sound, and—what is more important—punctual," observed the Major, laughing.

"And very clever it was of you," said Miss Grey encouragingly. "I think I shall write a letter about you to

The Spectator to swell the number of its interesting anecdotes on sagacity. You know the sort of thing:—

"'SIR,—I have had a pet lover for only a few weeks, but already his sagacity and intelligence are remarkable. The other afternoon I ordered him to follow me to a friend's house, supplying him with merely the vaguest directions. Although the neighbourhood was entirely new to him, and I had an hour's start, he found his way without a mistake, and arrived at the front door punctually in time for tea. I have several friends who will vouch for the truth of this story.

"'I am, sir, etc.,

"'C. GREY.'"

Major Glyn smiled in delighted admiration, and the two girls laughed out.

"I expect it will cause quite a little flutter of interest in the scientific world," continued Constance, "and that I shall receive heaps of letters from maiden ladies inquiring the address of the fancier from whom I procured my pet, as they will be wishful to possess specimens of so intelligent an animal."

The conversation rippled on for another half-hour, and then Major Glyn and Miss Grey started on their homeward walk. As soon as they had left the room, the remaining couple—as was inevitable—began to discuss them.

"He is a very nice man," said Maud; "really good and all that, don't you know? But I don't believe that Connie appreciates him. Of course she is awfully pleased at making such a brilliant match, but she isn't an atom in love."

"She'll never care for anybody as she cared for Sydney Thorne," remarked Ethel with conviction. "She was thoroughly in love with him, and stuck to him for years. I wonder what made her sheer off at last."

"I know; she said she had reached the age when ninety-nine women out of every hundred want homes of their own, so a home of her own she felt she must have. You see, Sydney was awfully clever, and she was devoted to him, but he couldn't afford to marry. He tried for the appointment of Chief Constable of the county, and Constance told me that she should decide by that; if he succeeded, she should marry Sydney at once; but if he failed, she wouldn't wait any longer for something to turn up, but should accept Major Glyn who was even then tremendously in love with her. As you know, Sydney failed to get the appointment—I suppose because he was a barrister and not a military man; and Connie accepted Major Glyn."

"I think it is a pity she did not wait a little longer," said Ethel. "Sydney Thorne is so clever and so is Connie, and they would suit each other admirably. My father says that Sydney is sure to succeed in the literary world, as well as in his profession, if he will only wait patiently, as even now his novels are considered of unusual merit. Constance would have loved a literary lion as a husband."

"Constance would have loved Sydney anyhow if she could have had him, and she was frightfully cut up about that Chief Constableship. But she was very philosophical. She told me that a great man had said that 'Politics is the science of the second-best,' but she had learned that life is the science of the second-best; so she would

therefore take the second-best and make the best of it, so to speak."

"Do you think Sydney minded?"

"Oh, yes! he minded dreadfully, and so did Connie. But what could they do? I really can't blame the dear girl myself—nor would you if you had seen how she cried over the Chief Constableship."

"I think if she had cried less and waited more it would have been better," persisted severe little Ethel.

"You are horribly hard on Connie—I don't believe you really like her."

"Yes, Maud, I do like her—I like her immensely, and she fascinates me extremely; but I don't believe in her. I always feel that she is a graceful and charming performance, and one that it is a pleasure to look at; but I never feel that there is a real, living, loving, suffering woman behind her mask. Did you ever read the account of a thrilling occurrence in a newspaper, only to find at the end that the heroes thereof had been saved from blood-curdling perils and overwhelming catastrophes by the judicious use of somebody's Soap or somebody else's Extract of Coffee or another man's Safe Cure; and that you had been wasting your time and sympathy in wading through an advertisement? Now I always feel that Connie is like that: she is very clever and taking and interesting at first, but when you get to the end of her you find she is nothing but an advertisement after all—an advertisement of her own excellences. She is often very kind and says really nice things, and when she has been posing in a specially sweet and amiable manner I always long to exclaim, 'Call a spade a spade, and Miss Constance Grey perfection!'"

Her Heart's Desire

Within two months of Maud Leslie's tea-party Constance Grey was married to George Glyn amid the ringing of bells and the flourish of trumpets. It was a fashionable wedding, followed by a fashionable honeymoon at the house of a neighbouring peer, who had kindly lent them his abode for the occasion: and then Major and Mrs. Glyn settled down at Handilands, their beautiful country place, and began to live the easy, luxurious, uneventful life of the English upper classes. At first Constance, with her pretty wit and boundless ambition, thought she should die of dulness in the conventional decorum of her new home; but, contrary to her expectations, she didn't die; and (which was more remarkable) she began to forget her former dreams of doing great things in the literary world with Sydney at her elbow, and to find that she was adapting herself with wonderful facility to the dreaded decorum. True, she felt that something passed out of her life when she parted from Sydney, which nothing else could quite make up to her. But, though she knew she had missed the best in life, she realized that the second-best was by no means a thing to be despised; and she sensibly decided that if she could not have what she liked, she would like what she had. Her husband bored her a little at times; he had a dreary habit of finishing to the bitter end every sentence on which he embarked, and to a brilliant woman like Constance, who knew from a word what people were going to say, and whose favourite form of conversation was a series of hints, this was rather terrible. She found George's lengthy speeches and long-drawn out anecdotes tedious in the extreme; but she was very fond of him on the whole, and immensely flattered by his absorbing de-

votion to herself. Admiration was as the breath of life to Constance; and George meted it out even more unsparingly than Sydney had done. But Mrs. Glyn's peace was ordained to be abruptly broken.

"Connie," asked Major Glyn one day, "suppose you had injured a person and he did not know it, should you feel bound to confess what you had done?"

"Certainly not," replied Constance. "I have no patience with people who are always confessing things. If a person does not know that he has been injured, why should you tell him so? 'Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise,' my dear George."

"Still it seems dishonourable, somehow, to let anyone think you are better than you are," murmured the Major doubtfully.

His wife looked at him in surprise. "People always think me better than I am," she said: "I should hate them if they didn't. I like to play to the gallery, and I can not endure anyone in the stage-box seeing how I do it."

"But you are different, darling; nobody could think you better than you are, because you are perfect to begin with."

"You remind me," mused Mrs. Glyn, ignoring this last remark, "of a girl I knew at school, who pulled up a whole class to confess to the teacher that her attention had wandered during the last five minutes. I despised that girl."

"Of course it was a stupid thing to do, but I think I understand what made her do it," said the Major.

"Well, I'm thankful to say I don't," replied his matter-of-fact wife. "I never understood folly."

"But I say, Connie," persisted George, pulling his moustache and looking very miserable; "I once did you a dirty trick, and it has made me wretched ever since. I can't bear you to go on liking me, knowing nothing about it."

If poor George had known how small a place he occupied in Connie's heart, he would not have experienced any qualms about accepting so modest a domain; but the foolish fellow judged his wife by himself, wherein he showed his ignorance of women in general and of Mrs. Glyn in particular.

Constance raised her pretty eyebrows. "Did *me* a dirty trick, George! What on earth are you talking about?"

"And somehow, don't you know? I feel as if I couldn't drag on any longer without telling you."

Mrs. Glyn smiled, and settled herself to hear her husband's confession. It bored her a good deal: but now she was so accustomed to being bored by George, that she could bear it beautifully; and then she had the grace to feel he was so good and true of heart, that the least she could do was to suffer him gladly when he was more than usually foolish.

"I'm listening, dear," she said sweetly. "Fire away!"

"I say, Con, do you remember when that clever fellow, Thorne, tried for the Chief Constableship?" began George, in his clumsy, blundering way.

Constance was attentive enough now. "Of course," she replied, in a queer, strained voice.

"Well, then, he would have got the appointment if I had given my vote in his favour: but I used all my in-

fluence against him, and proved to the other magistrates that he was not suited to the place because he was a civilian. But that wasn't the real reason."

Constance's face had grown very hard and white, but she did not speak.

"I know I was a brute," continued Major Glyn, his voice breaking; "and I could almost shoot myself for having behaved like such a low cad, but I heard a rumour that if Thorne got the place you and he would marry; and I could not bear the idea of giving you up to that book-writing fellow."

But still Constance did not speak.

"I know you are disgusted with me," went on George, his voice trembling more and more. "and I well deserve it. But I could not go on any longer without telling you. I was mad for love of you, Connie, and that was how it happened. If I hadn't been mad, I couldn't have done such a thing. But you'll forgive me, won't you, darling? I know you didn't really care for Thorne; for if you had, you'd never have looked at me, and you'd have stuck to him through thick and thin. You're just that sort. And I'm sure you're much happier here with everything you want, than you would have been writing books in a garret with Thorne. I say, Con, speak to me, and say it is all right. I can't bear you to look at me like that."

And then Constance spoke. "You mean hound!" she said in a low, thrilling voice. "You unspeakably contemptible cur! If I had had any idea of this, I would have died sooner than marry you. You are right in supposing that I should never have looked at you if I could have had Sydney Thorne. But he was too poor to

marry; though we should have done so at once had he got that appointment. You plotted well, Major Glyn, and your plans turned out as you intended. I congratulate you on your success! Will I forgive you, do you ask? People do not forgive cads—they despise them too much for so high a thing as forgiveness to be possible. But I will tolerate you—that is all you can expect. As your wife and mistress of your house, I will look well to the ways of your household, and will entertain your guests: but I will never speak another word more than is necessary to you as long as I live. I have only one life, and you have spoilt it—and I might have been so happy if it hadn't been for you. Oh! George, how could you—how could you?"

And then poor Connie buried her face in her hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Major Glyn stood looking at his wife for a moment as if stupefied; and then—feeling that he had no right to comfort her, though he would have given his life to be able to do so—he stumbled out of the room, blinded by an agony of remorse, and not caring whither he went.

From that time George Glyn's punishment began, and sometimes he felt it was greater than he could bear. Constance was always polite to him—always indifferent. Never again was she betrayed into saying an angry word to her husband; but though she no longer chastised him with the lash of her tongue, her silent scorn stung him like a scorpion. Gladly would he have exchanged her coldness for some fiercer feeling: but it was too late. Constance also was unhappy, though not quite as miserable as she fancied she was. She was still smarting from the discovery that she had missed her ideal happiness

only by a neck; but her heart was not smashed up to the extent that she believed: partly because Mrs. Glyn's heart was not nearly as brittle as she supposed, and partly because a fat sorrow is always more endurable than a lean one, especially to a pleasure-loving nature such as hers. In time Constance began again to derive a chastened pleasure from her goods and her chattels and the strangers within her gates; and the house-parties at Handilands were once more delightful to every one but the host; toward him Constance was as adamant. She was perfectly conscious of his abject devotion to her—of his agonizing remorse for what he had done; but she relented not one whit. Constance felt that her husband had slain her better self—or, rather, that the better self which a happy marriage would have called into being, was now doomed by him never to see the sun. And she mourned this might-have-been self accordingly; not knowing—in her foolishness and ignorance—that virtues which are slain by adverse circumstances are growths too feeble to be called virtues at all; and that people who fail to make the best of themselves because of the disappointments and disillusions which darken their lot, would fail equally though fortune smiled on them, and legions of good fairies fought on their side. Circumstances can not really mar a man's character, although they may spoil his life. But Constance Glyn had not learnt this. Every time she heard of Sydney Thorne's successes in the literary world (and Sydney had written several popular novels by this time), she hardened her heart still further against her husband: and consequently her husband had a bad time of it.

"What a good woman I might have been," she said

to herself, "if only I could have chosen my own lot! With Sydney to help me, my better, higher nature would have developed; for it is love, and love only, that teaches a woman to be unselfish and true and good. Now I shall grow into a hard, shallow, worldly woman, unloving and unloved. I am handicapped heavily in the race of life. Surely I am not to blame if I never now realize that ideal which, in other circumstances, would have been possible to me. Everything is in a horrid jumble, and the world is all awry. I must make the best of a bad bargain; but Providence has made my lot too hard for me."

CHAPTER II

It came to pass one spring—about five years after Constance's marriage—that Major Glyn went yachting in the Mediterranean. He had not been very strong all winter, but the doctor assured him that a cruise in the sunny south would set him up completely; so to the sunny south he went. He meekly suggested to his wife how delightful he should find it if she accompanied him; but Mrs. Glyn nipped this daring suggestion in the bud, and definitely decided to dwell among her own people while her husband was seeking health on distant shores; and the Major had not the spirit to press the matter. But just before he started he screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and ventured to mention once again to his wife the tabooed subject of their quarrel.

"I say, Connie," he began shyly; "one never knows what may turn up on these voyages, and I do wish you'd

forgive me before I go. I've never ceased to be sorry for what I did, and I think you might make it up now. Heaven knows my punishment has been hard enough; and even a criminal is pardoned when he has served his time."

"I never know what *forgiveness* means," replied Constance coldly. "If you ask me whether I am still so bitter against you that I have any wish to injure you as you injured me, I tell you, no—a thousand times no. I have no intention of punishing you—I have long ceased to care whether you are punished or not. If you were tortured, it would not help me one atom. You do me an injustice, George, when you think me so vindictive. But if by *forgiveness* you mean do I love and respect you as I should have loved and respected you had you never done this thing, again I say, no. How can I? What once we know we always know; and now as long as I live I shall know how cruelly and meanly you once behaved to me."

"How hard you are!" groaned Major Glyn, bowing his head on his arm.

"But, George," continued Constance more kindly, "I should like you to know that I have not been altogether blinded by my anger against you; I have seen how good you have been to me in other ways, and I have not been ungrateful. When first you told me what you had done, I thought I could never be happy any more; but after a time I forgot how much I had cared for Sydney, and, owing to your unceasing kindness, I became contented in a blind kind of way. I am contented now. You killed the Constance who used to be so gloriously happy and so utterly miserable in the old days; and the

Constance who took her place is neither happy nor miserable. She does not love you or anybody else; but she is quite satisfied with her position as your wife, and she is wishful that you may forget as nearly as she has done the 'old, unhappy, far-off things' which made you and her so wretched once upon a time."

And with that scanty comfort George Glyn had to be content. Nevertheless this conversation brought the two nearer together than they had been before; and during George's cruise in the Mediterranean he and Constance wrote longer and nicer letters to each other than they had written since their quarrel.

When Major Glyn had been absent for about a month he wrote to tell his wife how he had found his old enemy, Sydney Thorne, lying sick of a fever in a dirty little foreign town, and how he had removed the invalid to his own yacht and was nursing him himself. On hearing this, Mrs. Glyn admired her husband more than she had thought it possible that she could ever admire anybody again. Then there came accounts of how well the sick man was going on now that he was properly looked after; then for a little time there came no accounts at all; and then there arrived a note from Sydney Thorne himself, saying that Major Glyn had caught the fever, but that everything was being done for him that was possible, and begging Mrs. Glyn not to worry herself. Mrs. Glyn followed Sydney's advice—she was not given to worrying herself about anything, especially about her husband; but gradually the reports of Major Glyn's health grew more and more serious; and finally, one bright day, when the spring had almost grown up into summer, there came a preparatory telegram, followed by a sorrowful letter

from Sydney, telling how George Glyn had quietly passed away, "babbling o' green fields" and calling upon Connie to the very last.

Constance Glyn mourned for her husband with a sorrow that was by no means hopeless. She patted herself upon the back for having spoken to him kindly before his departure, and written to him still more kindly afterward; and when she found that he had left her sole mistress of his large estate and handsome fortune, she felt still more glad that she had thanked him for his goodness to her before he went away. And so George Glyn's time on earth was ended, and the place which had known him knew him no more.

Eighteen months after the Major's death, Sydney Thorne and Constance Glyn were sitting together at Handilands in the garden. Constance had put off her weeds and was making ready to put on a new woman, viz., Mrs. Sydney Thorne; for she and her old lover had at last found all the obstacles to their union swept away, and felt that for them—as for the folk in the fairy tales—there was to be a marrying and a living happy ever afterward. They were both very radiant, and could hardlv realize the fact that, after all the long years of hope apparently dead, the desire of their hearts had come at last to be a tree of life growing in the midst of an earthly paradise. The hard look had vanished from Constance's face and the bitter one from Sydney's, and they were now like a pair of happy children.

Mrs. Glyn had begun to tell Sydney how her husband had come between them in the matter of the Chief Constableship; but Sydney had stopped her recital with the information that George had already told him the

whole story, and that he never wished it mentioned again in his presence as long as he lived.

"And did you forgive him?" asked Constance in surprise.

"Of course I did. I daresay I should have done the same in his place, poor fellow!"

"Oh! no, you wouldn't," cried Constance. "You are incapable of doing anything mean or cowardly."

"Don't, darling!" said Sydney, wincing at her thoughtless words. "I can not bear to hear you say anything showing a shadow of disloyalty to poor George's memory."

"Can't you?—not even when it proves how much fonder I am of you? How funny!"

"Oh! don't, Connie," cried Sydney, turning away. So Connie "didn't," because she perceived that it vexed him, though how and why it vexed him she hadn't the ghost of an idea.

"If Syd had married anybody before me," thought Constance, "I should like to hear him say he hadn't cared for her one bit; it would be the greatest comfort to me. But men are so queer."

Although Mrs. Glyn failed to understand men's peculiarities, she knew enough of them to see that it was now high time to change the subject, so she began:

"Syd, are you sure that you like me well enough to do anything I wanted?"

"Yes, Connie, anything."

"Would you go to the length of altering the shape of your collars?"

Sydney laughed. "Certainly. But what is wrong

with my collars that makes you think a change therein so advisable?"

"Nothing is wrong with your collars—I only used the word *collars* as a modern instance. The thing about you that really distresses me is your necktie."

"What on earth is the matter with it?" inquired the devoted swain, vainly endeavouring—by means of a violent squint—to catch a glimpse of the offending garment.

"It is red," replied Connie, with decision; "and I loathe red ties."

"I am so sorry, sweetheart; I will straightway dispossess myself of the red rag and destroy it, so as not to offend my lady's taste again. But why didn't you mention this before?"

"I didn't like to—I couldn't tell how you'd take it. I should be simply furious, you see, if you found fault with anything I wore."

"Well, I am not in the least furious; I only regret that for so long a time I have resembled 'young Laurence' in the poem when he wore—

> "'That across his throat
> Which you had hardly cared to see.'

What colours would you care to see for the future across my throat? Say the word, and the colour shall be worn, even though it be one that turns the interesting pallor of my complexion to a green and yellow melancholy."

"My favourite ties are navy-blue, or navy-blue spotted white."

"All right—so be it; henceforth I will appear before men clad in the guise my lady loves, so that she may

thereby her true-love know from another one. In proof of the fact that your foot is upon my neck, I will (to adapt the poet)—

" 'Set the jewel-print of your feet
In neckties blue as your eyes.'

Could man do more?"

"That is very nice of you."

"No nicer than setting the jewel-print, &c., in neckties as red as your mouth. The two compliments are equal."

"Oh! no, they are not. My eyes are much more important than my mouth, you see, because it is two to one—a good working majority—and the wishes of the majority ought always to be paramount."

"Then am I to believe that which your eyes say rather than that which you utter for my instruction by word of mouth?"

"They all say the same thing to you, namely that I love you."

Whereupon Sydney promptly bestowed upon the minority member sundry tokens of his appreciation of the sentiments of the good working majority, and the majority appeared to be eminently satisfied.

Shortly after this Sydney Thorne and Constance Glyn were married, and went abroad for a month's trip. Constance had a very happy time at first, and found her husband a most delightful companion. She thought she should never grow tired of hearing him talk, and of reading his books, and of looking over his manuscripts; but—contrary to her expectations—she did grow tired of all these things; and was moreover increasingly con-

scious of being mentally always on tip-toe when she was with Sydney, which consciousness became very fatiguing.

Then they spent two months in London, where Constance was duly introduced to all Sydney's literary friends. It had been the dream of Connie's life to meet people who, as she said, "did things"; but in her dream the people who "did things" were somehow always inferior to herself, and offered freely the savour of their talents as sweet incense on her shrine. Now—when her dream was realized—the clever people turned out to be cleverer than she, which Constance felt was an intolerable impertinence on their part; and it never seemed to occur to them to raise a shrine to Mrs. Thorne at all—much less to offer up incense on the same. Connie had fully appreciated the fact that poor George had been known in his circle as "Mrs. Glyn's husband"; but she felt less pleasure now that the positions were reversed, and she was tolerated in society as "Sydney Thorne's wife." True, this circle was more brilliant than the former one: but Mrs. Thorne considered that serving in desirable places was poor fun compared with ruling even in very inferior ones—an opinion not without a precedent.

Another surprising thing was that the good and wonderful Constance, who was to have been brought into existence by the genial atmosphere of a heart's desire attained, never put in an appearance at all. Connie was just as selfish and discontented (she called it being just as lonely and as much misunderstood) under Sydney's *régime* as under George's. She put it down to the fact that Sydney was not so sympathetic and appreciative as she had imagined: it never occurred to her that the fault

lay—as it had lain all along—not in the man beside her, but in the woman inside her. It is difficult for more people than Constance to understand that the cure for their faults must be inwardly applied: they are so prone to take refuge in remedies "for outward application only."

After the Thornes left town they paid a round of visits to country houses, which Sydney found somewhat of a bore, but which Constance infinitely preferred to the battle of wits with the lions of London; for the easy and unintellectual life of the ordinary country house was the atmosphere in which she had hitherto lived and moved and had her being. Finally the pair brought their wanderings to a close, and settled at Handilands for the winter; where Sydney intended to write a new book, and where Constance meant to return to that trivial round of little social pleasures and duties, which she aforetime considered irksome in the extreme, but for which of late she had begun to feel homesick. Mrs. Thorne enjoyed her return to the beaten paths amazingly; but her husband soon grew weary of them, and suggested either a run up to London or an importation of his friends to relieve the tedium. Constance decided in favour of the latter alternative (she hated London in the winter); so a house-party of Sydney's special literary cronies was bidden to Handilands. Constance resented the fact that her husband was not a sportsman, as she had been brought up in the faith that sport is the first duty of man.

"It is such a pity you can't kill anything," she complained; "you'd never find the country dull if you did."

"Well, I can't, you see—I can't even kill time—so its dulness does somewhat depress me," was the reply.

Therefore Mrs. Thorne felt it her duty to fill her

house with the people whom she detested and Sydney loved; and she did it with the best grace she could muster.

"By the by, Con," said Sydney the day before the arrival of the visitors, "you needn't mind about always dressing for dinner while these people are here. Old Sandford (the chap who writes those clever novels, don't you know?) hates the bother of rigging himself out in evening dress every night; so I'll tell him he can put on a smoking-jacket and it won't matter."

"Not mind about dressing for dinner?" said Constance in amazement. "I don't know what you mean."

"I only mean that such a literary swell as Sandford can't be bothered with a lot of silly little conventionalities. It is a great honour that he has consented to visit us, I can tell you; so we will make it Liberty Hall to suit him. Of course we can all be neat and tidy, but the men can dine in their smoking-coats, and the women can wear tea-gowns instead of all their low dresses and diamonds and things. Don't you see?"

"No, I don't see. We *must* dress for dinner."

"On what compulsion must we?—tell me that," quoted Sydney.

"The servants will think it so queer if we don't."

"Who cares for the servants or what they think? It is no business of theirs."

"They will think it so awfully queer, and will tell about it to other servants, and then people will talk."

"What on earth does it matter whether people talk or not? Darling, you are foolish."

"No, I'm not: it is you who are foolish, Sydney—foolish and impracticable."

"Besides, it is quite possible that Sandford may prefer to dine quite early—about five or six o'clock—so that he may work all evening at his coming book: and I know Mrs. Morgan, the poetess, would infinitely rather have a 'high tea' sometimes than that long, dreary function you call dinner. A 'high tea' is her favourite meal. She told me once that indulging in a 'high tea' was like falling in love with a man who had no money: it was an open defiance of all society's traditions, and would probably disagree with you afterward—but all the same it was delicious at the time. Therefore let us give Mrs. Morgan her heart's desire now and then: and in that case no one could expect us to don all our war-paint."

"Mr. Sandford can't dine early here, Sydney: it would be too queer, and I'm sure the servants and the neighbours would make unpleasant remarks upon it. And I wouldn't have such a vulgar thing as a 'high tea' in my house to please a hundred Mrs. Morgans."

"Of course you are mistress in your own house, Connie; but it is silly to be influenced so completely by what the neighbours and the servants may say. Surely the opinion of two of the most gifted writers of the day, such as Mr. Sandford and Mrs. Morgan, is of as much importance as the opinion of your footman and of Mrs. Mortimer, the vicar's wife; at least I should have thought so. Moreover, vulgarity is not a matter of lunches and dinners and teas, but of thoughts and words and works. I hate vulgarity as much as you do, Connie; but I hate conventionality almost more: in fact I am not sure that conventionality isn't a form of vulgarity. Of course you must do as you like about the time and the manner of meals in your own house: it is a question in which I have

no right to interfere. But one wish I must express, which is that on the night of the dinner-party Sandford shall take you in to dinner, and not that ass, Sir Vincent Dashwood."

"That is quite impossible, Sydney."

"Why impossible, if I wish it?"

"Because Sir Vincent is a baronet and Mr. Sandford is only a——"

"Genius of the highest rank, and one of the most distinguished men of the age: and therefore I insist that at my table he shall take precedence of the son of a successful brewer."

"You are very silly and tiresome, Sydney."

"Am I? I am sorry, dear. But I will hear reason, although I am only that unreasonable being, a man. You shall have your own way about the times and seasons of the meals—you shall eat and drink and make merry at the most orthodox hours to which the clock can point—if you will in return do honour to Sandford at the expense of Dashwood."

"Very well," grumbled Constance; "of course I shall have to give in: but you are extremely ignorant and stupid all the same."

"Well, darling, we needn't quarrel about it; though I own it is incomprehensible to me how a clever and cultured woman like yourself can be in bondage to such trifling considerations as what the servants and neighbours will say. If I do what I think to be right, I am profoundly indifferent to any remark to which my conduct may give rise; and I fail to comprehend why you do not feel as I do. But, like the lady in the poem, though 'I can not understand, I love.'"

And, kissing his wife, Sydney went out of the room.

After he had gone Constance stood looking for a long time into the mirror over the fireplace, wrapped in thought, and with a puzzled frown upon her pretty forehead.

