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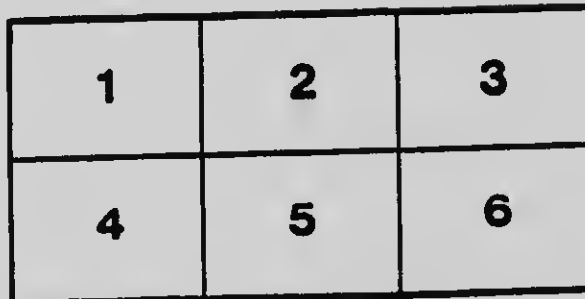
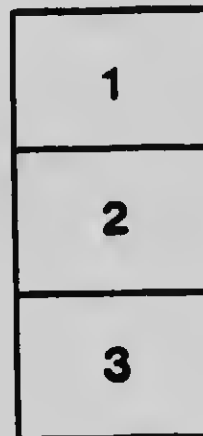
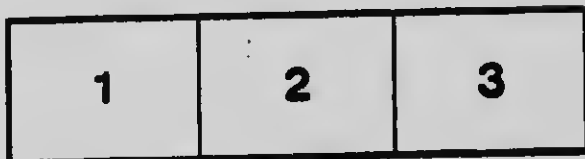
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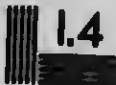
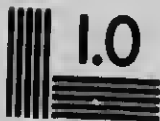
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Sir Theodore's Guest

and Other Stories

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

"KALEE'S MURDER," "RECALLED TO LIFE," ETC. ETC.



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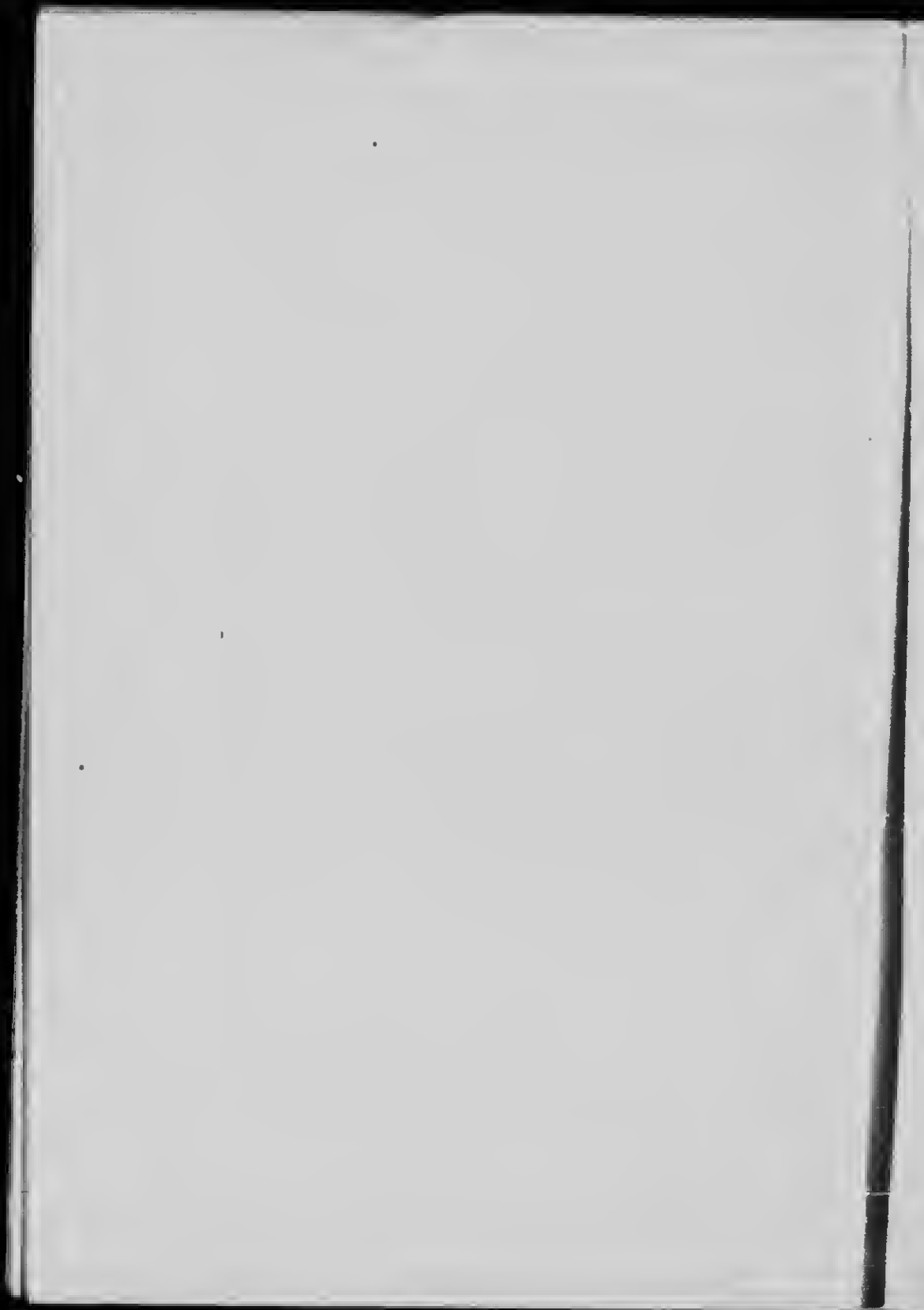
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His Last Chance.

CHAPTER I.

MIRIAM MAITLAND sat on the couch with her affianced lover. It was in her father's house at Southbourne-on-Sea; and Arthur and she were to be married in September. The time was evening. They were alone and Arthur had been reading poetry to her out of a green-bound anthology of English love-songs. When people are very young, and engaged to be married, they read poetry out of green-bound books together.

But while Arthur read, laying stress on the rhythm, Miriam's eyes were far away, as if fixed on infinity. She heard his voice dimly: the sonorous verse buzzed vague in her ears: but her bosom heaved now and again with a stifled sigh and her thoughts seemed to be wandering into boundless space as Arthur closed the volume, with one finger between the pages, when he had left off reading.

"It's not been so with us, darling," he murmured in a low voice, taking her hand in his. "True love with you and me has run on smooth like a placid river."

Miriam gave a little start and brought her eyes back to earth again.

They were lustrous dark eyes, very large and soulful.

"Read that again," she said slowly, fingering the red flower in her black lace bodice and trying to recover the last words with an effort. "I hardly heard it." Then she added, a sudden smile lighting up her beautiful face, "When you read to me, Arthur, I hear only your voice. Your tongue is music. The words mean nothing. It's you and your tone alone I listen to."

Arthur opened the little green-bound volume once more, and began again dutifully.

"'Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But, either it was different in blood,—
Or else misgraffed in respect of years,—
Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,—
Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary——'

Why, Mimi darling, what on earth's the matter with you?"

For Miriam had darted back to the other end of the sofa, and was hiding her face now in her trembling hands, overcome with some sudden outburst of suppressed emotion.

"I don't know, Arty," the girl answered, seeming to shrink from his approach. "It's so terrible, you know, so cruel, such an awful prophecy. Who was it that wrote it?"

"Shakespeare," Arthur answered, looking down for confirmation at the name in italics at the foot of the extract.

"Shakespeare! And they say he knew human nature so well! Then, Arty, either ours is not true love, or something must turn up sooner or later to check it!"

Her lover gazed down at her fondly. She was tall and lissome and just twenty-one, a dark gipsy-like girl, with the face of a Circe, great wealth of black hair, and rich parted lips that reminded one of Rosetti's ideal portraits. He seized her hand once more.

"No love could be truer than ours, Mimi," he cried, consoling her. "No love could be

truer. I adore you from my heart, Pet, and you—you know you love me!"

The girl flung herself upon him with a fierce embrace. She was a great passionate creature, with more of Southern fervour than of English reserve in her.

"Oh, Arty," she cried, clinging to him, "do I love you? Do I love you?—You know how I love you! You know no one on earth ever yet loved as I do. I feel it run through me like fire to my finger-ends; my whole soul glows with it. From the very first day when you took me in your arms, I have somehow felt as if I always belonged to you. I must have been yours from the first—from the beginning of worlds: you and I were made for each other. And yet—I can't feel as if all would go well with us. I'm so sad to-night. Comfort me, Arty; comfort me!"

She threw herself back on the couch with arms open in front of her. Her face was wistful, with a touch of vague terror in it he had once or twice noted there. Her eyes were mute sadness. That made part of her very charm, indeed, to Arthur Haslewood. Her beauty was mysterious, unearthly, Sybilline.

She had for him the fascination of some strange sad picture—some Dolores of Burne-Jones's, some Tuscan Madonna of Botticelli's. Those lustrous black eyes, that rich mass of glossy hair, those luscious red lips, that pensive half-Eastern, half-Florentine profile—all affected him with a sense of witch-like beauty, cast a spell over his soul from which there was no escaping.

“Comfort you, darling?” he murmured, bending over her with a soft smile. “Why, of course, I'll comfort you! But why should you need to be comforted? What can ever come between us two to spoil our love? Dry those precious tears, darling.” He held his handkerchief to her eyes, and tried to wipe them away. But Miriam's sadness lay too deep by far to be so easily got rid of. She could stand it no longer. Suddenly, with an unexpected movement of those large limbs, she sprang from the sofa. She stood before him, her full height, sad as night, gloomy, beautiful.

“Don't think me unkind, Arty,” she cried in a choking voice. “I must go. I can't stop here another minute. I mustn't make you sad with my own foolish sadness. But I can't help

it, somehow. Let me go: I'll run upstairs and cry my cry out in my own room alone. I feel as if my heart would break to-night. Yet I love you with all my soul: oh, Arty, how I love you!"

She slipped lithely from his grasp, and opened the door, in her plain black dress with the one red flower, a very picture of grace in distress that might have melted marble. Arthur Haslewood gazed after her with longing and admiration.

"She's unaccountable," he said to himself, nodding his head once or twice, "the most inexplicable creature that ever walked God's earth: and yet she holds me tight: she winds herself round me. I like her all the better for her very unaccountableness!"

As for Miriam, however, she rushed upstairs by herself, her eyes brimming with tears, and flung herself on her bed in a perfect agony of wretchedness.

"The last post gone!" she moaned aloud to her own soul, "and no letter from Carlo! He *can't* mean to expose me! He *can't* mean to keep them! I thought him once so true, so generous, so fond of me! He *can't* mean to

ruin me for his own selfish ends! I must see him once more! I must dare all and see him! Till I hear it from his own lips, I can never believe it."

She rose from the bed as she spoke, her face white with fear. A table stood by the window: she lighted the gas, and sat down at it, one wild mass of sobbing horror. Her fingers trembled so much she could hardly command them to guide her pen: yet with feverish energy she began writing, writing. Her hands moved over the paper in spasmodic jerks. But this was what she wrote, throwing her very heart and soul into each word of the letter.

"CARLO!—The last post has gone, and you haven't yet sent them. As I sat there with Arthur in the library to-night, I could bear the suspense and terror of it no longer. I have come up to write to you. With my body and soul, I am writing to implore you. Oh, Carlo, if ever you loved me as you say you did, do send them! Till you return them to me once more I must live in abject fear: I can never marry him. If you don't return them, you will crush me and kill me. Have mercy, mercy,

and pity me, Carlo. You have wronged me and ruined me, but I will forgive you all that, if only, for God's sake, you'll give me back my letters. Give them back, give them back to me. Meet me at three to-morrow at the same old place: I pray of you, I beg you, meet me, and bring them with you. Why will you torture me thus? Oh, Carlo, bring them! For God's sake I implore you.

Your heart-broken

MIMI."

She sealed it and stamped it, with tears dropping on the envelope. For Arthur's sake, she sealed it and stamped it. Then she stole downstairs secretly on tiptoe, and opened the front door, and ran hurriedly across to the pillar-post opposite.

CHAPTER II.

LONG before three next day, Miriam Maitland was waiting, with a heart that stood still, at the Lovers' Seat at Southbourne. The Fernery was well known to every pair of young hearts in all the borough—and to nobody beside them. Queen's Park, Southbourne, is the pretentious name of a little public garden, laid trimly out on either bank of the artificialised stream to which the fashionable watering-place owes its name and its origin. Neat walks stretch formally along the straightened brook-side: stiff parterres of flowers rise above it on either hand with landscape gardeners' regularity. But a dell on one side, the site of a disused quarry, has been laid out with less care and more natural taste as a somewhat tangled fernery. The spot is well chosen. It lies off the road on the way to nowhere, and possesses for certain purposes this remarkable advantage, that from nearly all parts of the

leafy dell you can see, unseen, through the veil of foliage, whoever approaches. It was here that Miriam Maitland sat trembling in suspense, where she had sat so often before with heart beating high for the expected approach of her faithless lover.

She sat there some minutes, her eyes strained towards the main road, her hands quivering visibly on her panting bosom. At last, a faint sound of light feet on the gravelled path struck her eager ear. She gave a sigh of relief. She knew that foot-fall well—too well by far! It was he! It was Carlo!

One moment later, a young man of about thirty, very gay and debonair, sauntered lightly down the narrow zigzag path that descends from the main high-road into the Fernery. He was of medium height, thick-set and well built, with an indescribable jaunty air of assurance and self-content which testified at once to his Italian parentage. The fashionable singing-master of a fashionable watering-place, he accentuated to the utmost in dress and manner (as is the wont of the minor arts) his aristocratic pretensions. His hair was long, and wavy at the ends, his moustache had a care-

less Rembrandtesque curl in it; his restless eyes were large, dark, and fiery, his complexion was clear but of a creamy olive. A soft felt hat, somewhat gracefully crushed in at the top, a white silk shirt with a twisted cord for neck-tie, and as brigand-like a cloak as English respectability will readily permit even to an Italian singer, completed a costume in full accord with its wearer's individuality. He was smoking a cigarette as he descended the winding path: he threw it obtrusively away as he drew near to Miriam.

The girl rose to confront him with a sudden access of outer and imperturbable calmness.

"Well, have you brought them?" she asked in a cold voice. Then, with a stifled sob, "Oh, Carlo, have you brought them?"

The Italian, pulling himself up, stood and surveyed her critically. She was beautiful, very beautiful: not a doubt about that: though not quite so beautiful, perhaps, as some two years back, when he knew her at the opening of her girlish bud: well, well, that was well:—he had had the very best of her. He stood and gazed long. Like a practised player as he was, he

was inclined to delay, to parley, to fence with her. He held out one gloved hand.

"So it's *Carlo* still!" he cried aloud, half mockingly. "I'm glad of that, at least: for after your letter last night, I half expected, *carissima*, to find it would be *Signor Molinari*!"

Miriam waved aside the proffered hand with a gesture of scorn and anger.

"It is *Carlo*," she said simply, with proud disdain in her voice, "only because when two people have been to one another as you and I have been they can never quite undo their past, and be as though all that was had never passed between them. It is *Carlo* still—not because I love you, but because I hate you."

"Bad tactics," the man retorted, smiling, and shaking his head. "That's not the right way to get them back, you know, Mimi. Bad tactics, my little one!"

The girl surveyed him with silent scorn from head to foot. Even under his ample Neapolitan cloak, there was no room she felt sure, for all that bundle of letters. For she had written to him—ah, God, what reams she had written to him! in the first mad flush of her guilty passion,

when she loved him as much as she now loved Arthur purely.

"You haven't brought them," she said with angry emphasis, petrifying him with one fierce flash from those unearthly eyes. "What use to try coaxing? I can see for myself you haven't brought them!"

Any other man on earth would have shrunk back appalled from that wrathful face and those terrible eyes, half yearning, half appealing. But Carlo Molinari had known Miriam too well to be any longer afraid of her. He regarded her for a moment as a cat regards the mouse which it holds under its paw but refuses as yet to put out of its misery. She was beautiful when she was angry. The man's artistic spirit always rose within him at those exquisite features of hers. His heart bounded out at her. He sat down on the rustic bench and looked up at the girl admiringly.

"Take a seat," he said with a pensive smile. "We may as well talk this out—and talk it out amicably. . . . Well, no, as you say, I haven't brought them."

Miriam let herself drop down wearily on the end of the bench. Her hands fell listless by

her side. She looked the very picture of abject misery. Then a current of emotion passed visibly over her face. It thrilled her from head to foot; it moved like a wave through her.

"You coward!" she cried, clenching her hand, and turning round upon him fiercely. "You can't mean to tell me you're going to keep them just to shame me and disgrace me!"

The Italian leant back in his place and gazed at her as one might gaze at some exquisite statue.

"Well, not exactly that," he answered, in English almost as pure and perfect as her own, rendered somewhat more melodious by the open Southern breadth of his clear-toned vowels. "I don't want to expose you, Mimi. I certainly don't wish it. I've no idea of doing that. All I want them for, don't you see, is just to keep my hold over you."

He bent forward to her as he spoke. The girl shrank away from his touch with evident loathing.

"To keep a hold over me!" she echoed, with withering contempt. "And I once thought you chivalrous! Ah, Carlo, Carlo! Oh, how cruel! how unmanly!"

"Yes; to keep a hold over you," the Italian

repeated with careless ease, as though talking of a thing that mattered to him very little. "Mimi, I've been reading over those letters to-day, every burning one of them. Well, they *are* just compromising! So well written, so ardent, but, oh, so compromising! They're the most passionate letters, the frankest letters, the warmest letters, the most beautiful letters, I ever received in my life from any woman. No girl; Southbourne has written to me at all so plainly as you've done. The rest hint darkly; but you—with the intensity of that woman's heart of yours—you say out everything. There's a noble outspokenness about your fearless nature that I admire immensely. I kept all those letters, every precious line of them, at the time, because I thought them, in their kind, so perfect, so beautiful. They breathe pure passion, pure bodily passion—not loves of flesh-and-blood—the true voice of humanity—as no other girl's letters in all England could breathe them. I'm glad I kept them now. I've got them for ever to hold over you and bind you."

The girl rose once more, like a tiger at bay, and faced him angrily.

"Carlo," she said, with a despairing half-loving cadence even now upon those two soft syllables, "Carlo, you've been a fiend to me. I don't know how many other girls' hearts you've broken—as many as you boast, perhaps—but not one of them can you have broken more cruelly than mine with that remorseless love of yours. You laid a trap for me early and stole my heart before I knew what all this meant—all the shame and disgrace of it. I was so young and so innocent when you first tried to ruin me."

The Italian leaned back carelessly on the rustic bench, and played with his watch-chain.

"You're all young and innocent," he said with a cruel smile, "till somebody takes you in hand and teaches you better."

"I could have forgiven you *that*," the girl went on, never heeding his interruption; "I loved you so much, I could have forgiven you anything. I did forgive you because I thought you loved me so. And then that once, when I thought something dreadful was going to happen and it must all come out,—and I must be openly shamed,—I begged you to marry me—even then, when you refused, I could still

have forgiven you. I would have left my Father's house, and braved his anger, and lost my place in the world, if only you would have married me. But you—you wouldn't! Yet even then, I forgave you. The reasons you pleaded to me were all selfish to the core; *I*, I loved you so much I would have given up everything for you; and *you*, you talked to me of your position and your prospects!"

"Precisely so," the man Molinari answered, smoothing his black moustache. "I make a good income here in Southbourne, entirely by my cleverness in remaining single. I live on my looks and my personal attraction. If I were to marry any one of them, all the rest would desert me. What would you have, *bella mia*? Should I marry a wife, and lose thereby the wherewithal to keep her?"

"I asked you to marry me then," the girl went on fiercely, her eyes flashing fire at his studied coolness. "I don't ask you now: I have ceased to expect it. I would have married you once: and when you wouldn't marry me, I would have fled with you, lived with you, starved with you uncomplainingly. I loved you so much, I could have braved shame and

death for you. I didn't ask to be your wife even: I asked only to be allowed to share my days with you. But you—you held me off; you held me at arm's length; you made me feel that what to me was the one passion of my life, had been to you but one among many passing amusements. And even then I forgave you! For the love's sake with which I loved you, I went on loving you still, after I had found out you did not and had never really loved me. I let you do as you willed, because I loved you. If there was anything in me that could give you pleasure, I yielded it up to you—you should have it freely." Her voice changed with a sudden revulsion. "Carlo, Carlo!" she cried in a voice of endearment, as if the ghost of her past love revived in her for a moment, "for the sake of the love with which I loved you once, won't you let me have them back? Won't you give me up those letters?"

The man eyed her sullenly.

"They're all I've got," he answered, with a curious pout of his thick upper-lip: "all I've got to show against you."

"Why do you want to show them?" the girl cried with an ashen face.

It was hopeless striving against him: her pride recoiled at it: yet—in her utter despair and for Arthur's sake—she must try every art and wile she knew to make him yield them up to her.

"I don't want to show them," the singer answered, with a forced smile that showed all his pearly teeth—they were straight and beautiful:—"unless you compel me. As long as you remain single and will still be true to me, I won't show them to anyone. But by heaven, you're mine: if you marry this Haslewood man—why, body of St. Peter, what claim can you have upon me?"

The girl looked at him with staring eyes of piteous alarm.

"Oh, how cruel you are!" she cried. "How wicked! How pitiless! You wouldn't marry me yourself, even when I thought I was going to be openly disgraced before the eyes of the world: you let me see you didn't mind for my shame and my misery: you let me see you didn't care whether it came upon me or not. The shadow passed away; but I had found you out. Then, gradually, as you grew more and more callous and unkind, and I saw more

clearly the utter selfishness of your nature, I began to feel I didn't any more love you. You didn't mind that: you only asked me, as before, to go on amusing you. My body recoiled from it. In time, in the world where I lived my open life, I met a good man, a thousand times better and truer than you, who loved me with pure love, as you never could love anyone, and loved me devotedly. At first I wouldn't love him: I wouldn't return his love: partly because I felt I had once been yours: partly because I couldn't bear—he was so good—to deceive him. But as time went on, and he pressed me hard for an answer, the purity and goodness of his nature overcame me. I couldn't resist him. I ought to have, but I couldn't. I found how differently he loved me from anything I could ever have learned from *you*: I found he was ten thousand times worthier than you of the love I had wasted on you. My own heart prompted me: more and more, every day, I felt I loved him. Many times he asked me to marry him, and I refused, for shame's sake, and my deadly sins: but at last, I loved him so, I could refuse him no longer. And then you, Carlo,—you,

who had ruined me—you, who had said me nay with cruel taunts and gibes when I asked you to marry me and hide my shame from the world—you came in with this horrible threat of yours to divide us. You would neither marry me yourself nor let me marry him."

"Because you're mine," the man answered, with the blind male instinct of the wild beast in its harem: "and I won't let him have you."

"Then marry me!" the girl cried, opening her hands, with a rapid gesture as though she would take him to her breast once more with tenderness.

She never meant it in her heart: she loathed him too much now, and loved Arthur too well. It was a rhetorical trick, taught her by nature itself, to force him into open avowal of his utter baseness.

"There was no talk of marriage between us two when you first gave yourself up to me at those singing lessons on the Marina," the man answered sullenly. "You were content then to love and be loved in return. All you asked for in those days was the passion of the moment."

"I was so young!" the girl retorted, with a

crimson face: "a mere child, when you ruined me. I was wax in your hands, to do as you liked with. I didn't know what it meant, what misery it entailed, what lasting shame it would bring for the future. I know it all now, and on my bended knees—" she flung herself wildly before him—"Carlo, Carlo, I beseech you, have mercy upon me! have mercy! Spare me this exposure. Give me back my letters!"

She might as well have beaten frantically with her naked hands against a wall of adamant. The Italian looked down at her with a glance of scornful pity.

"Come, come," he said, carelessly, "this is only pure theatre! this is hysterical! this is absurd! Suppose anybody were to come! Get up again this minute!"

But Miriam, nothing abashed, clung to his knees in her agony.

"No, no!" she cried, "I'll stop here; I won't get up till you've promised to give them to me. If those letters were shown to anybody, but above all to Arthur, I should die of shame. Carlo, Carlo, for God's sake, for the love's sake I once bore you, I beg of you,

I implore you on my knees here, give me back my letters!"

The man shook her rudely off, and retired into himself again.

"I will never give them back," he said with an angry scowl. "You're mine, and I shall have you. I will hold them over you like a sword hung by a thread over your head. I will never allow you to marry that man, Haslewood. You made yourself my own, of your own free will, and you're mine for ever. You may pray till you're black in the face, but you shall never have them."

Miriam rose from her knees with a stately grace and confronted him once more.

"You have said your say!" she cried bitterly. "You have driven me to despair. My blood will be on your head if you drive me to kill myself."

"Oh, kill yourself by all means," he answered mocking, "if that will give you any amusement."

CHAPTER III.

THAT evening, when Arthur Haslewood called as usual, he found Miriam, strange to say, quite calm and herself again. To be sure, there was something odd and almost ominous in her calmness: after the fierce nervous crisis he had witnessed the night before, her quiet self-possession now struck him as unnatural. But when he alluded to their last leave-taking, Miriam laughed it off easily: it was a fit of the blues, she said with a smile, and she was given to them when overwrought.

"I love you so, Arthur, I never feel myself when I sit beside you. I can write to you a great deal better than I can talk; though even then I find it difficult, for my heart beats so fast I can hardly hold my pen; but as to talking to you, and telling you exactly how I feel,—why, darling, I seem dumb and dead before you. I love you so much, it takes speech and thought all at once clean away from me."

Arthur reflected to himself, with his English common-sense, that these hysterical feelings would probably all disappear with marriage. In anybody else, he would have laughed at them as pure fads; yet in Miriam, somehow, he condoned and almost admired them. The very strangeness and weirdness of the girl was no small part of her fascination to him. He felt he was going to marry, not some commonplace creature like every other man's wife, but a being, unique, inexplicable, mysterious. And he had just enough poetry in the background of his nature to be pleased at that: through his English common-sense, there ran like a woof some half-hidden strands of profounder imagination.

Miriam had never been more loving to him than she was that night. Instead of desiring, as before, to rush away from him and leave him, she seemed nervously anxious he should stay with her and comfort her—as late as possible. She couldn't bear him to go, she said; she didn't want to be left alone; she wished he could stop with her for ever and ever. And all the while one hand kept moving nervously to

her pocket, where she felt and fumbled a thousand times for a little paper packet she had bought that afternoon at the chemist's in the High Street. Arthur wondered more than once what she could be fingering so furtively. When he looked at her with enquiry in his honest frank face, however, Miriam's big eyes filled with tears, and she cried aloud to him,

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur, how can I love you? You're too good for me!"

But love him she did, in spite of that wild cry, with all the profoundest depth of a passionate nature.

It was past eleven when her father opened the library door slowly, like one who doesn't wish to obtrude upon two lovers' privacy. Miriam was a motherless girl, and Mr. Maitland had always desired to watch over her like a mother. But though, many years before, he had crushed young Molinari's first pretensions to an acquaintance with Miriam, and so driven [the girl into a clandestine correspondence, he had never attempted in any way to limit her relations with so correct a lover as Arthur Haslewood. Now, however, he put

his head in at the door with a timid air and observed paternally,

"Young people, young people, time to be going, I fancy!"

Arthur rose at the words and with one last embrace bade good-night to Miriam. But Miriam went upstairs, with her heart like a stone, full of righteous wrath against Carlo Molinari.

When she got there, she didn't begin to undress at once. On the contrary, she sat down at her little writing-table, took a crimson flower out of the bosom of her dress, and laid the packet from the chemist's on the paper-case in front of her. It was plainly labelled in very large letters, "Arsenic: Poison."

But it wasn't for herself. It was far more probably for Carlo Molinari.

She would give him one last chance though, before she did the unspeakable. For the very love's sake she once had borne him, she would give him a final opportunity still of repenting and retrieving himself. He should not die in his sin if she could help it. She took up her pen and wrote, no longer trembling now, hurriedly, eagerly, firmly.

"CARLO,—No one can ever know, no one can guess, the intense agony I have suffered since I saw you this morning. Won't you relent, and pity me? My father's anger would kill me: so would Arthur's unhappiness. Will you bring this upon me? Oh, for whatever love you ever had for me, I beseech you, I implore you, don't denounce me! If Arthur were ever to read my letters to you, he would hate me as a guilty wretch. Carlo, Carlo, don't let him! I loved you and wrote to you in my first ardent love: it was with my very deepest love of all that I loved you. I put on paper, under that spur, what no woman should ever have written. Carlo, for God's sake, I ask you, give them back to me. On my bended knees I write and ask you, as you hope for mercy yourself on the Judgment Day, don't make me a public shame; have pity on me; release me. I don't ask you to love me or to make me your wife: the hour for all that is long since gone by; but, oh, will you not help me to keep my secret from the world, you, for whose sake I sinned so deeply? I have prayed to-night, wrestling and praying hard, that God might put it into your heart

to save me from such disgrace. Have I prayed in vain? Oh, before I go mad with it, Carlo, Carlo, don't say no: say you will bring them back, say you will release me. Think of the days when I made you so happy! Think of them, and relent. I give you till three o'clock to-morrow afternoon to bring back the letters—to the same old place, at the same old time. If I haven't them by then, Carlo, I will kill myself. Bring them back: bring them back.

Your distracted

MIMI."

As she fastened the letter down, she glanced aside with a terrible look at the little packet of powder. "Which will it be for," she thought to herself as she looked, "him or me, I wonder! God only knows." For as she wrote those words, "I will kill myself," she more than half meant them. According to his decision, it should be one or the other. Driven to distraction as she was, she felt herself in the mood when the turn of a hair would make the balance tilt either way—to murder, or to suicide.

And yet—and yet, the shame to Arthur! If

she made it suicide, all would doubtless come out: and that would be worse ten thousand times than death to her.

The hour was very late: but for mercy's sake she braved it for all that. Slipping off her light shoes, and carrying them in her hand downstairs, she opened the front door noiselessly, and stole across to the pillar-box. If possible, she longed and yearned to save him. As she posted the letter, she gave a sigh of relief. "If he refuses even now," she thought, with a sudden revulsion of hate for the creature who had wronged her, "his blood be upon his own head! As he would let me die in shame, without remorse or pity, so in shame will I kill him."

But when Carlo Molinari received that letter next morning, he read it over to himself with a half chuckle of triumph. He was a very vain man, and, where women were concerned, his vanity amounted to something like mania. Men who curl their moustaches or wear them twisted are always vain of their success with women. Carlo Molinari's were curled extravagantly. "She's coming round!" he said to himself. "She's coming round after all! When

she finds I don't mean to let her marry this man Haslewood, she'll soon come to anchor; she'll soon drift back to me! No woman on earth who has loved me once can ever break away from me. They think they can for a while, but sooner or later, their hearts compel them: they have to come back to me. I draw them like a magnet: I can see I'm drawing Mimi. And, per Bacco, she's a fine girl: a very beautiful woman! I can read between the lines of this very note that she's in love with me: she regrets me still. 'I loved you, and wrote to you in my first ardent love: it was with my very deepest love of all that I loved you.' The woman who can write such words as that to a man, loves him still, you may be sure. I won't give her back her letters, or mind her threats of suicide. Let her be at the Fernery by all means, at three o'clock to-morrow: she won't find anybody there to meet her. Then she'll go home, and cry and sob, and think to herself she means to carry out this idea of killing herself. But she won't, for all that, when it comes to the scratch: she won't have courage or the nerve to do it. When they look

at the knife, their resolution oozes. She'll think it all over in her room with herself, and she'll see I mean to keep to my resolve. Then she'll begin to reflect that it's better after all to be Carlo Molinari's love than to be publicly shamed out of marrying Arthur Haslewood!"

CHAPTER IV.

IN the Fernery, at three, Miriam waited and waited. Ten minutes passed, twenty minutes, half an hour: but yet no Carlo. Miriam waited still, not as she had waited the day before, in an agony of suspense; but rather in coldness of heart, as one who loiters to see whether or not another by his own insensate folly will irrevocably condemn himself. Her glance was fixed and stern; her whole mien was marble. Unless he came before she went, it would be he, not she—his doom was sealed: he had as good as killed himself.

She sat there as judge and jury to try him for his crime. She gave him that last chance. Unless he appeared before the court, he should be found guilty in his absence.

At last wearied out, she rose to leave. Judgment had gone by default. Carlo Molinari had wrought his own sentence.

She moved on her way home to her father's

house in Normanhurst Square, hardly knowing how she walked, how she kept herself from falling. It was all so terrible. Her heart was like a stone; her brain reeled and sickened. She didn't try to reason with herself what possible good her act would do. How could it serve her cause that Carlo should die, if he left all those inculpating letters behind him! If he died, there must be an inquest and a trial, no doubt; and the letters, those unspeakable letters which she could hardly understand having written herself in the white heat of her passion—letters that said everything a woman's pen could say, or leave unsaid, to her unrecognised lover, in the fullest flush of quickened senses—those letters must be read in cold blood before an open court, and listened to by coarse and brutal men with gaping wonderment. All this she would bring upon herself if she carried out the sentence she had pronounced as if impersonally on Carlo Molinari.

Dimly in her whirling brain she felt it all, and realised it. She saw herself in the dock, dazed, terrified, spell-bound, while quibbling lawyers read aloud her own shameful words

and covered her with their shame before the prying eyes of men and women. She recoiled from the bare thought; and yet, she would brave it. What good it could do her, she neither knew nor cared; she walked as in a dream; from the moment she had risen from the seat in the Fernery, it had come upon her as a fixed objective fact that her duty in life now was to execute the sentence upon the man who had wronged her. And through her all womanhood.

He had cruelly ruined her; he had more cruelly refused to repair his wrong; he had most cruelly persisted in his design of exposing her. Those crimes were enough; as a woman, it was her duty to avenge her sex. She would not shrink from it. The letters he should have held most sacred upon earth he had threatened to turn to her shame and disgrace by publicly betraying her. When she went round to the Fernery that afternoon, she had gone with the fixed resolve to try him. She had tried him indeed, and she would abide by the verdict. It was he and he alone who had condemned himself. The fate he would have allowed to fall upon

her so lightly, he should himself endure. It was her mission to punish him.

There was but one way to do it, and that way she would take with a clear conscience. She hated herself for taking it, but still she would take it.

At eight o'clock that evening, Carlo Molinari was sitting by himself in his rooms on the Marina. They occupied the first floor in a corner house, but the front door stood aside in a narrow and unobtrusive little alley-like street, under a darkling archway. Carlo Molinari had chosen them on purpose, because it was so easy for anybody to slip round the corner and let themselves in with a latchkey, unobserved by the fashionable throng that promenades on the Marina. He had such visitors often, and he laid himself out for them.

The singing-master was seated in his lounging basket-chair, cigarette in mouth, attired in his graceful brown velvet coat, and engaged in reading over Miriam Maitland's last letter. "She'll come round," he murmured to himself between the pensive puffs, twirling his curled moustache; "as sure as fate she'll come

round. No woman who writes like that ever means to desert one. 'No one can ever know, no one can ever guess, the intense agony I have suffered since I saw you this morning: that means she still loves me. 'I don't ask you to love me or to make me your wife, . . . you, for whose sake I sinned so deeply.' Those words can only point to one thing after all; she loves me still; for respectability's sake and to settle herself in life, she would throw herself away upon that tailor's block, Arthur Haslewood. But she doesn't care for him; having once known *me*, could she possibly care for him? No, no: depend upon it, when she really finds out I won't let her marry him—*that* I mean what I say and am firm as a rock upon it—she'll fly back to me once more, as they all do always. She loves me too well ever to really desert me."

He laid the letter down on the table by his side and gazed at it fondly. She was a magnificent creature to be sure,—his own pet conquest. Such eyes, such a bust, such fire, such passion! Never before in this cold North had he met anything like it.

As he sat there, ruminating, with her picture

in his mind's eye, he heard a step on the stairs and a light knock at the door which seemed so strangely familiar that they almost startled him.

Why surely that was Miriam! Not so soon, not so soon: confident as he felt of his own potent charms, of his nameless spell, he could hardly expect it yet: his ear deceived him.

"Come in," he said jauntily, just arranging his long hair with his dainty hands as he spoke; for whoever it might be, 'twas at least a woman. Slowly, hesitatingly the door opened at his word, and Miriam entered.

Too quick for belief! She had come back to him already!

"Why, Mimi," the singer cried, darting forward with desire in his eyes and a smile of triumph on those sensuous thick lips of his. "What on earth has brought you here? I—I hardly expected you."

Miriam stood before him for a moment mute. Her hands clasped on her breast, her eyes cast furtively round, she hardly dared as yet to begin to speak to him. She loathed in her own heart the hypocrisy she must practise. But he had brought it upon himself; and she,

why, for justice's sake, she must go through with it.

"I let myself in with the latchkey," she said, panting hard and holding her hand on her throbbing heart. "I keep the latchkey still. You weren't at the Fernery, Carlo. So I felt to-night I *must* come round and see you."

"How did you manage it?" the man asked, as casually as though their meetings had never been interrupted.

"I went to the Mordaunts to tea and to spend the evening, telling father I was going, so that he didn't expect me home till ten o'clock: and then, before eight, I said I had a headache and felt I really must go home to bed; so I slipped off quietly by myself and came here."

"And what have you come for?" the young man went on, with that easy smile of success growing still more confident on his lips each moment. "To beard the lion in his den and beg back your letters?"

Miriam flung herself at his feet in a perfect tempest of passion, half real, half simulated. How much of it was acting, indeed, how much

of it was reality, she herself couldn't say. Stirred and agitated as she was by love for Arthur, hatred for her false lover, fear, suspense, horror,—all emotions at once seemed to surge up tempestuously within her.

"Oh, Carlo," she cried, laying her head on his knee and caressing it tenderly, "when I found you wouldn't come and give me back my letters, what on earth could I do? There was but one way open. I've come to tell you it. I went round at once to Arthur Haslewood, and told him in plain words I never could marry him, because—because I loved another man better. I told him I had never really loved him at all; I explained to him everything, except—well, except what I could never explain, of course, to anybody. I made it quite clear to him I could never be his wife. And now—well now, Carlo, I've come back again to you! I'd rather be your lover than any other man's wife. Oh, Carlo, you've forced me to it; cruelly forced me to it; but still, for all that, Carlo, I love you!"

Nothing but her infinite hatred could have made her say it or do it. It was the strength of her loathing that enabled her so exactly to

imitate the broken phrases of rapturous love. She loathed herself for doing it; but still, for justice's sake she did it.

As for Carlo Molinari, however, she had struck with instinctive cleverness the right chord in that shallow mean nature to work upon. In the immensity of his egotism, his vanity, his self-conceit, he could believe almost anything of his own sinister power over women. It was real, but he exaggerated it. He exulted in his victory. The revulsion had come even quicker than he had hoped. He saw it all clearly. That strange fierce soul of hers, in the swiftness of the inevitable reaction against the fellow Haslewood when compared with *him*, had swung her round with incredible energy to her own first love again. She had loved him always; she would love him still; and he for his part, why he really didn't mind forgiving her everything.

He laid his hand caressingly upon her glossy hair. His fingers burnt her temples; but still for her vengeance sake she endured it.

"Why, Mimi," he said exultingly, "I always knew you'd come back to me in the end. I always knew you loved me best. It was

nothing but mere pretence about that living walking-stick." He fondled his curled moustache with tender solicitude. "I felt sure," he cried once more, "sooner or later you would feel for yourself you couldn't do without me. It was for that alone I pretended to be cruel."

Miriam's heart gave a bound. Then her plot had succeeded. His colossal vanity could stretch its mouth wide enough to swallow almost anything that seemed to feed it.