"I believe I liked poor George best after all," she said to herself with a disappointed sigh. "But oh! what a good woman I might have been if only my lot had been different. Sydney is so tiresome and inconsiderate that it is impossible to be amiable with him; but poor George was so patient and thoughtful and well-bred that he made every one about him good-tempered. It is good-breeding, and good-breeding only, that makes the wheels of life run smoothly. When George was here I was always calm and cool and pleasant; but now I shall grow into an impatient, irritable, old hag. These highly intellectual, conversational people drive me nearly off my head, and bring out the worst side of me. They despise me for being stupid, and I despise them for not being smart. I am heavily handicapped in the race of life. Surely I am not to blame if I am not as sweet and amiable as I should have been under more congenial circumstances: but it is tiresome to find one's self falling short of one's ideals, and all through some one else's fault. I suppose I must make the best of a bad bargain: but Providence has made my lot too hard for me."

EPILOGUE

An angel (of those that excel in strength)
Looked down from above on the breadth and length
Of the ways of men; and he sadly sighed,
" A failure indeed was the course I tried.
Not glorious summers nor cloudless morns
Can draw figs from thistles or grapes from thorns:
'Tis not talents withheld from his lifetime's plan,
But the thoughts of the heart that defile a man.
The mean and the worthless would prove the same
Under blessing or ban: yet they lay the blame
On their lowly positions or lack of parts,
And not where 'tis due, on their evil hearts."

POOR LADY LEIGH

POOR LADY LEIGH

I CAN remember it all as distinctly as if it had happened only yesterday.

"Why on earth does Leigh shut up his wife in this absurd way?" exclaimed my brother, Dr. Brown, impatiently. "It is most ridiculous!"

"I have ceased to wonder at it," I replied. "It is now two years since Sir Laurence brought his American bride home, and not a soul has set eyes on her save the old servants at Leigh Court. I'd almost forgotten her existence, and his too, for the matter of that, for one never meets him anywhere."

"It is most ridiculous!" repeated the irate young doctor.

"Perhaps she is an invalid," I suggested.

"I don't think so. She never sees a doctor, and when one inquires after her ladyship, Sir Laurence always says she is well."

"She may be out of her mind, then."

"Not she. He has heaps of books brought down from London for her; and lunatics don't care for all the newest novels, my dear Margaret."

"Why are you so particularly keen on the subject today?" I asked. "It is no new thing."

"Well, the fact is," explained Dick confidentially,

"that Leigh happened to be in the club to-day, and a miniature fell out of his pocket and rolled to where I was sitting. In returning it to him I made some remark about its not being injured by the fall, and he said he was glad of it, as it was a portrait of his wife, painted not long before her marriage. He is such a proud, reserved beggar that one daren't ask him any questions."

"What was the portrait like?" I asked with much interest.

"Like the loveliest face you ever saw in your life—a face to dream of—an angel's face!" exclaimed Dick rapturously.

"Dark or fair?"

"Golden hair and a fair complexion," answered my brother, "and the most glorious eyes you can imagine, with dark brows and lashes. You never saw anything so exquisite. It is a thundering shame, I say, for a man to have such a beautiful wife as that and to shut her up out of every one's sight!"

And then Dick went on his rounds, banging the door after him in futile rage against the master of Leigh Court.

Dick had bought a practice in the quaint little town of Linley. As he was a bachelor, I had come to keep house for him, and we had been very happy together for over three years. After the noise and bustle of a large family, I enjoyed the repose and importance of being the mistress of Dick's house, and if ever I felt dull I could always go home for a few days to be cheered up again. Although Linley was a sleepy old town, there was a fair amount of quiet visiting going on, which Dick and I found very pleasant. The only big place in the neighbourhood was Leigh Court, a handsome but rather deso-

late house, surrounded by a fine estate, about five miles from Linley. It was empty during the first year of our sojourn in the little town, Sir Laurence Leigh, the present baronet, having been abroad for some years. He had no near relatives living; and gossip said that he was too much of a rover ever to settle down in the dull, country home he had inherited from his father. Then the news came that Sir Laurence was going to be married to some great American beauty; and after that there were rumours of a quarrel between him and a rejected rival. All Linley was agog to see the bride when at last she came home to Leigh Court, but, strange to say, no one from outside was ever permitted to set eyes on her. This was a nine days' wonder at the time, but after a while people grew tired of talking about the Leighs, and almost forgot their existence, for her ladyship never appeared at all, and Sir Laurence received any overtures from his neighbours so coldly that such overtures were not long continued. The baronet was civil to every one in his stately way, but no one had been admitted to anything approaching friendship with the master of Leigh Court. I had seen him out riding several times, but I did not pay much attention to him, he was so dull and heavy looking, I thought; and though my interest in Lady Leigh was revived by Dick's description of her beauty, the little duties and pleasures of my busy life soon drove her out of my thoughts again. I read in the Peerage that Sir Laurence Leigh, fifth baronet, married Laura, only daughter of Ralph Vanden, Esq., of Virginia, U. S. A., and with that scanty information I thought I should have to be content. But subsequent events proved otherwise.

One day it happened that I went with Dick on his rounds for the sake of the drive, and as we approached Leigh Court we met a man on horseback riding as hard as he could. He pulled up on meeting us, and said:

"If you please, Dr. Brown, I was coming to fetch you. Sir Laurence Leigh has had an accident, and is badly hurt."

We at once hurried on to the Court, the man riding beside us; and on our way we learned from him that Sir Laurence had been thrown in his own park by a new horse he was trying for the first time, and had been carried home unconscious. On reaching the house we found everything in confusion, the devoted old servants being completely upset by this accident to their master. As Dick was hurrying to Sir Laurence's room he said to me:

"You had better go to Lady Leigh, Margaret, and find out if you can do anything for her. They have not let her see her husband yet, I hear, and I am sure she needs a friend now."

And then he went to his patient and left me alone.

The fine old house had a very desolate appearance. The Leighs only kept a few faithful old servants, and these were all crowding round their master, trying to revive him from his unconscious condition, so I had to find my own way to her ladyship's apartments. Luckily the first passage I tried was the right one, and took me into a dainty little ante-chamber leading to a larger and even more elegant room beyond. The rest of the house, as I said, had a bare and deserted appearance, but there was no trace of anything of that kind here. I had never seen such an exquisitely furnished room in my life be-

fore; no expense had been spared to increase its luxury and beauty, and it was made still lovelier by the rare hothouse flowers which filled every available space. It was a room fit for a queen. All this I took in at a glance, and then my attention was absorbed by the sole occupant of this fairy chamber. A tall and very graceful woman was standing with her back toward me; her figure was perfect, and the pose of her small head most queenly, while the luxuriant hair coiled round and round that dainty little head was of a beautiful golden colour.

"How lovely!" was my mental ejaculation; then I said aloud:

"Lady Leigh!"

Immediately the golden head was turned round, and I saw, oh, horror! the most awful face it has ever been my lot to behold—a dreadful, distorted, hideous face, hardly human in its deformity. There seemed no shape in it, no features; and the contrast between this terrible visage and the lovely, girlish form beneath it was too ghastly for description. At first I felt that I must scream, but by a strong effort I controlled myself, and I heard a sweet voice saying pleadingly:

"What is the matter? I do not know your voice. Tell me, please, who you are?"

And, as Lady Leigh approached me with groping, outstretched hands, I saw that she was blind.

I at once explained my presence to the poor lady, and told her of her husband's accident—of which she had not yet heard—making as light of it as I could. She was not as much alarmed as I expected, and never expressed a wish to go to Sir Laurence. She seemed to be one of those selfish, easy-going people who never trouble

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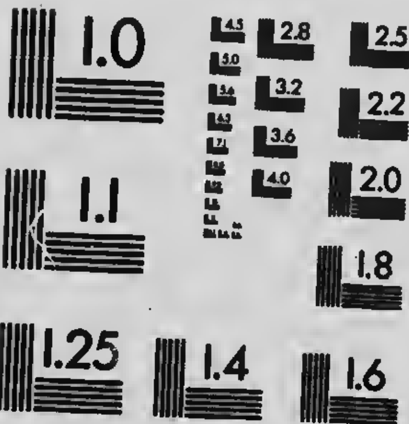

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much about anybody except themselves, and she soon turned the conversation from her husband to herself. She was so pleased to have somebody fresh to speak to that she did not notice the horror which I tried in vain to keep out of my voice whenever I looked at that awful face.

"I am so glad that you have come," she said. "It is so dreadfully dull here, and Laurence never will let me have any one to see me. Isn't it cruel of him? Here am I—only twenty-two—shut up in this prison, with no one to speak to but my husband and his old nurse, Emma."

"But do you want to have people to see you?" I asked in wonder, thinking that if I had a face like that I would hide myself for ever from human gaze.

"Of course I do," answered her ladyship. "I had such a gay life at home in Virginia that I feel the change all the more. It is stupid of Laurence, I think, to be such a recluse! Of course he is very good to me, and spends most of his time in reading to me and trying to make me forget my blindness; but I'd rather he would go out more and let me have a little change of society."

"Do you ever go out?" I asked.

"Only in the garden," answered Lady Leigh pettishly: "Laurence takes me out walking every day when it is fine, but that is as dull as staying in. It is bad enough to be blind, without making matters worse by becoming a hermit into the bargain."

Here we were interrupted by the old nurse, who came to report to Lady Leigh my brother's opinion of Sir Laurence. Dick had informed her of my presence, so she showed no surprise at finding me there, but I detected

a shade of annoyance under her respectful manner. She brought word that Sir Laurence had regained consciousness, and that Dr. Brown said, with perfect quiet and careful nursing, he would be all right in a week or two. The doctor had sent his trap back to Linley for some medicine, and would remain with Sir Laurence until its return.

"Then you must stay with me, Miss Brown," chimed in Lady Leigh, "till you can drive back with your brother. Bring us some tea, Emma, at once."

And the old woman withdrew to fulfil her mistress's order.

Then this strange being made me sit beside her and tell her all about Linley, and what the people were like, and how we managed to amuse ourselves in such a dead-alive place.

"Oh, how I wish I could see you!" she said at last; "it is terrible to be blind!"

"Have you always been blind?" I asked, my curiosity growing stronger than my good manners; but Lady Leigh was always ready to talk about herself, so did not object to my impertinence.

"Oh, no!" she answered. "I will tell you how it happened. People said that I was the prettiest girl in Virginia, so of course I had a lovely time and lots of admiration. I was first engaged to a Mr. Abela, a half-Spaniard, but threw him over when I met Laurence. He was a very dark man, with a vile temper, and he vowed he would be revenged. One lovely evening—it was the last sunset I ever saw, so I can remember it distinctly—Laurence and I were saying good-night to each other in the garden at home; and just as Laurence was kissing

ine Mr. Abela fired at us from behind a tree. After that I can not remember anything for weeks and weeks; but when I recovered consciousness again I found that Laurence had been but slightly hurt, while I was permanently blind. Wasn't it cruel? And I was only nineteen. At first I was afraid I had lost my beauty as well as my sight, and then I wanted to die; but when Laurence came to see me, and told me that he thought me as pretty as ever, I felt such a weight taken off my mind. I had always thought so much of my beauty, that I felt I could not lose it and live. But Laurence was so lovely to me all the time I was getting better, that I quite ceased to miss my favourite occupation of looking at myself in the glass. It is like poetry to hear Laurence tell you how charming you are! By the way, are you pretty?"

"No," I truthfully answered; "I only wish I were!"

"Never mind," said Lady Leigh soothingly; "heaps of nice people aren't at all pretty; and there is one comfort, you need not always be in agony for fear of losing your good looks. Ever since I was a tiny child I have been in constant terror of growing plain. Ugly girls have a horrid time, I think. I had far rather have lost my sight than my beauty; and Laurence says he loves my face better now than he did when he first saw me as the reigning beauty of Virginia."

My heart was filled with a passion of pity for the poor, hideous, unconscious creature, and I said gently:

"With such a devoted husband as Sir Laurence, looks do not matter; he would love you just the same if you were old and ugly."

"Not he," laughed her ladyship derisively; "men

soon get tired of us when we grow plain, and Laurence is the same as the rest."

"I don't think he is," I said gravely. I had never spoken to the man in my life, but the thought of the pathetic deception he had practised for the sake of his wife's happiness made me his sworn ally from that time forward.

"Oh, but he is!" persisted her ladyship; "besides, if he wasn't it would not matter to me. I hate love with any pity in it—I only care for love that includes admiration—and if I were old and ugly, Laurence's love would be half pity, and I should simply detest that."

It was weird to hear such talk proceeding from those unsightly lips; but my compassion for the vain, unsuspecting soul compelled me to support the delusion which her husband had so unselfishly fostered. And, as we sat together over our tea, we became quite friendly; and Lady Leigh told me further how, as soon as she had sufficiently recovered from her illness, Sir Laurence married her and brought her by easy stages to his English home, where the only drawback to her happiness was the strict seclusion in which her husband always kept her. Why, I now knew only too well.

"What became of Mr. Abela?" I asked.

"Oh! he shot himself immediately after his attempt on our lives."

Then a summons came for me to go home with Dick; and with many promises to come again soon to see her, I parted from Lady Leigh.

So began our friendship with the inhabitants of Leigh Court, which friendship for many years formed the greatest interest in the lives of my brother and myself. As we

had once seen his wife, Sir Laurence did not object to our being with her as much as we liked—indeed was only too grateful for our company; and as great a friendship sprang up between him and Dick as between Laura and me. He never mentioned his wife's disfigurement to me but once.

"I always feel it was my fault," he said; "if it had not been for me that scoundrel would never have shot her, and it was a pure fluke that I wasn't the victim instead of poor Laura."

I felt that this was a somewhat strained idea, but forbore to throw the blame where it was really due, on to my lady's thoughtless vanity in playing with two lovers at a time.

"I always wonder how she lived through it," continued Sir Laurence, with a break in his voice; "it was only her superb physique that kept her alive. Her poor face was actually almost all shot away, and for weeks and weeks the doctors said recovery was impossible. I am glad that she was blinded; it would have killed her to see herself as you see her now; and I vowed that, if I could prevent it, she should never know how she was altered, my sweet darling!"

"But do you think it was right to tell her a deliberate falsehood?" I asked.

Sir Laurence was silent for a moment; then—

"I never lied to her," he said slowly; "I told her that to me she was still the fairest woman in the world—and so she was, and so she ever will be. The beauty love has once seen, love sees always, no matter what changes time and chance may bring. As those we love are always young to us, so they are always beautiful. Age and

alteration, and decay and death, are words which do not exist in love's vocabulary, Miss Brown. The disfigurement which is so apparent to you, is invisible to me; I still see Laura as I saw her first. But I can not bear that strangers should see her now for the first time; it seems like disloyalty to that once glorious beauty, which—though clouded now—is ever present with me."

"She must have been very beautiful if she was anything like the miniature," I said.

"She was far lovelier than that," answered Sir Laurence, his face lighting up with enthusiasm; "I never saw again such beauty as hers—it was positively dazzling when first we met; and, for the sake of what she was then, she will always be the fairest woman in the world to me."

Our friendship with the Leighs grew deeper and warmer as time passed on. I used to read to Laura a great deal, and she evidently derived great pleasure from my society; she and her husband and Dick and I spent many a cheerful evening together. The more we knew of him the more did my brother and I admire and respect Sir Laurence Leigh. His devotion to his wife was wonderful; hers was a frivolous, shallow nature, but his infinite patience with all her whims and fancies never failed. I became used to her disfigurement in time, but, intimate friends as we were, and though I was really attached to her, I never kissed Laura Leigh; I shrank too much from her terrible unsightliness, and she simply put it down to my undemonstrativeness. But Sir Laurence used to kiss and fondle the poor disfigured face as if it were the sweetest in the world; and I believe it really was to him.

And so the current of our lives flowed peacefully on, until there came one bitter winter's day when poor Laura

caught a chill, from which her system—accustomed to the warm climate of Virginia, and weakened by the tremendous shock it had sustained when she was shot—was unable to recover. To the last she was shallow and exacting; to the last her husband's devotion to her never failed; and when she had been laid to rest in the quiet churchyard, and we had returned without her to the empty house, Sir Laurence once more showed me the exquisite miniature, saying in a trembling voice:

"It is thus that I always think of her. Margaret, will you try and do the same?"

"I will try," I answered.

"It seems like sacrilege now to remember that she was not always as fair as this; but, thank heaven, she never knew it, my beautiful darling!"

And so the place where I had met and loved poor Laura knew her no more. Her husband went abroad again after her death, and Leigh Court was once more shut up and deserted.

It is now ten years since Laura died, and these years have brought many changes to us all.

A new Lady Leigh reigns at Leigh Court in Laura's stead, and the stately old house now rings with the music of children's voices and the patter of tiny feet; while Sir Laurence has lost the sad look he used to wear, and seems almost as light-hearted as his sturdy little sons.

A wife has also come to reign in Dick's little home, and has ousted me from the place I loved so well in the dear old days. Dick looks happier than he ever did under my benignant rule, and I have learned not to feel jealous.

And as for myself——

But I must not stop to write anything about myself just now, for I hear a well-loved voice shouting, "Margaret," while good old Emma is knocking at my door and saying:

"I think Sir Laurence is calling you, my lady."

LADY MARION'S CURSE

LADY MARION'S CURSE

"WHAT is the story of Lady Marion's curse, Helena? And why should it stand between you and me?" asked Leonard Carey.

"I hardly like to tell you, Leonard; it is so horrid, and frightens me so."

"Nonsense, darling. Tell me, and we'll make merry over it together."

The girl shuddered. "Don't laugh, Leonard; Lady Marion might hear you."

"My dearest girl, how can a disagreeable old woman, who has been comfortably deceased for a couple of centuries, be caught listening at doors like a latter-day maid-of-all-work? But tell me the story."

"Well, the mistress of Garstang Grange, about two hundred years ago, was Lady Marion Garstang, widow of Sir Cuthbert. She had one child, Althea, heiress to the Garstang property; and Althea wanted to marry her kinsman, Lionel Carey. But Lady Marion hated the Careys, because Sir Richard Carey, Lionel's father, had jilted her in the days of her youth, before she met Cuthbert Garstang. So she swore that the Garstang estates should never go to a Carey; and when Althea persisted in the match, she brought enchantments to bear upon her daughter. Poor Althea, by day a beautiful girl, was

turned at night into a large white bear. The consequence was she became so miserable that finally she died of a broken heart."

"And what happened to Lady Marion?"

"She was burnt as a witch, but not before she had laid a curse upon any Garstang who should ever wish to marry a Carey, and so join the two estates; and she swore a terrible oath that she would prevent such a marriage, even though she had been dead for centuries. At her death the Garstang property went to a brother of Sir Cuthbert's, and from that day to this no Garstang has ever wanted to marry a Carey till you and I fell in love with each other."

"But was there no way whereby Lionel Carey could have defied her ladyship's enchantments?"

"If her lover had sprinkled some water from the holy well in Garstang Glen over the white bear, Althea would have regained her natural shape, and her mother's enchantments would have been thenceforward powerless to touch her. But this could only be done by a lover who loved her for herself, and not for the sake of her wealth; and Lionel Carey only cared for the lands, and not for the lady of Garstang."

"Poor little Althea! She wasn't the first woman, or the last, whose life has been spoiled because her lover loved what she had better than what she was."

"Let us talk of something else now, Leonard," and Helena said it impatiently.

And they did talk of something else, and preferred it, which was not to be wondered at, considering that the loves of one's contemporaries are more interesting than the loves of one's ancestors; and that the love of one

particular contemporary is the most interesting thing of all, as anybody knows who knows anything worth knowing.

Leonard Carey soon overcame Helena's superstitious fears, and their engagement was announced. Every one was pleased thereat, notably Mrs. Garstang, Helena's widowed mother; and at first the course of the affair ran with a most unorthodox smoothness. But after a short time a ghastly rumour went abroad that a great animal, like a white bear, had been seen in the dead of night wandering along the corridors of Garstang Grange. Mrs. Garstang first tried to hush up the report, and then to laugh it to scorn, but equally in vain. The servants one after another gave notice, and the guest speedily discovered that they had pressing engagements elsewhere, which could not be postponed. The existence of this weird apparition could not long be kept from the knowledge of Miss Garstang, and it filled her with unspeakable horror. At first she wanted to break off her engagement because of it, but her lover held her fast.

"See here, darling," he said, "it is rather rough on a fellow that not only must he gain the consent of the girl herself and her near relations when he wants to get married, but of all her dear, departed ancestors, to the third and fourth generation. Just think of rejecting an otherwise eligible suitor because your great-great-great-great-grandfather did not altogether agree with the gentleman's political opinions, or because your equally great-grandmother considered his nose a quarter of an inch too long."

"It is all very well to try and laugh it off, Leonard, but the ghost never appeared till our engagement was

settled—the first engagement between a Garstang and a Carey for two centuries. How do you explain that?"

Leonard shook his head. He could not explain it, and he knew he could not; but he did not want Helena to see how uneasy this mysterious apparition appeared to him.

"And," she continued, "the Thing, whatever it is, comes in the form of a white bear, the shape into which, according to tradition, Althea Garstang was metamorphosed. How can you explain that?"

And again explanation was beyond the power of Leonard Carey.

One night an awful cry broke the stillness of the slumbering Grange—shriek after shriek of mortal terror. The rudely awakened household rushed to the west corridor, whence the screams proceeded, and found Lilian Carden (a friend of Helena's) lying in a dead faint. Restoratives were at once applied, and the terrified girl soon regained her senses; but it was some time before she was able to tell her tale coherently. When she did, it ran as follows:—

For several nights Lilian had been awakened by a noise in the passage outside her door, as if some large and heavy animal were shambling along the corridor; but she did not say anything about it, as she knew that Helena was already very unhappy about the ghost. On this particular night Lilian awoke suddenly with a horrible feeling that something was in the room; and then she heard a peculiar shuffling sound, as if a heavy body were crawling over the floor. Gradually this strange sound came nearer; and then she saw, slowly creeping toward her round the foot of the bed, the lumbering form

of some large white animal. Nearer and nearer the clumsy Horror came; and indescribable was her fear when the Thing put one of its white paws upon the bed, and gradually drew it along toward her face. Then the poor girl became unconscious from sheer terror; and when she came to herself the mysterious presence was gone. She rushed to the door in time to see the awful creature disappear round the end of the corridor. Then, after uttering shriek after shriek, she had again become unconscious from fright.

Great was the excitement that thrilled through Garstang Grange after Lilian Carden's unearthly adventure. The few remaining guests packed up their belongings and fled, not daring to spend another night in the haunted house. But Leonard Carey remained.

"Helena," he said, "I have made up my mind to sift this thing to the bottom. I shall sit up all night in the west corridor, and meet the creature on its own ground. If it is a trick to frighten us, I will soundly punish the perpetrator; if it is the doing of that old witch, Lady Marion, I will break the spell of her enchantments."

"How, Leonard?"

"I will fill my hunting-flask with water from the holy well and will sprinkle it over the apparition, as my ancestor ought to have done two centuries ago. Where he failed I shall succeed for I love the heiress of Garstang for herself alone, and not on account of her lands and money. I should love you just the same if you were homeless and penniless, Helena; and surely a man's love is stronger than any wicked old woman's curses."

So Leonard Carey kept his vigil that night, armed with

a flask of water from the holy well. For a long time he thought his watch was in vain; but suddenly he saw in the moonlight a ghastly object making its way along the corridor. For a moment his heart stood still, brave man though he was; the white Horror was exactly as every one had described it. With a slow, shambling gait it came shuffling along in the moonlight, rolling heavily from side to side, and making the dragging sound which always heralded its approach. Only for a moment did Leonard hesitate; then he rushed forward with a shout, and poured the contents of his hunting flask on the creature's head, which was just then in the shadow on one of the heavy window mullions. The Thing uttered a strange groan, and fell on its side, rolling as it did so into the moonlight again; and then, to his unspeakable amazement, Leonard saw that the object at his feet was none other than the unconscious white-robed form of Helena Garstang.

By this time Mrs. Garstang and Helena's old nurse had appeared upon the scene, roused by Leonard's war cry; and as they stood round the prostrate girl she slowly opened her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she cried. "Why am I in the corridor? Mother, my hair is all wet, and I am lying on the floor, and I am afraid of the ghost!"

Mrs. Garstang and the old nurse succeeded in soothing Helena and conveying her back to her room; but as they went the mother turned to the speechless Leonard, saying, "You shall have an explanation in the morning; I must attend to my child now."

Early the next day Mrs. Garstang summoned Leonard Carey to her presence.

"I have sent for you, Leonard," she said, "to ask you to listen to my story, and then to forgive me. The first you are bound to do, but the second rests with yourself."

Leonard silently bowed, and waited for her to proceed.

"When Helena was a child," continued the lady, "she contracted a bad habit of walking in her sleep; and, what made it worse, of walking on all fours. Naturally her father and I were anxious to keep secrct even from herself so uncanny a peculiarity, particularly as the doctors assured us she would outgrow it. As a matter of fact she did outgrow it, and the habit ceased when she was seven years old. She never had the slightest return of it until now. The only explanation I can offer of the recurrence of this distressing malady, is that she dwelt so much on the dangers of a forbidden union of a Garstang and a Carey, and brooded so incessantly over Lady Marion's curse, that she fell into a morbid and abnormal state of health, and so was subject to the old nervous disorder."

Leonard's brow was dark. "Why did you not tell me this before?" he said sternly.

Mrs. Garstang burst into tears. "Because I loved you as if you had been my own son, Leonard, and I longed to see you the husband of Helena and the master of Garstang Grange. I was afraid that you would not marry her if you found out that she was a somnambulist, and that then my child's heart would be broken and her life spoiled. I thought that her nurse and I could watch her while she slept, and prevent her from leaving her room; but two or three times she has escaped our vigi-

lance, with the results you know. You have heard my story, and it now rests with you to say whether you forgive me and still wish to marry my daughter, or whether your friendship for me and your love for her are alike at an end."

"My friendship and my love never come to an end, Mrs. Garstang. I wish to marry Helena as soon as you will let me, for I think that the happiness, which I feel sure I can give her, will be the best tonic that her overwrought nerves can have."

And Leonard Carey was right. Her horror of Lady Marion's curse, and her doubts as to whether she ought to break off her engagement because of it, had undermined Helena Garstang's health and had brought back the nervous malady of her childhood; but after the whole truth had been laid before her, and she realized that the dreaded ghost was no one but her sleeping self, she speedily regained her health and strength, and Leonard Carey won his bride after all.

One day, six months after her marriage, Mrs. Carey said: "I sometimes think, Leonard, that there was more in Lady Marion's curse than met the eye. It all had a natural explanation, I know; nevertheless there was an engagement between a Garstang and a Carey after an interval of two centuries, and the heiress of Garstang did again appear as a white bear, and it was the water from the holy well that broke the spell and made her into a woman again."

"It was a queer business altogether," replied Leonard.

"And," continued Helena, "if you had loved the lands and not the lady of Garstang, as Lionel did, per-

haps the water from the holy well would not have had the right effect."

"Perhaps not," assented her husband.

"And if you had thrown me over because I walked in my sleep, as mother feared you would, the union between a Garstang and a Carey would again have been prevented, and my heart would have been broken as Althea's was. Perhaps Lady Marion's spell was upon us, after all, and your love was strong enough to break it."

"Perhaps so," said Leonard. "Who knows?"

FRANK WEKENEY'S BILL

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FRANK WEKENEY, Esq., M. P., was what is called a man of parts, whatever that may mean. He had once spent six weeks in India, and consequently possessed a perfect and exhaustive knowledge both of the way in which that country ought to be governed and of the difficult question of the rupee. Not that this in itself proved him a man of parts: any person who has spent six weeks in India and does *not* know everything there is to be known about that country and the Government thereof, is—well, a most exceptional individual. But Frank Wekeney had more than this ordinary form of intelligence; he had travelled in Thibet, and had there chanced upon a barbarous hill-tribe where this singular and interesting custom prevails: the principal dish at all the marriage feasts—the equally indigestible counterpart of our English wedding cake—is the mother-in-law herself.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the advantages of this system, both as a deterrent to match-making mothers and a preventive of post-nuptial domestic unpleasantness. They are obvious to the meanest intellect, and need no pointing out.

Now Frank Wekeney was a man gifted with the power to grasp fresh ideas and to adapt them to established environments—the art, in fact, of mending old

garments with new cloth: he was, further, a married man; and Mrs. Wekency's mother was in her prime. Consequently he had the wisdom to perceive that the great English-speaking nations have much to learn even from the barbarous hill-tribes of Thibet; and consequently also he was fond of travelling.

Mrs. Frank Wekeney was a handsome woman; but her mother, Lady Wilverown, was decidedly handsomer. People called her an *édition de luxe* of her daughter (and they pronounced it *looks*). Lady Wilverown was never actually unkind or violent to Frank; but she had a way of saying, "*Dear* Mr. Wekeney!" when she disapproved of him, which froze the very marrow in his bones. And if saying it once did not silence him, she said it again and again until it did. The first time that "*Dear* Mr. Wekeney!" occurred in a conversation, Frank generally tried to explain his meanings and vindicate his actions: the second time he humbly and sweetly apologized for his very existence: and the third time he merely sat mute, and decided in his own mind that a mother-in-law was an evil and a bitter thing.

When Parliament reassembled, Frank Wekeney brought forward a Bill to the effect that the aforementioned custom of the Thibetian hill-tribes should become the law of England. It was, as might be expected, a most popular measure. The Prime Minister was delighted with it, and with the young member of his party who had proposed it; for the Parliament was moribund, and the Premier was in sore need of a new and popular cry wherewith to go to the country. Here was one after his own heart! The world was weary of annexing continents, and disestablishing churches, and disintegrating

empires, and inaugurating new eras; in vain were these tempting programmes dangled before men's jaded eyes; but here was a chord which appealed to rich and poor alike—a touch of nature which made the whole world kin. The contest between Church and State—between the Classes and the Masses—between Repose and Reform—may come to an end; but there is no truce in the war between Man and his Mother-in-law.

The great Bill passed merrily through its earlier stages. Frank was able to give his whole time and attention to it, as Lady Wilverown was at that time holding a succession of meetings throughout the provinces against the iniquitous custom of a married man's keeping an opinion of his own without a licence, which said licence to be procured only from his mother-in-law; and Mrs. Wekeney was accompanying her mother on this important missionary tour. On one memorable occasion the Bill was nearly wrecked by a north-country member, who spoke at great length on the dangers arising from so heavy (and presumably tough) a meal in the middle of the day; this speaker had considerable knowledge of the subject, as his excellent wife suffered from conscientious scruples against dining late upon the Sabbath; consequently—as he informed the House—every Monday was Black Monday to him; and it was invariably Wednesday before Richard (whose real name was Robert) was himself again. But the political catastrophe was averted by a brilliant young Radical, who saved the cause and established his own reputation by suggesting that "the words *rôti, en aspic*, or *cut up into sandwiches*, stand part of the question"; for—as he pointed out—in a sandwich, as in a sausage, the ignorance which is bliss is the attribute of

the consumer. This train of thought led the young orator into brilliant speculations as to a satisfactory manner of finally disposing of all one's poor relations at one evening-party, the guests who had partaken thereof being none the worse and none the wiser; which opened up lurid possibilities as to the sandwiches of a man's past as well as the sandwiches of his future; but the honourable member was recalled to better and brighter thoughts by cries of "Question."

One peaceful summer's evening, when the course of the great Bill was running as smoothly as the course of love which is not true, Frank Wekeney gave a little dinner in one of the dinner-cells underneath the High Court of Parliament.

"Isn't everything going splendidly!" cried Lady Herbert Fitzcoddlington, who was seated on Frank's right hand. "We shall pass the Bill without any difficulty; and then, if the House of Lords gives us any trouble, we shall go to the country on it, and come back with the largest majority our party has ever had."

"I certainly think it would be a popular cry," said Frank, in the sweetly instructive manner he always adopted toward women not of his wife's family: "to my mind, dear lady, it is questions of domestic policy such as this which demand the attention of every Government. 'The greatest happiness of the greatest number' is the only solid foundation whereon any political superstructure can be built—by which, of course, is meant the happiness of that section of the community to which one belongs one's self."

"And do you think that this measure will ensure the greatest happiness to the greatest number?" inquired

Mrs. Thorowgood, one of those satisfactory women who begin at No. 1 when they visit the Royal Academy, and go bravely and unflinchingly right through the catalogue until they are found, faint yet pursuing, among the water-colours.

"Without doubt," answered Frank. "I have brought my mathematical knowledge to bear upon the question, and can prove to a demonstration that while the number of a woman's sons-in-law is regulated only by the quantity of her daughters or the quality of their attractions, it is unusual for any sane man to have more than one mother-in-law."

"This is the thin end of the wedge," said Lady Herbert, "and I don't believe that an enlightened nation like ours will stop at mothers-in-law when once it is proved how well the system works."

Frank could not help wondering what the thick end of the wedge must be like, if Lady Wilverown represented the thin one; but he merely said, in his Columbus-and-the-egg-like manner, "It is an old system, dear lady, and a very simple one. I have only tried to adapt it to our modern civilization."

"By the way, I see that Mrs. Wekeney and her mother are at home again," chattered Lady Herbert.

"What makes you think that?" asked Frank, trying to look careless, while a great fear chilled his soul. "They were not at home when I came to the house at three o'clock."

"Oh, no! but I met them driving from Waterloo as I came here," answered her ladyship.

Then Frank knew that the Assyrian had come down like a wolf on the fold in his absence; and the cold grip

of fear and coming disaster grew tighter round his heart. But he tried to be brave, and kept saying to himself that he was an English statesman and need fear no man's mother-in-law; and then he remembered that Canute had been an English king and yet had not the slightest influence over the incoming tide when it chose to come in; for no one knew better than Frank Wekeney that though " man marks the earth with ruin, his control stops with the shore," or with the bodily presence of his mother-in-law.

Let kind hands draw a veil over the rest of the sad story. Suffice it to say that Lady Wilverown held only one conversation with Frank on the subject of his great Bill, wherein the expression "*Dear* Mr. Wekeney" occurred seven times. Frank—though a good deal shattered—survived that conversation; but the Bill did not.

So Frank Wekeney's Bill was withdrawn on the third reading; and the lengthened sweetness of the long-drawn-out Parliament evaporated in a Dissolution; and Frank's party were hopelessly beaten at the general election. His own seat was contested by some local magnate, and Frank came out of the battle crowned with what is called "a moral victory." He found it an unsatisfactory kind of thing, it is true; but, at any rate, it was more than he had ever had in his own home.

Frank never went back into Parliament. He spends most of his time travelling in outlandish districts where there is no accommodation for ladies, and says he shall continue to do so as long as health and strength are spared to Lady Wilverown. He is also writing a great poem on one of the hill-tribes of Thibet, and he calls it The Delight of Asia.

THROUGH THINGS TEMPORAL

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CHAPTER I

"Now, mamma, what does this cock-and-bull story mean, about Millicent and that dreadful young Thornton? Tell me everything at once," demanded Lady Thistletop, who had just driven over to her ancestral home for the express purpose of hearing the love-story of her beautiful sister.

The Countess of Roehampton trembled at this mandate of her terrible first-born; she dared not disobey Emma, but she shrank from holding up her beloved Millicent as a target for the Thistletopian scorn.

"It is really nothing to make a fuss about, Emma, nothing at all; but, of course, it has worried your father and me a good deal. And you ought not to say, 'That dreadful young Thornton'; it is most unjust. He is such a nice person—not one of our set, of course, but quite a gentleman in his way; and he has behaved very reasonably about the whole thing."

"Reasonably!" snorted Lady Thistletop; "what a word to apply! But tell me the story, and I will judge for myself."

Her mother felt sure that she would. From her youth upward Emma had judged for herself, and now she judged for Lord Thistletop as well.

"Well, you see, dear Emma, it came about in this

way," stammered poor Lady Roehampton. "The Thorntons are artistic people—paint pictures, you know, and things of that sort—and they took the Grange after old Mrs. Woodruff's death, so as to be able to copy all the pretty views round about. There is only Miss Thornton and her brother; and Millicent set up a great friendship with the sister. You know how dear and sweet Milly always is to people of that kind."

"I should think I do know," snapped out the scornful Emma.

"And so," continued Lady Roehampton, ignoring the interruption, "Millicent and Miss Thornton used to go out sketching together, and after a time—as I understand—the brother began to look over their sketches. And then he helped Millicent; and they used often to meet each other in the village or the park when he had been fishing; and then they went and fell in love with each other. It is very unsettling," concluded the poor lady, with a sigh.

"It is very absurd! I can't think why Millicent wants to go wandering about parks and villages," replied Lady Thistletop.

"Poor little Milly! She is so young and so pretty that one must make allowances for her," explained the fond mother, bravely defending her absent lamb.

"I don't see what that has to do with it," retorted the irate Emma, who had left off being young and had never begun to be pretty. But though Millicent's youth and beauty might have nothing to do with her wanderings about parks and villages, it had a great deal to do with the question as to whether the said wanderings were soli-

tary or otherwise; and so Lady Roehampton tried to explain, but her daughter would not listen.

"I have always disapproved of the way in which you let Millicent walk out by herself in country lanes and places," persisted Emma; "and now I find that she was not walking out by herself, but with this dreadful young man. It was terribly vulgar!"

"Millicent could not possibly be vulgar," said Lady Roehampton, flushing angrily.

"She evidently could be, and was," persisted Millicent's implacable sister; "and where the pleasure lay, I fail to see. I never wanted to walk in a dirty country lane in my life—not even with Thistletop."

The Countess had not a very keen sense of humour, but she laughed at this; for she felt that the presence of her noble and respected son-in-law would rob the most idyllic pathway of its romance.

"I don't know what you are laughing at, mamma, I am sure. I see nothing funny in the idea of Thistletop's taking a walk. In fact I believe he does so every day on account of his liver."

"But a walk on account of one's liver and a walk on account of one's lover are quite different forms of exercise, I should imagine," murmured Lady Roehampton, still laughing.

"And what is to be the end of the affair?" asked Lady Thistletop haughtily, feeling that her lord's aristocratic liver and her sister's plebeian lover were not things to be spoken of in the same breath.

"Oh! of course Milly is so sweet and good and reasonable, that she quite sees it would never do for her to marry out of her own class, so she has agreed to say

goodbye to Mr. Thornton and to think no more about him," said the mother, whose conscience did not altogether agree with her worldly-wisdom in thus sacrificing her daughter's happiness on the shrine of the Moloch which she worshipped. But her ladyship had worshipped Moloch too long and too consistently for nonconformity in this respect to come easy to her; so she stifled her maternal conscience. "He is quite satisfied about it, Milly says; but, as far as I can gather, the sister has turned rusty, and is really nasty to dear Millicent."

"If Millicent will make such friends, what can she expect?"

"Still it is very unreasonable of Miss Thornton," said Lady Roehampton. "She could hardly expect Milly to marry her brother; and if he behaves well about the matter, I don't see why she should make herself disagreeable. But it is always the way—middle-class men are so very superior to middle-class women."

"I think it is six of one and half a dozen of the other; and I know I would never mix myself up with such people. But here comes Millicent herself across the lawn."

"Please don't say anything to her about it," cried the anxious mother, knowing that Emma's touch upon a recent wound was by no means possessed of healing properties. And so the burning subject was dropped for a time.

Lady Thistletop was the eldest child of the Earl and Countess of Roehampton, and had always been more feared than loved by her obedient parents. Between her and the only other surviving child, Lady Millicent Carewe, there had intervened several little brothers and sis-

ters who had not outlived their infancy; so that Lady Emma was fifteen years older than her sister, and had been married to Lord Thistletop while Millicent was still in the schoolroom. Naturally Lord and Lady Roehampton doted on their youngest child, who seemed to have inherited all the love which belonged by right to the little brothers and sisters who could not stay to enjoy it; and they doted on her all the more because she was as beautiful and refined as a lovely white flower. Until this *affaire de cœur* with Edmund Thornton, Millicent had never given them a moment's anxiety; and even now she bowed to their superior judgment, and gave up her heart's desire in obedience to the parental decree. But the Roehamptons were no tyrants; and had Millicent but had the courage to convince her parents that her life's happiness was at stake, they would quickly have sacrificed their class prejudices to their darling's wishes. Yet for all her sweetness, Millicent was of her world worldly; and to her the things which are seen and temporal were decidedly more visible than the things which are not seen and eternal. Wherein her eyesight was not altogether peculiar.

It would have been impossible for the most affectionate parents to have doted upon Lady Emma Carewe. She was one of those people who seem middle-aged as soon as they can speak; and who begin to make use of the art of conversation, immediately after acquiring it, by setting right their less sensible fellow-creatures. For thirty long and (to them) weary years did the Lady Emma Carewe exercise unstintingly her reforming powers upon the parents committed to her charge, until at last they began to regard their first-born as a "fixture"

from which no fairy prince would ever essay to deliver them: then—to their unfeigned joy and surprise—she transferred her beneficent sway to Lord Thistletop, a widowed and neighbouring nobleman, whose dulness and decorum were beyond reproach. For five years Emma had reigned supreme at Thistletop. She regretted much that she had no children, or even step-children (half a loaf being better than no bread), to train up in the way they should go, but she kept her hand in by attending to the education of her lord and master; and even the small and sordid soul which nature had allotted to John, Lord Thistletop, he was not permitted to call his own.

But Millicent was wholly different from her sister. She was beautiful, while Emma was plain; she was tall and graceful, while Emma was short and increasingly inclined to "slowly broaden"; and further, she lacked that indomitable will which is the heritage only of women under five feet three, whereby they are enabled to drive their taller and weaker sisters to the wall. In short, Millicent was amiable and charming, and everything that Emma was not.

In a wooded hollow at the edge of the park Millicent Carewe met Edmund Thornton for the last time to say goodbye. She was very loving and tearful, and very wretched at the thought of parting from her lover; but the idea of trampling on her traditions and casting in her lot with his, never entered her head for a moment. Edmund was far too honourable a man even to think of suggesting to Millicent to disobey her own people, but he did ask her if she could not wait until he had made a name for himself as an artist,

and had a right to claim her. But Lady Millicent said no.

"But, my darling," pleaded Thornton, "suppose I were to work day and night until I became a great painter, wouldn't you marry me then?"

Millicent shook her head. "I'm afraid it wouldn't do," she sobbed.

"Wouldn't do?" cried Edmund, with some scorn. "Why wouldn't it do? You see, dear, it isn't as if I were poor, and couldn't afford to give you every comfort and luxury. As I have told you, my father left me a large fortune, and I only paint for the love of it—not because I am obliged to work. I do not ask you to share a life of poverty, though some women can even do that with the men they love; but I can not see why the fact that my father was what the world calls 'a self-made man' should stand between you and me for ever if we love each other."

"Oh! please don't be angry with me; it frightens me so when you are angry," said Millicent through her tears. "It seems impossible to make you understand how my people feel about a thing like this!"

"I am glad that it is impossible for me to understand that mere pride of birth can be stronger than love; for I believe that you do love me, Millicent," said Edmund grimly.

"Dearly, dearly; never doubt that I love you, and that it will be impossible for me ever again to love anyone in the same way. Do you know how, when one is quite young, life seems to be an unanswered question? I felt that always till I met you, and then I knew that you were the answer. You seem somehow to be mixed

up with everything that is good and beautiful, and the whole world appears to me good and beautiful because you are in it."

"And yet—feeling thus—you can give me up for ever, merely because of the difference in rank! I can not understand it, as you say."

"It is so difficult to explain, but I thought you would see it."

"No, Millicent, I don't see it, and I think I have a right to an explanation."

"But an explanation would make you angry."

"I can't help that; I must have the explanation notwithstanding."

"Well, what mother says is, that your people are so different from my people, and your way of looking at things so different from ours, that we should never be really happy together; and she says that if I married you my set would drop me, and I should have to live in your world instead of my own. Oh, Edmund! I know it is horrid of me, but I really haven't the courage to face it all."

"And yet you say you love me?"

"Yes, yes, a thousand times yes. And, what is more, I shall always love you, though I will not marry you. I am not at all brave, Edmund—I never was—but when once I really care for a person I never change. You do not speak; I know you are angry with me."

"No, I am not angry, only bitterly disappointed and wounded to the quick. But I think I do understand a little. If you married me, you would have to give up the fashionable world in which you have hitherto lived and moved and had your being; and that you consider

too prodigious a sacrifice for even love to demand. If you seriously think that the lot of a frivolous, fine lady is a happier and higher one than the lot of a tender and true woman, then I can only say that you are acting in strict accordance with your convictions if you finally dismiss me and my middle-class affection. I have never pretended to be what I am not, and I do not attempt for an instant to deny that all my relations—my married sisters, for instance, and my only brother—are what your ladyship would describe as 'common.' That is to say, they live in unfashionable London suburbs, and dine early, and fill their brand-new houses with unlovely furniture and ormolu clocks. All this is true; and it is also true that if you married me you would have to know these persons and to learn their habits, for no wife of mine, be she ever so high-born, shall ever come between me and my own people. Therefore, Millicent, if you have not the courage to face this thing, you are right to bid me go; but if you have the courage to stand by my side and let us face the world together, then you shall be loved with a love passing the love of women, and shall lack nothing that wealth or affection can obtain. It rests with you to decide."

"Edmund, forgive me, but I must dwell among mine own people," replied her ladyship sorrowfully.

And without another word the man turned on his heel and left her; left her to enjoy that mess of society's pottage for which she had deliberately bartered her woman's birthright of love and happiness.

But though Edmund Thornton might feel angry with Millicent himself, he would not allow his sister to abuse her.

"You can't understand her; you never could," he said, when Maria expressed her surprise at Lady Millicent's decision. "She's surrounded by a hedge of customs and traditions such as a girl brought up as you have been can have no idea of."

"And you regard this hedge of customs and traditions as the divinity which doth hedge a queen," remarked Miss Thornton scornfully.

"Yes, I do," replied her brother. "To me Lady Millicent is, and always will be, a sort of divinity, and I can not allow even you to lay rough hands on the shrine which I have raised to her in my heart."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted Maria. "I know one thing, however, namely, that if I loved a man, a million relations should not prevent me from marrying him, nor a million customs and traditions. I can stand against the stream, I am thankful to say, and I despise people who can not."

Edmund smiled. "A little brown rock can stand against the stream and a lovely white water lily can not; yet the rock could never despise the water lily."

"Why not?"

"Because in the scale of creation the water lily is a whole kingdom higher than the rock in spite of its mutability."

"Oh! you are absurd. I believe that girl has bewitched you. Now for my part I think her a——"

"Maria, be silent!" said her brother sternly. And when he spoke in that tone Maria always obeyed.

A few days later she said to him, "Edmund, have you heard that the Roehamptons are taking Lady Millicent abroad for the winter?"

"No, I had not heard."

"Well, it is true. Dr. Collins told me. He says Lady Millicent is far from strong, and they are anxious about her. But I expect she will get all right out there, and forget everything that has happened, and fall in love with somebody else."

Edmund was silent.

"And, Edmund, I don't know what you'll say, but I must tell you that I've just promised to marry Dr. Collins."

Edmund did not say much, but he smiled grimly to himself as he pictured proud Lady Millicent as the sister-in-law of the country practitioner. Yet in spite of his smile his heart was heavy within him as he thought of the perfect life that he and Millicent might have lived together if only she had loved the world less and himself more; and he felt no anger against, but only the tenderest pity for, the girl, who, in her blindness, was exchanging the satisfying substance for the very unsatisfying shadow—shadows having a way of vanishing when we want them most, as Jonah learned when he camped outside the walls of Nineveh.

CHAPTER II

So Lady Millicent Carewe was taken across the sea for the express purpose of forgetting Edmund Thornton. She did not forget him—she was not made of forgetting material; but the edge of her pain wore off in time, and as she would as soon have thought of fighting against

the laws of nature as against the social traditions of her class, she was spared the wear and tear of continual chafing, a thing no mortal can stand for long without a breakdown of some sort. Perhaps her cheek grew a little paler, a little more delicate in its oval outline, while her brown eyes acquired a pensive look which had never been seen in them before; but she soon regained her wonted health and strength, never robust at the best of times, and if her stately manner was even more quiet and reserved than it used to be, it only added to her charm.

"I hope you are not angry with me, my darling," said Lady Roehampton one day.

"Angry, mother? How could I be angry with you?"

"I am sure that your father and I influenced you for your own happiness. Of course, Milly dear, we should never forbid you absolutely to do anything on which you had set your heart; but if you set your heart on an undesirable object it is our duty to point out to you your mistake, though the ultimate decision must always rest with you," continued the Countess, whose conscience was apt to be troublesome when she perceived the lengthening oval of her daughter's cheek and the sad look in the brown eyes.

"Of course, dear mother; and you know I hate deciding things for myself; I like some one else to make up my mind for me."

"Yes, yes, dear; quite right and proper of you. And, by the way," added her ladyship in the studiously careless tone which always betrays preparation, "have you heard that Miss Thornton is engaged to marry little Dr.

Collins? Milford" (Milford was the housekeeper at Carewe Court) "told me in her letter yesterday."

"No, I had not heard; and I am surprised—very much surprised. Dr. Collins is very nice and clever, and all that, but don't you think he is a little—a little—common, mother?"

"Of course he is, darling. He is a dear little man, and I am quite devoted to him, but he never pretends to be a gentleman. His father kept a chemist's shop in the village, when first I married and came to Carewe; and then the son became a doctor. All that is quite charming in its way, you know, and I wouldn't say a word against it for the world; in fact I always feel the greatest respect for what are called 'self-made people'; but still, my love, it would be quite impossible, wouldn't it, for you to be sister-in-law to little Dr. Collins?"

Millicent's eyes dilated with horror: "Oh, mother, what an idea! I should as soon think of being sister-in-law to Milford. But of course, if—if—things had turned out differently, Edmund would never have let his sister marry such a person as Dr. Collins."

"But, my sweetest, how could he have prevented her, even if he had wished to do so?—which I doubt, as there was nothing snobbish about Mr. Thornton, and that would have been a very snobbish thing to do. If the brother had the right to please himself, the sister had the right to please herself also. Therefore, darling, though I can't deny that Mr. Thornton is a charming person in his way, you see it is really best not to be mixed up at all with people of that sort."

And the girl, who under all her amiability was an aris-

tocrat to her finger-tips, saw the force of her mother's reasoning, and in her heart of hearts agreed with it.

But though Lady Millicent Carewe could so far obey the traditions of her class as to shut out of her life Edmund Thornton and his love, she could not go so far as to put any one else in his place. Lovers loved and lovers rode away again, but Lady Millicent was cold and indifferent to all alike. Her father and mother loved her too well to insist upon anything that was distasteful to her, and were, moreover, only too thankful to keep their adored daughter at home to be the light of their eyes and the joy of their old age; so beautiful Millicent Carewe seemed destined to be an old maid. But she did not appear unhappy or dissatisfied. Hers was one of those calm, unemotional natures that take life easily; and time seemed willing to "write no wrinkle" on that sweet white brow of hers.

The years rolled on, and the Earl of Roehampton was gathered to his fathers; after the lapse of another decade the Countess followed him; and then Lady Millicent reigned alone at Carewe Court, as co-heiress of William, sixth and last Earl of Roehampton. By that time she was close upon forty years old, and a very grand lady indeed. She was the ruling spirit of the neighbourhood, and was treated as a kind of royal personage. If Lady Millicent said a thing, that thing became as law to all the country-side. She opened bazaars, and instituted guilds, and patronized charities, and superintended parishes, and was in short the ruling queen of her little world. To know her was a pleasure—to be known by her an honour; and she was the most popular as well as the most distinguished woman in the county. From time to time she

heard news of the Thorntons from Mrs. Grear, the vicar's wife. Dr. Collins had died some years previously, and his widow still lived in the village. Millicent called upon her once; but her ladyship was received so coldly—or rather rudely—that she decided never again to repeat the experiment; but she learned from Mrs. Grear that Edmund Thornton was married, and had several children, who came at intervals to stay with their aunt, Mrs. Collins.

"Oh! Lady Millicent," exclaimed Mrs. Grear one day, "have you heard of poor Mrs. Collins's trouble?"

"No, indeed: what has happened to her?"

"She has lost all her money, poor thing! at least her brother, Edmund Thornton, has done so for her. He has been speculating, I believe, and has lost his own fortune and his sister's as well."