He lifted her from the floor with a condescending smile, and seated her on his knee, as in the old days so often. That was almost more than Miriam's heart could endure; yet still, for her plot's sake and her very loathing, she managed to submit to it. She allowed him to fondle her and to call her by pet names. He had done so of old, for his own delight: why not permit it once more, for her vengeance and his punishment? Personality had vanished. She was no longer herself now: she was Doom; she was Nemesis.

They sat there for half an hour, like lovers reconciled: and Miriam talked and talked on, detailing to him in full all that had never passed at the imaginary interview between

herself and Arthur. The more she spoke the more the man forced upon her his hateful caresses. She received them unmoved. She even tried to return them. She felt herself nothing but the impersonal agent of divine retribution. No earthly court can redress these grievances. He should suffer for his sins: and *this* was the one way to it.

But Carlo Molinari, in his fatuous self-esteem, felt sure she had come back to him of irresistible impulse. She fooled him to the top of his bent: now she had once begun, she threw herself into her part with a certain fierce self-abandonment. That was part of her nature. The end was the one thing now clearly in view: the means were as nothing. Who wills the end must endure the means, no matter how distasteful. The siren instinct was alive in her. She suffered his vile endearments with a burning heart. She even condescended to pay them back at times with all the skill and ingenuity of a born actress.

At last, with a sudden artless glance at the clock on the chimney-piece, she gave a quick little start.

"It's time for your coffee!" she cried,

springing up. "You see, I haven't forgotten your ways and habits. Carlo, let me make it for you, just the same as I used to do!"

The Italian accepted her offer with a nodded smile as a token of reconciliation. He had her fast in his net again! He always knew the truant bird would fly back to him.

"As you will!" he said carelessly, as who should cage his dove. "You make it so well, Mimi, with those deft little hands of yours! And besides, I've taught you the true Neapolitan fashion."

Miriam moved to the chiffonier with a heart that stood still with fear within her. She took out the coffee, and boiled the water. Then she poured it into the cup for him, and added white sugar—a little slowly this last—from the bowl on the table. For one moment she stood irresolute, holding the cup in her hand. Even now, she had mercy upon him. Though her heart was like a stone, she couldn't bear not to give him one last chance of a reprieve. She would try it: she would pity him. She knelt down by his side, holding the cup out of reach, as one holds out sweetmeats to an expectant child.

"Carlo," she said coaxingly, "just this once more I ask you. For heaven's sake, for mercy's sake . . . won't you give me back those letters?"

She smiled an imploring smile that might have melted a stone. But the man drew back from her angrily.

"Oh, if you're going to begin about *that* again, I don't want to talk to you," he said with all the haughtiness of virile self-assertion.

"I thought you had finished with that. I've got them safe and sound under lock and key, and I tell you, Mimi, I mean to keep them. How can I ever know when you may have a relapse again?"

Miriam recoiled from him in horror. He had no mercy himself. No mercy should be shown him!

No longer hesitating, she handed him the cup with a deprecating gesture.

"Well, don't be cross with me," she said, those great black eyes flashing, "for to-night I can't stand it. I thought, after I'd made such concessions to *you*, you might make such a small one to *me* in return, Carlo."

She stood behind him, in suspense, as

he lounged in the long wicker-chair, and watched him drink it off with profound attention. Her face was like the face of an avenging angel. Would he notice anything strange? No, nothing; nothing. Molinari sipped it slowly, a spoonful at a time, enjoying the full flavour of the creamy berry.

"Nobody in England makes coffee like you, Mimi," he murmured with an abstracted air as he laid down the cup. "But there!—you see, it was I myself who taught you."

Cursed are the merciless, for they shall have no mercy.

When Miriam went home to her father's house that night, it was not to sleep nor yet to feel remorse. It was for something quite different. She sat down and wrote a long passionate love-letter of pure love to Arthur. But all night long she lay awake in her bed, thinking, waiting, wondering. Would it kill him? Would he die? Would they find her letters? Would they try her for her life? Would they tell out her shame on the house-tops, and disgrace her before Arthur?

She didn't know. She didn't care. She was like one dead. She only waited to hear

what the poison might work. She had no scheme, no plan, no idea for the future. To get rid of that vile wretch was all she had wished or attempted on earth. What came after, she had left to fate, or chance, or circumstance. But once, in the dead of night, she rose from her pillow and knelt on her bed and prayed earnestly, fervently. Not for forgiveness for herself; that thought never troubled her. Not for Carlo Molinari; he had wrought his own doom of which she was but the instrument. She prayed with all the energy of a passionate soul at fever pitch of emotion—that Arthur Haslewood might be spared the pain of this disclosure. For herself, she had wrought out what her nature imposed upon her; and now, if man's law would so have it, she would die for it. But Arthur, Arthur! Her soul shrank from that last shame—that the man who had loved her with pure true love should be publicly shamed in her.

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning at six o'clock, a messenger went round in breathless haste to Dr. Walcott's house in Normanhurst Square. Would the doctor come at once to see Signor Molinari? He was taken suddenly ill—looked like cholera or something.

Dr. Walcott rose with a very bad grace. He had been up late at night and until one in the morning. He was sleeping soundly when the messenger came, and was by no means pleased at being disturbed so early. Besides, he didn't like that Italian singer-fellow; he didn't approve of him. Doctors get to know many things in the course of their practice, and more than one of Dr. Walcott's women patients had told him things perforce about Molinari which redounded very little to the Italian's credit.

"What devilry has the fellow been up to now, I wonder?" the Doctor said to himself as he rose and dressed. "He isn't much given to drinking bouts; *that's* not one of his vices.

What on earth can have made him get suddenly taken in this way?"

When he went round to the house on the Marina, however, he found the Italian very seriously ill, and in such agonies of pain as to be scarcely capable of describing his symptoms. He writhed on the bed, doubled up with internal spasms, and seemingly in danger of instant death. He had been violently sick he said; the doctor eyed him narrowly. A few minutes' inspection of the rejected food made the man of science give a start of surprise and alarm. Why, surely, this was a case of arsenical poisoning!

"Had you been taking arsenic for anything?" he asked the patient, in an interval between the spasms of pain. With such a man, he could almost suspect some care of the complexion.

Molinari sat up in his bed with a sudden awakening. A horrible light passed over his pallid face.

"Arsenic?" he repeated, horror-struck. "Arsenic? Why do you ask me that? Is *this* the sort of thing then, that would come of taking arsenic?"

"It looks very like it," the doctor answered slowly. "These outbursts of pain, this irritated condition of stomach, this general congestion of all the organs."

Molinari pointed with his finger to the rejected food.

"And there's arsenic in there?" he asked, with a face of white terror.

"I can't say without analysing it," the doctor answered with medical caution. "But, what's this:—Well, yes, I fancy I detect a white insoluble powder that looks very like it. I shall treat it as arsenical, and give you an antidote."

Molinari flung his arms up with a wild cry of terror.

"I know what this means," he cried; "Miriam Maitland has poisoned me!"

"Miriam Maitland!" the doctor exclaimed, almost forgetting his patient in the surprise and terror of this sudden revelation. "You don't mean to say Miriam Maitland, too,——" He paused and hesitated.

Molinari cut him short with an impatient gesture.

"I'm dying!" he cried, "I'm dying. This

pain is killing me. My whole stomach's on fire. Miriam Maitland has done it. She gave me a cup of coffee, here—in this room last night. There are the grounds of it still. She must have come here to poison me."

Another spasm of pain checked his utterance for a minute. He fell back on the bed and writhed. The doctor scarcely heeding him in the horror of this infinitely more hateful disclosure, took up the cup and looked into it narrowly. "Miriam Maitland," he said to himself, "Miriam Maitland did it! Is it one of the fellow's lies, or did he really drive her to it?"

Molinari, pressing his hand to his body once more, rose up in the bed with a face now livid from mingled pain and terror.

"Look in my pocket over yonder, doctor, if you doubt what I say," he cried. "You'll find her last letter there. She's poisoned me to revenge herself."

The doctor followed with his eyes where the doomed wretch pointed. From the pocket of the velvet coat he drew forth a letter which he recognised at once as in Miriam Maitland's hand-writing. Professional instinct was so far

In abeyance in him that instead of attending to the dying man's wants, he sat down by the bedside and then and there read it. The words burnt themselves into his brain.

"Carlo, for God's sake, I ask you, give them back to me. On my benedict knees I write and ask you, as you hope for mercy on the Judgment day, don't make me a public shame; have pity on me; release me."

That cry of a tortured heart wrung his heart as he read it. But the callous wretch on the bed must have received it unmoved and refused to listen to it.

Miriam Maitland! The doctor knew her well as his daughter's dearest friend, and loved her dearly. Why, he had brought her into the world, and watched her himself with almost fatherly care through all her childish ailments. And now, this wretched thing!—Doctor Walcott was a Man, and the Man's blood in him boiled within him.

There was only one thing possible now to be done. If Molinari died, then the crime was murder. If the crime was murder, Miriam Maitland would be hanged, or imprisoned for

life. But if the doctor could only save that wretch's life, they might hush it all up and get back the letters.

He dared call in no aid, lest Molinari should tell his hateful secret to others. So for three hours, he sat there by the doomed man's bedside, wrestling hard with death, fighting fiercely against the poison. He did all his medical skill and knowledge could suggest to save that creature's life, though he loathed and hated him. When he needed drugs, he rang the sitting-room bell beyond the folding doors, and then waited outside in the lobby for the landlady. Nobody must see him. If Molinari must die, no man else must hear that unutterable secret.

The spasms grew fiercer and fiercer; then they gradually calmed down. Collapse was setting in. The patient was sinking. But once before he died Molinari roused himself for one last flickering effort. He sat up in the bed yet again. His face was livid with rage and pain, and horrible to look upon.

"In my desk there," he said, pointing with one white hand towards the davenport in the corner, "you'll find a brass key which will

open that box yonder. In the box, just on top, you'll find all that girl's letters. There's enough there to hang her. Keep the grounds in the coffee; keep everything, and analyse it. She's a murderess, that girl. She came here last night, and pretended to be reconciled, on purpose to poison me!"

The doctor rose from his seat, went over to the desk, opened it in silence, and put the key in his pocket. Then he sat down by the bed again and waited for the end, which could not now be long in coming.

Molinari from time to time gave a shriek of pain, and waves of agony seemed to convulse his body. He was murmuring broken sentences in Italian by this time. Once he called loudly in his native tongue for a priest. Bad Catholic as he had been, he shrank from death without the aid of Extreme Unction.

The doctor rose and paused. Should he venture to risk it? He didn't like to let the man die in his sin without the rites of his Church, if those could avail him anything; and yet, on the other hand, the danger to Miriam! What was that fellow's soul to Miriam's safety? So he paused and doubted.

Before he made up his mind nature had settled the question for him. With one more piercing shriek than all before Molinari flung up his arms, and fell back with his head on the pillow, foaming. The doctor leant over him and put his finger to the lips. No breath; no motion; that bad heart had ceased beating! The doctor stepped over very quietly once more and rang the bell. Above all, no panic!

"He's easier now," he said calmly, when the landlady came; "but he won't last long. I shall sit here and watch by him. Send round to my house and tell them I won't be home for at least another hour. If any patients want me particularly at once, they must see my assistant."

Then, with the calmness of a man well accustomed to death-bed scenes, he turned the key in the outer door, took the bundle of letters from the box in the corner, and sat down by the dead man's side to read them.

As he read, his loathing grew ever deeper and stronger. There they were, neatly arranged in chronological order, those terrible accusing letters—the whole history of a young

girl's love, and ruin, and misery. From first to last, they struck every note in the gamut of passion; from the earliest dawn of love to the last tone of despair in a heart-broken woman. He could read in them how years before Miriam Maitland had first received the passing attentions of the vain and heartless Italian. At the beginning, the correspondence was perfectly innocent in character. Then came dark hints of her father's displeasure; suggestions of breaking it off; a formal letter, evidently dictated by Mr. Maitland, bidding Molinari farewell for ever; a little pencilled note, dated the same night, disclaiming the other one, and signed, in a girlish hand, "Your own ever fond and loving 'Mimi.'"

After that, a new chapter opened. The letters were clandestine. But for a time they were still innocent. At a certain point in them, however, a fresh note came in, which told that practised head as plain as words could tell it what had happened meanwhile to Miriam. From that day forth all her letters were written in a fervid stream of unconcealed passion, with an utter abandonment of language, a wild self-revelation, of which

only such a nature as hers could be capable. The doctor read and read; no wonder Miriam Maitland had wanted those letters back again. For himself, he could understand, for he had a heart and a soul; but the mob in a court! Oh, how hateful, how horrible! So they went on for some years, breathing devotion, tenderness, unspeakable affection. Yet they were more like the letters of some warm Southern woman than of an English girl who was scarcely yet twenty. Next rose the shadow of a sudden terror,—consequences, disgrace, shame, agony, misery! Then touching appeals to Molinari to save her from the last depths of exposure by running away with her and marrying her—appeals which had evidently been answered by the man with crushing coldness and cruelty. The doctor's heart glowed within him as he read, so that he could have turned and struck that hateful unhallowed corpse that lay untended on the bed beside him. Finally there were signs of coldness, estrangement, rupture; then with the growth of the newer and truer love for Arthur Haslewood, the first urgent demand for the return of those incriminating letters.

At the beginning Miriam wrote as one who didn't doubt she would succeed in her object.

"I trust to your honour as a gentleman that you will not reveal anything that may at any time have passed between us. I know you will never injure the character of one who so deeply loved you. I know when I ask you, you will comply with my wishes."

But Molinari, evidently would by no means comply. She had reckoned without her man. The cur! The scorpion! He held the letters over her head as an abominable threat, reminding her, as his own pencilled draft of an answer in one case frankly showed, that "they breathed from end to end a most unbridled passion, and one and all of them contained enough to blast for ever any woman's reputation." Last of all came the final despondent appeals for mercy—

"Carlo, Carlo, don't say *No*: say you will bring them back; say you will release me. Think of the days when I made you so happy! Think of them and relent!"

But he had not relented. The doctor gazed at that silent wretch as he lay dead on his bed harmless to hurt in future, and didn't wonder

that he lay there. Surely, surely, he had tried that poor human soul past woman's endurance.

The doctor read them through to the last letter of all. He saw exactly what it meant. He knew as well as if he had been present how and why Miriam Maitland had poisoned Molinari. Where human justice failed, divine vengeance had smitten the man.

As the doctor laid down the last letter of all, he rose from his place, cast an angry glance at that still warm corpse, and then folded them together into a neat square bundle. His mind was made up: he had no doubt what to do with them. He washed out the grounds in the coffee-cup into a phial from his medicine chest; carefully bottled up the contents of the basin; and removed every trace of the suspected arsenic from all the vessels lying about in the bedroom. After that he rang the bell.

"Mr. Molinari is dead," he said, curtly, to the landlady. "It was the most violent attack of inflammatory enteritis I have ever seen. The body mustn't be touched, except by the people I shall send in to attend to it. I may probably have to conduct a post mortem this evening."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM the dead man's room, the doctor walked straight round to Normanhurst Square. Mr. Maitland had gone to town on business, the servant said, but Miss Miriam was at home. Would the doctor like to see her? The doctor breathed freer. That was fortunate, at any rate. With the bundle still in his hand, he moved into the drawing-room.

In three minutes more Miriam came down to see him. She was pale and dressed in black, with one crimson flower again; but great rings were round her eyes; and the doctor's professional eye detected at once the fact that her bloodless lips were dry and feverish. Otherwise there was little different from usual in her look or manner. Without a twitch of the facial muscles, without a tremor of the nerves, in her most impassive manner she stood there and confronted him.

For a second the doctor said nothing. Her imperturbable resolution, the fixed gaze of her

great black eyes, fairly silenced and frightened him. But *she* was not afraid: that he could see at a glance. Her features were haughty; her expression defiant. Surely the bitterness of death was past. She thought herself already detected and found guilty.

"Well?" she said in an enquiring tone, after a long, deep pause. "I know where you come from. Is he dead yet, doctor?"

"He *is* dead," the doctor answered in a solemn low voice. "He is dead—as he deserved to be."

Miriam stared hard at him once more out of those great startled eyes.

"And why have you come on straight here?" she asked with unflinching calmness.

"To bring you back these letters. He told me where to find them. They're yours. My poor child, take them at once and burn them."

"Are they all here?" Miriam asked, clutching at them fiercely with eager fingers.

"All—all—every one: down to that last sad pleading one."

"And—you've read them, doctor?" she asked, a bright crimson spot burning all at once in that pallid brown cheek of hers.

"I've read them," the doctor answered, in a very low voice, "every letter, my child. I've read them—and pitied you. Sadder letters—a more piteous life-history—I never came across. But don't fear on that account. Your secret is safe with me. That's why I brought them back—that you might destroy them yourself, and know they were destroyed. My child, my poor child, from the bottom of my heart I'm sorry for you, I pity you."

He spoke with infinite compassion. If he had been harsh to her, if he had threatened her, Miriam would at once have been cold as ice. But at those words of human sympathy, the hot tears rose like drops of fire to her eyes, and struggled hard to fall; she repressed them with an effort. She took out her handkerchief, and wiped them hurriedly away; then she swallowed down a sob that seemed to convulse her whole bosom.

"Thank you," she said simply: but she said it from her heart. All the force of her nature seemed concentrated into her face as she stood there and thanked him.

The doctor drew a fluted silver matchbox from his waistcoat pocket, and lighted a wax

vesta. Then he lifted the topmost letter from the bundle and opened it.

"May I?" he asked, with an enquiring look, holding it well above the flame.

Miriam nodded assent, darting forward, and seizing it in her hands, where she held it till it had almost burnt her fingers. It was that last wild note, wrung out of her by despair and shame and terror.

The doctor lighted them one by one, and watched them blaze slowly, taking care that not a scrap should remain unburnt of any of them. He held them by the fireplace, but he didn't let the charred paper fall loose in the grate to tell tales against them; he collected it all carefully in a sheet of newspaper.

"I shall throw this away myself," he said, as they finished the holocaust. "Not a trace must remain of *why* you did it."

Miriam fronted him, tall and erect. She stifled her sobs still, and preserved a wonderful calm for a woman so situated. She drew a deep breath of suspense relieved.

"I shan't mind the rest now," she said,—"now the letters are gone. They may hang

me if they like—but they never will know what led me to do it.”

The doctor laid his hand on her hand like a father. Those words ran through him.

“Miriam my child,” he said in a very earnest voice, “don't breathe a word of that. Speak low, if you speak at all. And say nothing even to me. We may keep it all to ourselves. No one else on earth need ever know it.” He drew the phial from his pocket. “See here,” he said quietly: “these are the dregs from the coffee-cup. I washed it all out. There's not a trace of it at his lodgings. I was going to take it home. I meant to analyse it. On second thoughts, I won't. I'll destroy it without examining it. I don't *know*, even I, what it was that killed him.”

Miriam stared at him fixedly. Her great eyes opened wide. She was white as a statue now.

“And there'll be no trial!” she faltered out. “They won't put me in the dock, and find me guilty, and hang me!”

The doctor spoke once more.

“My dear child,” he said in a hushed voice leaning over her tenderly, “I don't know

whether in this I'm doing right or wrong: God only knows: but anyhow, Miriam, I'm acting in strict accordance with my conscience. In trying to screen you, I'm making myself by man's law an accessory after the fact: I'm rendering myself liable to be hanged for murder. Yet, right or wrong, I can't help doing it. I must in mercy undo what that merciless wretch compelled you to do to yourself.—Miriam, listen here. Thirty years ago, in Glasgow, there was a case just like yours,—except for one thing: that *there* all the facts were at once discovered. The poor girl who had been so wronged was put upon her trial, and sat, day after day, with incredible fortitude, listening while her letters—just such letters as yours—were read in open court before judge, jury, and spectators. It was a horrible ordeal. No man has a right to impose it upon a woman. I was there at the time, and I followed her all through it. When the letters were read,—despairing, imploring letters—such a thrill of human sympathy ran unchecked round the court that no law on earth could avail against it. Women fainted on the spot: men cried like children. The feeling of

repulsion against the dead man's crime couldn't be restrained by the officials. All the world said openly, he deserved the fate the woman dealt him.