"Oh! I am so sorry."

"I knew you would be, you are so sympathetic, dear Lady Millicent. I hear that the rest of the family are so furious with Edmund that they refuse to help him at all; and they are equally furious with Maria for sticking to him."

"That seems rather rough on Mrs. Collins and her brother."

"It does; but of course it was wrong and foolish of him to speculate."

"Of course it was; nevertheless I feel deeply sorry for his wife and children."

"So do I, Lady Millicent; and all the more so because Mrs. Edmund Thornton is a silly, feeble, little thing, who will have no spirit in meeting trouble."

"Who was she before she married?"

"Nobody particular; only a governess whom one of Mr. Thornton's married sisters, Mrs. Gurly, was unkind to, and so he married her out of pity. This sister is a terrible woman, I believe, and the poor little governess underwent a martyrdom at her hands. It was chivalrous of Edmund to take pity on the girl and deliver her out of the hands of her tormentor; but people say his heart was buried years ago in some early romance that came to nothing, and so he did not much care whom he married afterward."

Mrs. Grear knew nothing of the Thornton-Carewe story; it was ancient history before she came to Carewe.

"Edmund Thornton is a good man," said Lady Millicent gravely, "and it was just like him to take pity on the poor little governess. Did you ever see her, Mrs. Grear?"

"Yes, and she isn't even pretty; a stupid little creature, interested in nothing and nobody but her husband, whom she simply adores. It is a pity to think of a clever man like Mr. Thornton heing tied to a nonentity! People say that it was because he wasn't happy in his marriage that he tried to divert himself by speculating. And now see what it has led to!"

A sharp pain went through Lady Millicent's heart, and through her conscience also; for a shadow she had bartered her own happiness. Perhaps she had a right to do what she liked with her own; but had she any right to throw Edmund Thornton's soul into the scale as a make-weight? It was not a pleasant doubt to enter into the mind of a pampered fine lady. As her ladyship was silent, Mrs. Grear continued:

"There are four children—all girls—pretty little things but dreadfully spoilt. Mr. and Mrs. Thornton are now staying with Mrs. Collins, so the vicar and I have asked them all up to dinner to-morrow; we think it is kind to do so just now, as people who are in the midst of money troubles are often so sensitive and touchy."

"It was very sweet of you and the vicar to think of it; and I am sure that Mr. Thornton, at any rate, will appreciate your kindness."

"The only thing that bothers me is whether or not we shall invite any one to meet them. It is, perhaps, not very polite to ask only just themselves, as if they were not good enough to meet our other friends; but on the other hand it would be worse to have any one who would be rude to them. I did ask Mrs. Holland, the banker's wife, telling her who were coming; but she turned up her nose and said she was very sorry to refuse my invitation, but she had rather not meet outsiders, as they always presumed upon it afterward."

"Disgusting woman! I have always thought Mrs. Holland a most vulgar person, and that loudly-dressed daughter of hers is simply impossible. But if you really want a third element at dinner to-morrow night, I shall be delighted to come in and make up your number. You and the vicar owe me a dinner, you know, Mrs Grear; you have dined here twice since I dined with you, and 'it doesn't do for the reciprocity to be all on one side,' as the Irishman said."

"How good you are, dear Lady Millicent! But it won't be at all a suitable evening for you."

"What nonsense! I shall enjoy myself immensely."

"I expect you will frighten poor little Mrs. Thornton into fits by your grand air."

Lady Millicent laughed.

"I won't be at all terrible, I promise you. I'll clothe myself with humility and with my oldest dinner-gown, and will be graciousness itself."

"You are always that, dear Lady Millicent, but you are a little frightening all the same; you are so very regal. Did I tell you what old Dobbs said after you had visited him the other day?"

"No."

"He remarked by way of description, 'Her were the Queen o' Sheba, and no mistake.'"

Lady Millicent laughed again, and then added—

"That is not as bad as what Thistletop said of me lately. He told Emma that I was like a church without a heating-apparatus—very orthodox and improving, but bound to give everybody a chill."

"Well, anyhow, that is better than being like a heating-apparatus without a church—which is what a great many people resemble," retorted Mrs. Grear, taking up the cudgels on behalf of her adored Lady Millicent.

"I shall tell Thistletop what you say; it will shock him terribly."

"I don't care; I rather enjoy shocking Lord Thistletop."

"So do I; it is, in fact, 'my favourite occupation,' as they say in Confession Albums. But, by the way, don't you think that Thistletop is a very disappointing person?"

"Yes, very."

"My father always used to say that a good old

Church-and-State Tory ought to be a combination of crusted port and York Minster. Now, Thistletop always seems aiming at that; but he only succeeds in concocting a feeble and cheap imitation out of a lecture-room and raspberry-vinegar. Which isn't the same thing at all, but he is too stupid to see the difference."

"But my husband would see the difference in both respects, I can assure you," said Mrs. Grear, laughing.

And there the colloquy ended.

On the evening of the following day Lady Millicent Carewe attended, as arranged, the little dinner at the vicarage. Mrs. Grear met her in the hall as she would have met a princess.

"It is lovely of your dear ladyship to come," she whispered. "The vicar says you grow more perfect every day, and this is just like you."

"And my dear ladyship has put on my shabbiest gown, as I promised," said Lady Millicent; "although it was as gall and wormwood to my maid to see me, like Enid, in my worst and meanest dress. I am as shabby now as she was in her faded silk."

"Shabby, indeed! You look like a queen, my dear, and always will, whatever you wear."

"The Queen of Sheba, I suppose." And they both smiled.

"I saw Mrs. Holland in the village to-day," continued Mrs. Grear, "and I let out that you were coming here to-night. You should just have seen her face! She was simply green with rage at having, through her own folly, missed meeting Lady Millicent Carewe face to face."

"Hateful woman! Don't talk about her to me."

And then the two ladies entered the pretty drawing-room.

At that moment it seemed to Edmund Thornton that time had stood still, and that the past twenty years had been a dream; for the stately woman, who held out a gracious hand to him, looked very little older and decidedly more beautiful than the girl from whom he had parted in the wooded hollow all those years ago. But if time had dealt lightly with Millicent, it had done the opposite with Edmund; for the storm and stress of life had made their mark upon his face, and he already began to look an old man. Poor little Mrs. Thornton wore an obviously home-made construction of vermilion velveteen, relieved by the cheap white lace wherewith dressing-tables are usually trimmed; and she shook with terror when she was presented to the lovely lady whom every one treated as a queen. Mrs. Collins was stiff and wretched, and was, moreover, consumed by a crushing dread of being (what she called) "patronized"—as if she were a concert or a fancy fair, with a list of would-be patronesses at her head.

At first Mrs. Grear feared that her party was going to be a failure; between the Scylla of Mrs. Thornton's terrified humility, and the Charybdis of Mrs. Collins's quarrel with society in general and Lady Millicent in particular, utter wreckage and destruction seemed imminent.

But the vicar's wife had reckoned without her guest. With a tact that had reached the level of a fine art, Lady Millicent first set her fellow-guests at their ease, and then guided the conversation into channels where she knew there would be smooth sailing and no rocks ahead. She

made as much effort to please as she had ever done in a London drawing-room; and, consequently, this was the most successful dinner-party the vicarage had ever enshrined. Without being brilliant herself, Millicent Carewe possessed the gift of making other people brilliant: she took the trouble to find out what they were interested in, and to let them talk to her about it; and, consequently, conversation always flowed freely under her benign influence. After dinner, even timid little Mrs. Thornton found heart of grace to confide in Lady Millicent, though in cold blood she would as soon have thought of making a friend of the Monument or the Marble Arch as of an Earl's daughter; and she was surprised to find that this great lady, on hearing their loss of fortune, did not treat it as a crime and shame, as Edmund's sister had done, but rather as a tiresome accident, such as leaving one's prayer-book in church, or forgetting to bring one's umbrella.

"It is most annoying and provoking for you," said Lady Millicent graciously.

"It is so bad for the children, you see, Lady Millicent," explained Mrs. Thornton.

"Very bad; but then it is such a comfort that they are all girls. Boys are so much more expensive than girls," replied Lady Millicent, who had never inhabited a world where boys were expected to earn their own living.

"I don't know about that," sighed Mrs. Thornton, in whose world both boys and girls were expected to keep themselves, and the heavier burden fell naturally upon the weaker sex.

"Have you decided where you will live? I think

your husband said at dinner that you intend to leave London."

"We are going to live in Lowton, a little town about five miles from here. Edmund has taken a situation in Mr. Holland's bank," replied Edmund's wife, blushing as she made the (to her) disgraceful confession.

But in Lady Millicent's aristocratic eyes, a clerkship in a bank and a share in a cotton-mill were socially on a par; so she did not seem at all shocked, as Mrs. Gurly had been, in whose commercial and mercenary sight a situation in Mr. Holland's bank was the depth of human degradation.

"That will be very nice for you," said her ignorant ladyship. "I sometimes drive into Lowton to do a little shopping; and I can assure you for your comfort that there are some decent shops there, and quite an admissible dressmaker, whom I sometimes employ myself just for morning-gowns," she continued, oblivious, for the moment, of the vermilion velveteen and the pitiful tale it told. "It will be pleasant also for you to be near Mrs. Collins."

"Yes, Lady Millicent; and it will be a comfort to send the children to her sometimes. Maria is always very fond of children, and, as she has none of her own, she has been like a second mother to mine."

And then Lady Millicent asked all about the said children, and lent a sympathetic ear to long and pointless chronicles concerning the same, until little Mrs. Thornton lost her heart once and for ever to the beautiful lady: and her timid soul grew hot within her as she recalled certain blasphemies which she had heard her husband and his people utter against the aristocracy. And Ed-

mund, meanwhile, stood afar off, and wondered how he had ever dared to make love to such a piece of exquisite perfection. The future would have surprised him even more than the past had he but known it; but at present it was hid from his eyes.

CHAPTER III

Poor Mrs. Edmund Thornton did not long survive her husband's change of fortune. Gradually she drooped, and in six months after the dinner at the vicarage she died, leaving her four motherless little children to the charge of Maria Collins. Then Edmund broke up his house at Lowton and took up his abode with Mrs. Collins at Carewe, walking to his work at the bank and back every day. Often in his walks he used to be overtaken by a handsome carriage and pair, wherein sat a fashionably-dressed woman who accorded him a gracious bow; and as Edmund contrasted his foot-sore, care-worn self with the brilliant occupant of the dashing equipage, he smiled grimly, and congratulated the shades of the departed Earl and Countess of Roehampton on the wisdom they had shown during the days of their flesh in opposing the sentimental folly of their beautiful daughter; but underneath this grim pleasantry he felt—as he had felt for twenty years and more—the unhealed smart of an ever-present disappointment, and he knew that his love for Millicent Carewe would last as long as he did. But all his love and his unalterable devotion availed him nothing, so long as he sat at the [illegible] of the air-castle men

call Society, and was not admitted therein. Now and then Edmund met Lady Millicent in the village or at the vicarage, and these occasions were red-letter days in the sad-coloured routine of his life; for the charm she exercised over him had increased rather than diminished, and her exquisite culture and refinement—as contrasted with the commonplace mediocrity of the people among whom his lot had always been cast—appealed to his refined sensibilities as irresistibly as it had done when first he met her all those years ago. Lady Millicent called upon Mrs. Collins, and invited her and the children up to the Court; but poor Maria's nature had not been sweetened by the uses of adversity, and her always vulgar dread of being "patronized" had assumed gigantic proportions since the loss of her money, so she repulsed Lady Millicent's overtures so rudely that her ladyship never ventured to repeat them. Edmund remonstrated feebly; but after his ill-usage of Maria, supplemented by Maria's goodness to his motherless children, he felt bound to respect Mrs. Collins's wishes in every possible way; therefore his red-letter days were few and far between. Moreover, Mr. Thornton discovered that after a glimpse of the above-mentioned carriage and pair on the Lowton road, the drudgery at the bank seemed more dreary, and the little house at Carewe more squalid than ever; which, after all, was a heavy price to pay for the privilege of taking off his hat once or twice a week to a fine lady. So, perhaps, the less he saw of Lady Millicent the better for his peace of mind. Edmund hated his life at the Lowton bank. The work was naturally distasteful to a man who had hitherto had enough and to spare of the good things of this life, and therefore had the time to devote himself to

his love of art; but the most unkindest cut of all was Mr. Holland's behaviour to him. When the Thorntons lived at the Grange, the Hollands had been to some extent in rivalry with them; and now that his enemy had been delivered into his hand, Mr. Holland was too vulgar-minded a man not to take full advantage of the position, while Edmund Thornton was too sensitive not to feel this advantage to the uttermost, and to be cut to the quick by Mr. Holland's well-directed snubs. But the cup of poor Edmund's humiliation was not yet filled to the brim.

"Oh! my dear, have you heard the news about the Thornton man?" asked Lady Thistletop one day, as she was taking tea with her sister at Carewe Court, about two years after Mrs. Edmund Thornton's death.

"No: is there any news?" asked Lady Millicent.

"Yes. Thistletop told me yesterday that that dreadful Thornton man has stolen fifty pounds out of Mr. Holland's bank."

"Impossible! I don't believe a word of it."

"Nevertheless, it is true. Mr. Holland told Thistletop himself, when Thistletop called at the bank yesterday. Fifty pounds is gone, and no one could have taken it but that Thornton man, because no one else knew where it was except Mr. Holland and his nephew, and of course they couldn't have done it."

"Why not?"

"Well, Mr. Holland naturally would not steal from himself; and his nephew wouldn't, because he has been brought up by the Hollands and is like their own son."

"I fail to see how being brought up by the Hollands would prevent a man from turning out a rogue or a cad,

or anything else disgusting," said Lady Millicent, with fine scorn.

"Oh, Milly! what things you say. However every one is certain that that Thornton man must have taken the money, because he is so poor he must have wanted it badly."

"What nonsense! Really, Emma, I wonder how Thistletop can demean himself by gossiping with such a creature as Mr. Holland; and I wonder still more how you can allow him to repeat such vulgar tales to you."

Lady Thistletop, however, was not abashed by her sister's magnificence as the rest of the world was, so she continued:

"Well, I believe it, anyhow, and so does Thistletop; and it is all over Lowton. Mr. Holland has very generously decided not to prosecute, but of course he has dismissed the man at a moment's notice."

"I repeat, I refuse even to listen to such low scandal; and I wonder that Thistletop could so far forget himself as to do so. But your husband has always been too fond of gossiping about Lowton, Emma. You should make it more cheerful for him at the Castle. If you entertained a little more, and he had more of the society of his equals, he would not be tempted to make all these common confidants," said Lady Millicent, who could show fight as well as her sister when she chose.

"Perhaps so," snapped Emma. "But about this dreadful Thornton affair: I believe he is a person who once presumed to make love to you, Millicent, but I daresay you have forgotten all about it, it was such ages ago."

"No, I have not forgotten," said Millicent quietly;

"though, as you say, it happened centuries ago. I saw his wife once at the vicarage, not long before her death, and I often see the children in the village and talk to them. They are dear little things."

"Really, Millicent, I wonder how you can notice second-class children like that."

"I am fond of all children, as you know, Emma, and I so rarely see any. I often wish that you had some, as they would have been a great interest in my life, and I should have made a model maiden-aunt," remarked Lady Millicent, who knew well where the shoe pinched at Castle Thistletop, and was as capable as most women of jumping upon the painful spot when the fortunes of war required it.

The arrow entered the gold. Millicent did not often rouse herself; but when she did, even Emma felt that it was time to take heed to her ways; so she said more pleasantly:

"Well of course, Milly, it is very sad for these poor Thornton children, whether the charge against their father is true or not; especially as you say they have no mother. I should quite like to send them some garments from my 'Ladies' Needlework Guild,' but their father might not like it, you know."

"I hardly think he would," said Millicent, smiling in spite of herself, for she knew that the "Ladies' Needlework Guild" was as the very apple of Emma's eye, and if any one gave to or received from that excellent body of upper-class matrons suitable garments, it was counted to them for righteousness in Lady Thistletop's eyes. "Poor little things! I wish I could do something for them, Emma, but I can't, because they live with Mrs.

Collins. She is such a disagreeable person that it is impossible to show her any kindness."

"I always did dislike that Mrs. Collins," said Lady Thistletop, treading with the caution of the already wounded, and feeling that peace was more comfortable if less glorious than war. "The brother, I remember, was quite nice-looking and gentlemanly when first they came here, but she was always ugly and common."

"Wasn't she?" agreed Millicent graciously, being quite willing to sacrifice her pawn on condition that she might keep her knight; and being moreover enough of a woman, underneath her grand manners, to resent Maria's summary treatment of her distinguished self. "And she always had such horrid manners and such a nasty temper. I remember mother used to say that a man can rise to any position socially, but that a woman always sticks to the station in which she was born."

"Very sensible of mamma!" said Emma cordially. Whereupon the sisters drifted into conversation upon other subjects.

But Lady Millicent did not forget the news which she had pretended to despise. She took the trouble to learn all the details from Mrs. Grear, and her heart ached for her old lover when she heard what sore straits he was in. Without the slightest ground for his suspicion, Mr. Holland had decided that Thornton had stolen the missing fifty pounds, and had accordingly dismissed him at a moment's notice; and poor Edmund—who had neither the means nor the spirit to bring an action for libel against his employer—quietly accepted his dismissal, and returned to the cottage at Carewe a broken-hearted man. But even then his troubles were not over.

Mrs. Collins was a hard, useful, unornamental little woman, that reminded one of a hard-worn horse-hair sofa. She seemed made to be sat upon, and yet was harsh and prickly to all who approached her. But even horse-hair wears out at last; and so did Mrs. Collins. Her health had been failing for some time, but no one had taken the trouble to notice it; and she was so prostrated by this fresh misfortune and disgrace that she could not rally from the shock, but died just a fortnight after her brother's dismissal from Mr. Holland's bank. Then one by one the children fell ill, chiefly because there was no one to look after them; and their father, who by this time was almost penniless, was at his wit's end to know what to do or where to turn for help. As he sat in his squalid and desolate home and looked back on his past life, he realized how the world would congratulate Millicent [illegible]ewe on having refused to link her lot with his all those years ago. Since she had said him nay, he had steadily gone down into the valley of failure, while she had remained serene and happy in the high places of the earth. And perhaps it had been well for her that it had been so. Nevertheless, though his love was too perfect ever to cast a shadow of blame, Edmund Thornton could not help being conscious that with Millicent beside him he would never thus have made havoc of his life; it was her dismissal that had made him first despondent and then reckless. If only Millicent had had the courage to take her life into her own hands twenty years ago, and to declare that her world of fashionable frivolity would be well lost for love, he felt that he could have made a name worthy of her, and would have written himself down in the book of human history as a success-

ful man. But because Millicent bowed her neck to the yoke of rank and fashion, and chose to walk softly and to lie delicately among her own people rather than to face the scorn of her little world for making what it would call a *mésalliance*, Edmund Thornton had signally failed in the race, and his failure was Millicent's fault as well as his own. True, it was weak of Thornton to let a woman thus wreck his life; but this did not indemnify the woman for her share in the wreckage. The weakness of the weak brother did not exempt the great Saint from abstaining from meat while the world should stand, if by that meat the weak brother should be caused to offend.

"I really don't know what to do, Lady Millicent," said Mrs. Grear one day with tears in her eyes. "Mr. Thornton's maid-of-all work, Kate Green, is leaving him to-day, because she says she won't remain in the service of a suspected thief; and for the same reason—absurd though it appears—I can get no one in the village to take her place. As if any one who had the merest acquaintance with Mr. Thornton could for a moment believe him guilty of anything that was not strictly honourable! I have no patience with people for listening to that horrid Mr. Holland's vile accusation, but about here they are so ignorant."

"Do you mean to say that that poor man is alone in the house with four sick children, and no one to help him to nurse them?" exclaimed Lady Millicent.

"Yes; isn't it dreadful? And, what is worse, I am afraid he has no money," replied Mrs. Grear, fairly crying by this time.

Lady Millicent did not cry—she was not of the cry-

ing sort; but her eyes were very bright, and there was a red spot on either cheek as she said warmly:

"But this is too terrible! What is the matter with the children? Are they very ill?"

"Only severe colds to begin with; but the poor little things have been so neglected since their aunt's death, that now I fear they are very bad indeed; and they will be worse unless I can get some one to look after them at once. I would gladly go myself, but the vicar is suffering from one of his worst attacks of gout, and can hardly bear me out of his sight; and none of my servants will go on account of this 'suspected thief' nonsense."

"It is nonsense, and worse than nonsense," said Lady Millicent, with flashing eyes.

"I know it is; but, nonsense or no nonsense, it will be the death of those poor children, and will prevent everybody from offering that desolate man a helping hand."

"Not everybody; it will not prevent me," said her ladyship.

"No; you are always good and kind. But in this case I fear you are powerless, as your servants will object as much as mine to go and nurse the little Thorntons."

"I shall not ask my servants to go and nurse the little Thorntons; I shall go and nurse them myself," said Lady Millicent, with her grandest air.

"You, Lady Millicent?" gasped Mrs. Grear, breathless with amazement that this fine lady, who had never done a stroke of work in her life, should suddenly offer to undertake a menial duty, at which even little Kate Green had turned up her plebeian nose.

"Yes, I. I am a very good nurse, I can assure you, Mrs. Grear. I shall drive straight to the cottage, and see for myself if the children are fit to be moved. If they are, I shall bring them back to the Court with me; if not, I shall stay and nurse them at the cottage."

"But, my dearest, lady, what will people say?" expostulated Mrs. Grear, in whose sight the conventionalities were as Commandments.

"It doesn't matter in the least to me what people will say," answered the daughter of a hundred earls, with fine scorn.

"But what will they think?" persisted Mrs. Grear, who did not approve of mountains being uprooted from their appointed place in order to pursue the Mahomet of the moment.

"I can tell you what they will think if they are wise," cried Lady Millicent; "they will think that Millicent Carewe—who has been a fine lady for forty years—has at last begun to be a woman; and that, having spoilt Edmund Thornton's life twenty years ago, by her pride and cowardice, she has now the courage to try to make amends by her voluntary humiliation. That is what they will think, Mrs. Grear, and they will not be far wrong."

As Edmund Thornton sat in his wretched home, helplessly endeavouring to soothe the sufferings of his poor little children, he felt that life was over for him, and that his heart was broken. He had wrestled with Fate, and Fate had conquered; what was the use of struggling any more? Kate Green had left him that morning; and the girl's insolent explanation of her reasons for thus forsaking him in his extremity, had cut him to the quick. His brother and sisters—to whom he had humbled him-

self to ask for help—had definitely and finally refused to have anything to do with him and his starving children; and now he was in a sore strait indeed, and knew not which way to turn. But while he sat in dumb misery, feeling that his burden was too heavy to be borne, a radiant vision entered his shabby little parlour, and the voice which had made the only music in his life, said softly:

"Edmund, they say you are in trouble, and I am come to help you."

CHAPTER IV

Edmund Thornton listened spell-bound while Millicent Carewe unfolded to him her plan of carrying off his family wholesale to Carewe Court, and there nursing it back to its normal health. At first he was sorely tempted to accept the goods the gods had thus tardily provided, and make no demur; but on second thoughts the gentleman in him (which poverty and shame had still left intact) rose up and spoke.

"You are very good, Lady Millicent!" he said. "I can never convey to you how intensely I appreciate your offer of help, and all that it involves; but it is impossible for me to accept it."

"Oh! you are wrong, you are wrong," cried Lady Millicent eagerly. "It is cruel of you to punish me now for the folly of twenty years ago!"

"I am not punishing you. You never deserved punishment; and if you did, I am the last man to mete it out to you."

"Then you are too proud to let me help you. Pride may be a good thing in moderation (though I have my doubts about that); but now you are carrying it too far."

"But it is not pride now that stands in my way. As a matter of fact I think that the pride which can not submit to receive real kindness is a very cheap affair indeed, and I am proud to say that I never possessed it."

"Then if it isn't pride which prevents you from letting me help you, what is it?" demanded her ladyship impatiently, for the queen-regnant of Carewe was unaccustomed to the slightest opposition.

"It is love," cried Edmund eagerly, taking her unresisting hands in his. "Oh! Millicent, can't you understand? Though I am reduced to beggary and branded as a thief, I am still a man—and a man who loves you. Therefore I can not accept favours at your hands. Believe me, if I had never loved you—or if I didn't love you still—I should most gratefully accept your offers of charity to me and to my motherless children, and should spend the rest of my dishonoured days in trying to show forth my gratitude toward my Lady Bountiful. I do not stoop to assure you that I am innocent of the vile thing laid to my charge—it would be an insult to your friendship to suppose for an instant that you had even listened to it; but though I am still honourable and honest, I am nevertheless steeped in misery and disgrace. It would be preposterous for such a man as myself to offer to the Lady Millicent Carewe his love; but none the less would it be impossible for him to accept her charity."

"I believe the words love and charity are really synonymous," said Millicent softly; "but, if you would

prefer it, we will call the thing which I am offering to you by the former name."

"Oh, Millicent! don't tempt me above what I am able to bear. You know as well as I do that it would be madness for you to marry me in my present position; but for pity's sake don't add to my misery by playing with me. I can not bear it."

"Listen, Edmund; twenty years ago I threw away the substance for the shadow, and I have been living among shadows ever since till I am half sick of them, like the Lady of Shalott. Now I want to change my tactics and throw away the shadows for the substance. I am not an inexperienced girl as I was then; I am a woman of the world, and I know what I am doing. If by marrying you I lose my place in society, let it go! I have had my fill of it, and can be perfectly happy without it. A woman can be happy without being a fine lady; but a fine lady can not be happy without being a woman. When I was young and foolish you asked me to marry you and I refused. Now that I am old and wise I ask you to marry me; will you refuse as I did, Edmund?"

And of course Edmund did not refuse.

So Lady Millicent had her own way, and carried off the sick little Thorntons to the Court, where she nursed them back to health; and thereby implanted in their youthful breasts a passion of devotion to her sweet self which nothing thereafter could shake or diminish. Her engagement to Edmund Thornton was a nine-days-wonder of the finest quality; but its edge was slightly taken off (in her ladyship's opinion) by the discovery at the bank that Mr. Holland's nephew had stolen the fifty pounds after all, so that Edmund became a hero on his

own account. She would have preferred to marry him with the stigma still on his name, to prove to the world the intensity of her devotion to the man she loved; and for his name to be cleared afterward. But then Lady Millicent was only a woman; Thornton very much preferred the arrangement as it stood.