"Well, Miriam, the case was proved to the very hilt against her. It was shown exactly where she had bought the poison, and how she had administered it. And there she sat all the time, with stoical indifference, waiting for the jury to bring her in guilty. But when the jury retired, they did their duty like men. They brought in at once a Scotch verdict of 'Not Proven': and the girl was acquitted.

"Now, I asked myself this morning, 'What good should I do if I were to show these letters, to expose these dregs, to analyse the stuff I have here in this bottle?' No good at all, save needlessly to shame you. For the honour of our common humanity, I trust and believe no twelve men in England could be found to condemn you. But I won't put it to the test. Why should I expose what this wretch would have exposed? It was for that God slew him. My child, at the risk of my life, I've made up my mind to screen you. And I *can* screen you, I know. The letters are gone: the

evidence is destroyed. I shall get rid of the drugs. I shall bury everything."

Miriam gazed at him vacantly, as one who can scarce believe such great tidings of joy.

"Then, Arthur," she said slowly with a burst of delight,—“his heart need never be broken! He need never know about it!”

The doctor was more practical.

"Have you the packet?" he asked in a very low voice, "the packet from which you took—well, the drug you gave him?"

Miriam put her hand into her pocket and drew out without a moment's hesitation the little piece of paper marked "Arsenic: Poison."

The doctor stared hard. It would be difficult to protect anyone so careless of her own fate.

"And you walked about with *this* lying loose in your pocket!" he exclaimed, taken aback.

"You didn't think of destroying it!"

"When once it was done," Miriam answered truthfully, "I gave myself up for lost: I felt my work was finished. I had no more care for anything on earth. The only thing I thought of was Arthur's shame and agony when he

came to hear of it — not the poisoning, you know," she added frankly, after a short pause, "but . . . all that went before it."

The doctor lighted another match and burnt the paper to ashes.

"Now I must go at once and get rid of all these other things," he said decisively. "Nobody need know a word of it except the bare fact that Molinari is dead. I'll give a certificate of the cause of death that will satisfy everyone."

"But surely," Miriam cried, all breathless with suspense, "there'll be an inquest, an enquiry. They'll find out he's been poisoned, and try to discover who did it. You *can't* hush it up. It must all come out somehow!"

"Not so loud! not so loud!" the doctor exclaimed, raising one warning forefinger. "If you will be cautious yourself, no one will ever suspect you. No, Miriam, my child, there need be no inquest. I'll conduct a post mortem myself this afternoon; I'll return the cause of death in the most probable way, and nobody here will doubt me. My position in Southbourne puts me high above doubt. Whatever I say will be accepted as final. Even if the coroner

should happen to order an inquest, he's my friend, as you know, and it's I who always conduct his post mortems. I should only give evidence of what I had seen and done, and the thing would be settled. Besides, there's no danger. Molina^{ri} has no friends or relations in England. When once I've arranged what I mean to arrange, all evidence of the facts will be destroyed for ever."

Miriam seized his hand fervently.

"Oh you mustn't!" she cried, bursting into sudden tears. "You mustn't, for my sake, run such risks as that. I've been wicked, so wicked: I've brought it upon myself, and I don't deserve your kindness. You must tell out everything, and let them punish me as I deserve. Let me atone for it with my life." Then she drew back with a sudden shrinking. "And yet," she cried in a low moan, "poor Arthur! poor Arthur!"

Tears were rolling slowly down the doctor's cheek. He laid one hand on her shoulder and drew her towards him tenderly. Then he kissed her forehead.

"Miriam," he said very solemnly, "this is a hard case to judge; but I have taken upon

myself in all sincerity to judge it. Asking myself to-day what duty imposed upon me, I came to the conclusion I should act as I am acting. God knows whether in doing so I am doing right or wrong; he knows, at least I am obeying my conscience. At risk of my own life, at risk of shame and disgrace to my own wife and children, I am hiding this thing for you. For if it ever came out after this, it would be on me, and on me alone, that suspicion would fasten itself. Knowing all this, and striving hard to do right I yet feel in my heart, I *can't* denounce you. When I read those letters, I struggled hard with myself; I tried if I could do it; my own soul wouldn't let me. My tongue wouldn't have framed the words to tell your shame: my feet wouldn't have carried me. My hands wouldn't even have allowed me to lay the letters down in that creature's room where others might find them. When a man's whole nature rises up in revolt against a suggestion like that, I say to myself humbly, he has no choice but to obey it—to obey the promptings of his own heart within him. Miriam I can't do otherwise than I am doing now: though they hang

me for it, I must save you. I have saved your good fame; I must save your life also."

The girl clung to him in a fever of remorse and gratitude.

"Oh, Doctor Walcott!" she cried fervidly, "I mustn't, I can't; I won't accept this sacrifice."

With gentle fingers the doctor untwined the clinging arms and hands that surrounded him.

"No, no, my child," he said softly; "you must let me go now. I must get rid of these things. That man's very mercilessness has impressed upon me all the more the duty of mercy." He paused and smoothed her hair. "Now go, my child" he said; "wash your face and bathe your eyes; try to look like yourself again. Take a little sal volatile, have some lunch by and by, and drink a glass of light wine with it. Try to bear up till I come again to you. This evening, at eight o'clock, I'll step round and report. Be at the window when I come, if you possibly can, and run out to open the door for me." He grasped her hand hard. "And above all," he added with a last farewell, "keep your own counsel."

CHAPTER VII.

THAT evening at eight o'clock, Mr. Maitland sat in the dining room after dinner with his daughter. Miriam seemed moody and pre-occupied. She stood by the window as if expecting somebody.

"Arthur Haslewood, no doubt," her father thought to himself with a smile. "When a girl's in love she can think of nothing else in all the world but her lover."

But Miriam stood there all on fire. It was hard to contain herself. That's the worst of such situations: when one has committed a murder and is expecting detection, it's terrible to have to dress and talk and laugh, and lead one's everyday life as if nothing at all had happened!

Presently, the colour rushed with a sudden burst into her pallid face.

"Here's Doctor Walcott!" she cried, turning round impulsively. "I must go and let him in." And regardless of decorum, she rushed out into the passage.

Why on earth, her father thought, couldn't she wait, like a lady, till Emma went out and opened the door for him.

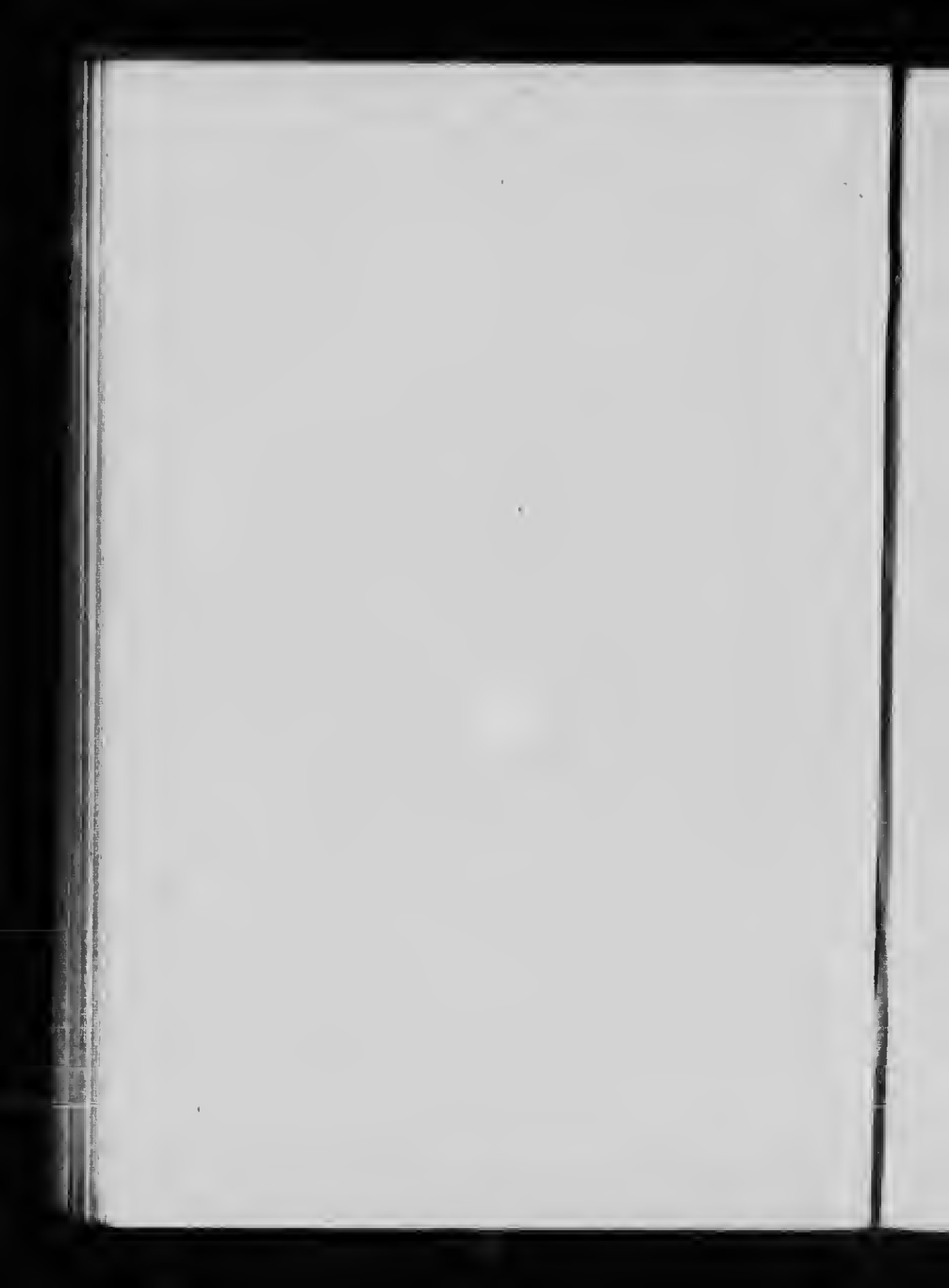
On the threshold, the doctor paused and spoke low for a moment.

"I have destroyed both bottles and their contents," he whispered. "I held a post mortem this afternoon at three. I have returned the cause of death as acute peritonitis. So it was—in all essentials. I set down its origin to a chill at night, of which I say he spoke to me. There will be no enquiry, and if all the coroners in England examine the body now, they won't find a trace either of poison or its effects anywhere about it."

Miriam stooped down and kissed his hand.

"You have saved me," she said simply, "from far worse than death. Though I didn't mind much for the rest when once we had burned the letters."

And the two walked together into her father's dining room.



Sir Theodore's Guest.

CHAPTER I.

"NOW, remember, Grindon," my wife said to the coachman in her impressive way, as we set out for the station to bring home our visitor, "whenever you speak to the Archbishop you must say, 'Yes, your Grace,' 'No, your Grace,' at every sentence. Not 'My lord,' but 'Your Grace!' That's always the proper way to address an Archbishop."

"I am aware, my lady. I will remember, my lady," Grindon answered, touching his hat with one iron finger. An irreproachable starched coachman, Grindon, sitting bolt upright on the box with his stiff curled wig, as though to smile were impossible for him! A coachman, in point of fact, who *almost* overdid it, if that were possible, in the matter of official gravity and decorum.

"I have explained to all the other servants, Theodore," my wife went on, as though titles of nobility were a matter of the first importance in life; "and they now know their lesson thoroughly. But *will* you recollect to see the porters at the station before the train comes in, and impress upon them strongly the absolute necessity for addressing the dear Archbishop in proper form? They *are* so rude, those porters! Why, one of them said 'Yes, ma'am,' to me myself the other day! Grindon, be sure you remind Sir Theodore of this when you reach the station."

"Really, Gwendoline," I broke in, "you attach too much importance to these trifling details of etiquette. What *does* it matter whether the porters say 'Yes, my lord,' or 'Yes, your Grace'? Dick Kesteven is a sensible fellow, who happens to have been made an Archbishop. But the mere fact that he has been made an Archbishop in the fulness of time doesn't quite get rid of the habits and ideas of a sensible fellow, contracted during fifty years of previous experience."

Gwendoline gazed at me severely. (She

never forgets that she is an earl's daughter, while I am nothing more than a country squire, made a baronet by "that man Gladstone," whom she always mistrusted.)

"*Mon ami*," she answered in French, that Grindon might not understand, "what ideas to put forth before my servants! Your Radical doctrines are subversive of the moral and social order. Depend upon it, if inferiors once begin to say 'My lord' where they should say 'Your Grace,' the game is finished: they will go on to say 'Ma'am' where they should say 'My lady,' and it will soon be all up with the throne, the church, the peerage, and the aristocracy!"

"*Miladi a raison!*" Grindon muttered half to himself as we drove off down the avenue.

The comment took my breath away.

"Goodness gracious, Grindon," I cried, starting, "you don't mean to tell me you *understood* her ladyship?"

"Monsieur forgets," Grindon answered, in very tolerable Parisian French, "that I had the honour to be coachman for three years at the English Embassy in the Faubourg St. Honoré."

"Bless my soul, so you had! Then you are a Tory, Grindon?"

"Certainly, sir. Leastways, I'm a Conservative. Every gentleman's servant always is Conservative. It's like this, don't you see, sir: we must do something to check the huppishness of the lower classes. Why, agricultural labourers, sir, is beginning to think such a precious lot of themselves since they was give the franchise that they won't so much as say 'sir' to a gentleman's coachman!"

"Is that really so, Grindon?"

"Well, sir, I don't mind telling *you* that the boys on the estate is that familiar to me myself that I've had to remonstrate with them with my whip many's the time as I passed 'em. An' what I says is this: you've got to maintain the status quo from top to bottom. It's the status quo as is the saving of England. Over yonder in France, they ain't got no status quo, leastways none to speak of, an' what's the consequence? A coachman to the embassy has to say 'Mam'zelle' to every saucy under-housemaid and every flower-girl in the street: that's where them republics leads you to

ultimately. I'm the president of the Sutton-Folgate Working Men's Conservative Association, sir, which is pledged to resist your return, sir, at the next election: and what I always tells them is this, sir: unless you pay respect to the aristocracy yourself, how can you look to receive respect from the lower orders? It's a ladder, that's where it is, sir; a regular ladder. The Queen's at the top: the slums is at the bottom: and you an' me, if I may make so bold, is somewhere about on the middle rungs, each in his own position. Unless we puts our shoulders together to maintain the status quo it's my opinion the whole blooming show will topple over in a lump; and then where'll we be, either coachmen or baronets? Begging your pardon, sir, for the liberty I take in making free to address you on behalf of my position as a British subject."

I made no answer. I was of the opposite camp. But as an old parliamentarian, I felt that Grindon had the root of the conservative argument in him.

When we arrived at the station, the train was just coming in. I rushed upon the platform, and saw somebody in full canonicals—



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apron, gaiters, shovel-hat—emerge with slow and stork-like dignity from a first-class carriage. The effect was ludicrous. It was only Dick Kesteven! The bishops whom one has been born and brought up upon—the bishops whom one has never known save in the episcopal purple—strike one simply as bishops and nothing else. But when you see a man whom you have known at Oxford, with whom you have rowed in the same boat and played loo at the same wine-party, turn up before you thus transformed, with the true ecclesiastical carriage of the legs, your first feeling is merely, “Why, bless my soul, if here isn’t Dick Kesteven dressed up as an Archbishop!”

“My dear Denselow,” my old friend began in a very measured voice, most slow and deliberate, “I am delighted to see you! So good of you to receive us! Amid the labours and worries of official life, you can hardly imagine what an oasis it is—a veritable oasis—to come away from the desk to the countryside, among the heather and bracken, and get a whiff of fresh air, with dear old friends, far away from the controversies of censers and chasubles. Lady Gwendoline quite well, I hope? Neuralgia?

Ah, well, ah, well : we have all our crosses ! You know my dear wife. Clara, Lady Gwendoline has been unable to meet us, owing to an unfortunate attack of neuralgia. But you remember Sir Theodore. You have aged, Denselow : you have aged. I suppose 'tis common. I myself am not so young as when we bumped Brasenose. Your carriage ? Most roomy and comfortable. They make these things so luxurious now." He stroked his smooth chin with reflective fingers. "I suppose your men will look after our luggage ?"

He stalked out to the carriage with the stately and stereotyped episcopal tread—the tread of a man well aware that his legs are being observed, a man who suffers under the double disadvantage of wearing gaiters and having perforce outlived all youthful vanities and follies, a man for whom it is impossible to cut capers. Mrs. Kesteven trooped after him in her smaller yet preciser fashion. I have always pitied an Archbishop's wife. She goes through life a mere adjunct, like the Prophet's donkey. It is hard to know that your husband ranks above the premier duke, and yet yourself be a mere plain Mrs. Kesteven !

CHAPTER II.

I FOUND it a curious study to observe Dick Kesteven in his new position, for he had been appointed to his province during the three years that I spent in Australia. So many things were the same—and so many were different! Every now and again I caught some gleam of the old fun in his eye, the old wit in his speech, the old quaint comicality in his voice or manner. But he repressed them sternly: for the most part the Archbishop had swallowed up the man. To me who knew him, he seemed all the time to be acting a part: a part, however, played so long that it almost came as second nature. He was above everything the dignified, demure, politic, cautious, irreproachable, severe English ecclesiastic, the product of the strange Erastic union between church and state, the hybrid offspring of convocation by Her Majesty's pleasure, half the chief of Anglicanism and half the nominee of the Prime Minister of the moment.

The first night at dinner, as it chanced, we had some curious passages. My son Reggy was at home, just back from Oriel with another undergraduate. Now, Reggy had been "under Kesteven," as he phrased it, when "the Doctor" was still headmaster at Rugtonbury: and I must also admit that he is about the most irreverent lad I ever came across, even at Oxford. He has no respect for age, or rank, or official position. His mother tears her hair over his misdemeanours. The Archbishop had been discoursing over the plover's eggs to my wife on the worries of his position.

"The task of the mistress of a house like this, Lady Gwendoline," he said, holding his hands in front of him, thumbs and forefingers together, "is difficult, I will admit; very difficult: it requires tact and patience—the organisation of your servants! But consider what it is with *me*' In place of housemaids, recalcitrant curates and insubordinate rural deans! the eternal trouble of candles on the altar—the eastward position! What is a man to do? so many parties in the church, so many outside it! And parliament to answer to! the Jews, the Wesleyans! If you take

any step, you are sure to offend one side or the other: if you take none, you offend all together."

Gwendoline is generally a woman of great social discrimination, I must allow: as a member's wife, and an ex-colonial Governor's, she may be safely trusted to say the right thing in the right place to everybody. Except where such serious questions of right and wrong are concerned: there, she does not understand paltering or prevarication: her serious sense of the importance of the moral points at issue stands her in good stead as a pure and censorious British matron.

"But why cannot you act without regard to any of them," she asked bluntly. "Why not just follow your own conscience?"

It was an appalling moment. This revolutionary suggestion non-plussed the Archbishop. An English prelate cast policy and the political necessities of the moment to the winds, and follow his own conscience! The idea was so unexpected. Kesteven gazed at her uneasily and clasped his hands, twiddling his thumbs.

"Ah—quite so," he murmured in his blandest and most mellifluous episcopal voice. "Why

not follow one's own conscience? An excellent notion! It shall have my consideration. Lady Gwendoline, I thank you for it."

But here, that scapegrace Reggy of mine burst in over it all with a sudden thunderbolt.

"My dear mother," he said curtly, "if the doctor had been the sort of man who follows his own conscience, do you think he could ever possibly have risen to be an English Archbishop?"