Lady Thistletop drove to Carewe, as was meet on hearing the astounding news, on a sort of special mission to point out to her misguided sister the error of that sister's ways. For some hours previously to her expedition, Lady Thistletop carried on such an impressive conversation with herself, that her lord and master feared that the wife of his bosom was demented, and ventured to ask why she thus greedily consumed her own smoke.

"I am preparing what to say to Millicent," replied her ladyship, with the ominous quietude which precedes a storm.

"It is always useless to prepare what one says to people," observed Lord Thistletop; "they never seem to have learnt their part properly, so fail to give one the correct cues."

"Cues or no cues," said Lady Thistletop scornfully, "I shall have to be very severe on Millicent."

For a moment the hen-pecked peer trembled for the offender for whom such punishment was fore-ordained; but when he recalled how the thunders and lightnings of his lady's wrath—which scorched his poor soul to a cinder—played apparently harmlessly around his sister-in-law's pretty head, he took comfort, and thanked a kindly Fate which reserved its fiercest storms for those who were strong enough to endure them. In which phalanx of heroes Lord Thistletop was not numbered.

As her husband had foretold, Emma's carefully rehearsed dialogue was not histrionically a success. Millicent certainly had omitted to learn her part properly—at any rate she was never ready with her cues, so that when Lady Thistletop at length uncorked the vials of her wrath they were as flat as bad soda-water.

"I really don't see the use of discussing it any further," said Lady Millicent at the conclusion of the whole matter. "I have made up my mind, and surely I am old enough to please myself."

"But think what people will say about such folly," groaned the agonized Emma.

"They can't say nastier things about my folly than they do about your prudence," replied Millicent, with her sweetest smile; "and yet you and Thistletop don't plunge into reckless extravagance just because a lot of stupid people call you mean and stingy. I often admire your indifference to people's opinions in this respect, and your superior sense in calmly pursuing your own way in spite of impertinent remarks," continued the younger sister, knowing full well that the free comments of the country-side on Lord Thistletop's publicly-practised economies were as gall and wormwood to his hospitable wife's soul.

"And it is such a wretched match, too," remarked Emma, wisely ignoring her sister's counter-attack, "for you who have always been so much admired."

"As if I cared about that! The fact is, Emma, I have had all that the world can give, and it hasn't satisfied me. I have had wealth and rank and worship and adulation till I am heartily sick of the whole show. Because the world's best gifts have been mine, I have been

able to examine them closely and to prove their true worth; and I have found that not one of them has the hall-mark of reality, but that all are nothing better than electro-plate. I feel that my life is empty and desolate, and that I have been near to missing the best altogether. I am tired of shams, Emma; and I am thankful that I have found out their worthlessness before it is too late for the realities to become mine. To know the good and to eschew the evil—that after all is our principal duty; but twenty years ago I was so blinded by the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of its high places, that I deliberately eschewed the good and chose the evil—for my conduct was ruled by my own selfishness and my love of ease and pleasure."

"Stuff and nonsense! I couldn't have believed that a woman of your age could be so school-girlish and romantic."

"I am not school-girlish and romantic; but the experience of life has taught me that the best things in the world are free to rich and poor alike, so happiness is not so unevenly distributed as it sometimes appears. I am tired of being a great lady, and now I hope to be as happy as the lodge-keeper at my own gates."

So Edmund Thornton and Millicent Carewe were married, and lived happily ever after, as the story-books say. And of course society did not drop them, as Lady Thistletop had hoped and foretold. Lady Millicent's world had hailed her as a queen for so long that it felt she could do no wrong; and it was accordingly ready to bow the knee to any king-consort whom her majesty might be pleased to select. The world is somewhat like a nettle after all; it stings those who fear it, but upon

those souls who dare to defy its sordid and frivolous traditions it is powerless to work any evil.

Set free from the chains of poverty, and with the inspiration of Millicent always at his side, Thornton took up his art again, and became a painter of no small distinction; and proud indeed was Lady Millicent when her husband was acknowledged to be one of the foremost artists of the day. The children were an interest to her; and under the constant influence of that most perfect of all creatures, a well-bred Englishwoman, they developed into charming girls, distinguished by much of their father's beauty and their stepmother's ease of manner.

In the early days of Lady Millicent's married life, the hearts of the Hollands were heavy within them. It was characteristic of Mrs. Holland that, though it was she who had egged her husband on to drag the name of Edmund Thornton through the mire, she blamed her spouse unceasingly for his vindictiveness, now that their enemy had triumphed over them; and she never rested until she had induced Mr. Holland to go himself to Carewe Court, in order to make his peace with the offended ruler thereof. But the offended ruler, for all her gracious ways, was not made of such light elements as the banker's wife imagined. Lady Millicent looked out of her window one sunny morning, and spied Mr. Holland driving through the park toward the house; whereupon she laid her plans and made her ready for battle, rejoicing that Edmund was out at the time, so that her enemy would be delivered into her hands with no fellow-man near to help him.

Mr. Holland tried to hide his sinking heart under his most business-like and banking air, as he rang the bell at

Carewe Court. He feared the lady he was about to encounter, but he feared the lady he had left behind still more; so between the deep sea on the one hand and the unmentionable alternative on the other, the prosperous banker was in a sore strait.

The butler answered in the affirmative to his inquiry as to whether Lady Millicent were at home; but, to Mr. Holland's amazement, the man left him standing in the hall while his card was carried in. The emissary quickly returned.

"Her ladyship says that if you want anything you had better apply to Mr. Thornton himself, or to the agent. She never sees people on business."

Mr. Holland could hardly believe the testimony of his own ears. Could the lady realize to whom she had sent this message? But yes, she must, as the banker had sent in his card so as to prevent any mistake as to his identity.

"Tell Lady Millicent Thornton," he replied in his most pompous manner, "that I, Mr. Holland, the banker, most particularly wish to speak to her. Neither Mr. Thornton nor the agent would serve my purpose."

The butler carried the message into the morning-room. On his return he said—

"Her ladyship is too much engaged just now to speak to you; but if you will wait in the housekeeper's-room for an hour she will see you then."

Again Mr. Holland felt that he had received a blow. The housekeeper's-room! What an unseemly spot for an honoured banker to sit down in! But he had no redress, so meekly followed the stately and imperturbable butler down a long stone passage to his unhallowed rest-

ing-place. As Mr. Holland sat for more than an hour alone in the housekeeper's room the spirit gradually went out of him, and his fears of the woman he had left behind became as nothing in comparison with his fears of the woman he was about to meet. After all, it is the unknown that terrifies us, and the Gehenna of Mrs. Holland's wrath was by no means an undiscovered bourne to her much-enduring husband; in fact he felt almost home-sick for this oft-trodden valley of humiliation, when he pictured the unimagined torments to which Lady Millicent's anger might expose him. After nearly an hour and a half of this dreary waiting, during which time all his courage oozed away through his finger-tips, Mr. Holland was released by his stately gaoler and conducted into the august presence. Lady Millicent was sitting on an easy chair in her pretty morning-room, looking more regal than usual, and she neither rose herself nor invited Mr. Holland to be seated. Which further discourtesy did not serve to put the wretched banker more at his ease. So he stood at the door with his hat in his hand, looking the picture of misery, and feeling even worse.

"I believe you want to speak to me," said her ladyship in her coldest manner, without even the prefix of "Good morning."

The banker's knees trembled beneath him; it was worse than he had pictured in his wildest nightmares, but the thought of the storm that awaited him at home impelled him not to fall without striking a blow for himself and his.

"I wanted to speak to you, Lady Millicent, on a little matter of business," began poor Mr. Holland, wondering how it was that his voice seemed to come out of

the top of his bald head instead of out of his mouth as usual.

"If it has reference to taking one of my farms, or anything of that sort, you must see Mr. Thornton or the agent about it. I told my servant to tell you so; did he not?"

"Oh! yes, he did—he did. But it isn't about that," gasped Mr. Holland.

"Perhaps it is about a nephew of yours," said Lady Millicent more graciously, "who, I was sorry to hear, got into trouble some little time ago. If he wants to make a fresh start, and if you think he would be more out of temptation working in the country than in a bank, I should be very glad to help him to take to better ways by finding him something to do on my estate; but that also must rest with my husband. He understands business so much better than I do that I leave everything to him; and of course his wishes are paramount here. But I am sure he would be willing to help any young man in trouble, so I shall be very pleased to refer your request to him."

But this was more than even the affrighted banker could stand, so at last he found words.

"It was about your husband that I came to speak to you, Lady Millicent, and not about my nephew. I wish to explain to you that unfortunate—er—mistake connected with Mr. Thornton's dismissal from my bank."

"Excuse me," said Lady Millicent freezingly, as she rang the bell, "if I decline to listen to your explanation. I should regard it as an unpardonable liberty if a friend of my own presumed to discuss my husband and his affairs with me; but from a perfect stranger such as your-

self such presumption becomes an intolerable impertinence. Show this person to the door," she added to the man who answered the bell.

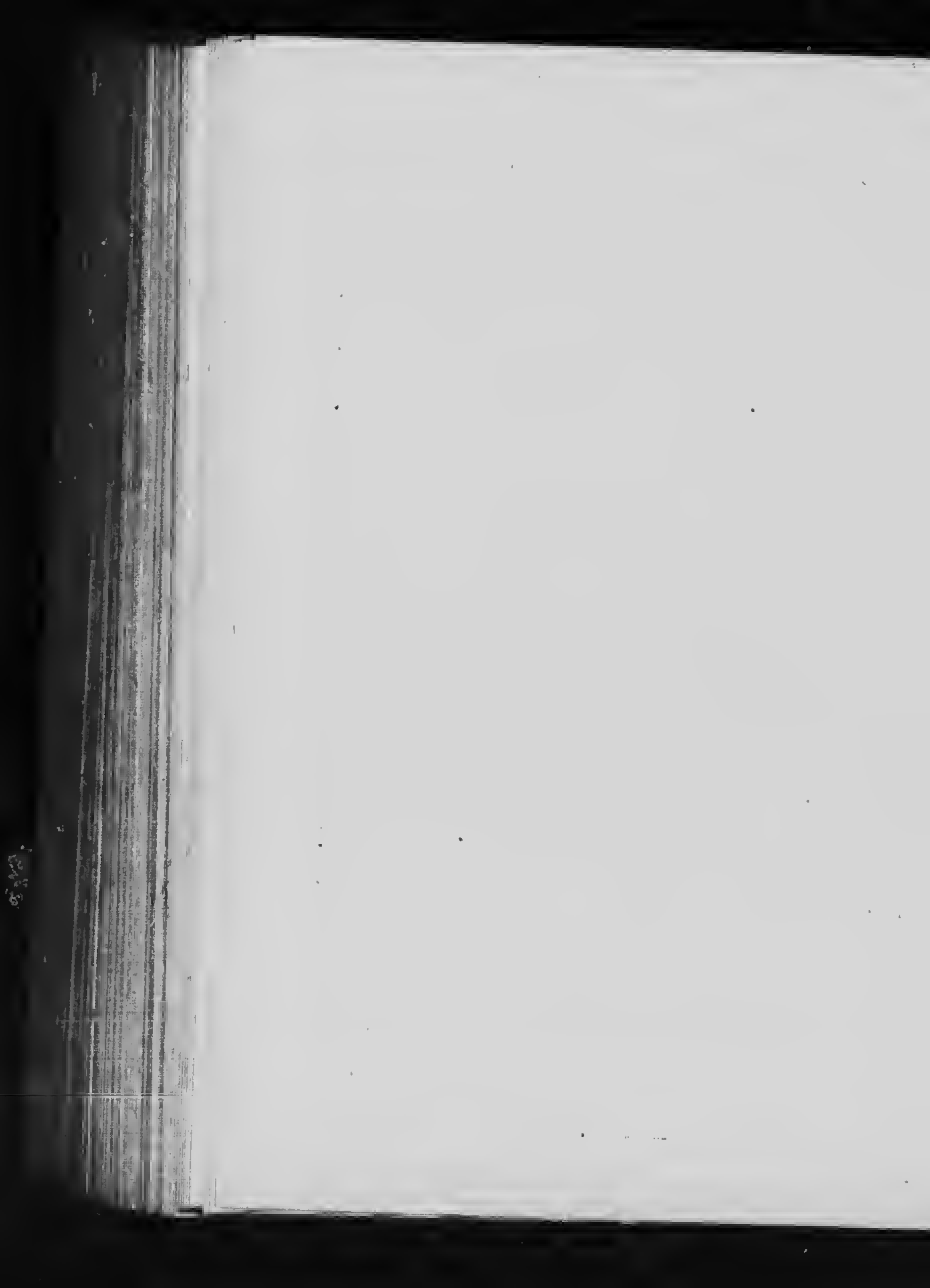
For one moment Mr. Holland stood irresolute. It was insupportable to be called a "person" by a fine lady, with an imperturbable butler looking on. But on the other hand, of what profit was speech? for it would be difficult to prove by force of argument to the most unprejudiced audience that a middle-aged banker was not a "person." So he decided that wisdom and safety lay in flight. And he fled.

After she had thus routed and discomfited her enemy, Lady Millicent laughed heartily to herself.

"I punished the old wretch thoroughly," she mused, with complacence; "he will never forget it as long as he lives. But I am glad Edmund was not at home; he would never have allowed me to be so rude to anybody in my own house—not even to Mr. Holland. Men are so dreadfully magnanimous. I am very thankful, therefore, that I am a woman—otherwise that horrid banker would never have got his deserts."

But another woman than Lady Millicent took it upon herself to see that Mr. Holland had his deserts; and if her ladyship had heard what his better half and domestic Nemesis was pleased to say to the offending banker, she would have felt that Edmund had been amply avenged.

A LATTER-DAY STYLITES



A LATTER-DAY STYLITES

The Reverend Mark Tyrrell sat in his dingy little vicarage, trying—as he had been trying as far back as he could remember—to soothe the garrulous complainings of his invalid sister. And the soothing of Julia Tyrrell was not a task to be lightly undertaken: it combined the maximum of effort with the minimum of reward; for the smiles of Julia when gratified were by no means as effective as the sneers of Julia when grieved. Nevertheless it was a task in the fulfilment whereof Mark never failed or even lost his patience. His mother, at the close of her life, had made him promise that he would care for her spoiled darling henceforth as she had done hitherto; and since Mrs. Tyrrell's death, some four years ago, Mark had kept that promise to the uttermost. Every one else had grown tired of Julia's ill-health and Julia's ill-temper; but not so Mark. The more their little world wearied of Julia, and cast her off (as everybody's little world will do sooner or later to those whose afflictions are long drawn-out), the more did her brother cleave to her, and sacrifice himself on the shrine of her whims and fancies. Untried friendships are those which last the longest; and Julia tried her friends so sorely that they soon ceased to be her friends at all: Mark, noticing this and yet powerless to avert it, did his utmost to prove

himself an antidote to the poison which disillusion and disappointment had instilled into his sister's soul. Julia Tyrrell was much to be pitied—notably in that she was one of those women, unfortunately not a rare type, whose insides and outsides in no way match each other. Inwardly she was a silly, romantic girl, caring for little else than pleasure and luxury and admiration; and, had she been rich and good-looking, she would have cut a very fair figure in the worldly world for which her needy little soul hungered. But outwardly she was a sickly woman, past her first youth, whose slight pretensions to prettiness had long since been rubbed out by those merciless erasers of feminine charms, ill-health and limited means; therefore the poor, warped creature spent her useless days in devouring sensational novels, and kicking feebly, though unceasingly, against the pricks. Her brother's pity for her was inexhaustible: in all the stress of his full life he was never too busy to sympathize with her sufferings, nor too tired to lighten the gloom of her monotonous existence. And, further, he denied himself almost the necessaries of life in order that Julia should have enough and to spare of those little luxuries and delicacies for which her pleasure-loving nature craved.

"I am very sorry that you feel so ill to-day, dear," said Mark gently.

"There is nothing to be especially sorry about to-day, that I can see," replied Julia pettishly; "I always feel ill, but you are too busy to notice it."

"Oh, no! I'm not, Judy. I am sure it makes me wretched when I think that you are in pain; and I'd gladly bear it for you if I could."

"But you can't, you see," snapped Julia, "worse luck for me!"

"Nevertheless, cheer up, old girl! I daresay you'll feel better to-morrow."

"Cheer up, indeed! That is just like you. You are so strong and well yourself that you find it easy to be cheerful; and therefore you think that everybody is as happy and as comfortable as you are," grumbled Julia.

Mark was silent for a moment. "Cheering up" was not as easy a task to him as his sister imagined, and as for being "happy and comfortable," he had long ago decided that such blessedness was a dainty not written down on his *menu* of life. Then he said tenderly: "Isn't there anything that I can do for you, little girl? Let me take you out in your bath-chair."

"Take me out in my bath-chair? I'm far too ill to dream of going out to-day, and you ought to have the sense to see it."

"You do seem ill, darling," agreed Mark lamely. He felt that somehow he had been a brute, but could not quite understand wherein his brutality lay. "Of course, I noticed it as soon as I came in, but I thought the fresh air would do you good."

"Strong people are always so stupid about the fresh air," whined the invalid; "they think it is such a treat; but delicate people detest it. I wish you could enter into other people's feelings a little, Mark; but you never seem able. You judge everybody by yourself, and you think that all mankind are as strong and happy as you are."

The young vicar smiled sadly. "I could hardly be accused of optimism if I did, Julia; but let that pass. And I have a piece of news for you: Beatrice Earle is

going out to Australia, to live with that rich old uncle of hers."

"Well, I am surprised! Who told you, Mark?" exclaimed Julia, who was so much elated by this unexpected piece of good news that she did not notice how old and worn her brother's face had grown since yesterday.

"Beatrice told me herself this morning," replied Mark, in a voice that was not quite his own.

"I never was more surprised in my life, and I can't say I'm sorry," cried his sister. "I never did like Beatrice, as you know; she is so vigorous and full of life and spirits that it exhausts me to look at her."

Mark made no reply, so Julia continued:

"As she has about five hundred a year of her own, I don't know why she must go and live with that old Australian uncle. She has got on quite well since her father's death, and her little home always looks bright and comfortable."

"Still, it is lonely for a woman as young as Beatrice to live by herself," said the vicar. "I knew that her staying on in that house after Colonel Earle's death was not a permanent arrangement."

"At any rate she is sure to secure a husband. Husbands are as plentiful as blackberries out there, I believe."

Mark's face grew cold and scornful. "That is not a nice remark for a girl to make about another girl whom she has called her friend, Julia."

"What nonsense! Girls are not as ridiculously loyal to their so-called friends as you are, Mark, I am glad to say."

"And, moreover, such a speech is absurd when ap-

plied to a beautiful girl like Beatrice," continued Mark, ignoring the interruption.

Julia pouted. "Oh! everybody knows you are simply infatuated with Beatrice; but, for my part, I could never see her charm. She is too vigorous and energetic for my taste; and I am sure that men admire delicate fragile little women more than those big strong ones."

"They may in novels, Judy; I doubt it in real life."

But Miss Tyrrell was so overjoyed at the news of her friend's exodus that, for a wonder, she did not feel inclined to quarrel; though her custom was to twist any and every remark into an insult for herself, and to resent it accordingly. But for this once she did not make herself ready for battle, and she continued:

"I am extremely glad that she is going away for another reason. Do you know, Mark, I have sometimes felt afraid that you might fall in love with Beatrice and want to marry her? It would have been fearfully hard on me if that had happened. I scarcely think you could have been so selfish as to do such a thing; but still it was just possible, as long as Beatrice was on the ground."

Mark crossed the room and looked out of the window, for he did not want Julia to see his face or hear his voice just then. When we have just buried our happiness, we do not care to see our friends dancing and making merry over the grave. After a time we allow them to picnic there at will; but while the grave is quite fresh, we feel inclined to put up a notice: "Visitors are requested to keep off the grass." As Julia continued her silly, selfish chatter, in serene unconsciousness of the

pain she thereby inflicted, Mark gradually got himself in hand again, and was soon the same patient, unemotional brother as before.

"You see," moralized Julia, "it would have been frightfully wicked of you to marry Beatrice Earle, because mother made you promise you would always look after me. Even with the help of Beatrice's little fortune, you could hardly have afforded to keep the two of us: and if you could, I would never have lived in the same house with that noisy, violent girl. That vulgar cheerfulness of hers would have given me a chronic headache," added Miss Tyrrell, whose besetting sin was gentility, and who regarded everything that was straightforward and natural and healthy as common and low in the extreme. To her mind a feeble pulse was the sign of noble blood, and an untasted dinner the acme of genteel refinement.

"This is foolish and profitless conversation, Julia," said her brother sternly. "It is enough for you to know that I have given you my promise that I will never marry, but will devote myself to taking care of you, and lightening—as far as in me lies—the burden which has been laid upon you. Therefore do not again worry yourself, or make yourself miserable by imagining that any woman, however charming, could ever come between you and me. I have given you my word, and that is final; and as it is a subject I do not care to discuss further, I shall be obliged to you if you will kindly refrain from mentioning it again. And now, my little sister, let us change the topic and talk of something pleasant. Has any one been to see you to-day?"

"People hardly ever come to see me now. The way

I am neglected is abominable! The only caller I have had to-day is Mr. Roper."

The young vicar's face clouded. "I don't like that fellow, Julia. I wish you would not let him call here."

"That's just like your selfishness, Mark! Here am I shut up in this poky little hole, while you are going about enjoying yourself; and yet you grudge me even the few pleasures within my reach. For selfishness of the purest water, commend me to strong, healthy people, like you and Beatrice Earle!"

"I hope I am not selfish, Julia; I certainly try not to be," replied Mark sadly; "and I would gladly add to your pleasures if I could. But I fail to understand how Edgar Roper's visits can be counted among them, for he is not a nice man, nor a suitable friend for you and me."

"Well, his visits are a pleasure to me, anyhow," said the invalid crossly; "and that ought to be enough for you."

"But he is such a vulgar man, dear; and they say that his wealth is by no means well-gotten."

"Stuff and nonsense! I hate the stupid, gossiping people about here, Mark; and the fact that they abuse Mr. Roper only makes me like him all the more."

But Mark Tyrrell had fought such a battle with himself that day, that he had not the heart to begin another with his sister. He had conquered, it is true; but he had been so sorely wounded in the fray that he longed to lie down and die. Therefore he capitulated at once to Julia, and then locked himself up in his study and looked his triumph in the face; and he realized that, though the victory was his, the pain of such victory was

harder to bear than defeat; for the garden of his life had been the battlefield, and it was so scorched and blackened, and trampled into dust by the fury of the fray, that it could never rejoice or blossom any more for ever. For he loved Beatrice Earle, and he knew that she loved him: nevertheless for his oath's sake, and for the sake of the worthless sister who daily sat at meat with him, he put love and all its attendant happiness out of his life, and deliberately chose rather to suffer with Julia than to rejoice with the woman he loved. Mark was fully aware that no one would have the patience with poor Julia that he had, and he believed that, apart from him, she would mope and pine away; and he also knew that she would never consent to live in the same house with Beatrice, as she was terribly jealous of all women more fortunate and more attractive than herself. Therefore there seemed nothing for it but to let Beatrice go; though in that case their parting would, in all human probability, be a final one. And—which was the cruellest cut of all—Beatrice would have to go away with hard thoughts of him in her heart; for if once he spoke the words of love, whereof his spirit was so full, no parting would be possible: therefore his lips were sealed.

Ever since they had been boy and girl together, Beatrice Earle had been the one bright element in Mark Tyrrell's dreary little world. She was the salt of his life, and kept his spirit fresh and wholesome, in spite of the depressing counter-influence of his selfish and exacting sister. There are many people who are like salt on the earth: the presence of one such gives savour to the dreariest party, and flavour to the dullest day;

and yet they are not necessarily better than their fellows. But they have the gift of a strong personality; and without such as these in the world, life would soon lose its savour for most of us. Deprived of Beatrice's bracing and invigorating influence, Mark felt that he should soon grow as dissatisfied and bitter as Julia herself; nevertheless—so strong was his sense of what he believed (though wrongly believed) to be his duty—he had decided to put away from him the only gladness he had ever known; and, having once decided, he was as iron—nothing on earth could alter his decision. With the tendency of all morbid and ascetic natures to see only one side, and that the darker side, of a question, Mark did not realize that a duty which coincides with inclination may possibly be as urgent as a duty which involves self-sacrifice; nor did he understand that a brilliant, capable woman, such as Beatrice, had after all as great a claim to consideration as a sickly, unattractive woman, such as Julia. He still clung to the mediæval heresy that what is unpalatable is invariably to be commended, and what is pleasant, invariably to be condemned; and, further, he was ready to uphold, even to the death, whatsoever he imagined to be of faith and not of sin. Nevertheless he could not yet bear to face the idea of a daily life wherein Beatrice no longer lived and moved and had her being.

During the weeks which preceded Beatrice Earle's departure, the girl bore herself bravely, though a life apart from Mark was to her mind the very abomination of desolation. But Beatrice had her full complement of that useful article called pride, and this came to her help in her time of need. She was enough of a woman

to know that Mark loved her; but if his love proved weaker than his (as she thought, mistaken) sense of duty, she was too proud to let him see how much stronger her love was than his. She was fully aware that she could prove a help meet for the young vicar; and that, with her beside him, he could do better work for his Master, and rise to nobler heights himself, than were possible to him as long as he was left to his own unpractical dreamings. For Mark lived up among the clouds, and sorely needed some human hand now and then to bring him down to earth, and guide his sometimes blundering footsteps; while Beatrice, on the contrary, kept her eyes too close to the ground, and took life in so easy and light-hearted a fashion, that she in her turn required a loving hand to lift her out of her Happy Valley, and bring her nearer to the Delectable Mountains. In the depths of her heart, below her love for him, Beatrice faintly despised her lover for preferring (as she imagined) his tiresome sister to her radiant self; and she was alike incapable of fathoming the depths of Mark's silent devotion to her, and of scaling the heights of his quixotic powers of self-sacrifice. Beatrice could not understand that people may voluntarily give up their hearts' desires at the call of duty; if they thus gave them up, she simply believed that the forfeited articles were not their hearts' desires at all, but dummies prepared for the occasion. Perhaps Beatrice Earle's scales were, after all, ordinary instruments, capable of measuring only common things, and not designed for meting out the precious metals; but, such as they were, Mark Tyrrell was weighed in them, and found wanting. Not the least bitter drop in the young man's cup of renun-

ciation was the knowledge that of the two women dearest to him upon earth, one was unconscious of, and the other disdainful toward, his great sacrifice. But all this moved him never a whit.