I stood aghast in my shoes at the head of my own table. The implied principle was so true, so painfully true: there lay the whole sting of it. Compromise is the soul of official Anglicanism.

I must say Gwendoline, though she began it herself, was thoroughly shocked and ashamed at her boy. "Reggy!" she broke out in her most awful tone—that tone before which housemaids and privy councillors have quailed—not to mention her own husband. When Gwendoline says "Reggy!" in that particular tone, with three notes of exclamation implied in her voice, you feel at once that the culprit might as well go and hang himself instanter.

"You must excuse him, my dear Kesteven,"

I said—"I mean, my dear Archbishop. He's only a boy, and I'm afraid he's still possessed with a boy's desire to check his headmaster."

As for Mrs. Kesteven, she looked at Reggy with the look which an Archangel bestows upon the reprobate as he consigns them to perdition. I knew she considered that hanging was too good for him. She would have preferred some ingenious mediæval torture, with Latin imprecations and molten lead in it.

The only member of the party who was not in the least perturbed by Reggy's bombshell was the Archbishop himself. He smiled benignly at the culprit—as benignly as if he were just about to birch him—and murmured with his bland voice,

"Very true, Denselow major, very true; you hit the right nail on the head this time with your usual frankness. Excuse my calling you Denselow major—a *lapsus linguæ*—it comes so natural after Rugtonbury! Sir Theodore, this boy of yours has a remarkable head. I've often thought he might do great things some day in English politics. Might go into the House, don't you know, and strike out a line for himself—a quite original line, which nobody

else has dreamt of. Might tell the truth, for instance. Consider the possible effect of that! If a man were to stand up and tell the truth in the British Parliament, there's no knowing what might happen. He *might* get consigned to the Clock Tower, to be sure, till he went down on his knees and begged the Speaker's pardon for his breach of the etiquette of that honourable House: or he *might* be torn to pieces. But he might also be made President of the British Republic at once. There's no forecasting what might happen to such a remarkable innovator." And he smiled again, restrainedly.

Mrs. Kesteven's steely blue eye was upon him at once. It was the cold blue eye of the headmaster's wife, just modulating into the judicious suavity of the archiepiscopal consort.

"*Richard!*" she said, in a voice which almost cast my Gwendoline's "*Reggy!*" into the shade. If *I* had been an Archbishop, I should have curled up before it.

But Kesteven went on unabashed, turning now to Gwendoline.

"Your son touches the point," he went on in his honeyed tone, like the headmaster well

accustomed to the task of interviewing the anxious parent. "*Rem acu tetigit*, as we say in Latin. The English archiepiscopate is a great tradition. It is a school of self-effacement: it subordinates the individual to the interests of the church. Since the Reformation it has been the meed, for the most part, of moderate men—very moderate men, chosen by the State for that responsible post just because they *were* moderate, not hot-headed enthusiasts. When a bishopric is vacant, a Prime Minister asks himself, 'Whom can I cast into this see, with some likelihood of his steering clear between Scylla and Charybdis—the Scylla of Rome, the Charybdis of Evangelicism?' He picks a likely man—a good sound man—a cautious man—a man not liable to be misled by his his own conscience. A man, in one word, who will follow precedent. Sometimes he goes wrong—and chooses a Laud. Laud had his ideas, and got his head cut off for them. Subsequent prelates have avoided that error, and have died in their beds. They have shown some gratitude to the men who appointed them, and have refused to be led astray into Laud's extravagances. When a

see falls vacant, the Prime Minister chooses a bishop, and sends word to the cathedral chapter that they are at liberty to elect him. The chapter solemnly invoke the aid of heaven to choose aright—and then proceed to appoint the man whom the Prime Minister dictates to them. That is a perfect sample of our Anglican polity."

Mrs. Kesteven's steely eye was upon him as he spoke. I could see in it anxiety, as well as the settled dislike of the British matron for admission of the plain truth about anything.

"My dear Richard," she said, with a pointed smile, "you almost rival our friend Reggy's frankness."

The Archbishop pulled himself together with a start.

"True, true," he answered, confusedly, like one who comes to himself after a sudden lapse. "You are quite right, Clara. All avowals are lawful, but all avowals are not expedient. Perhaps I have said more than I meant. One gets these lapses. You will forgive me, Denselow. I humbly hope there is much excuse for me. In other countries, each church is exposed to the criticism of its own

members alone. In England, it is assailed by the interference of dissenters, Jews, free-thinkers, and Roman Catholics. I sometimes get so worried out of my life with these repeated assaults that I really don't know what I am saying or doing."

"You could avoid it all," Reggy put in, as bluntly as before, "if only you would consent to give up the temporalities—disestablish and disendow her."

The Archbishop gazed at him with a compassionate smile.

"We could avoid it all," he answered, never altering his tone, "if we chose, as you say, to give up the loaves and fishes—but that is just what we will not do and cannot contemplate. We will stick to our funds." He paused a second, then he added in an afterthought, "We will not deprive those who come after us of the inestimable advantages to be derived from the pious foundations and endowments of those who went before us. Lady Gwendoline, how lovely your garden is looking!"

We took the hint, and dropped the subject.

When the ladies had quitted the room, however, and Reggy had run upstairs for a moment

to fetch his cigarette-case, so that I was left alone for awhile with the Archbishop, I ventured to say to my old friend,

"The officialism of your position galls you, Kesteven. You chafe at it sometimes."

He turned round to me with a face of profound gratitude for a passing expression of human sympathy.

"Chafe at it, Denselow!" he cried. "Chafe at it! Great heavens, I should think so! Look at my legs; I could ~~not~~ play football! I feel at times as if I must rush out into the street and stand upon my head, gaiters, apron and all, just by way of revulsion. You don't know what it is to be an Archbishop, and nothing but an Archbishop, not once in a way, but all day long, and all night, and always. Chafe at it! Who wouldn't? Your Reggy is quite right. It's almost enough to make a man of spirit throw up the temporalities!"

CHAPTER III.

WE live in one of the wildest and weirdest parts of the West of England. My house, built by a filibustering Elizabethan ancestor, stands on the summit of a bare black moor; and though in form it is an Italian mansion, in spirit it is still to a great extent a buccaneer's castle. It looks down on wide stretches of heather-clad country, with here and there a farm or a gentleman's house nestling low in the valley, surrounded by great expanses of ling and bracken. Gorse is one of the leading elements in the vegetation; and much of the gorse was dead that summer, killed by the severe frosts of the preceding February. We are always liable to heather fires in these barren uplands, but never so much so as when the gorse has been killed by a cold winter: the bare stems light with great ease and burn like tinder. Such fires, indeed, are the great drawback of our heaths. For two months in summer, the moors in these parts

are purple glories: but when fire has swept over them, they remain for a whole year one charred and blackened mass of repellent desolation.

That evening, as it happened, while we were looking out of the drawing-room windows at the fading glow of the sunset, our attention was suddenly caught by a red glare to southward. I glanced at it in dismay: I knew what it meant.

"Those scoundrels!" I cried, clenching my fist. "They've lighted the heath close up to my chestnut plantations!"

Even as I spoke, great red tongues of flame shot upward to the sky, through murky wreaths of smoke: next instant, the wind had driven the blaze against my larches and chestnuts: we could see the fire run spirally up each in a living corkscrew curl: it was a beautiful spectacle—for those whose property was not endangered by the outburst.

"Do you mean to say they light them on purpose!" the Archbishop asked, looking out at the strange sight with marked curiosity.

"Nine times out of ten, yes. Sometimes a labourer shakes his pipe out carelessly or flings

away a match, and the heather smoulders slowly for a minute or two, then bursts into a blaze. But nine times out of ten, as I say, it's done for pure mischief—sometimes a grudge, sometimes mere devilry. The young men do it because they love a blaze: the poachers, in order to divert the gamekeeper's attention: the commcners, to provide fresh pasture for their donkeys. I can always tell a fire caused by an incendiary, because it begins remote from the road, and runs with the wind straight for one of my copses."

"How shockingly wicked of them!" Mrs. Kesteven ejaculated.

"It's a lovely sight," the Archbishop mused to himself, fingering his chin as was his wont. "I think I should like to go out and see it."

"*Richard!*" Mrs. Kesteven exclaimed again. But the Archbishop was adamant.

"Come out with me, then," I answered. "I'm going to help beat it down. All the men on the estate will be there in five minutes."

The Archbishop snatched up his hat and followed me on to the moor. We ran hurriedly toward the spot. Already my beaters were on the scene, for we keep an organised brigade of

amateur firemen in training for such emergencies. On our dry hill-top no water is to be had: but the men cut down young fir-trees and beat the flames down with them. It is curious how well this rough procedure succeeds: in half an hour, unless the wind is unusually high, we can get under control almost any conflagration that occurs in the moorland.

The two most energetic men on the hill that night were Grindon and the Archbishop. They beat with a will: the flames went down like ninepins beneath their vigorous flails. At first I remonstrated against his Grace taking part in the fray: it was undignified, I thought, for the chief of the English Church to grime himself with smoke on such a petty business. But he would not be withstood.

"No, no," he cried. "I am a man first, an Archbishop afterward. Besides, is it not everyone's duty to help where life and property are at stake? How could I feel justified in sitting still and looking on when the flames might spread to your poor tenants' cottages!"

"The Doctor enjoyed the fire better than anybody," Reggy said to me, when we had got it well under, with the loss of half my planta-

tion. "He worked with a will. It quite pleased me to see how jolly hard he pitched into it."

"Grindon worked well too," I answered. "He is a first-rate hand at a fire. Loses all his starch and buckles to like a man! I wonder who started it?"

"Beg your pardon, Sir Theodore," the policeman, who had come up to help us, put in with a wise smile: "has it ever struck you that them as lights the fires is the first in the field to put them out, and works the hardest at them?"

"Nonsense, Peters," I answered. "Grindon is a most respectable man, with a large family and an excellent character. I can believe nothing against Grindon. He is as safe as the Archbishop: a pillar of Church and State. I believe in Grindon."

"As you please, sir," the policeman answered demurely. For he was a wise subordinate and knew when to be silent.

We returned home to the Hall, very black and grimed. Our clothes were a scarecrow's. Mrs. Kesteven received the Archbishop with a face of horror.

"My dear Richard," she exclaimed, "what *have* you been doing? Sir Theodore, you really

ought not to have allowed him to make such a guy of himself!"

The Archbishop gazed down at his stained and fire-scorched apron.

"Oh, that's all right, Clara," he answered carelessly, with a certain malicious glee, as of a boy let free from school. "It was a thing to see for once in a life." Then his voice altered at once to the archiepiscopal key. "Besides," he went on, "it was so very instructive. It will afford me such admirable descriptive matter for a future sermon, as illustrating the final end of the unrepentant."

CHAPTER IV.

DURING the rest of Kesteven's stay at the Hall, I could see that his wife's vigilant eye was ever upon him. Gradually it dawned upon me that she feared something. I could remark that she was far more jealous of the archiepiscopal dignity than he himself was. She seemed to be ever at his side, trying to prevent him from unseemly relapses. He was a thorn in the flesh to that poor woman, I feel sure. I had never seen her so worried when Kesteven was a mere headmaster. I gathered that the conjugal couch of an archbishop is not always a bed of roses.

Like all the rest of the world, I had lately taken to riding a bicycle. My doctor prescribed it as a remedy for my increasing gouty tendency. Gwendoline opposed it: she stuck out for horse-exercise; but Sir Arthur was firm.

"My dear Lady Gwendoline," he said, with that impressive voice of his, "your husband has ridden to hounds for heaven knows how

many years, and it has not saved him from the ancestral malady: he must use his own legs now instead of a horse's. You will find it suit him."

I confess I think the machine a trifle undignified for a squire, a baronet, and the patron of seven livings: but I enjoy it immensely: oh, yes, I enjoy it.

Reggy had just bought a new-fangled bicycle of the latest pattern, something chainless, or else something that changed its gearing automatically—I don't remember which—he is always springing fresh "improvements" upon me—and we practised it round the drive in front of the main porch—the invariable carriage-round of every decent English mansion. The Archbishop was interested.

"I wonder if I could ride it?" he said, eying it with a certain sidelong glance of concealed desire. "Do you know, Denselow, I've really half a mind myself to try it."

He darted a parrot-like glance craftily sideways at Mrs. Kesteven as he spoke. He was obviously afraid she would veto his attempt on the first blush of it.

And she did.

"My dear Richard!" she cried. "In gaiters and apron! Consider the servants, dear: *and* your examining chaplain!"

The Archbishop's hand lingered reluctantly on the handles.

"I might just *try*," he murmured. Then one foot crept slowly and unobtrusively into the pedal. He leapt into the saddle, and glided off, well pleased. Except that he ran into the high box hedge, and threw himself off with a bang, he didn't do badly for a raw beginner.

"Have you hurt yourself?" Mrs. Kesteven exclaimed, rushing after him.

The Archbishop picked himself up, rubbing a bruised knee with one hand.

"Oh, nothing to speak of," he answered, jauntily. "I shall try it again. I believe I should soon learn to ride the thing quite easily."

I could gather from Mrs. Kesteven's face that she regretted he had not hurt himself more. A good tumble at the outset would be such a splendid deterrent!

He mounted once more and rode safely round the grass-plot. Mrs. Kesteven faced him as he returned.

"Richard!" she said solemnly in the same awe-struck voice, as of embodied England: "you *must* not do it."

The Archbishop dismounted with a look of chagrin.

"I suppose I mustn't," he answered. "But—it is very tempting."

I don't know what passed between those two that evening, but I know that during the rest of his stay, the Archbishop never once attempted to mount a cycle.

Strange to say, however, almost every night from that time forth we had a perfect epidemic of heath fires about us. Kesteven did not see most of them. He was busy at his desk with important official documents, and he retired after dinner to my study, where he locked himself in for the evening, and did not reappear till breakfast next morning. When he came down to breakfast, he looked tired and ill, like a man who had sat up all night.

"The work is killing him!" Mrs. Kesteven said once to my wife. "This Brighton Contumacy case is worrying his life out."

One night, a week after the episode of the bicycle, the Archbishop had retired to the

study as usual, and I was gazing out of the window in a vague sort of way, wondering what part of my heath or my coverts those rogues would next set fire to. The Archbishop at dinner had preached resignation and forgiveness to me :

"Consider," he said, "these people's monotonous lives! How dull, how uneventful! What a public amusement a fire must be to them! We should not be harsh to our poorer brethren. If we knew all, we could forgive all: and the temptation must be great to relieve their vacant nights by any sort of variety."

I was thinking over what he said, and wondering whether a workman's club might diminish incendiarism, when suddenly, not half a mile across the moor, I saw a flame burst forth, and a man's form distinctly defined against it. I had caught sight of the actual incendiary! I gave the alarm to the household and rushed off myself. I had no time to get out my horse,—that would have wasted three minutes—so I seized the first bicycle I found in the hall, and rode wildly across the rough path to the moor on it. But the policeman was before me. He and three

detectives had been watching the hill all evening, and now they had caught the man, red-handed by his fire. They pushed him forward as I came, for of course I am a magistrate. I looked at him in astonishment. It was Grindon—my coachman!

"Why, what does this mean," I cried, unable to believe my eyes. "You lighting my heath, Grindon!"

He gazed defiance at me from between the two men who held him.

"Oh, it's all very well for you, Sir Theodore," he said in a voice of unwonted insolence. "You can do as you please, and be yourself as much as you want. But how about *me*? *me*—a gentleman's coachman! I ain't complaining of it: I was always for law an' order: and now I'm lagged, I'm for law an' order still: I'll pay six months for it. But if *you* had to sit up stiff and starched on the box of a landau every day of your life, and be a baronet's servant, without a smile to your name, the same as if you was stuffed, why, you'd soon do as I do. Human nature'd come out in you. It's bound to have its fling. I wanted a break out, and a break out I've

had. I've lighted four fires this week; that I have: and if they hadn't caught me, I'd have lighted a round dozen of 'em!"

Even as he spoke, I saw of a sudden a second flame rise all at once on the heath, half a mile further on. This was clearly a conspiracy. Without answering him a word, I jumped on to the bicycle and rode off helter-skelter over the bare burnt moor by the feeble starlight. I would catch them all! they should all have six months for it!

The suddenness of my approach took the incendiary aback. I came upon him unawares, with a dark lantern in his hand and a blazing mass of gorse in front of him, at which he gazed with evident satisfaction. He was a rough-looking person in a moleskin cap and corduroy suit, like a poacher. I clapped my hand on his shoulder unperceived.

"In the Queen's name," I said, "I arrest you!" He turned round and looked at me with a furtive air. By the light of the dark lantern I could make out his face. It was a hunted, tortured face. His jaw dropped suddenly. I let my hand drop too. "Great heavens!" I cried, "Kesteven!"

He did not attempt to steal away. He looked me back in the face with a look of positive relief in his glassy eyes.

"Yes, Denselow, it is me. Now, do as you like with me!"

"Kesteven," I cried again, "Archbishop, I mean—what on earth has made you do it?"

He walked quietly by my side.

"Let us go back," he said in a tone of deadly calm. "This farce is played out now. Writing sermons! rubbish! In your study—what nonsense! I have dressed myself up like a poacher every night and gone out by myself to light your copses. I have burnt a few sticks. If you knew what a relief it has been to me to break loose for once, you wouldn't grudge them to me."

I was too astonished for words.

"You must come home," I said slowly after a while, "and change these clothes. I see what Mrs. Kesteven meant, now. She knew you were going mad, and she tried to restrain you."

His face was grimed with smoke and disguised by the moleskin cap, but he looked at me again with an expression that yearned for sympathy and pity.

“No, not mad,” he answered: “human, simply human! If only you knew, Denselow, what sort of thing it is to be an Archbishop in England! the constant strain, the politic caution, the ceaseless watchfulness of it! The peers, the commons, the clergy, the dissenters! A man must keep guard over every word and every deed. He must compose his face, even. He can never be himself. He must act, act, act, morning, noon, and night, till he is sick and tired of it. He must walk delicately, like Agag. A single false step, and he has high or low or broad down upon him. I tell you, an English prelate longs like a schoolboy to rush out into the playground and kick up his legs. I have kicked up mine—and kicked off my episcopal gaiters in doing it.”

“For ever?” I asked, for I saw he was desperate.

“Yes, for ever! I shall not go back to it. I can’t. It kills me.”

“But the scandal!” I cried. “The exposure! The interests of the church! Your wife! Your family!”

The man’s face was full of a haunting horror.

"I can't help that," he answered gloomily. "I have taken those things off, and I shall never put them on again. Never—never—never! I feel my legs free." He shook them out. "I shall keep them free, Denselow!"

I took his hand in mine. Then I recoiled. It almost burnt me.

"Why, Kesteven," I exclaimed "you are in a high fever!"

"So much the better," he answered with a reckless gesture. "I have played in this farce too long. It will be the sooner over."

Then I understood that the case was really serious.

I hurried him home somehow, smuggled him into the house, got him into his bedroom, and washed his face clean for him, for he was utterly passive. Then I put him to bed. He was docile as a child. I took the key of my study from his pocket, brought up the archiepiscopal clothes he had left downstairs, and removed the poacher's. Not till all that was done did I dare to send for a doctor.

I had anticipated his diagnosis. As I thought—brain-fever.

It lasted three days. I hardly left his bed-

side. When he recovered consciousness once,
I leant over him and whispered,

"You need not fear: I will never tell your
wife."

He smiled a peaceful smile, and pressed my
hand.

"Thank you," he whispered. He was dead
before evening.

Not till now, when Mrs. Kesteven has followed
him after so many months, do I make public
in part the story of his death. I alone could
do so. No other soul in England knew of it.

A Woman's Hand.

CHAPTER I.