"Mark," said Beatrice one day, not long before the date fixed for her departure, "when I am in Australia I shall often think of you, and wonder what has happened to you, and what you are doing."

The vicar's face had grown very worn and haggard of late, but he answered cheerfully: "A less vivid imagination than yours would hardly need to experience wonder on that score; for I shall always go on doing the things that I have always done, and nothing will happen to me till I die."

"Don't be too sure of that, reverend sir. Perhaps I shall hear of your leading about a wife as well as a sister some day."

"Never, Beatrice. I once promised my mother that I would never marry and leave Julia, and I mean to keep that promise to the end. I feel that my life is not my own, but is dedicated to my suffering sister."

"That is very dear and sweet of you, you know, Mark, and I can not tell you how much I admire you for it. In fact I don't believe there is anybody in the whole world as good as you. Nevertheless I can't help thinking that such extreme unselfishness is unnatural and to some degree morbid, like the hectic flush on a feverish person's cheek, in spite of its beauty."

"I know that you and I could never think alike on such a subject, Beatrice," replied the young man sadly, "for you have always been a bit of a pagan. You are

so prone to take the world easily and cheerfully, and not see the self-sacrifice which the ideal life involves."

"Good gracious, Mark! you really are too good for anything. Being with you is like living in a cathedral—very ennobling and improving, but apt to make one cold and hungry if one lived there entirely. But, for all your goodness, you are terribly misguided. I can not for the life of me see why Julia's happiness is all-important, while yours counts for nothing."

"I can not explain, Beatrice; but I see my duty plain before me, and I mean to do it. I am perfectly aware that you consider me a fool; but that only means one more prickle on my already thorny path of life."

Even a worm will turn—much more a highly respected ecclesiastic. Beatrice knew that she could make this particular worm turn whenever she liked, and for years these enforced gymnastics had been a spectacle much patronized by that young lady; so she was glad to discover that her hand had not lost its cunning in worm-turning exercises, and cheerfully continued the same.

"I don't *think* you are a fool, my good Mark; I have always *known* it. One doesn't *think* about self-evident facts. But don't be depressed, my dear boy; yours isn't at all a peculiar case."

But Mark was a little cross by this time, and held his tongue; so Beatrice, nothing abashed, continued musingly:

"Curtius was a hero when he jumped into that horrid, yawning pit, but he was none the less a fool; Simeon Stylites was a saint when he sat all his days on the top of that nasty old pillar, but he was none the

less a fool; the Reverend Mark Tyrrell is both a hero and a saint, but he is none the less a fool. I have spoken."

"And spoken to the point, as usual," said the vicar, whose anger had been ephemeral.

"I always do—it is a rule of mine. Now, for my part, I never understand people like Curtius and Stylites. If a thing is of any practical use, do it by all means; but I have no patience with folks who sacrifice themselves to some absurd fetish created by their own imaginations. You are rather like Stylites, Mark, now I come to think of it; if you thought it your duty to live on the top of a pillar, to the top of a pillar you'd stick all the days of your mortal life. Now to me such an existence would be capital punishment indeed (please pardon the pun). It would not amuse me at all."

"I don't think it exactly 'amused' Stylites," interrupted Mark drily.

"Then why on earth did he do it, for certainly no one else benefited by the saintly escapade?"

"He felt he was doing what was right, I suppose."

"Nonsense! Now, in my humble judgment, it is a far better thing to found a hospital or to open a soup-kitchen, than to jump down all the pits or to climb up all the pillars in creation."

"Nevertheless I think I understand why Stylites stuck to his pillar," mused Mark.

"Of course you do, 'for 'tis your nature too.' But—to change the subject abruptly from saints to sinners—why do you let Julia see so much of that terrible Mr. Roper?"

"I don't let her; she will do it. But I hate to interfere with her pleasures, she has so few."

"You are very good to her," said Beatrice gently.

"I try to be, because I am so sorry for her. You see, she is completely shut out from everything that makes life so pleasant to pretty, healthy girls like you; and I am always endeavouring to make up to her for what she has missed, poor child! The little jaunts and junketings, the sweet secrets and love-affairs, which make up the lives of other women, are a closed book to Julia. She never had any real youth; and it is hard to grow old before one has been young."

"Still I don't think that in any circumstances Julia would have gone in much for love-affairs," said Beatrice seriously; "the taste doesn't run in your family."

"Simply because we are neither in a position to marry," replied the vicar quietly.

"Stuff and nonsense! That has nothing in the world to do with it. Love, my dear boy, is a pastime for one's youth—marriage a provision for one's old age. It is stupid of you to confound the two."

"Oh, Beatrice, Beatrice, what a cynic you are!"

Miss Earle laughed. "But," she said, "to return to Julia; I think that, with such a brother as you in one scale, all the delights you have mentioned will not be heavy enough to weigh down the other."

"Yet I utterly fail to make the poor girl happy, or even contented," sighed the vicar.

"I can't bear Mr. Roper myself," remarked the young lady, with decision.

"Nor can I," agreed Mark, who with regard to all

things save matters of conscience was as wax in Beatrice's capable hands.

"He is so vulgar," continued the law-giver.

"And so terribly anxious to visit with gentlefolks," added the cleric.

"And so eager to marry a lady," cried Beatrice, "as those common men always are."

"I don't see what good that would do him: marrying a lady wouldn't make him a gentleman."

"It would be just as good," corrected Miss Earle. "Have you lived all these years and not yet learned that it is immaterial whence Cæsar comes to see the world he is about to conquer; but that the name of Cæsar's wife must be written in the Red Book, or else nobody will care to visit with the Cæsar's?"

Mark smiled. "I fear you are very worldly-wise, my child."

"No, reverend sir, I am not; but I have learnt a thing or two in my life, which use you do not appear to have made of yours."

"Haven't I? Well, never mind. This Roper asked me to Rawley Court times without end, but I invariably declined his invitations; then he took to calling on Julia, and bringing her books and flowers. I should prefer to have nothing to do with him; for, if report be true, the money which he spends so lavishly at Rawley Court was wrung out of the savings of widows and orphans by sundry bogus companies which Edgar Roper promoted. And it is only, I believe, by his extraordinary sharpness and cunning that he has hitherto escaped detection and punishment."

"No wonder, then, that he longs to be hand and

glove with such a saint as my dear old Stylites," said Beatrice, looking up affectionately into the vicar's worn face, "and to bask in the light which your halo exudes."

"And I have heard also, my dear Beatrice," continued Mark, "that he presumed to offer his dirty hand and sordid heart to the lovely Miss Earle, but that—in spite of his enormous wealth—she had the courage and the good taste to say him nay."

"Nasty beast!" said Beatrice concisely. "I hate him. Let us talk about something else."

And then Mark and Beatrice fell to talking over happy times long gone by, and tried to forget for a while the agony of separation which lay straight before them.

Those days before Beatrice's departure were bitter-sweet days for Mark Tyrrell; but he endured bravely to the end. He kept his lips from speaking words of love, though his silence was pain and grief to him; for he knew that he must be either all or nothing to Beatrice Earle, and his warped conscience decided in favour of nothing. Therefore he felt bound to leave the girl free to make fresh ties and to form fresh interests in the new world to which she was going, untrammelled by even the confession of his love. He reasoned within himself that Beatrice could do without him, but Julia could not; and that therefore Julia's was the stronger claim. His heart was sore as he pictured Beatrice in a happy home of her own, surrounded by the admiration and devotion which beauty and high spirits such as hers can always command, and utterly forgetful of her childhood's friend: but he knew his heart would be far sorer if he could picture Julia, lonely and deserted, in the midst

of strangers who had no patience with her fretful misery. Therefore he bravely faced a joyless future, though he knew that his sister would probably grow weaker and more discontented as the years rolled on, until he and she went down the dark valley together. They would be together—there was always that comfort; and Mark's promise to his mother would be fulfilled in the spirit and in the letter. After all, duty was more important than love, he thought in his ignorance.

But in spite of his unselfish devotion to his sister, it was a relief as well as a surprise to Mark when Julia suddenly decided she would go up to London to spend a month or two with a widowed aunt who lived there. The vicar of Norton was thankful to be alone when Beatrice actually went away, so that he might wrestle with his agony unseen; and after the first bitterness was over, he vowed to himself that he would bury his sorrow out of sight, and be equal to the task of making the home cheerful for Julia when she returned to it. For Mark was not one of those people who sacrifice themselves for their friends, and thenceforward keep sending in to the said friends the bill, until all their little world grows weary of the "account rendered," and regrets that the martyrs were not selfish enough in the first instance to take their own way, and have done with it. Such self-made martyrs, alas! are not rare; but Mark had not enlisted in this noble army. He ran up to town for a day to see Beatrice Earle sail in the Calliope; and even in his anguish of parting he found time to call upon Julia at his aunt's, and was comforted in the depths of his misery by finding her better and more cheerful than she had been for years.

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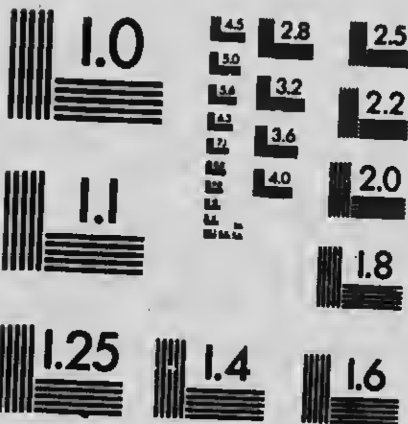

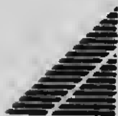

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He felt that this improvement in his sister's health was the first-fruits of the joyful harvest which his tearful sowing would one day bring; and when he heard her laugh, as she had not laughed since her mother's death, he said to himself that his sacrifice had not been in vain.

One evening, some weeks after Beatrice Earle's departure, the vicar of Norton sat alone in his study. The fire had gone out, the room was bitterly cold, and it was many hours since the weary man had tasted food. But Mark Tyrrell heeded none of these things. Over and over again he read two paragraphs in the local paper, which seemed to burn themselves into his brain.

The first one ran thus: "On the 4th instant, at S. Ninian's Church, Kensington, by the Rev. D. Smith, vicar of the parish, Edgar Roper, Esq., of Rawley Court, Norton, to Julia, only daughter of the late Rev. John Tyrrell."

And the second was as follows: "On the 30th ultimo, lost in the wreck of the Calliope, Beatrice Earle, aged 28."

ACCORDING TO HIS FOLLY

ACCORDING TO HIS FOLLY

"I'M sure you'll be glad to hear, Mr. Brunton, that a really good thing has come in my way at last," said Algernon Carmichael, whose sunny curls and sunnier face seemed to mark him out as an "official receiver" of the good things of this world.

Wilfred Brunton smiled satirically: it was so like Algy to expect other people to rejoice when he rejoiced, and to weep when he wept; and so utterly impossible to Wilfred to rejoice or to mourn over anything that did not actually concern himself and his own interests. Nevertheless, he asked, with a faint pretence at sympathy, "What may your stroke of luck consist of, Carmichael?"

"Read this letter, and you'll see. It is from old Rooke, Lord Meerschaum's agent."

Brunton took the epistle thus eagerly proffered to him, and read as follows:—

"DEAR MR. ALGY,—I feel so old and so broken-down in health, that I have to-day informed Lord Meerschaum I must resign the post of agent which I have so long filled. I know that you have finished learning the business at Mr. Brunton's, and are anxious to take an agency yourself: therefore I make bold to write

you a line, saying that this appointment will now become vacant, so that you may be the first in the field to apply for it. His lordship is so easy-going, that he is sure to appoint the first applicant, in order to save himself further trouble; and it would make me very happy to think that you, whom I knew so well when you were a little boy, were going to step into my shoes; and to make a home for your mother in the pretty old house where I have lived for forty years. The income of Lord Meerschaum's agent is six hundred a year, and a very good house.

"Hoping that you will pardon the liberty I have taken in thus writing to you,

"I remain,

"Yours obediently,

"WILLIAM ROOKE."

Brunton read this letter over twice before he returned it to its owner. "It seems not at all a bad thing, Carmichael, as agencies go, and I think you would do well to see after it. You have learnt pretty much all that I have to teach you, and I suppose you would like to set up on your own account now."

"Oh! it isn't altogether that," replied the young man. "You've been awfully good to me, Brunton, and I always enjoy working with you, and shall be dreadfully sorry to leave you; but the fact is, we're so beastly poor, you know, and I do want to be earning something. It is as much as my mother and I can do to make both ends meet as it is; and things seem to get more expensive every year."

"What a queer fellow!" said Brunton to himself.

"He doesn't seem in the least ashamed of being poor, as I should be; these swells are strange beggars." Then he added: "I shall be happy to give you an excellent testimonial whenever you wish to leave me, as you thoroughly understand the management of an estate, and are a capital worker."

Carmichael's boyish face glowed with pleasure. "I say, you are a good chap," he said, "and far kinder to me than I deserve; but old Rooke told me once that to have been taught by you was a testimonial in itself. But there won't be any need of rot of that sort, as Meerschaum is a second cousin of my mother's, and so will be sure to give me the post as soon as he knows that I want it."

This easy self-confidence irritated the elder man: why should Algy have everything for the asking, when better and cleverer men than he had to fight every inch of their way through the world, and only meet with defeat in the end? But Algernon, unconscious of his offence, continued cheerfully, "I think I'll write to Meerschaum at once, if you approve; but I wouldn't do anything till I'd consulted you."

"Why write at all? It seems to me it would be far better if you went over to Meerschaum Court yourself and interviewed his lordship: conversations are so much more satisfactory than letters in a matter of this kind."

"What a clever old chap you are! Of course it will be the best plan to go straight to Meerschaum Court myself: it is only a couple of hours by rail from here, and the station is close to the park. I'll go to-morrow."

"I'm afraid I can't spare you to-morrow," replied

Wilfred. "Somebody must ride over to Endwood to-morrow to collect the rents; I can not possibly go myself, and there is no one but you that I would trust in my place."

Carmichael's face fell. "What a bother! I'm in such a funk that somebody else will step in before me if I don't see after the thing at once; and that would be an awful disappointment to the mater. I don't much mind about the thing for myself, but she has set her heart upon it. She has had such a rough time, you see, since my father died, that I do want her to have something jolly now."

"Of course, of course," said Brunton blandly; "but there is no hurry that I can see. Rooke tells you that at present no one knows of his resignation but yourself and Lord Meerschaum, so other men can't be applying for it. The day after to-morrow is Sunday—a blank day: you can go then."

"Oh! I shouldn't like to knock all about the country after a piece of business like that on a Sunday somehow. I hate travelling on Sundays if I can help it, it is so rough on the chaps that boss the trains; and besides, the Sunday trains are so inconvenient."

Brunton smiled his sardonic smile. "You can have Monday to yourself," he said, "if you object to Sunday travelling."

Algy blushed. "Well, the fact of the matter is that my father—he was a parson, you know, and one of the best fellows that ever lived—didn't like my travelling on Sundays; so I promised him I never would if I could help it; and I haven't."

"Then go on Monday: one day won't make any

difference, I should imagine. The advertisement of Lord Meerschaum's agency can not be in the papers before Monday at the earliest."

"All right. I must go home now, and talk to the mater about our stroke of luck. Good-night, old chap."

"Good-night, Carmichael; but remember I don't believe in luck or fate or Providence or anything but cleverness. Every clever man is his own Providence."

After Algy had gone, Brunton stood for some time looking into the fire. "What a fool!" he exclaimed to himself; "what an arrant fool! He entrusts his safety to his God and his secrets to his friends. I believe in neither God nor man, and I trust in no one but myself; and I shall be a rich man, while that simple lad and his aristocratic mother are still struggling with the poverty that they are too high-and-mighty to be ashamed of. Again I say, what fools these high-bred, high-principled people are! And yet, for all their sentimental piety, they despise me because I am not one of themselves. Let them wait; I may be neither a gentleman nor a Christian, but I'll be even with them yet!" And he laughed aloud.

Before Wilfred Brunton went to bed that night he wrote and posted two letters:—

"MY LORD,—I have just heard incidentally that Mr. Rooke is compelled by ill-health to resign his post as your lordship's agent, and I venture to offer myself in his place. I have been agent to Sir John Pontifex for fifteen years, during which time I have taken pupils, all of whom have done me great credit, so that I thoroughly understand the management of a large estate.

I trust that your lordship will pardon the liberty I have taken in thus writing to you; but I thought that by so doing I could save your lordship the trouble of advertising, interviewing applicants, etc., if you thought that I should fulfil your lordship's requirements.

"Believe me to remain,

"Your lordship's obedient servant,

"WILFRED BRUNTON.

"To the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Meerschaum."

"DEAR SIR JOHN,—I hear that the post of Lord Meerschaum's agent is about to fall vacant, and have applied for it, as both the house and the salary are larger than what I have at present. But this need not put you to any inconvenience, as my younger brother, Albert, is quite ready and competent to step into my shoes here, should you be kind enough to appoint him as my successor.

"Believe me,

"Yours very truly,

"WILFRED BRUNTON.

"To Sir John Pontifex, Bart."

"If I had been a gentleman and a Christian I suppose I should not have done this thing," mused Brunton after he had posted the two letters, "and that ass of a boy would have got the best appointment in the county. But I am neither, I am glad to say; so a fine old house and an income of six hundred per annum will be mine for the asking. What fools men are who give up tangible benefits for the sake of sentimental scruples which they dub 'questions of honour' or 'points of con-

science'! They deserve the obloquy which falls to their share; they call ill-luck what is merely idiotcy. If Carmichael had known better than to believe in me, he would have kept his newly-acquired knowledge to himself; and if he had known better than to believe in God, he would have broken the Sabbath as was expedient; and if he had known better than to believe in honour, he would have broken his absurd promise to his dead father. Therefore the three-fold fool will be but answered according to his folly when he finds Lord Meerschaum's agency already given to a better man than himself; while wisdom will be justified of me, her child."

Wilfred Brunton was the eldest son of a small London shopkeeper, and by his unusual talents and efficiency had raised himself to the position of agent to Sir John Pontifex. He had augmented his income by taking pupils; and the neighbouring gentry and nobility were only too pleased to get "Brunton's young men" as their agents, so thoroughly did these understand their business. At the bottom of his heart Wilfred smarted under the knowledge that he was not by birth a gentleman, though he would have died rather than acknowledge the fact; and he was terribly ashamed of all his own people, with the exception of the young brother, Albert, who had been one of his most promising pupils. He had, however, succeeded in marrying a lady, the beautiful but penniless daughter of an impecunious barrister; and it was his life's ambition to bring up his only child—the one creature in the world whom he really loved—as a gentleman. Little Wilfred inherited both his father's brains and his mother's beauty, and Brunton felt with justice that such a son was worth working

and scheming and plotting and striving for. Was it then likely that he would sacrifice both his own interests and Willie's, because of some absurd whim about keeping faith with Algernon Carmichael? he asked himself. And self answered that he need do no such thing.

Carmichael was the son of a clergyman, who died just after Algernon left school, bequeathing a scanty and insufficient income to his well-born widow and handsome boy; and it had been a hard struggle with poverty for Algy and his mother ever since. One of Mrs. Carmichael's rich relatives paid the premium for Algernon to become Mr. Brunton's pupil; and now that he had thoroughly learned his business, the lad was anxious to set about earning something. Therefore the news of Mr. Rooke's retirement was joyfully received by Mrs. Carmichael and her son. Algy had one of those loving, trustful natures that think well of everybody and everything; and he was especially devoted to Mr. Brunton, whose cynical cleverness was of a type peculiarly attractive to younger men. The idea that his hero could play him false, was an idea that had never come into Carmichael's curly head; but the light-hearted boy had much to learn which his two-and-twenty years had not yet taught him. The thirties and the forties are better schoolmasters than the teens and the twenties; but the lessons they set are not always pleasant forms of learning, and they are increasingly chary of their half-holidays.

On the following Monday Algernon Carmichael went over to Meerschaum Court to request his noble kinsman to give him the agency. He explained to Lord Meerschaum that he had heard from Rooke, and had

come over on the first opportunity to offer himself in Rooke's place. "Oh! I say, old fellow, I am so awfully sorry, but you have come just two days too late," his lordship said.

Algy turned pale. "What has happened?" he asked. "I thought Rooke had told no one but myself that the place would be vacant."

"I can not understand it at all," replied Meerschaum, "but the fact is I had a letter from your chap, Brunton, on Saturday morning, saying that he had heard that Rooke was leaving, and asking me to give him the agency. I knew what a clever fellow he was, and how well he had managed Pontifex's place, and I was only too thankful to be spared the bother of advertising and interviewing applicants; so I wrote by return, appointing him as Rooke's successor. I wish to goodness I hadn't been in such a hurry! I should have been only too glad to have given you the place, if I'd had any idea you wanted it."

Algernon was silent. He could have borne the disappointment about the agency, though that was great; but the knowledge of Brunton's disloyalty to him, like the proverbial tooth or foot out of joint, seemed for the moment unendurable.

Lord Meerschaum put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "I can't tell you how awfully sorry I am, old man," he said; "I should have been so tremendously pleased to do you and your mother a good turn. Besides, for my own sake, I would far rather have had you here than that cad Wilfred Brunton, who for all his cleverness is nothing but a bounder. But cheer up, my boy! Something else is sure to turn up before long."

"Thank you, Meerschaum," said Carmichael, swallowing down a tiresome lump in his throat. "I know I'm an awful ass to be knocked over like this, but it is such a disappointment to me."

At first Algernon thought he would tell Lord Meerschaum wherein the real sting of the disappointment lay; but he had been so devoted to Wilfred Brunton and so loyal to him, that he could not bear to expose the breaking-down of his altar and the overthrow of his idol to careless eyes; so he held his peace.

"I can't think why Rooke was such a fool as not to remind me that you were on the look-out for a place of this kind, or why I was such an idiot as not to remember it for myself," grumbled his lordship. "And I can't for the life of me make out how Brunton got wind of the thing. I suppose I couldn't throw him over now, could I? I wish I could. What do you think, Algy?"

"Oh! no, no; a thousand times no; I wouldn't take the place from him like that, if you did; I should feel I was behaving like a cad. Never mind, Meerschaum, don't worry about it; I daresay something else will, as you say, turn up before long."

"I hope to goodness it will, old chap, for I shall never feel happy till it does. Now come and have some lunch. You are always such a favourite with my lady, and I know she is dying for a chat with you."

And so Algernon went in to luncheon and talked of other things, and made himself delightful to Lady Meerschaum and the children; and meanwhile deep down in his heart he dug a grave for his boyish devotion to Wilfred Brunton, and felt that nothing would ever

grow there again. But Algy was only twenty-two. Among the things taught by the thirties and the forties are valuable lessons in gardening: one of the most important being the recuperative nature of the human heart, where the graves of old loves form a fertile and admirable soil for the planting of new ones, and the graveyard is quickly turned into a garden again by the spade of that clever horticulturist, Time.

Wilfred Brunton had his way, as unscrupulous people often do, and succeeded Mr. Rooke as Lord Meerschaum's agent; while his younger brother, Albert, stepped into his shoes as manager of Sir John Pontifex's estate. Whereupon Wilfred congratulated himself on the success of his scheming, and on his want of honour and principle; a man hampered with scruples could not have done the trick as neatly as he had done. So the Wilfred Bruntons moved to the picturesque house on Lord Meerschaum's estate, and were delighted with their new home. It was indeed a beautiful old house, barge-boarded and ivy-covered and oak-panelled, like the frontispiece to an historical novel; and the garden was as charming and quaint as the house.

But when they had been in their new home for a few weeks, little Willie fell sick; and the doctor, after a day or two of agonizing doubt, pronounced the child's complaint to be typhoid fever. For some time the boy battled for life; and when the struggle was at its height, and its issue most doubtful, Willie's mother—his cleverest nurse and strongest ally against the foe attacking him so cruelly—was stricken down by their common enemy, and was unable to continue to wait on her darling. The doctors pronounced Mrs. Brunton's case

hopeless from the first; and when his mother was no longer beside him Willie began gradually to sink.

"Is there no chance for either of them?" asked the stricken husband and father one terrible night.

"None, I fear," replied the doctor. "Your house, Mr. Brunton, must be in a most unhealthy state, for I have never come across more virulent cases of typhoid anywhere."

"I never bothered about the drains," said Brunton in a hoarse voice; "more fool I! My predecessor told me the house was perfectly healthy, and I was idiot enough to take his word for it."

"You see, my dear sir, Mr. Rooke had lived here so long that he had become accustomed to breathe sewer-gas, and was none the worse for it; but to new-comers the poison was most dangerous. I wish I could do something more; but I fear it is impossible. However, I have given the nurses full instructions, and will look in again the first thing in the morning. Good-night."

That night Wilfred Brunton had a strange dream. He thought he was in a foreign land, surrounded by a people he had never seen before; and these people were busily engaged in sprinkling their door-posts with blood. When he asked them what it was for, they answered: "The angel of death will pass through the land this night, and will smite all the first-born; but when he sees the blood upon the lintel he will pass over our doors and will not suffer the destroyer to come into our houses."

Then a great fear filled Wilfred's heart for Willie, his first-born; and he too strove to sprinkle his door-

posts with blood. But his striving was in vain, for the blood turned to water when he touched it, and his door-posts remained as white as ever. Then he cried to the others to help him, but they turned away, saying: "You are not one of the Lord's people; you are a stranger in the land, and the Lord knoweth you not." Then he offered all that he had if only the people would help him and save his child; but they told him that the salvation he asked for was not to be bought by money. And presently it became dark, and the air was stirred with the rustling of unseen wings; and as the rustling drew nearer the whole earth was filled with the sound thereof, till there seemed nothing in the universe save the rushing of those mighty angel-wings. In vain Wilfred shrieked for mercy, and flung himself upon the unstained lintel of the door of the house where Willie lay; the door-posts gleamed spotlessly white through the darkness, and he knew that no bolts nor bars could keep out the awful visitant. For weeks and weeks, as men count time, that agony lasted, for Wilfred himself lay under the shadow of the death-angel's wings. But after many days the ghostly rustling ceased to sound in his ears; and Wilfred Brunton slowly came back to life to find that his wife and son were peacefully sleeping in Meerschaum churchyard, and that he himself had well-nigh been overthrown by the enemy that is feared of men.

A month or two after this, Algernon Carmichael received a letter from the Earl of Meerschaum:—

"My dear Algy,—I am extremely glad to be in a position to offer you my agency, though very sorry

for the sad events which have made this course possible. I suppose you have heard that all the Bruntons caught typhoid fever as soon as they came to live in my agent's house. It appears that the drains were in a fearful condition, but old Rooke was inured to them, and so never found it out. Mrs. Brunton and the child died; and poor Brunton himself is such a wreck since his illness, that the doctors say he will never be fit to work again. He has gone to live with his father, a small tradesman in Hoxton, so that his mother and sisters may look after him, as he will have to lead quite an invalid's life. It is awfully sad, and I feel it is somehow my fault. I wish to goodness I hadn't been such an idle beggar, but had looked after things a bit myself! But I hope it isn't too horrid of me to feel thankful that it was to Brunton and not to you that I gave the appointment. Think what would have happened if you had taken your mother to that rotten old house! I can not bear to think of it. The place is now being put in a state of thorough repair, and will not be habitable and healthy for several months; but Adela joins me in hoping that Mrs. Carmichael and yourself will take up your abode at the Court until your own house is ready to receive you.

"Yours very sincerely,

"MEERSCHAUM."

One day—when the Carmichaels were comfortably settled in their new home, and the story of Wilfred Brunton's treachery and its punishment was almost forgotten as a tale that is told—Algy received the following letter:—

"DEAR CARMICHAEL,—I wish to beg your pardon; not for stepping into shoes which were destined for your feet, and thus saving your life at the expense of my wife and my son's—for this surely you would offer me thanks rather than forgiveness, though I want neither; but because I took you for a fool, and despised you accordingly. It was I who was the fool—not you; for I said in my heart, 'There is no God.' But there is.

"Yours truly,

"WILFRED BRUNTON."

PHILIP MAYSFIELD'S WIFE

PHILIP MAYSFIELD'S WIFE

"And what have you been doing this afternoon, Bertha?" asked the Rev. Philip Maysfield, as he came in, tired with his hard day's work, and kissed his wife's welcoming face.

"Oh! I have had the sewing party here—such a lovely sewing party! Honourable women not a few have permeated my drawing-room with the odour of sanctity and unbleached calico, and have beguiled the way of duty by reading aloud a most pathetic and gruesome little tale. Every one in turn read aloud till she began to cry, and then her next neighbour took up the parable till she began to cry also; and so on, till our eyes were red, and our tale was read and our spirits were down in our boots."

"You should not make fun of everything, dear," expostulated the weary young divine somewhat sadly.

"I didn't make fun, Phil: I behaved beautifully. I wore my pale blue gingham gown, and felt so sweet, simple, and forget-me-not-like, and mingled my tears with the tears of the saints over the gruesome little story. By the way, I am sure one's clothes have a tremendous effect on one's feelings; for my part, I am always my nicest in blue. I make you herewith a present of this original idea, Philip; it would work up into a superb

sermon, and you might gently remonstrate against the putting on of brown apparel. Have you ever noticed how horrid people always are in brown clothes? I often have. I think it is old Mrs. Gribble's brown frock that makes her so snappy and disagreeable. I dare say that she'd be quite wee, and modest, and crimson-tippèd, in pink."

"You are talking nonsense, darling, and I am too tired to laugh."

Bertha's bright face grew serious at once.

"Are you really tired, you dear old boy? I am so sorry, and I won't bore you any more, but will become a 'gracious silence,' like Mrs. Coriolanus (I forget her other name), and give you your tea in peace and your bread-and-butter in pieces, all *en suite*."

When Philip had had his tea, and the weary look had faded a little from his face, Bertha laid her hand on her husband's arm and said softly:

"I'm sorry I vexed you, Philip, about the sewing-party. I'm always frightfully unhappy when I vex you, and yet I do it every day. But I won't laugh at a sewing-party again, as long as the world standeth, if I may thereby gain your good graces. You know I don't really care about anything but pleasing you, Phil."

"But that is where you are wrong, my darling," answered her husband gravely. "As I have so often told you, you should do right for right's sake, and not just because you think it will please people."

"I didn't say people, I said *you*," corrected Bertha; "do please be accurate when you quote me."

"Well, then, you should not do it just to please me: I am no better than any one else."

"Oh! yes, you are; you are better than every one else, or I shouldn't have married you; and whatever I do that is good and nice, I do it to please you."

"But that is not right, dear, and it pains me when you say it. Surely duty is as high a thing as love; and conduct should be guided by abstract principles rather than by emotions, however powerful!"

"I hate abstract principles—they always give me cold," shuddered Bertha. "I infinitely prefer *you* to a whole code of ethics; and I like to think that you are perfection, and must therefore be implicitly obeyed in everything."

"But that is foolish: I am very imperfect, and you must be able to see it."

"Well, I have noticed it once or twice, but I hoped I was mistaken, and looked the other way. The minute you show the tiniest little fault, I shut my eyes tight, and never open them until I feel sure you are perfection again."

"What a childish darling you are! To believe what is not true is always a source of weakness. I am no more perfection than any one else, and you can not help knowing it."

"I can not help knowing that the mailed figures in the Tower of London are stuffed with straw; but the Tower was a much more interesting and thrilling place to me in the days when I believed that every suit of armour concealed a live and terrible hero, who might jump upon me and slay me at any minute. I remember now the delicious horror with which I used to tremble as I thought I saw them move. In the same way it makes life a very dull affair to discover that the heroes

in its battlefield are only suits of armour stuffed with straw—in fact it takes the shine out of the whole show. Can't you understand that I *want* to believe you are perfection?"

"It is folly to *want* to believe anything that you know isn't true, dear."

"It is folly of my dolls to stand up and tell me that they are filled with sawdust! Why on earth can't they leave me to find it out for myself? I am sure to find it out sooner or later; and the later the better, both for me and for them! Taking the gilt off the gingerbread may be a very beneficial exercise, and must doubtless enhance the wholesomeness of the viand; but for my part I prefer it with the gilt left on. I will take sugar in my tea and gilt on my gingerbread as long as I live, or else I will abstain from gingerbread and tea altogether."

And, with an impatient pout, Mrs. Maysfield marched out of the room.

The course of true love between Philip Maysfield and Bertha Deans had run with an unevenness sufficiently marked to satisfy the dreams of poets. Fierce opposition had thwarted their attachment; and they had so often parted for ever and met again—so frequently written *finis* at the end of their love-story, and crossed it out to put *to be continued* over the top—that their hearts were fairly sick with hope deferred when at last the gates of paradise were opened which led to the desired tree of life. Paradise was at first all—and more than all—that they expected; but in theirs as in everybody's Eden, apples grew and serpents crawled; and Mr. and Mrs. Maysfield learned—as we all have to

learn—that a cloudlessly blissful paradise is too closely guarded by flaming cherubims for us erring mortals to gain a footing therein: therefore we have to take the apple-grown, serpent-haunted gardens of earth as they stand, and make the best of them according to our lights.

After a time Philip thought Bertha a bit too light-hearted and frivolous, and Bertha considered Philip a shade too severe and dogmatic; and they both were right and both wrong, for they did not yet know each other well enough to discern the idealism below the frivolity, and the tenderness beneath the severity. But they were thoroughly in love, and so were bound to understand one another sooner or later, either in this world or a better one.

One evening Philip came home looking more jaded than usual.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Bertha, quick to perceive any sign of suffering in her beloved husband. "You seem quite worn out."

"I am rather worried, darling. Fever has broken out in the town, and I am afraid there will be a severe epidemic."

Bertha turned pale.

"Oh, Philip! you won't go and see any of the sick people, will you? it would terrify me to death if you did."

"Not go to visit my sick people, Bertha! Why whatever are you thinking about, little girl?"

"Darling!" cried Bertha, clinging to her husband's arm, and trying in vain to stifle the little catch in her voice, "let us go away together out of this nasty, un-

healthy place. You are so tired and worn with one thing or another that I know you will catch the fever if you stay here, and I simply could not go on living if you were ill. Oh, Phil! we've only had such a short time of happiness together, and we waited for it so long: don't let anything happen to spoil it yet."

"Bertha, you mustn't tempt me to neglect my duty," said Philip gravely.

"Do let us be happy a little longer," sobbed Bertha, "and then when we are older we will give ourselves up to duty and self-sacrifice and things of that sort. Oh, Phil! don't spoil my happiness. I've had so little of it in my life at present; and I love you so dearly that it would kill me if anything happened to you."

"Poor little girl! you are frightened and overdone, and you don't understand what you are saying. Our happiness is quite as precious to me as to you, Bertha —perhaps more so. I sometimes think you don't realize how dear you are to me, because I am not clever like you in saying pretty little speeches. But duty must come first; and if I were to fly with you from the danger which threatens us, I could never face my flock again."

"That is so like you," wailed poor Bertha, "to think of the flock and take no thought for yourself and me."

"But, sweetheart, you would be the first to despise me if I proved a selfish coward. You may not believe it, but my wife's high opinion of me is one of the greatest joys of my life, and I would not forfeit it for worlds. I can not tell you in words how your ideal of me has stimulated and strengthened me, and filled me with

longings really to become what you believe I am. But if we were to run away together now, darling, we could never idealize one another any more; and love without esteem is a poor thing, my Bertha."

"I don't care. Love without esteem is a good deal better than fevers and funerals; and I'd rather be the wife of a live dog than the widow of a dead lion any day. Solomon said that, or something like it, and I am sure he knew better than you do. What will all your goodness and heroism matter to me if you catch fever and die? I don't care whether you are 'a selfish coward' or not, if only you will make earth like heaven to me by staying on it. Now I know you are angry and think I am wicked, and I dare say I am; but I'll be good for the rest of my days, if only you'll come away with me to some safe, healthy place. Life is too short for such sacrifices as this."

"It is because life is so long that I can not do as you ask me, Bertha. If it were short, as you say, I would do as you suggest; but in the light of eternity, sweetheart, I think your plan would look but a sorry one. Therefore be brave, my own dear little girl."

So the fever spread through the town, and Philip Maysfield stayed at his post to face the foe, to comfort the afflicted, and to pray for the dying. And at last it came to pass that the pestilence seized on him also, and stopped him in his work. He had felt very ill for the whole of one day; and on his way home he called at the doctor's, where he soon learned that what he feared was true, and that he was sickening for the fever.

"I shall not return home, doctor," he said, "but shall go at once to the fever hospital."

The doctor looked surprised.

"You'd be more comfortable in your own home," he expostulated.

"No; my wife is at home, and I would rather die than one hair of her head should be harmed. She is so nervous that she would take the infection from me at once, and my anxiety about her would do me more harm than the fever could do. I shall go to the hospital, and I shall not allow my wife to come near me while I am ill."

And Philip Maysfield, being a quiet man, had his own way. In the fever hospital, surrounded only by hired nurses, he wrestled with the grim enemy, and conquered; and came back, sorely tried yet triumphant, from the valley of the shadow. He sternly refused either to see his wife or to write to her, though his heart alone knew the bitterness of its constant unsatisfied longing for her presence. At first Bertha rebelled against this prohibition, and vowed that in spite of everybody she would nurse her husband; but when the doctor assured her that such defiance of his commands might prove fatal to Philip in his weak condition, she bowed to her husband's decree with bitterness in her heart.

"It is just like Philip!" she said to herself in her anguish. "He thinks I am too selfish and frivolous to be of any use in sorrow and sickness. Just because I am not as serious and gloomy as he is, he never believes I have a soul at all. Good people are very hard."

And then she burst into tears, and cried for her husband as if her heart would break.

But suddenly it was borne in upon Bertha Maysfield

that she need not be treated like a spoilt child any longer, but could show Philip that there was a real woman beneath the mask of her whims and fancies. So she straightway put away her horror of infection, and made herself ready for the battle; and went down into the squalid slums of the plague-stricken town to take up the work which her husband had been forced to lay down. The people who had hitherto regarded Philip's wife with affectionate and indulgent contempt, were astonished beyond measure at this new Mrs. Maysfield who had suddenly appeared among them as an angel of mercy. Bertha was naturally an excellent nurse, and her bright face and winning manners made her doubly welcome in a sick room. The sick folk simply adored her, and even dying eyes grew bright at her approach. For Philip's sake she gave herself up entirely to Philip's work, and took little rest day or night in the fulfilment of her self-imposed duty. And by following in her husband's footsteps and going down, as he had done, into the dark places of the earth, Bertha began to fathom the depth and intensity of his character, and to comprehend the unselfishness and nobleness of his life. By facing realities she learned to despise shams, and to perceive how paltry her own passing emotions had been in comparison with Philip's unbending principles and high ideals. But Mrs. Maysfield firmly refused to see her husband, or even to let him know what she was doing, lest, in his present weak state, it should worry and alarm him; and the doctor thought that she was right, and upheld her in her decision.

"I see now that Phil didn't keep away from me when he was ill because I was selfish, but because he

was utterly unselfish," she said to herself. "I am glad I am learning to know him better. I shall have a lot to say to him when he gets well." (Bertha always had a lot to say to everybody, well or ill.) "I used to think him cold and hard and unfeeling, but that was my stupidity. He is like a great rock against which silly little waves dash themselves to pieces; but when they leave off dashing themselves to pieces and go round to the other side, they find that the great rock makes a sheltered haven where there is rest and peace. I have wasted a lot of time in dashing against the rock; but now I mean to be safe and happy inside the haven."

For weeks the epidemic continued to rage in the town; and just as Philip Maysfield was pronounced convalescent, Bertha in her turn fell sick of the fever. Then, of course, Philip was allowed to see his wife, and was told by doctors and nurses the whole story of her bravery; and how she had been like an angel of God standing in the path of the pestilence. It would be difficult to say which was the greater, his sorrow that his darling was ill, or his joy that she had proved herself to be all that he had ever imagined in his most ideal dreams of her.

But the new-found happiness of Philip and his wife promised to be short-lived. From the beginning the doctors pronounced Mrs. Maysfield's case to be a hopeless one; she was so thoroughly exhausted, they said, by continual and unusual work that the fever seized upon her, and she had not strength left to grapple with it; and poor Philip soon gleaned from them that the desire of his eyes was to be taken from him at one stroke. At first the idea fairly stunned him; and then

he devoted himself entirely to Bertha, feeling that he should have the rest of his life for mourning after she had gone. Those days were very sacred ones to the two who had only just begun to understand each other; death seemed to bring them nearer together than life could ever have done.

"Darling," said Philip one day, taking Bertha's thin hand in his, "I can never forgive myself for not finding out how good you were before. I always knew you were brilliant and charming and altogether lovable, but I didn't quite realize that you were a saint as well."

"But I wasn't good till you made me so," answered Bertha, laughing softly. "I am all the other things on my own hook, but the goodness is simply your goodness reflected in me. I should never have been nice at all if it hadn't been for you."

"Oh! yes, you would, darling."

"No, I shouldn't. And look here, Phil, I can't bear you to think better of me than I deserve. When I went and looked after the fever people, I didn't do it because I wanted to be good, but because I wanted to please you. After a bit I began to be sorry for them, and to want to help them; but at first I hated going, and I only did it for your sake; it would be a story if I said I did not. I know you don't like to hear this, dear; but God is not as hard as you are, Phil, and I think He'll understand."

"Oh, my darling, my darling," sobbed Philip, "I never meant to be hard on you, but I was afraid that I loved you too much. What a blind fool I have been all along in imagining that love and duty were not one and the same thing!"

"Poor old boy!" whispered Bertha, gently stroking her husband's bent head with her transparent hand, "I don't think we need ever be afraid of loving anybody too much. It is to those who love much that much is forgiven, and we all stand in need of forgiveness."

"Can you ever forgive me, Bertha?" groaned Philip.

"Forgive *you*, Phil? Why, what nonsense! Think of my presuming to forgive you! The earth might just as well forgive the sun for shining upon it. I suppose there must have been some good dormant in me all along, as there is in everybody; but nobody ever woke it up till you came by, like the prince in the fairy story. As long as you live, dearest, I want you to remember that it was you who awakened the soul in me, because I know that it will make you glad to think of it years after I have gone away."

But Philip bowed his head on his hands, and refused to be comforted.

Bertha, with her usual inconsequence, defied the doctors and recovered after all. She was a long time in getting well, but she succeeded in the end, and came back from the gates of death to life and to Philip. One day, after she had grown quite strong again, she airily remarked to her husband:

"It was a very good idea of yours to marry me, Phil. I don't wish to hurt your feelings; but in time—if left to yourself, without my stimulating society—you might have grown just one tinge dull and heavy, and the heaviness of your character would have permeated your sermons and spoiled them."

"It was indeed a good idea, my darling, the best I ever had. I am a dull, stupid person, you see; but I keep your high spirits from running away with you, so perhaps it was a good idea of yours too to marry me. You are the balloon, Bertha, and I am the ballast."

"A very palpable hit!" laughed Mrs. Maysfield. "If you will follow out your happy metaphor to the bitter end, sir, you will perceive that a balloon without ballast is still a balloon, and can go soaring away by itself among the stars; but as for ballast without a balloon—who ever heard of such a thing? It is not ballast at all, but ordinary dust and rubbish and stuff. It is the balloon that makes the ballast, not the ballast that makes the balloon. Your similies are most flattering to me, my dear Philip."

"You are too clever by half, Bertha; you push my beautiful parables to the verge of absurdity, and hail my metaphors with most unbecoming mirth," said Philip, smiling, and softly caressing his wife's curly hair. "But, all the same, my metaphor will bear following out, for I should be 'dust and rubbish and stuff' without you, my darling."

Bertha's mocking face grew wistful.

"And after all, Phil, dear, you are glad that your balloon didn't go soaring away by herself among the stars, aren't you?"

Philip didn't answer the question in words; but Bertha knew how great his gladness was, and was satisfied with it.

THE KING'S FOOL

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THE summer sunshine streamed into the morning-room at Ashleigh, and illumined the three occupants thereof: Theodore Lumsden, the deformed and crippled master of the house; Mrs. Jessop, an ancient and widowed relative, who was at the head of his establishment; and Violet Lumsden, his cousin, whom he had adopted on the death of her parents ten years previously. Violet was now nineteen, more than twenty years younger than her cousin, and was still—as she had been when a child—the light of Theodore's eyes and the bane of old Mrs. Jessop's existence. At this particular moment Miss Lumsden was looking out of the window, while a frown puckered her pretty forehead.

"I wish you wouldn't make fun of everything, Theodore," she exclaimed petulantly.

"I don't; I only make fun of you."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't make fun of me, then."

"Why not, my fair cousin? Surely you would not deprive me of the greatest pleasure of my life?"

"The fact is," continued Violet angrily, ignoring her cousin's last remark, "that you trot out other people's thoughts and feelings, and make fun of them; but you take care that other people don't have a chance of seeing yours. You never show your real self to any-

body; so that nobody can laugh at you. You are like London trees, that have iron palings all round them for fear the crowd should come too near."

"But you see, Vi, even though you may disapprove of palings on principle, if they are there you have no right to climb over them. I have known policemen chastise little boys severely for doing that very thing. Therefore, if I choose to have palings round me, you really ought not to come prying through the bars. But you can have a set of palings of your own, you know; there is no harm in that."

"I don't want the nasty things; I wouldn't have them for worlds. I'm glad to say I make no secret of my feelings about anything or anybody."

"That is true, my dear Violet; your courage in expressing your opinions is only equalled by your indiscretion. Allow me, however, in passing to draw your attention to one peculiar advantage of the paling policy; namely that it prevents passers-by from carving their names upon the trees. Now, in your case, for instance, people are always carving their names upon the tree; there are so many names carved thereon that I really can not keep count of them. How many 'dearest friends' have you possessed, my dear, since I first had the honour of making your acquaintance? By the time you have fully demonstrated to my slower intelligence that the current number of the 'dearest friend' is but little lower than an angel, that unfortunate individual does something that displeases you; then you straightway turn round and prove to me that the aforesaid familiar spirit is but little better than a friend. It makes it very confusing for me. 'From change to change the creatures run'

with such marvellous rapidity that I am powerless to pursue them."

Violet was silent, but a smile began to play about the corners of her mouth.

"My question is not prompted by mere vulgar curiosity," continued her tormentor, "but by a commendable desire for the acquisition of accurate information. I should really like to know how many names can be carved upon a human heart without permanently injuring the bark."

"You'll never learn by experience," responded Violet. "I shouldn't think you ever had a name carved on your heart in the whole course of your life."

"Perhaps not; but if 'experientia' will not 'docet,' then Violet must. Which further proves the desirability of the 'palings.' (I thank thee, Vi, for teaching me that word!) Not only do they prevent the public from carving vulgar names upon the tree, but they also hinder curious persons like yourself from seeing if any names have already been carved thereon. By the way, whose name is now in process of being carved on yours? Judging from my own imperfect observation, I should say it is Basil Keene's; but it is quite possible that I may be mistaken."

Violet's pretty face grew very pink. "You are always hard on Basil," she said, "because he happens to be poor."

"You misjudge me; I have the greatest regard for Basil, personally if not financially. But he seems to me to be a depressing though a deserving young man."

"You are always hard on people who are poor,"

persisted Violet; "I've noticed it often. I think it is because you are so rich yourself, and have had everything you wanted all your life; and so you don't understand how horrid it is sometimes for people not to be able to afford things."

"Had everything I wanted all my life, have I? I'm glad you consider me such a fortunate being. 'Now, Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man, and honourable; he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.' I daresay I'm almost as much to be envied as Naaman was."

"Oh! but that's different. It was much worse for Naaman than it is for you."

"I don't agree with you; for he had a Mrs. Naaman, you see, and I haven't."

"*You* wouldn't care for a Mrs. Naaman," said Violet, scornfully. "You'd be bored to death with one."

"I'm not so sure of that. I've no doubt, when the leprosy was more than usually troublesome, or when things went crooked in the house of Rimmon, that Mrs. Naaman was the greatest comfort to the captain of the host."

"If Naaman had been as poor as Basil Keene, he wouldn't have been able to afford a Mrs. Naaman at all, for there'd have been nothing for her to eat," said Violet, firing this parting shot as she went out into the garden.

"O noble judge! O excellent young woman!" called Theodore after the graceful retreating figure. Then he mused bitterly within himself: "And Naaman had a river Jordan to wash in and be made whole, while I have to wallow in Abana and Pharpar all the days of

my life. There is no river Jordan for me—at least, not yet," he added, smiling sadly.

It was now ten years since Violet—then a little girl of nine—had come to live with Theodore Lumsden (her only surviving relative) and old Mrs. Jessop; and no one but Theodore himself knew how, during that decade, the pretty, wayward child had wound herself about his heart; nor how frequently and how fervently he wished that he had been strong and straight as other men are, so that he might have asked his petted *protégée* to become his cherished wife. Violet herself had no idea of the state of her cousin's feelings.

There was once a distinguished blind professor who, on taking a walk near Cambridge with a bevy of undergraduates, was much amused to overhear two of them discussing his age. "How old is he?" asked one. "Oh!" answered the other, "he's beastly old—he's forty." Violet Lumsden counted time as undergraduates count it; and the idea that so antique a personage as Theodore the aged should have any leanings toward such youthful pastimes as love and love-making, was a thing undreamed of in her nineteen-year-old philosophy. She would as soon have suspected Mrs. Jessop of flightiness as Theodore of romance.

One summer's afternoon she and Basil Keene were sitting together under the veranda at Ashleigh, talking such pretty follies as lovers talk, quite unconscious of the fact that the morning-room window was open, and that Theodore Lumsden could hear every word they said.

"It is a horrid nuisance that I am so poor," groaned Basil disconsolately.

"It is a bore," sighed sympathetic Violet.

"I say, don't you think old Lumsden could do something for me?" suggested the desponding swain. "You see, my father, being only a poor parson himself, can do nothing at all to help me. I daresay I shall get on at the Bar in time, but it's uphill work; and by the time I can make enough money to keep you, you'll have got tired of waiting, and will be married to some nasty, rich brute, I expect. I wish to goodness old Lumsden would fork out, and allow us just enough to begin on."

"Oh! it would be no good bothering Theodore about it, it would only make him laugh at us for a pair of noodles. Theo doesn't understand anything at all about love. Of course, he's too old, for one thing; but I think being a cripple has always made him different from other people."

"But, darling, he must know there is such a thing in the world as falling in love."

"He only thinks of it as a childish thing that silly people do, and despises it accordingly. If you were to talk about love to Theodore, he'd just laugh at you in his quiet way till you'd feel deadly ashamed of the thing yourself. I know Theo better than you do."

"I never think, Vi, that you do Mr. Lumsden justice."

"Oh, yes, I do! I'm very fond of him in a way; he is so clever, and says such funny things. But I understand him too well ever to dream of talking sentiment to him. I don't believe that cripples have quite the same sort of feelings as ordinary people—they seem

to be all head, don't you know, and to have hardly any body or heart."

"Well, we've got any amount of heart between us—you and I—haven't we, darling? and that is all that matters to us," said Basil tenderly; and then the lovers wandered off, hand-in-hand, over the daisied lawn, while the hunchback, lying in the darkened room, turned his face to the wall, and wished that he had never seen the sun.

A few days after this, Theodore Lumsden said to his cousin: "Violet, I gather from young Keene that he wishes to marry you, and that he has also an idea that you yourself would not object to the arrangement."

Violet blushed and played nervously with an antimacassar. "I knew you'd think it silly," she murmured; "I told him so."