ST. THOMAS-IN-THE-VALE is universally allowed by all who have seen it to be the most beautiful parish in a beautiful island. You reach it by the Bog Walk, a road whose odd name enshrines a curious negro corruption of the old Spanish title, the Boca d'Agua. The steaming gorge or "water-mouth" up which you ride (in the atmosphere of an orchid house) is bordered on either hand by rocky precipices, overgrown with bamboos and huge snake-like lianas. Down its midst you hear rather than see the cool cataracts of the Rio Cobra. Caves lined with maiden-hair open out among the limestone. But after a mile or two of this shady ravine, a tangle of greenery, the road emerges suddenly into

a basin-shaped dale, set round with high mountains. This is St. Thomas-in-the-Vale, once the bed of an inland lake, and still lake-like in outline, but drained long since by the wearing of the gorge through the enclosing barrier.

In the centre of the vale lies the negro village of Linstead, a casual collection of loose thatched huts, with a market for its nucleus. And near Linstead one evening, when the full moon shone with the pale green light peculiar to the West Indies, a group of ragged blacks, in the scanty costume of the country, held an informal meeting. They had chosen that night of set purpose, for a full moon in the islands is a public occasion. The noonday is always too hot and dusty for the transaction of business, while on moonless nights the tangled paths of the hillside become almost impassable with creeping roots and hanging sprays of climbers, over which if you trip, you fall down the precipice into some bottomless gulley. But a moonlight night is cool, and almost as clear as day, and 'tis then that the country negro assembles in force to discuss measures for the redress of grievances.

The malcontents had gathered by a tall group of bamboos, whose feathery foliage waved solemnly with ghost-like effect in the pale green atmosphere. In the midst stood Gerge, a stout and powerful negro, with a short stubby beard. He was suspected of Obeah—the local compound of witchcraft and poisoning. He was a mighty man, was Gerge, a deacon of his sect, and credited by his admirers with supernatural skill and profound knowledge; while the fact that his sole clothing consisted of an old pair of cotton pyjamas cut off at the knees, and surmounted by a shirt simply formed out of a flour-sack with two slits for armholes, detracted nothing from his supernatural majesty and mystery in the unsophisticated eyes of his simple followers. Your negro is no stickler for dress in his prophets. The things of the soul outweigh in his mind the things of the body. Nay, so careless was Gerge of such mere outer marks of earthly dignity that he allowed the words "Oneida Flour Mills" to appear distinctly across his chest in the big red letters impressed upon the sacking. For your negro is a believer in the spiritual truth of the universe, and no

small matter of material uncouthness can shake his faith in his chosen hierophants. He can accept a teacher in an empty flour-sack as readily as earlier races accepted one in a camel's hair garment.

"Fren's an' fellow - countrymen," Gearge concluded his address with emphasis, "I axin' you dat; is you gwine to stand it? For if you gwine to stand it, den your liberties is all done wit. What far did Wilberforce set you free? I axin' you dat. You tink him set you free far de Colonel to trample on you? I tellin' you no; him set you free far you to quit yo'selves like men. Rise, rise, an' be free! De tyrant am oppressin' you. Up, fren's, an' strike him!"

"Dat true, fer sure," one grey-headed negro answered, shaking his white locks solemnly. "De Colonel am a tyrant. Gearge am de man fer de rights ob de black man. Gearge don't gwine to see you suffer, my bredderin. Down wit de Colonell!"

"What hab him done to *you*, Clemmy?" Gearge continued oratorically, swooping down on a particular case, and taking advantage of the impression his speech had created. "Yo'

tell de ladies an' gentlemen what de Colonel gone done to yo'."

Clemmy was a stout, good-looking negroess of forty, with very white teeth, very clear eyes, very red lips, and a very smooth complexion. She wore a coloured print dress and a big red bandanna set turban-wise above her curly head. Under most other circumstances Clemmy would have shrunk from addressing a public meeting, though as a class leader among the Wesleyans she was not wholly unaccustomed to dilating upon her "experiences." But this evening, when the safety of the African race was at stake, Clemmy found her tongue marvellously.

"Him turn me out ob my cottage," she cried aloud, "an' burn de roof ober my head. But him don't gwine to do it no more; bress de Lard, Hallelujah!"

The other negroes caught up the last cry vociferously: "Him don't gwine to do it now; bress de Lard, Hallelujah!"

A little religion goes a long way with the negro, especially when he is most bent upon instant bloodshed.

George continued his harangue, singling out

another case with demonstrative black fore-finger.

"What hab him done to you, Tammas Goban?"

Tammas Goban held up his two hands as witnesses.

"Him turn me out ob work, an' don't pay me what him owe me. Him bad man, for true! Him cheat me out ob me own. But him don't gwine to do it now no longer; Hallelujah!"

Again the negroes took up the strain in excited voices: "Him don't gwine to do it now no longer; Hallelujah!"

Gearge surveyed them once more with the eyes of a born leader. In spite of his strange costume he was a ruler of men. He knew the very chords to touch on an emergency. With a weird moaning cry, he spread his hands in front of him as if to give a blessing.

"De word ob de Lard come to me," he said slowly, in an inspired tone, "as I sleepin' in my cottage. De vision ob de head on me bed as de Lard send it. Arise, saith de Lard, and let my enemies be scatter. Who is dis dat stand up against my people? saith the Lard. Thou shalt take dis Colonel and all

him folk dat oppress my people. Thou shalt destroy dem—man, woman and child—as de children of Israel destroy de Midianites. Arise, slay, let none escape, saith de Lard. Bressed 'be de man dat dasheth de brains ob de little ones out against a stone. Arise, slay, wit' my servant Gerge; slay dem utterly; let no one escape among dem!"

He waved his hand over the crowd with a wild African gesture. A deep thrill ran through the meeting. Religious enthusiasm is much the same among negroes everywhere, whatever be their creed; and it is everywhere closely allied with the emotions of battle. To the little group of insurgents at Linstead Gerge was indeed a prophet; he swayed them as the Mahdi sways their countrymen in the Soudan. That one set of men are nominally Christians while the other are nominally followers of Islam is a mere external circumstance; what is essential is the profound emotion of the negro character. As Gerge waved his hands above them the whole assembly took fire. The men groaned; the women keened; some gasped for breath, some staggered. "Bress de Lard!" went forth the cry. "Him delibber

us from de oppressor! Him gib us Him aid!
Him send Him serbant Gearge to lead us!"

Gearge seized his cutlass, which to the West Indian negro is at once hoe, rake, and weapon of aggression.

"Follow me!" he cried. "De crisis which were expected to hab arrove hab arriven. De Lard hab heard de cry ob His peopls. Burn, burn, slay, burn! Set fire to de trash-houses! Set fire to de canes! Burn all dat is de Colonel's! Slay all dat you meet! De Lard hab delibered him into our hands dis ebening."

His eyes rolled wildly with the true dervish roll. His followers caught up the cry, carried away by his enthusiasm. And, indeed, they had been ill-treated enough by the redoubtable Colonel, who was a hard landlord and a hard taskmaster, dealing out the letter of the law in all its rigour to those simple black folk, better accustomed to an antique patriarchal régime than to the modern system of nothing for nothing. "Sia, burn!" they cried aloud. "De Lard wills it. Arise, slay, burn; kill de Buccra—men, women and children!"

They set themselves in motion with wild

Mænad-like shouts. It was a weird procession. At their head went Gerge, still waving his arms fiercely; close beside him, Clemmy foamed at the mouth and shrieked with her strident voice, while the other women rolled their white eyes and sang wild hymns tumultuously.

"Burn de trash-houses first," Gerge cried. "Dem is de symbol ob your servitude."

With a fierce onslaught of destructive energy, the little mob flung itself upon the trash-houses, where the refuse of the canes—the empty stems—lay stored for burning.

On their way they met Isaac Carvalho, a good-humoured young negro, who as yet had taken no part in the murmurs of discontent. But seeing him cross their path, with his cutlass in his hand, the revolution annexed him. "You coming wit' us, Isaac? It is de Lard's work. We gwine to kill all de Buccra in de island. Selah, glory! Burn, burn de trash-houses, saith de Lard; slay, kill de Buccra!"

Isaac gazed at them for a second, irresolute. He did not love the Colonel, who had given him three months' imprisonment for no greater

crime than just helping himself to the yams that grew temptingly before all eyes in the garden of the great house. But he was an easy-going fellow.

"What for you want to kill dem?" he asked. "Him don't no worse to us now dan him always been."

But the eddy seized him and carried him away in its vortex. Clemmy snatched him by the arm, pretty Rose Watson caught him frantically by the shoulder.

"It de Lard's will," they cried, mouthing. "De Lard raise up him serbant Gearge to delibber us. Cry aloud, 'Slay, burn!' Be on de Lard's side, Isaac!"

And so strong is the impulse of imitation in a great crowd of enthusiasts that, before he knew where he was, Isaac was hurried into their midst, and found himself rushing along among the fierce group of malcontents, shouting aloud with all his lungs, "Slay, burn, destroy! Kill out de Buccra!"

CHAPTER II.

THE dinner at Colonel Flowerdew's was a social success. Irene Cleminshaw had never enjoyed herself better. She was new to the West Indies—the daughter of an officer just arrived in the island—and the whole glamour of the scene was still fresh upon her. The open windows that gave upon the creeper-covered verandah, the green light of the moon that shone through the big blossoms of the crimson bignonia, the cool air that blew in from the scented garden, the fireflies that flitted among the white hibiscus bushes without—all, all were so strange and fresh and beautiful. Then the profusion of tropical flowers on the table itself; the noiseless brown waiters, in their spotless white linen jackets, moving cat-like up and down; the huge heaps of oranges, pines, and star-apples; the negro women in the background handing in the dishes and showing their white teeth as they passed them to the brown men-servants. It

was like some magic scene of the "Arabian Nights" to Irene's imagination. In her cool white muslin, with the sea-breeze streaming in upon her and the moonlight flooding the careless garden beyond, she wondered why she had not always lived in the West Indies.

"Try some of our pepper-pot, Miss Cleminshaw," Colonel Flowerdew said, pressing it upon her. "Pepper-pot, you know, is a *spécialité* here. We make it once, then go on adding to it always, without ever finishing it. My father told me that Monk Lewis praised this pepper-pot highly when he was here in 1820."

Irene helped herself to some, and found it not unpalatable. The historical dish was still as good as ever.

"But it tastes quite fresh," she answered, rolling it on her palate.

"No, no," the Colonel corrected gravely, twirling his white moustache. "That depends. It tastes modern, with occasional antique reminiscences. The beauty of pepper-pot is, you never quite know what you're going to fish up out of it. You may happen on a piece that was put in yesterday; and you may happen

on a piece that can remember Waterloo and was old before Traïalga."

"It is certainly delicious," Irene interposed.

"Yes," the Colonel replied. "It's about the only thing these confounded niggers can do that's worth doing."

Irene glanced with a little sense of discomfort at the handsome young brown man in the white linen jacket who was carrying the dish; she thought it was unkind of the Colonel to speak of his race before him with such sweeping condemnation. But the brown man smiled imperturbably, and went on handing the pepper-pot. He was accustomed to such language. The Colonel noted her look, however, and burst out laughing.

"My dear child," he cried, "you needn't trouble your head about these niggers' feelings, because—they haven't got any. They prefer being kicked; it suits them. They're just like a dog, don't you know. The harder you hit him the better he loves you. Give him a sound good hiding, and he crawls to your feet and fawns upon you. Well, your nigger's just like that. He's all the better for an occasional licking."

Irene was too polite to differ from her host, especially as she had only that week arrived from England; but she glanced again at the handsome young brown man. She felt sure he could not like to hear his mother's people so spoken of. Though she could not help admitting to herself that he seemed to take the remarks very quietly.

"We have a proverb here," the Colonel continued, sipping hock like a *connoisseur*, "'God made the food, but the devil made the cooks'; and for my own part I improve upon it, 'The devil made the servants.' Here, Thomas, I say, the hock to Miss Cleminshaw!" Irene hardly knew what to answer; but the Colonel went on unperturbed. "They have one virtue, though: they serve you faithfully in great emergencies. They'll thieve, and they'll play you tricks, and they'll laugh in their sleeve at you as long as things go all right; but when trouble's about, by George, they'll stick to you as a dog sticks to his master. They'll fight for you, and they'll die for you."

"That's the nature of the lower races," a clergyman opposite her broke in. "A negro

mammy will take more care of your babies than she would take of her own."

"Yes," the Colonel assented; "just as a dog is capable of deep attachment to his master's children, but utterly careless what becomes of his puppies."

Irene felt greatly embarrassed by this curious disregard of the black servants' feelings: and to turn the conversation she went on,

"But they *are* so sweet, the dear little black babies! Such funny little bright-eyed things. I'm quite in love with them. We saw several of them tumbling about in the dust as we came up the Bog Walk. And what a lovely drive it is! I don't think I ever saw anything so beautiful as the bambos and the tree ferns."

"Yes, it's a pretty drive," the Colonel answered, caressing the white moustache once more; "but they keep it badly. You can't get these confounded niggers to keep anything as it ought to be kept. And as for the babies, well, they're fat enough, anyhow. I've seen half a dozen of them, black babies and black pigs, rolling in the dust outside a hut together, so that you couldn't tell which was which—black pig or black baby."

"They say your people here are discontented, Colonel," a young officer from Kingston put in, looking up the table towards their host. "Do you think there's anything in it?"

The Colonel laughed.

"Discontented?" he cried. "Oh, well, they're always grumbling, of course, if that's what you mean; but discontented, not seriously. What have they got to be discontented about, I'd like to know? They have everything they want: plenty to eat, and plenty to drink, and nothing to do but lie under the mango-trees and wait till the mangoes drop into their mouths; so what can they find to grumble about? And they don't grumble, really, except just for the pleasure of it. It amuses them, grumbling. A more contented, good-natured, lazy, idle, happy-go-lucky set of blackguards than the negroes of this district I wouldn't wish to meet anywhere. Discontented? Not a bit of it; they wouldn't hurt a fly— God bless my soul! Walker, what's that blaze over yonder?"

Even as he spoke, a sudden flare of red lighted up the background. The Colonel rose from his seat at the head of the table, Thomas,

the handsome brown boy in the clean white linen jacket, rushed over to the verandah.

"Run, sah, run!" he cried, throwing up his hands. "Save yourself! We will look after de house and de property. Oh, my king, dem risin'. It Gearge Macleod and his set! Dem burnin' de trash-house!"

And from the side whence the glare came rose a loud discordant shout of triumph, "Arise, slay, burn! It de will ob de Lard! Kill, kill de Colonel! Kill, kill de Buccra!"

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL FLOWERDEW at least had that saving grace of his kind, great physical courage. His cheek never blanched; his voice never faltered. He turned to his daughter.

"Gwen," he said calmly, as he might have spoken on parade, "this is a bad business. Slink away by the back, dear, and try to get out on the North Road before they reach us. I will stop here and fight the ruffians with the men and the servants." Then he turned to Irene. "My child," he said softly, "you must understand that this means real danger. The negroes have risen. If they catch you they will kill you—or worse than kill you. Hide in the river and drown yourself rather than fall into their hands." As he spoke he was drawing out and preparing his revolver. "If they take you alive, I dare not say what may happen to you."

Irene shrank away into the back of the room

in a wild access of terror. What happened next she hardly knew. But she was dimly aware of smoke and flame drawing nearer and nearer. The red glare grew redder. She saw the Colonel standing by the verandah, very resolute, with his revolver in his hand; she saw Thomas by his side, with a cutlass rapidly snatched up, and ready to defend with his life the master whose words she thought must so deeply have hurt him; she saw the other servants rushing forward, men and women alike, with knives or whatever other weapon came handy; and beyond them all she saw advancing that wild band of insurgents, in coarse plantation clothes, with their inarticulate cries of "De Lard has risen! Hallelujah! Arise, slay, burn! Kill de Colonel! Delibber de people!"

Gwen Flowerdew seized her arm.

"Come away, Irenel" she cried. "There's no time to lose. If they catch you, they will kill you."

"You will not desert your father," Irene exclaimed, almost too terrified to move.

"We must," Gwen answered. "The servants will protect him."

As she spoke the words, Gerge had leaped up on the verandah. The Colonel raised his revolver and fired one shot deliberately. But just as the trigger moved, Gerge flung up his hand and diverted the bullet. Next instant, with a quick twist of the arm, he had wrested the pistol from the Colonel's grasp, and tossed it far among the bushes of the shrubbery. Thomas, rushing forward, brought down his cutlass on Gerge's body; and the other servants closed in. Blood was spurting freely; there was a clang of weapons. Irene closed her eyes, and could look no longer. With a common womanly impulse, she clapped her hands to her ears and stood rooted to the ground. Gwen seized her by the arm and dragged her off bodily. As they slunk out by the further door, Irene opened her eyes once more and looked back. The last thing she saw was the Colonel's body, hacked and bleeding; the white shirt front was dabbled and reddened with blood; above it the household servants were fighting like wild cats; while the insurgents were rushing on with uplifted cutlasses and unearthly cries of "Kill, kill de Colonel!"

They were drunk with lust of blood, and flushed with the sense of victory.

Irene followed Gwen blindly into the cane-field outside, and then, groping like one blind, to the thicket beyond. There her strength gave out suddenly. She dropped her new friend's hand. It was a life-and-death crisis. Gwen, in her thin evening dress, gazed at her guest for a moment, hesitating. Love of life triumphed. She turned and fled, leaving Irene alone among the tropical jungle.

CHAPTER IV.

ISAAC CARVALHO had joined the riotous mob at a moment of indecision, and in a most half-hearted fashion. He had been drawn in by the whirlpool. Unlike George, who really hated and dreaded the whites, Isaac had no particular ground of complaint against the dominant Buccra. He disliked the Colonel, to be sure, whose domineering ways had made him unpopular throughout all the valley; but against the whites as such he harboured as little grudge as it is possible for a black man to feel in an old slave colony. However, the momentary enthusiasm of revolt carried him forward with the others on the crest of its wave; and before he quite knew what he was doing he found himself rushing madly forward, with his cutlass in his hand, and joining aloud in the fierce chorus of "Burn, slay; it de Lard's will; kill, kill de Colonel!"

He had joined them in the first wild act of incendiarism. From the blazing trash-houses

he rushed on with the others to the Colonel's house. On the front steps of the verandah he saw the Colonel waiting for them—erect, soldierly, a noticeable man, in his evening dress and broad front of white shirt, with his immaculate tie, facing death as stoutly as he would have faced it on the battlefield. Isaac half drew back at the sight of that one strong man, with his guests by his side, smiling at certain fate, and prepared for all emergencies. But Gerge, his eyes flashing and his white teeth clenched, leaped forward like a tiger and sprang upon his victim. Before the Colonel could fire Gerge's hand had wrested away his weapon, Gerge's cutlass had wounded him in the neck; red blood spurted forth; the Colonel reeled, but still fought with his stick bravely. But it was one against many. In another minute or two the white shirt front was red with dabbled gore, the evening coat was in strips, the carefully trimmed moustache was one clotted mass, and the Colonel's body lay for dead on the verandah.

"Fire de house!" Gerge cried, with a ring of triumph in his voice. "De Lard's will is done. We hab slain de tyrant!"

Clemmy's eyes flashed rage; she fired the house with a brand from the cane-trash. The wooden verandah and thatched roof blazed like tinder. The house servants, wounded and bleeding, still fought desperately among the flames, as the Colonel had predicted they would, for their master's property. But revolt was in the ascendant. More negroes had joined the little band of insurgents, roused by the flare of the burning roof and maddened by the sight of blood. It was clear that all was lost, for the moment at least. They could but lurk and wait for reinforcements from the loyal troops and people in Kingston.

"Where is de Missy?" Gearge cried, glancing round him for Gwen Flowerdew and counting his slain. "She is worse dan dem all. She too proud, dat gal Gwen. De word ob de Lard came to me, 'Slay de white Jezebel dat oppresseth my Israel.' She go out de odder way. I see her slink away dere. Friends, breddern, join hands; scour de fields and plains till you come upon her an' slay her, de Lard's enemy, de woman ob de painted face, de Jezebel ob St. Tammás."

All the women had fled at once, leaving the

handful of men to fight their battles. Now the house was carried the insurgents rushed out with fierce shrieks into the garden and the jungle beyond, which led down to the river. Obeying Gerge's orders, they joined hands in a long row, and began netting the space, as it were, in search of the fugitives. But they were not quite numerous enough to form an uninterrupted line; and at one of the gaps by the end Isaac Carvalho found himself some six yards off from his nearest neighbour.

In a great straggling string they closed slowly in, sweeping the fugitives before them towards the banks of the Rio Cobre. Isaac strode on through the deep haulms of guinea-grass, up to his neck in lush meadow, searching eagerly as he went for "de Lard's enemies." If he found one he would draw his cutlass like a man and cut her throat. "Dem sneakin', cowardly, proud, good-for-nuffin' white women"; for his part he was determined——

He started aside even as he thought of it; for close beside him, as quiet as a mouse, something stirred in the guinea-grass. Isaac's first thought was, an iguana; then he knew it was a white woman.

Gazing down in the twilight, aided by the red glare from the burning house, he saw, crouching in the grass, a delicate young girl, in a dainty white muslin dress, who gazed up at him appealingly. Her eyes seemed to plead; her breath was held hard; she put one finger on her lips to bespeak his silence. Then, with a sudden silent movement, her hand slid into his own, and she drew him down to her gently.

At the unexpected touch of that confiding hand Isaac Carvalho was another man. Without moving from the spot or betraying the slightest emotion to his fellow-hunters, he bent his head slightly, held one hand to his heart to still its beating, put his own finger to his lips in return, and whispered, in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible, "All right, missy; don't you move or stir. Dis nigger understand; gwine to take care ob you."

The touch of that hand had thrilled through and through him.

Irene looked up into his honest eyes and saw he meant it. In hot blood he would have killed a dozen white women, and thought no more of it than you or I would think of so

many mosquitoes. But the girl's confiding hand had taken his negro heart by storm, and he had no idea now save to protect and preserve her.

The line moved on. Isaac, with a hurried glance to right and left, dragged behind a little, dropped gradually out, and then crept back to her slowly. He crept on all fours through the tall guinea-grass, which covered him in above, till he was close by Irene's side.

"Keep low, missy," he whispered. "Don't you show your head! If dem niggers see it, dem will hack you into bits same as dem hack de Colonel. Creep along here by my side. No, no; it don't no good to creep down towards de ribber, 'cause dem gwine to search it; and it don't no good to creep back to de house, 'cause too many ob dem guardin' it. But you jest creep along sideways dis way towards my hut, an' if once we can get you dere nobody ain't gwine to hurt you."

Irene's heart was in her mouth; but, in a flutter of terror, she took the man's hand, and crept on where he led her. The sharp edges of the guinea-grass cut her hands and knees

till they bled; but she did not dare to stop short. The hue and cry of the insurgents was too close beside them; the shouts of "Kill! Kill!" rang in her ear each second. They crawled on, sideways, noiselessly, invisibly, through the deep high grass, Isaac leading the way and putting aside the undergrowth in the stealthy negro manner with his bare arms; Irene following on and setting her hands and knees in his tracks quite blindly.

Creeping in silence so for many hundred yards, they reached at last the edge of the grass-piece and, pushing through a gap in the cactus hedge, came to a close jungle of prickly bushes which to Irene looked impenetrable. Isaac surveyed it dubiously.

"We *got* to get tro' dere," he said, at last, holding his head on one side. "It don't no udder way about it. If I take you round by de open, missy, dem gwine to find us an' kill us bote. Dem will say I harbourin' de Lard's enemies."

"I can never push through that," Irene cried, shrinking away from it.

"I know it, honey," the black man answered, looking round at her with consideration in his

eyes. "You don't strong enough to push tro', and de tharns gwine to tear your flesh. But I tink I can manage him."

He turned to her suddenly. Then he seized her all at once in his arms without a word, and, with a strange monkey-like action, began to run backward through the jungle, looking behind him as he ran, crushing the bushes with his back, but protecting her as far as possible from the thorns and spines with his own body.

He must have run several hundred yards, still stealthily and noiselessly, when he reached the open. In front stood a small thatched hut. Isaac motioned her to be silent again, and carried her into it like a baby.

He laid her gently on the bare mud ground of the hut and struck a sulphur match, with which he lighted a cheap petroleum lamp, such as one always finds in negro cottages. Irene could see that his arms and back were torn and bleeding.

"You have hurt yourself!" she cried, drawing away.

Isaac looked down carelessly at the bleeding wounds.

"Oh, dat ain't nuffin'," he answered in a

cheery voice, though he was very much torn. "You done hurt youself, missy?"

"Not—not very much," Irene whispered back trembling.

The whole position began to come home to her with a thrill of horror. She was alone and helpless in that black man's dwelling.

Isaac seated her gently on the ground, and then, from the recesses of the hut produced a calabash full of fresh cold water. With it he proceeded very reverently to wash the deep scratches on her neck, face, and hands, drying them afterwards on a tolerably clean square of red cotton handkerchief. The situation was curious. Under any other circumstances Irene would have found the stifling heat and close air of the negro hut intolerable; she would have shrunk from the calabash and red cotton handkerchief. Under the conditions in which she found herself, however, she was glad enough of the shelter into which she had crawled; glad of the cool water and the momentary respite from that breathless adventure. But her heart still beat fiercely, and her limbs trembled. For she was by no means sure even now of Isaac.

As for Isaac himself, half an hour before, in his alternative mood, he would have sprung upon Irene with the spring of a beast of prey, and cut her small white throat without one second's compunction. But that appealing hand had made all the difference. When Irene slid her delicate fingers into his, with the air of a suppliant, Isaac felt his whole nature turned back upon itself in a sudden revulsion: the innate chivalry which is dormant in every savage came out at once, and he had no thought now but how to save this dainty, shrinking white woman. He recognised her as a being of a higher type, and he became at once her devoted slave, ready to die in her service, as the Colonel had truly said, with dog-like fidelity.

What could he do to show it? He brought the pillow from his bed and laid it on the ground for Irene to sit upon. The poor girl sat on it, dazed. He leant down and tried to console or to reassure her. Half an hour before, it had been "de Lard's will" to massacre the whites, but now he declared, with many asseverations,

"Dem is only a set ob foolish, drunk niggers.

De soldiers from Kingston gwine to come down to-morrow, to shoot dem all; and den we gwine to take you back straight to your people."

Irene sat and shuddered.

"My father is a soldier," she said simply, "in command at Kingston."

It was terrible to think of passing that night alone with this strange negro in that close, dark hut; but there was nothing else possible. As yet she hardly realised how much danger still lay in store for her. Isaac recognised it more fully, for he knew his own people.

"Looky here, missy," he said, leaning down to her, with his white teeth showing. "It don't all ober yet. Before long, dem nigger gwine to come here to ax for me. If dem find you here, dem gone kill you dead. We muss hide you somehow. But it don't no good hidin' you outside de hut; dem search de open; you muss hide in here, honey. When dem come, you do like I tell you, and don't ax no question. Meself will take care ob you. If dem gwine to kill you, missy, dem gwine to kill you tro' dis nigger's body."

Irene grasped his hand in silent gratitude.

She sat there cowering for an hour in silence. All the time she could hear her own heart beat, and feel her bosom fluttering. At the end of an hour or so, Isaac raised one warning finger and held his ear attentively.

"Dem comin', missy," he murmured, his quick ear detecting the noise even faster than Irene's. "Dem comin', I tell you. Make haste an' hide here!"

As he spoke a distant cry fell on Irene's ear.

"De serbant ob de Lard hab slain de tyrant. Hallelujah! Arise, kill all; let not one libbin' soul be left among dem!"

The cry drew nearer. It rose and fell hideously. Isaac meanwhile opened the mouth of the sack which Irene had seen him preparing before, and whispered to her low, "Creep into it!" Dazzled and mazed, Irene crept in, hardly aware what she was doing. Then her black friend laid a few cut ends of yam at the mouth, to look as if it were full, and rolled the sack and its contents with seeming carelessness near the door of the hut, yet very gently.

He had scarcely done so when Clemmy and

Gearge, with their followers, burst in—a wild mob of murderers. They had lights in their hands, and were shrieking discordantly, for the Colonel's rum had added by this time to the fierce Mænad enthusiasm.

"Where am de traitor?" they cried aloud. "Him dat run away from us? What for him run away? Him shelterin' de Lard's enemies! Search him house! Find dem out! Kill, slay dem!"

"I don't no traitor," Isaac said, standing out by the door of the hut, and giving the sack of yams (with Irene inside) a slight backward kick with his powerful foot, so that a few yams rolled out in the most innocent manner. Irene, holding her breath within, felt that he did it with extraordinary strength, yet perfect gentleness. "I don't harbour no enemy. I is de fren' ob de Lard; I lub de Lard's people."

And at the moment of speaking, he meant it seriously; for Irene was now to him the blessed fugitive.

"Search de house!" Gearge cried, pushing him aside, and half inclined to hack him down.

The women began to search it. Isaac stood

aside haughtily, and then seated himself with great deliberation on the sack. Irene's breath came and went in short gasps; but she lay still as a mouse. The women searched everywhere, except in the sack, which, with its protruding yams, looked too innocent for concealment. It was so much the most salient object in the hut, indeed, that they never thought of examining it. Isaac sat and stared at them with stolid unconcern. At the end of their inquisition Gerge drew off frowning.

"Stop here, Clemmy and Rose," he said hoarsely. "Stop an' see dat him don't get into no mischief wit' de Buccra."

The women stopped on. Irene in her sack lay breathless and trembling.

CHAPTER V.

AT any other time it would have been comedy to her to hear during the next hour or so the curious, clever steps by which Isaac cajoled and courted and flattered those two angry black women. At first fierce and indignant, they melted as he talked to them, praised them, paid them extravagant compliments, made open negro love to them; melted by degrees till at last they sat chatting quite amicably with the disaffected neighbour they had been set to keep watch upon. All the country-side was up, they said. It was war in the island. The fire in the trash-house had been the signal for a dozen others; the people were roused, and St. Thomas-in-the-Vale was getting rid of the Buccra. Everywhere blazing houses, everywhere cries of vengeance. "De Lard am clearin' de island ob de vermin," they told him gleefully; "By to-morrow marnin' it don't will be left a Buccra in St. Tammus."

Isaac, well-pleased at their garrulity, brought out more rum. The women drank it, and

laughed and toasted him, making love after their rude fashion. Every now and again Isaac, seated gingerly on the yammy end of the sack, gave Irene's arm a light touch of soothing reassurance. She knew what the touches meant. "It won't be long now. We shall soon get rid of them." At last, one after another, the women dozed off as they sat. She could hear their breathing grow deeper and deeper.

Then Isaac rose cautiously. With every mark of silence, and with the stealthy tread of the barefooted, he lifted the sack in his arms, and carried Irene from the hut. He carried her for a hundred yards or more down the mountain footpath before he dared to lay her down. By and by he opened the sack and let it drop about her. Half-fainting as she was, the freer breath revived her. The tropical air felt cool and fresh as England after the stifling atmosphere of the sack and the hut. The stars glittered overhead; the wild glare of burning trash-houses lighted all the horizon.

Isaac brought her water from the brook in his joined hands. She drank it eagerly. Only in great straits do we learn how little these

things matter. He patted her on the back to soothe her fears; she took the pat as it was meant, as a symbol of friendly interest. Then he held her hand confidently, and led her in the half-dawn down the mountain path for a quarter of a mile before he dared halt or speak to her. They walked side by side in tremulous silence.

"Now, missy," he said at last, "dis is not a rising; dis is a rebellion. It gwine to last a week. All de valley am in de hands ob dem blue-guard blacks. Dem holdin' de road. We muss climb de mountains and get down upon Kingston. But it don't no use for you to go ober de mountain tracks in dat dress. I got to make you into brown gal." He picked some nuts from a tree—large nuts, with a smooth green husk, and scraped them with his nail. "It will burn," he said simply, "but you has got to stand it." Then he rubbed the rind with rapid ruthlessness over her face, neck, and hands, yet with such respectful tenderness that Irene felt instinctively she was dealing with a gentleman. It did burn, as he said; burnt painfully, like red pepper. But it browned her skin at once to a delicate mulatto colour.

"Eh, missy, dat don't all," Isaac went on, approaching her still more deferentially and with a sort of mute apology. "I got to arrange your dress." And without more ado, taking the light muslin in his hands he tore and stained it in places, tied a bit of dirty sacking round the waist for a sash, and twisted a turban deftly out of the red cotton handkerchief. When he had finished the costume he stood and gazed at it, well pleased. Irene could not see herself, but she was vaguely aware that he had transformed her at once, by a few clever touches, into a ragged brown woman. Even one sleeve he tore so as to show a patch of the bare arm below, and then bronzed the skin with the nut as far as visible. "Nobody will take you for Buccra now," he said, chuckling. "You is my sister—a brown gal!"

They set out once more along the winding mountain paths. Irene's instinct was to make for the trackless jungle; but Isaac understood his country and his countrymen better. He explained in his own dialect that if they were to reach Kingston at all they must do it by sedulously avoiding suspicion, and by following the lesser beaten tracks among the mountains,

with a bold front, as if they were merely going from hut to hut in the neighbourhood. It was a terrible task. For three days they walked on and on, Irene almost dropping with the heat and fatigue. For three nights they slept out in the open; or, rather, Irene slept, her head pillowed on fern, while Isaac, with true negro persistence and faithfulness, sat by her side and watched over her. Once or twice when he found himself nodding, he bit his tongue till it bled to keep himself awake. They drank water from the streams; for food they helped themselves in the dusk to the bananas and plantains in the negro gardens. It was stealing, of course—the same crime for which the Colonel had punished him—but there was no help for it. Now and then as they passed some suspicious negro on the paths he would ask in doubt: “You is on de Lard’s side?” (for all the parish was now in arms), and Isaac would answer fervently: “We is on de Lard’s side; glory, glory, Hallelujah!”

On the third morning they descended all at once on the high road above Spanish Town. Soldiers were marching up the Valley road. To Irene’s unspeakable delight, she recognised

the uniform of her father's regiment. Waving a white handkerchief, they hurried down till they reached the line. Colonel Cleminshaw himself came forward to meet them, for he took them for friendly negro fugitives who might give news of the insurgents. As they drew near, his set white face grew strangely changed.

"Eenie," he cried. "It's Eenie!"

Irene fell into his arms in a transport of relief from long pent emotion.

CHAPTER VI.

IN camp that evening, when Irene was naturally the heroine of the moment, Isaac, too, came in for his fair share of attention.

But when Colonel Cleminshaw suggested that the man who had saved his daughter's life should stop with them and enter his service, Isaac shook his head sadly.

"No, no, sah," he said, in his inarticulate way, "I don't want nuffin now. I gwine back to my village."

"You have a wife and children, perhaps?" the Colonel suggested. "If so, you may be sure we should be only too happy——"

Isaac shook his head again.

"No, it don't dat either, sah," he said, bracing himself up for a great effort of speech. "But—I done wit' de missy. It break my heart to leave her; yet I don't can stop near her. Sah, you is not a black man, and you don't can understand a black man's feelin's. But for tree day an' tree night I lib close to

dat lady. I watch ober him; I take care ob him; I gib my life up for him. She is like my sister dem tree day an' night; she say to me soft all times, 'Isaac,' like dat—same as one speak to one's lubber. You tink I can stay now an' lib near dat lady, an' wait upon her an' serbe her, same as if it was any udder white lady? No, sah, I don't can do it. Dat all ober now. I go back to my own people. Take away dat gold, sah; put up dat purse. I don't want none ob it! De lady gib me her white hand in de guinea-grass dat night, and for lub ob her white hand I bring him back here safe to you. Now dat all gone and passed. I gwine back to my people."

And waving his hand twice, with tears trembling in his eyes, Isaac darted from their midst and was gone like a shadow—home to the obscurity out of which he had come; but a negro gentleman.

The Stoke-Parva Murder.

CHAPTER I.

THE Reverend Keble Wainmaker commended himself as an early riser. It suited his health; it suited his habits; and it suited his views of a curate's position. Ever since he had held the curacy of Stoke - Parva - cum - Littleton (with distant glimpses of a reversion to the vicarage) he had gone to bed at a quarter to ten at night, and got up again at a quarter to six in the morning. This gave him full enjoyment of the eight hours which alone he thought it right to devote to slumber. It also afforded him an hour's leisure for meditation and reading before Early Celebration at seven punctually. A page or two of the *De Imitatione* and a reverie at the window over the clipped lime avenue

put him into the mental key which he needed for the service.

On the particular morning of the Stoke-Parva murder, Keble Wainmaker had tubbed and dressed and just completed his neat clerical costume (unobtrusively Anglican) when his landlady knocked at the door of his one sitting room (for he lived at Mrs. Rigg's lodgings in the village street) with the unusual announcement, "A gentleman to zee you, zur."

"At this hour?" the curate answered, incredulously, looking up from "Liddon's Bampton Lectures." "A gentleman? To see me?"

He laid some slight stress on the words "A gentleman", not because he was any respecter of persons,—far from it—but because he was unaccustomed at so early a moment to receive visitors other than poor parishioners, or as he himself would have said, "our humbler brethren of the working classes." The curate, though small and spare of body, was a kindly, large-hearted, well-intentioned person; it was not his fault that distinctions of class existed among Christians, nor that the poor were often

in want of advice and assistance, with both of which he supplied them liberally.

"Yes, zur, a gentleman; leastways," the landlady hesitated; "he do look as if he 'ad been one, zur: an' he zays he do know you."

"Any name?" Wainmaker asked.

"Mr. Austin Adair, zur."

"Show him up," the curate said promptly. Then he repeated to himself, in a meditative voice, "Adair; Adair; yes, Adair of Oriel."

Mrs. Rigg showed him up. Keble Wainmaker stood nervously by the open window. It was a large first floor window, at the back of the house, (for the room looked both ways) half choked by sprays of jasmine and Virginia creeper that straggled across the lattice: it gave on a vista of spalliered fruit-trees in the vicarage garden. He stood there and waited, rubbing his hands in a timid fashion at the further end of the room. Adair of Oriel! that dashing, high-spirited, handsome man! Went into a cavalry regiment, surely! And to call on him at this hour. Why, at Oxford, he remembered, Adair was seldom out of bed before ten, or even eleven. But then, he used to sit up playing cards—the curate vaguely recollected

having heard in this connection the names of loo and vantoon—till appalling hours at night, say twelve or later. Perhaps, however, he was altered now. Six years of contact with the realities of life *do* alter a man, doubtless.

He lifted his eyes and looked, as Adair entered the room. Six years of contact with the realities of life! Yes, Adair *was* altered.

A dirty-looking, degraded, unclassed creature stepped across the room jauntily with outstretched hand to greet him. He was handsome still, with a somewhat reminiscent and degenerate handsomeness; but undeniably handsome. The devil-may-care gleam still shone bright in his eye; the artistic twirl still gave point to his moustache; the easy air of well-bred bravado, as in a portrait by Rubens, still animated his action. He was not quite bloated, though he smelt of drink, and the influence of spirits asserted itself vaguely in his cheeks and eyelids. He was a gentleman, gone to the dogs, in whom familiarity with the sordid shifts of poverty had not as yet entirely succeeded in crushing out all relics of gentle breeding. Even his dress retained memories of a higher estate. His shirt and collar, it

is true, were dirty, and his cuffs were frayed; but his coat, though green on the seams, had been cut long since by a fashionable tailor, and his tie had the old Adair carelessness of subtly deft arrangement. He looked like a man-about-town run to seed; his face and his costume were both equally seedy.

But he entered none the less with the old confident manner, and held his hand out briskly. It bore no signs of very recent ablution.