"He did not seem to think it silly, at all events; it was his want of pence, rather than his want of sense, that appeared to trouble him. So I told him that, as you will be my heiress when I die, I shall be pleased to make you a handsome allowance, as befitting my heiress, while I live. Therefore, you are in a position to ally yourself with that personification of penury, a church-mouse, if so the fancy takes you. Not that I consider you a suitable partner for so ecclesiastical a functionary as a church-mouse—quite the reverse; all that I wish to intimate is that my little girl can afford to please herself."

"Oh, Theo, how lovely of you!" cried Violet, while her eyes glistened with unshed tears. "I don't know how to thank you."

"For goodness sake don't try! Be happy, sweet maid, and let who will be grateful! I hate gratitude

—I've had so much of it poured upon me during my life, and it always bores me to extinction. There is nothing to make such a tremendous fuss about. I really should not like you to be as poor as that quondam 'dearest friend' of yours (I forget what name she carved, in passing, upon your too susceptible heart), who married so indigent a wooer that they had to go and live upon a South Sea island, because there, she said, they should want no clothes and could eat each other, and so would avoid the two most heavy items in housekeeping. Now you and Basil will have to live quite close to Ashleigh; so, as I could not spare you to go to a South Sea Island, I am bound to provide you, out of my abundance, with such food and clothing as are adequate to the exigencies of our English climate and customs. That is the long and short of the matter."

"You are awfully good, Theo," said the girl, laying a timid hand on her cousin's shoulder. "You've no idea how happy you've made Basil and me. I should like to tell you how much we love each other, and how perfect our lives will be on account of your kindness to us; but I daren't, for fear you should laugh at me."

"You are wise, Vi," replied Theodore, trembling under the touch of the little hand; "you had better not tell me how much you and Keene love each other, for fear, as you say, I should—laugh."

So Basil Keene and Violet Lumsden were married, and settled down in a pretty little house close to Ashleigh. And as the years rolled on a new interest came into Theodore's life. Violet's small son, Teddy—who would one day be master of Ashleigh and all that pertained to it—devoted himself, from the time of his baby-

hood and upward, to his crippled kinsman, and Theodore learned for the second time how great is the healing power that lies in the touch of a little child. These twain became inseparable friends, Teddy feeling intensely flattered by the fact that Cousin Theo always treated him as if he were a "grown-up." The people who talked "baby talk" to him were dowered with Teddy's undying scorn. And the sick man enjoyed the friendship as much as the boy did.

But when Teddy was about five, Theodore's health—always very frail—began to grow still feebler; and, although the doctors could find nothing actually the matter with him, they shook their heads and talked of "failing powers."

One afternoon, when his small cousin was established as usual in a corner of his sofa, Theodore asked, "Teddy, do you know who the king's fool was?"

"Not 'zactly," replied Teddy, who always discreetly strove to hide the full extent of his negligences and ignorances from the quizzical gaze of Cousin Theo.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. As you grow older you will perceive that nowadays there are still plenty of people who are fools by nature, but none who are so by art. Folly, I may say, has ceased to be a profession, and has descended to the level of a mere pastime. But hundreds of years ago there lived certain persons whose business it was to make fools of themselves; they were well paid for it, and every king and every great lord had a fool of his own."

"What was they made of?" asked Teddy politely, just to show that he was following the conversation. He would rather have died than confess that Theo-

dore's "grown-up talk," as he called it, was unintelligible to him; and his cousin, knowing this, used to delight in multiplying words without knowledge, to the further mystification of the boy.

"They were generally dwarfs—little deformed or humpbacked men, you know."

"Like you, you mean?"

"Yes, like me, my child. And they were very quaint, and said funny things, and kept everybody in fits of laughter. It was their business to make people laugh."

"Like you again, Cousin Theo; you are awful funny, you know. Mummy thinks you are the funniest person she knows; and I do."

"Just so; they were as entertaining as my humble self. You have a great aptitude for similies, my dear Edward; I can not tell you how I admire it."

"Go on about the fools," suggested Teddy, who preferred the conversation to flow in impersonal channels.

"Well, they used to have a splendid time. The king's fool lived in the king's house, and feasted at the king's table, and wore lovely, many-coloured clothes trimmed all over with little silver bells. He had a fine life of it, I can assure you, for the king always made a great pet of him, and let him do pretty much as he liked."

"And where are they all now?"

"They are altogether out of it in these advanced and enlightened days, my boy. When the old-fashioned sort of kings disappeared—I mean the regular out-and-out kings who wore their crowns at breakfast, and always went out walking with a sceptre instead of an um-

brella to keep the reign off, or, rather, on—nobody wanted the poor fools any longer, so they were scattered all over the country with nothing to do, like 'the unemployed.' The modern utilitarian kings, who wear frock-coats and top-hats, wouldn't give them situations at any price—they couldn't be bothered with such silly, useless creatures."

"They was out of a place, like nurse's nephew?"

"Is nurse's nephew out of a place?"

"Yes; he wants a place as first footman. He says he won't be second footman any longer."

"Indeed? And is he a nice person—one that you would think suitable for a first footman?"

"Oh, he's just splendid! You should see him bowl at cricket!" cried Teddy, waxing enthusiastic at the memory of the hero's prowess; "you *would* like him!"

"I don't know about that," said Theodore, playing with the boy's yellow curls. "I'm not much of a hand at cricket myself, you see."

"But he's such a nice man all round. He carves the loveliest teeny-weeny little boats out of walnut shells, and he plays bu'fully on the concertina. He's fine! Nurse and I think he's good enough to be a butler, we do."

"He seems from your account to fulfil the duties of a butler admirably—bowls well, carves walnut shells, and plays the concertina. My present butler can do none of these things."

"But your butler is a nice man, too. He is too fat for games, but he is very kind in letting me help him to wash up. There is one partic'lar teacup I always wash; it's a cracked one."

"As the article in question happens to be my property, would it be beside the mark to inquire if it is cracked because you clean it, or if you clean it because it is cracked?"

But Teddy, wisely ignoring this base innuendo, continued, "Nurse's nephew came to tea last Sunday, and played Hark, Hark, my Soul, and Jerusalem the Golden on the concertina. Nurse made him play Sunday tunes, you see."

"Nurse's nephew appears to be a great friend of yours."

"He is. You are my greatest friend, and then nurse's nephew."

"It is very kind of you to like me better than him, considering that I can't bowl, nor carve walnut shells, nor play the concertina."

"Oh! but you're very funny to talk to, you know," replied Teddy encouragingly. Then, "My word!" he exclaimed, in a different voice, "that just 'minds me that we'd forgotten all about the kings' fools. Nurse's nephew put them clean out of my head."

"So he did. We must hark back. Well, these poor fools—being 'out of a place,' as you so neatly express it—have nothing to do and nowhere to go. Nobody wants them, you understand—it is only strong, healthy, capable people who are wanted in these glorious modern days of ours; which accounts for my lying—such a useless, good-for-nothing log—here."

"I see. If there were kings' fools now, you'd have been one."

"Exactly so. You see, I can't hunt or shoot or fight or go to business, but I should have been just

the person to be the king's fool. Real kings don't despise people for being lame and weak and sickly and deformed, as the rest of the world do. I should have done my very best to serve the king, and the king would have said, 'Never mind being lame, poor fool! You have your work in the palace as well as the soldiers and the stewards have; and my fool is as much my servant as is the captain of my host!'"

"You'd have liked it too, I 'spect. It would have been jolly living in the king's palace, and wearing the little silver bells."

"Very jolly."

"It seems a pity you can't be one, doesn't it?—because it must feel rather dull lying here all day with nothing to do."

"So dull, Teddy, that, to tell you the truth, I am thoroughly tired of being 'out of a place,' and I think I shall set up soon as a king's fool on my own account."

"Really?" asked Teddy, with saucer-shaped eyes.

"Yes, really. Some day you will come to Ashleigh to see me, and I shall be gone away; and then you will know that I have got a situation at last as a king's fool."

"But you will come back again, won't you?" whispered Teddy, thrusting a hot, sticky, little hand into Theodore's transparent palm.

"I don't know about that; I don't expect I shall want to. You see, I really haven't had a particularly rosy time in my present situation."

"Then you'll let me come and see you?" persisted the child; "because you'll want to hear how the rabbits are getting on, and if the seeds I sowed in my garden

are coming up, and all those things that you are so in-t'rested in."

"Of course you will come and see me, old fellow."

"And feast with you in the king's palace, and play with the little silver bells?"

"I hope so."

"That'll be jolly, won't it?" cried Teddy with glee.

"Very jolly; but in the meantime I will tell you a story about a fool, if you like."

"Oh, do!" besought Teddy, creeping closer to his cousin's side.

"Once upon a time there was a king's fool who had a very cheerful time of it, with pleasures and palaces, and all the rest of the fine things. But it came to pass that the king was beheaded by some dissatisfied and agitating subjects, and then the poor fool was turned out of the palace to beg his bread. He tried to get another situation, but failed; nobody but a king could do with a fool, and there were no more kings thereabouts. He kept asking the common people to employ him, but they said: 'You are no good to us; we want soldiers and sailors and farmers and merchants, but we have no room for fools. Great and wealthy kings can afford to be burdened with useless little hunchbacks like yourself; but ordinary people can not be bothered with you. It is only kings that will keep fools.' So the poor fool wandered about in despair: no one but a king could have any use for him, and never a king could he find. But one evening, when he was nearly dead with cold and hunger, he saw a very old priest coming out of a chapel in a little mountain village. The priest looked kind; so the fool told him how he was search-

ing the country for a king who would employ him. 'But alas!' he sobbed, 'there is not a single king to be found in these parts.'

"'Yes, there is,' said the old priest; 'there is my King, Whose I am, and Whom I serve: He is not far from any one of us!'

"'And does He want a fool?' cried the wanderer.

"'Yes, He does,' replied the old priest; 'He is always looking out for one.'

"'Then show me where He lives, so that I may go to Him at once,' prayed the poor fool.

"'This is His House,' said the priest, pointing to the chapel; 'but you are too faint and weary to go into it now. Come home and sup and sleep with me; and in the morning I will tell you all about the King.'

"So the fool went home with the kind old priest, who fed him and gave him a bed. But while it was yet dark, and the old priest was fast asleep, the poor fool woke up and felt he could not wait any longer for a master; so he stole out alone into the blinding snow to find the King's House; and when morning dawned the villagers found him lying frozen to death on the doorstep of the chapel. But the old priest said, 'Do not weep for him, my children; for he has gained his heart's desire at last, and is gone to be the King's fool!'"

"I don't quite understand that story," said Teddy solemnly: "but it seems rather a sad one."

"I knew you wouldn't now; but you will when you are older; and then you will learn that it isn't sad at all, but quite the reverse."

"When I'm six?"

"Hardly; perhaps when you are sixty. But now I am very tired, so you must go home. Goodbye, you nice little boy."

"Goodbye, you nice little man. Make haste and go to sleep and get well again."

The following morning Teddy was told that he could not go to Ashleigh as usual, because Cousin Theodore had gone away. He noticed that his mother's eyes looked red and queer; and he gathered from a conversation which he overheard between his nurse and the housemaid that Cousin Theodore's departure had been "very sudden."

"It was silly of nurse to say it was 'very sudden,'" said wise Teddy, communing with his own soul as he played cheerfully in the sun. "I knew Cousin Theodore was going—he told me so himself: he was tired of being out of a place, so he has gone to be the King's fool."

NO ROOM IN THE INN

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"Is every room in the house taken for Christmas, dear Sarah?" asked Miss Selina Williams, with an anxious look in her faded blue eyes.

"Every room, I am thankful to say; there won't be one to spare. In fact, I shall have to turn one of the servants' rooms into a visitors' room just for Christmas week, and let Jane and Matilda sleep at Smith's cottage."

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed Miss Selina, wringing her pretty little hands. "It is just as I feared. I wish I had spoken to you before, dear Sarah, I do indeed; but, as you know, I have such a poor memory, such a shocking memory! And now, alas! it is too late. Oh dear, oh dear! however shall we manage?"

"Why, what is the matter, my dear?" asked Miss Sarah soothingly.

Miss Sarah, busy as she always was, was never too busy to attend to the whims and fancies of "poor Selina," as she invariably called her younger sister. For Selina had been confided to her charge forty years ago by their dying mother, and Sarah had justified her mother's trust to the uttermost. When Selina Williams was seven years old she had a fall from the back of a big carthorse, which she was riding home from the hay-

field for a treat; and the hands on her life's dial had stopped then, and had stood at seven o'clock ever afterward. Now she was over fifty—at least her tired little body was, but her mind had still the perfect contentment and the unquestioning faith of a little child. She was not in the least idiotic, only quite childish; she had not grown mentally since she had that bad fall on to the back of her head five-and-forty years ago. People always spoke of "poor Miss Selina"; but they would have been nearer the mark if they had said instead, "poor Miss Sarah." For Selina's life was as happy and as free of care as that of a sheltered, petted child; while Sarah bore Selina's burden as well as her own, and had done so for forty long years. She kept the Laurence Arms at Coombe-Laurence, as her father and grandfather had done before her; and there was not a more comfortable inn in all the country-side, thanks to Miss Williams' efficient management.

Plenty of visitors came to the Laurence Arms all the year round; but it was always filled at holiday seasons, such as Christmas and Easter, by those who had no home ties of their own, and so were glad to spend the few spare days they could snatch from their busy life at Barnscombe, in the comfortable old inn by the shore of the western sea.

"What is the matter, Selina?" repeated Miss Sarah, to whom the middle-aged woman, that the villagers nick-named "Miss Softy," was never anything but the pretty, dainty little girl who must always be screened and petted because of her sweet face and shattered health. And Sarah simply worshipped her, with all the passionate, tender, protective care of the typical elder sister.

Miss Selina's brow puckered with anxiety. "Oh! I have just been so shocked, Sarah—so terribly shocked! in fact, it has sadly distressed me. Of course I must have heard of it before—I feel sure I must—but I had quite forgotten the incident. You know I have such a bad memory, dear Sarah—such a wretched memory!"

Which was quite true. A story which had absorbed Miss Selina's attention on a Monday afternoon was news to her again by Wednesday morning.

"Well, what is it, dear? Tell me, and perhaps I can put it straight," said Miss Sarah, with the unfailing patience that was always hers in dealing with anything that concerned "poor Selina."

"Well, sister, as Christmas is approaching, I have been reading over again the story of the first Christmas Day. I daresay you remember it, dear Sarah; you have such a wonderful power of retaining all that you read. In which case you were doubtless as much shocked and distressed as I have been to hear of that sad incident at the inn at Bethlehem. Could you believe it, Sarah? The Holy Child was born in a stable, because there was no room for Him in the inn! No room for *Him!* It really seems incredible, does it not, sister?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Sarah soothingly; "but it all happened so long ago, you know, that you needn't worry about it now."

Miss Selina drew herself up. "I don't see, Sarah, that the date has anything to do with it; it is the incident itself which is so amazing. It happened a long time ago, you say: well, I have no memory for dates, and I can not see that they signify. The terrible thing is to

know that there was any place on this earth where there was no room for Him. It really is incredible!"

"Of course the people of the inn didn't know Who it was, or they would have made room most probably," Miss Sarah suggested.

"But they ought to have known; that is no excuse," replied Miss Selina sternly. "It was very bad management, very bad management indeed! I don't know when I heard anything that shocked me so much."

"Never mind, dear; try to think about something else."

"But, dear Sarah, I can not think of anything else at present, because I am so afraid that it is going to happen over again, now that you have filled up all the rooms for Christmas. Suppose that He comes again (He is coming again, you know), and finds there is no room for Him here, I think I shall die of the disgrace of it—I do indeed. Oh, dear! oh, dear! What shall we do?" and Miss Selina wrung her hands in despair. "It is such a pity that you have filled up all the rooms without leaving one for Him—such a sad pity! I wonder at you, Sarah; you are generally so far-seeing."

"But, Selina, dear, He doesn't come in that way now, you know."

"How can you tell? When a thing has once happened, it may happen again. And think how terrible it would be if He came again this Christmas, and there was no room for Him in the inn! Oh, Sarah, Sarah! This isn't like your usual good management." And the faded blue eyes filled with tears.

"If He comes He will understand how it is," suggested the elder sister by way of comfort.

But the younger one refused to be comforted. "My dear Sarah, He will understand the truth, and the truth is we were so busy looking after our own concerns that we forgot Him altogether. I really can not see that the Laurence Arms is a bit better than that disgraceful inn at Bethlehem."

"Never mind, love," said Miss Sarah absently, settling down to her accounts.

There was a short silence, and then Miss Selina suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, sister! I've just had an idea—a capital idea. I can't imagine why I didn't think of it before; but my poor head is always slow and stupid—so different from your promptitude, dear Sarah."

"Well, what is it now?"

Miss Selina clapped her hands in delight. "I shall give up my own sitting-room, and turn it into a visitors' room for the time being, and then there will be a room ready for Him if He does happen to come. I couldn't bear for Him to come and not find us ready to receive Him: I couldn't indeed! It would place us on a par with that dreadful innkeeper at Bethlehem."

"My dear child, you can't turn out of your sitting-room," remonstrated Miss Sarah. "Why, you would be perfectly lost without it."

Now Miss Selina's room was the best room in the house, and was, moreover, a sacred spot which no one was allowed to meddle with. It looked over the western bay across to Hartland Point, and on a clear day one could almost count the houses at Westward-ho and Appledore and Clovelly. All day long the sun shone on Miss Selina's room, so that one forgot that there

were such things as east winds and winter days, until one went outside again. It was daintily furnished with every luxury that the wit of Miss Sarah sould devise, and was more like the nursery of a petted child than the sitting-room of a half-witted old maid. And here Miss Selina, with her books and her fancy-work and her piano, spent most of her peaceful days.

"My dear Sarah, I must turn out of it; there is nothing else to be done. And for the few days that the house is so full, I can sit with you in the parlour behind the bar. It will not inconvenience me at all—not at all; and I shall have the satisfaction of feeling that He can never come and find no room for Him in the inn."

Miss Selina, as usual, had her way; her sister always humoured her when it was possible. She turned her pretty sitting-room into a bedroom, and put it all ready for visitors, not even omitting to fill the vases on the chimneypiece with flowers out of the little greenhouse. When it was all completed, she surveyed her work with much satisfaction.

"It makes a charming visitors' room," she said; "quite charming! I can not help feeling that it would have been wiser if you had reserved the best room for Him, dear Sarah; but He will understand that, though we forgot Him at the moment, we were sorry afterward and did the best we could; because He never misjudges, you know, like other people do, but always counts our wanting to do anything for Him the same as actually doing it."

It was Christmas Eve, and every one was very busy at the Laurence Arms. Miss Selina persisted in staying

downstairs in the little parlour behind the bar, in spite of her sister's remonstrances.

"You'd much better go to your own room," Miss Sarah said. "You can sit in it all right though it is furnished as a bedroom, and you'll be tired to death if you stay down here. There are so many people coming in and out, and you know how bad any sort of bustle is for your poor head."

"My dear Sarah, what a suggestion! As if I would let any one sit in my room and make it untidy again, now it is so spick and span and all ready for Him."

"But you might sit in it yourself, my dear."

Miss Selina frowned. "Certainly not. Sit there with my embroidery, and drop bits of silk all over the carpet? I am surprised at you for making such a suggestion, Sarah—quite surprised! Do you go and sit in the rooms that you have just prepared for important visitors, I should like to know, and leave your sewing lying all about?"

At that moment the village doctor was shown in. It was raining and sleeting heavily, and his coat was running down with water.

"How do you do, Miss Williams?" he began in his cheery voice; "and how is my friend Miss Selina getting on?"

"We are quite well, thank you, doctor," replied Miss Sarah, "but very busy as we always are at this time of year."

"It is a dreadful day!" exclaimed the doctor, "so cold and wet. I really am not fit to come inside anybody's house, I am in such a state; but I could not

pass by your door without appealing to you for help, of which I am in great need at present."

"Why, what is amiss, doctor?" asked Miss Williams; "not old John Smith had another stroke, I hope—nor anything gone wrong with Susan Farmer's new baby."

"No, no; it is not one of my regular patients that I am concerned about, but a little lad belonging to a party of gypsies that are camping out on Coombe Heath. The poor little chap has got double pneumonia, and unless I can get him inside a warm house to-night he'll be past help in another twenty-four hours. So I have come to see if you can take him in here, Miss Williams? Any sort of a room will do, and the parish nurse shall come and look after him."

Miss Williams shook her head. "I am so sorry, Dr. Mortimer, but every crevice and cranny in the house is full."

"Couldn't you put up a little extra bed somewhere?"

"Quite impossible; every available scrap of room in the place is occupied this week. I've even had to arrange for the two maids to sleep out, so that I could put visitors in their room."

The doctor's kind face fell. "I am so sorry, but it can't be helped. I know you would help me if you could, Miss Williams."

"Indeed I would, only too gladly. If I'd a spare corner anywhere in the house, I'd willingly take the poor child in, and so do all that I could for him; but I really haven't."

"Well, I must be off and see what other arrange-

ment I can make. Another night in the draughty caravan—and such a night!—would kill the little chap right off; and I doubt if he could stand the long drive to Barnscombe. Yet I shall have to risk it, I'm afraid, for I know of no place between here and there where he can be taken in."

Suddenly Miss Selina joined in the conversation. "My dear Sarah, what are you thinking of? Of course we can make room for the little child. The room I have prepared, you know," she added in a whisper.

Miss Sarah looked aghast. "Put a gypsy-child into your pretty sitting-room, Selina?"

"Of course, of course," said Miss Selina; "that is His Way. When He doesn't want things for Himself—and of course He never really does want them—He lets one of the least of His brethren have them instead, and it counts the same as giving them to Him. Dr. Mortimer," she continued, to the puzzled doctor, "I have prepared a room specially for this occasion, and I hope you will bring the sick child into it at once. And if you will allow the parish nurse to sit up at nights, I will look after him in the days myself."

"But—Selina——" began Miss Williams in remonstrance.

"My dear Sarah, I am ashamed of you—positively ashamed; it is not like you to be so dense and obtuse! Don't you see, He has sent this sick child in His place; and if we turned the child away, it could be truly said that again there was no room for Him? Think if such a thing could be said of us, dear Sarah? Why, we could never get over the disgrace of it—never! I am so thankful that I prepared the room—so very thankful! If I

hadn't, I don't know what we should have done—I don't indeed; for absolutely there would again have been no room for Him in the inn!"

The doctor looked at Miss Sarah for instructions, and his look was hopeful. He knew that she could not withstand such special pleading as this. That sacred "Inasmuch" is a lever greater than any whereof Archimedes ever dreamed, for it has moved the world over and over again; and will continue so to move it until this world is exchanged for a better one—and, perhaps, even afterward.

"My sister is right," said Miss Sarah, and her voice trembled. "She is a wiser woman than I am after all."

"Oh, no, dear Sarah; you are really a thousand times wiser than I am. But it didn't just occur to you at the moment that this was His Way of accepting the welcome that we had prepared for Him. You see, my sister has so much to think of," she continued, turning apologetically to the doctor, "that one can not be surprised if now and then she doesn't see things all at once, and she didn't quite realize that this was the Guest for Whom we have been preparing. But I can assure you that nobody would be more grieved than Sarah if He came here and found there was no room for Him in the inn—nobody! Would there, dear Sarah?"

"I hope not, Selina. But it was you that remembered to make ready for Him. I forgot, more shame to me!"

"Not at all, not at all, dear Sarah. You have so much to think of that you can not be expected to remember everything at once. He will quite understand, sister—He will indeed. He always understands."

"I know He does; still I ought not to have forgotten." And Miss Sarah sighed heavily.

"Never mind, dear Sarah. But it was a good thing that I thought of it, wasn't it?—or else He would have come and found no room in the inn. And there would have been that disgraceful neglect of Him all over again. I really don't know how we could have borne the remorse for it—I don't indeed! It would have looked like such terrible indifference on our part."

"Well, I will go straight off to the gypsy camp," said Dr. Mortimer; and there was a very tender expression on his handsome face. "I believe that, with care, we shall pull the little lad through; and if so, the thanks will be due to you, Miss Selina."

"Not to me, doctor—certainly not to me; but to Him, for putting it into my mind that He might be coming to spend Christmas with us."

So the poor little gypsy boy was brought to the Laurence Arms, and there fougbt a brave battle with the enemy that men call Death. The parish nurse and Miss Selina were unremitting in their care of him; and because he had them on his side, with Dr. Mortimer, and all the warmth and comfort of a well-built and well-furnished old house instead of the cold and discomfort of a gypsy camp, the battle was not to the strong this time, but to the weakly little child. In a week he was out of danger; and in a fortnight he was sitting up and listening, with open mouth and eyes, to all the wonderful tales which Miss Selina composed and related for his benefit.

She told him over and over again the circumstances to which he owed his reception at the Laurence Arms;

and he accepted the story as literally and simply as it was told. Which is, after all, the best way of accepting stories, though nowadays people are generally too clever to realize this.

Dr. Mortimer had not allowed the child's mother to come with him to the Laurence Arms—partly because she was an uneducated, though very handsome young woman, whose strong views on the subject of nursing were only equalled by her total ignorance of the same; and partly because he felt that it was straining Miss Sarah's Christian charity to the breaking-point to ask her to admit into her house, filled with regular customers, an unknown young gypsy-woman, for whose honesty he could not vouch. But when the boy was well again, the mother was sent for to fetch him back to the camp; which, in the meantime, had removed from Coombe Heath, and was now pitched on the wilds of Dartmoor.

The young woman received her boy back at the hands of Miss Selina, with tears in her beautiful eyes.

"How can I thank you enough, lady?" she said in her musical Romany voice. "It is the child's life that you have saved by taking him in out of the cold, and keeping him warm till he was well again."

"It is not me that you must thank," replied Miss Selina in her most dignified manner; "but Him Who was born on Christmas Day. It was His room that your child had—the room that I had specially prepared for Him."

"It was a blessed thing for this little lad that you did prepare the room, Miss Selina," interpolated Dr.

Mortimer; "otherwise I couldn't have pulled him through."

"It was a blessed thing for us that when He came He found us ready to receive Him," replied Miss Selina; "it would have been too terrible for Him to have come and found that now, as in olden times, there was no room for Him in the inn. If such a thing had happened here, I should never have got over it—never; neither would my dear sister Sarah! But one should never be unprepared for Him, you see; as He always may be coming."

"I do not think He always may be coming," said the doctor softly; "I think He is always here."

THE END