"How d'you do, Wainmaker?" he said cheerily, in his easy aristocratic voice, a trifle thicker now than of old through the influence of frequent "whiskeys and polly." "Surprised to see me, old chap? Well, it is early for a call, isn't it? Usen't to be up at this hour at Oriel, did I? But as the scripture says, 'Circumstances alter cases.'"

The curate drew his head back nervously. To cover his confusion, he stammered out with difficulty,

"I think you err, Adair, in attributing that phrase to the sacred writers."

"Oh, it wasn't Paul, wasn't it?" Adair continued, laughing. "Nor Solomon either?"

Well, if it wasn't, it ought to have been; for it's as true as Gospel, old man; as true as Gospel. At Oriel, I slept as a gentleman should sleep, on a comfortable mattress. Last night I slept—or didn't sleep, confound it—F sharps, you know, F sharps—on a miserable truck in a tramps' lodging house. Oh, yes, you may laugh, my dear fellow—"though Wainmaker's face was very far from laughing; "but it's the truth for all that. I'm stony broke, old pal, I am. That's about the size of it." And he dropped into an easy chair and crossed one leg over the other with the foot on the knee, in a carelessly graceful attitude.

There was something really pathetic in the contrast between his easy grace (for all his bravado) and the hole in the boot which he displayed as he crossed it.

"But I thought," Wainmaker suggested, with a timid catch in his voice, "you went into the army."

Adair snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Army, my dear fellow!" he cried, with a deprecating air. "Why, that's ancient history. Army, indeed! Bless my soul, the

authorities kicked me out of *that* five years ago. I've almost had time to forget meanwhile I was ever an officer and a gentleman. Though, hang it all, I'm a gentleman still, I trust, in spite of the court martial; 'unbecoming an officer and a gentleman,' they found it." And he laughed uneasily. "But a gentleman, like a poet, is born not made. And you can't unmake him.—Got any tobacco, Wainmaker?"

The curate drew back.

"I—I don't smoke," he answered hurriedly.

"Don't smoke? Since when? You used to smoke like a factory chimney when you were at Brasenose, didn't you?"

"Ye-es, but I found it an unnecessary expense; I could do without it. And the calls upon one's purse here are so great, and the condition of our people such—. Not that I at all *object* to smoking. On the contrary—" he warmed up, "I think on the whole that tobacco has probably given a greater aggregate amount of pleasure, with fewer serious drawbacks, to the very poor than any other substance known to us. I am grateful for tobacco, though I do not myself now use it. I buy the same amount each month as I used to buy formerly for my

own smoking; and I give it away to the oldest inmate of our union workhouse."

Adair drew his finger deliberately round the hole in his boot in a contemplative fashion, smiling all the time at this extraordinary exhibition of human fatuity. That a man who had money to buy tobacco with should give it up of his own accord to a toothless old gaffer shelved in the workhouse! It was sheer insanity. "Well, anyhow," he went on slowly, "that's a nice trait in you to note—for it shows at least that you're generous. I don't see much point myself in a gentleman giving up his own comforts and luxuries for a broken-down chawbacon; though that's a matter of taste. And I suppose you think your profession demands it. But if you have cash in hand to spare for a fad like that, you can't refuse a small lift in life to a fellow of your own class, stony broke from South Africa."

"Oh, then you've been in South Africa since leaving the army?" Wainmaker interposed, to gain time for consideration.

"Since leaving the army!" Adair echoed, with a tone of contempt. "Good God! does the fellow think I'm a limpet on a rock?"

Since leaving the army! Why, I've been in Canada, and in gaol, and in affluence; and at Monte Carlo, and at Rome, and at my wife's end, and fifty other places and things since then, my dear fellow. Don't suppose because I come here rather out-at-elbow to day, through temporary misunderstandings with my tailor and my shoemaker, I'm laid on the shelf for ever. I am not done for. I have my moments still, and I'm going to have them. Hang it all, if a man's a gentleman, and has a figure like mine, and address, and cleverness, and is a favourite with women"—he glanced at the glass affectionately—"he can never go to the wall; somebody's sure to find a berth or a post for him somewhere. I've been on the turf a bit at times since I left my regiment; and I've made my pile, and spent it like a gentleman. And I shall make my pile again, and spend it like a gentleman once more, as soon as I'm out of the present hole, I can promise you."

He looked up with a gleam of half-drunken self-conceit. It darted vaguely across Wainmaker's mind at the moment, as a reminiscence and a generalisation, that no class attach so

high an importance to their own gentlemanly character as the class of outcast gentlemen to which Adair belonged. They cling to the end to the fetish, the tradition, the last soiled shreds of their own supposed gentility.

"Then you have — er — prospects?" the curate suggested mildly.

Adair leaned back in his easy-chair, folded his arms with conscious grace—the "handsome Adairs" were always alive to the fact of their own gracefulness—and proceeded to stare quizzically at his mild interrogator.

"Well, you *are* an innocent, to be sure," he murmured at last, surveying him as one might survey some new species of kangaroo or hippopotamus. "I remember, your sister told me so long ago at Oxford, and now I know it. You are a comical one! God bless my soul, what do you think I came here for?"

"I—I haven't the remotest conception," the Reverend Keble replied; and then his conscience smote him; for that was prevarication: he was fully aware that Adair had come to borrow money. "Borrow" the wise call it; though the usually correlative idea of repayment does

not enter at all into their conception of borrowing.

Adair smiled a genial smile. He showed his white teeth pleasantly. He was a bland-mannered ruffian, and this looked like business.

"I suppose you think," he said, bantering, "I dropped in here, at this hour, quite by accident. Likely, isn't it?"

"I—I thought you might perhaps have some ulterior motive," the curate admitted, shrinking from him.

"Ultrior motive! that's good; so far, good, decidedly. You speak like a parson. Ultrior motive! You didn't think I'd dropped in—all this way from town—just for the pleasure of seeing an old Oxford companion?"

Wainmaker scanned him up and down with a dubious smile.

"To be quite candid," he allowed, somewhat timidly, "I did not think that your—your appearance and dress would have warranted me in such a supposition."

Adair rose abruptly and seated himself with meaning in another chair, between Wainmaker and the door; his back was towards the

entrance and his face towards the curate. The window with the sprays of Virginian creeper lay to his right. He sat and gazed long, with his face between his hands, at this interesting specimen of the human species.

"Well, it's no use beating about the bush," he broke out slowly at last, removing his hands and sticking his thumbs in his trousers pockets. "I came to Stoke-Parva—I congratulate you on that name—Stoke-Parva-cum-Littleton—so charmingly appropriate—so rural—so stick-in-the-mud—I came here on foot last night, very late; so late, that the inhabitants wouldn't permit me to rouse you. They cherish a strange and unanimous respect for your slumber. They told me passon went to bed at ten; I pointed out to them the crude absurdity of supposing that a gentleman could retire at such an hour; but they persisted in their statement. I asked the way to your house; the being, erect on two legs, and with the outer aspect of a man, who keeps the inn, refused to show me the way, and referred me instead to the tramps' lodging house, which he tells me you founded for the benefit of our fraternity. My first

impulse was to double up my fist and knock the fellow down; my second was to sleep upon it, if possible, and look you up in the morning. I backed my second. But I don't mind telling you, now I've come to think it over, that a more confoundedly impertinent pig of a landlord than your ally at the White Lion it has never been my misfortune to meet in the extent of four continents."

"I regret that he was rude to you," Wainmaker put in nervously. "But you will allow, my dear Adair, that your costume, your appearance——"

Adair drew himself up.

"A gentleman is a gentleman," he answered with pride, "and should be recognised as such at sight by a common brute of an inn-keeper. However, that's neither here nor there. The point is this: I came to Stoke-Parva because I knew you were to be found here; and I desired to effect a small temporary loan, just to tide me over a bad place, till fortune turns her wheel once more in my direction."

Wainmaker fingered his beardless chin and hesitated. He pulled his clerical collar straight. It was a principle with him never to give or

lend money to undeserving objects; and though he did not desire to judge Adair harshly—oh, dear, no—he was nevertheless inclined at first sight to say that he was undeserving. Still, the man's presence was so vastly disagreeable to him—he was so anxious to get rid of him on any terms, short of capitulation, and to put himself into a fitting frame of mind for Early Celebration by the aid of George Herbert—that he felt half disposed to stretch a point and pass him on to the next parish at the expenditure of a sovereign. Though sovereigns, heaven knew, were rare enough and needed for many wants in that quiet lodging.

For a moment principle fought with disgust and loathing. Then disgust stormed the citadel: his hand sought his pocket. He drew out a well-worn leather purse.

“I am a poor man, you know, Adair,” he said with natural delicacy at bandying words over such a matter: “I have nothing to live on but my curacy. Still, if a pound——” It was a very large sum; he fingered it gingerly.

Adair leaned forward, opened his mouth in an inane fashion, let his jaw drop with a half-

idiotic stare, and then burst out laughing. His laugh was harsh and had a jarring note in it.

“A pound!” he repeated slowly, with an incredulous intonation. “You offer *me* a sovereign! Upon my word, Wainmaker, I don’t know whether to be more contemptuous or indignant. To lend a gentleman a pound is an obvious indignity—twenty shillings to a man who was educated at Oxford! But I waive that point; you have never been accustomed to the stratum of society in which *I* was brought up, and you carry into the church your petty bourgeois conceptions and limitations. I can afford to smile at them, in spite of the insult. It is your stupidity, rather, that fairly staggers me. *Do* you suppose that a man of my brains and my resourcefulness would tramp on foot all the way down from London to Stoke-Parva—Stoke-Parva-cum-Littleton—” he gloated over the name as if it sufficiently described poor Wainmaker’s place in nature—“for no other purpose than just to borrow a sovereign? Hang it all, sir, a gentleman may borrow a sovereign from another whom he meets by accident in the street, just to settle a cab fare. That’s a

temporary matter—'Forgot my purse: can you lend me a pound, my boy?' But to imagine that I would walk upon my own shoe-leather from London to Stoke-Parva, only to get one pound from a casual acquaintance—my dear sir, you must have lost all sense of proportion."

Wainmaker smiled feebly, to hide his embarrassment.

"You forget," he answered, "that one's"—he was going to say "benefactions," but he checked himself and added "loans must be measured by one's income."

Adair rose suddenly, with his face somewhat redder and more flushed than before, so that it showed more traces of long continued drinking. He moved quickly to the door. Before Wainmaker was aware what his visitor was doing, he had turned the key and locked it. Then he stepped back to his place as before, cutting off the curate's retreat by his burly presence.

"Let us understand one another, Wainmaker," he went on in a different tone, with an undercurrent of threat in it. He stood confessed the bully. "This is business, I tell you. Don't for a moment suppose I have

dropped in on you by chance. I have come deliberately and of set purpose. I'm down on my luck, as I told you, and I need some assistance from my former friends to start me afresh on the road to fortune. You have got to help me. Why do I select you first? Because you are the smallest, feeblest, and least important of the people whom I have in my power. I want money enough to set me up in clothes and so forth—things which will enable me to prosecute my campaign with success in other quarters. I come to you now because you are a curate, and I can call upon you early and in these shabby togs, unworthy my position in society as a gentleman by birth and education. Very well; there you are. I will put it plainly. So now we understand one another. I don't leave this room under twenty-five guineas. I say guineas, not pounds; because a gentleman is always paid in guineas."

"Paid!" the curate ejaculated. "I have nothing to pay you for, Adair."

The scoundrel stared at him with a comprehensive stare.

"That's your unfortunate little error," he continued blandly, relapsing for a moment into

his courtlier manner. "You have to pay me for several documents whose existence you have perhaps almost forgotten."

He drew from his breast-pocket a worn leather letter-case, which bore signs like himself of ruined gentility. Then he took from it and unfolded several old letters.

"These are yours, I think?" he said, still more blandly and calmly than before, laying them in front of the curate.

Keble Wainmaker gazed at them astonished.

"How did they come into your possession?" he asked angrily.

"That is unimportant," Adair replied, turning them over. "The point is that here they are. A clever fellow, who knows how to make himself agreeable, has exceptional chances now and again of seeing a lady's correspondence. I have had these in my bundle for more than a year. Nice letters for a parson, aren't they? 'My darling Lou,' 'My own beloved angel Loo-Loo,' 'Ever your affectionate and devoted Keble.' And to another man's wife! Dirt cheap, I say, at twenty-five guineas! What price, in the Probate and Divorce Division?"

The curate drew back, appalled.

"Adair," he said simply, without one word as to the blackguardism, "you are labouring under a total misapprehension. Those letters were written to Mrs. Grindalythe *before* she was married; they were written when I was an undergraduate, and she was Miss Louisa Netherley of Oxford. I was engaged to her at the time. You must be aware of it."

"Of course. So she told me."

"Then what can you mean by saying they are to another man's wife?"

Righteous indignation bridled up in the curate.

Adair laughed again, a low sweet laugh, with sugar of lead in it.

"Oh, you holy innocent!" he exclaimed. "How deliciously blind you are! Your sister was right: you are too good for anything. In future, may I urge upon you, as a clergyman and a gentleman, the desirability of dating your letters in full? It saves so much trouble. If you had given the year, you might have saved this lady's reputation. Instead of that, you do not even give the month or day of the month: you simply date them 'Tuesday morning,' 'Sunday evening.' So bad a habit deserves

to meet with its due reward. And yet, see how kind I am to you. You say you have nothing to pay me for. Do you still believe it? I offer you these letters for twenty-five guineas. Going, going, at an alarming sacrifice! Charlie Grindalythe, to my certain knowledge, is tired of his wife, and would pay me a hundred for them."

Wainmaker held his breath, unable to take in all at once such depths of baseness.

"But—I can prove their dates, and so can she," he said slowly.

"You mean, you can swear to them. Oh, yes; of course: the two incriminated persons. But who would believe you on your oaths on such a matter? And besides, look at the envelopes!"

Wainmaker turned them over, terror-stricken. Yes, it was only too true. Adair had put them into envelopes bearing dates and postmarks of four years later, after Lou was Mrs. Grindalythe!

"You infernal scoundrel," the parson cried, moved to unwonted indignation. "These are the envelopes of letters I have written to this lady *since* her marriage—letters about the ordinary affairs of the parish—most every-day.

and unavoidable letters to a squire's wife, beginning 'Dear Mrs. Grindalythe.'

"Precisely; I know all that. There's where my cleverness comes in. They do equally well for the Oxford correspondence. Besides, 'infernal scoundrel' is not a clerical expression. It's not even parliamentary: and it shows you're frightened. The fact of it is, my dear boy, you may as well confess yourself outwitted. I play a better game than you, and I also hold the ace of trumps in reserve. This is only the king. I advise you to give in to it."

The curate rose, livid.

"Sir, you are trying to blackmail me."

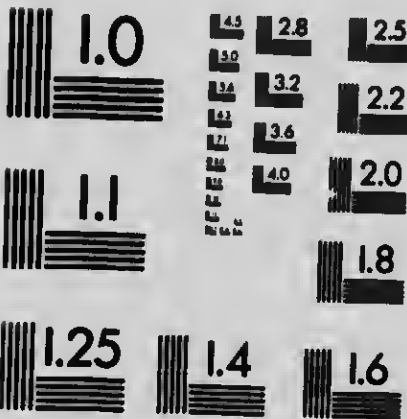
"Don't let us quarrel about terms. We will call it purchase-money. I offer you these valuable documents for sale. It is quite at your own disposition whether you prefer to accept or refuse them. I do not coerce you. But the price I consider extremely moderate. I have put it low, both in consideration of your means, and to oblige a poor devil of an idiot for whom I had always a real compassion."

"I don't want to buy them," the curate answered manfully. "Mrs. Grindalythe's reputation can take care of itself. It has nothing



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to fear from you. You can have no facts to prove against us. And besides, the letters must contain internal evidence of having been written at Oxford, when I was an undergraduate and she was unmarried."

"My dear Wainmaker, you think everybody else manipulates his cards as ill as you do. Now *do* you suppose I have not been careful to eliminate from this series all letters with local references or which carry date, and to keep those only which say, 'Meet me alone if possible;' 'Come early to the usual place,' and so forth? You seem to take me for a mere fool of a curate."

Wainmaker hesitated a second. Then he braced himself up for a violent effort.

"Give me those letters," he said, stepping forward, "and let me burn them before your eyes, or I will go to the window and call for the police and put you in custody on a charge of black-mailing."

Adair eyed him hard.

"You mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it. I will not be terrorised."

"Then I play the ace of trumps!"

He said it triumphantly.

The curate faced him with a strange foreboding of evil.

Adair drew out another letter.

"Read *that*," he said calmly.

The curate read it, and then buried his face in his hands.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, all his soul within him turning faint. "You scoundrel! My sister!"

Adair smiled victory.

"I have a lot of such letters from various ladies," he purred softly; "and I am now about to go the rounds of their families in order to sell them at what I take to be a very reasonable figure. A man of my personal attractions, you know, can always secure a fair number of this sort: what the world calls 'compromising.' I began with you, to put it plainly, because before calling on the others, I wish to be dressed in the sort of costume that becomes my place in society."

But the curate never heard him. He had only one thought. "My sister! My sister!" Happily married now, with a husband she loved, and two children she adored! And this scoundrel held the means of ruining her! He

could hardly believe it; yet here, the evidence was beyond dispute. In her own very hand! His brain reeled to realise it.

Then, of a sudden, it struck him that he was a man, and must take immediate action.

This might be the only letter. He must at once destroy it. Tearing it up was insufficient. It must be burned to ashes.

He lunged forward and snatched it, before Adair could prevent him; he rushed over to the mantelpiece. There, he took the match-box and struck a match. Adair sprang at him in turn and seized his arm, wrenching away the matches.

The rest was instantaneous.

"Give me back my letter!"

"Never! I will die first!"

Adair drew a knife.

"Give it back, I say!"—striking at him.

"Not while I live!"

The curate had seized the man's wrist, and with a sudden wrench had caught the open knife from him. It was an African clasp-knife. There was a short, sharp scuffle. Then of a sudden, Wainmaker found the knife in his left hand, and made a rapid dash forward. Next

instant, Adair had fallen back in the chair, with blood gurgling from a wound, and not a word spoken.

The curate, leaning over him, awoke all at once to the fact that he was a murderer.

Yet even in that fierce moment of surging emotion Keble Wainmaker did not forget his sense of duty. He went straight to the mantelpiece, picked up the matches, struck one on the box, lighted his sister's letter, and held it between finger and thumb till it had all burned away; then he threw the ashes with care under the grate, and returned to Adair's body.

He was dead, quite dead! That ineffable scoundrel! Wainmaker could almost have uttered thanks to heaven that moment that he was rid of a villain.

Just as he thought it, Mrs. Rigg knocked loudly at the door.

"I think, zur, you've forgotten the Early Celebration."

CHAPTER II.

WAINMAKER stood there, helpless. Then he aroused himself with a manful effort. In such an emergency, it is the need of the moment that carries one through. A man has no time then and there to reflect upon the remote future or the consequences of his act; but he must at all hazards conceal his crime for the present from the passing observer. The curate mustered up voice to reply with seeming unconcern.

“Dear me, Mrs. Rigg, so I have! I’ll be down in a minute.”

Then he stole softly across the room, cramming the bundle of letters to Lou into his pocket as he passed; turned the key imperceptibly in the lock; and opened the door wide, so that Mrs. Rigg could see into the place without hindrance. Adair’s body sat a little limp in the chair, with the head hung listlessly on one side against the back, as if he were tired or drowsy: but no blood showed

from where Mrs. Rigg was standing. With a masterful command of nerve, Wainmaker managed to say in a most casual voice, "Well, good bye for the present, Adair! I must go off to service. I won't be long. You'll find plenty of books in the shelf behind your back. Take one down to amuse you."

Then he turned down the stairs. On the landing he paused, reflected, and ran back again. He had no plan for the future, but he could not leave Adair's body open there before all comers in his absence. Unnoticed by Mrs. Rigg, who had preceded him down the stairs, he took the key from the door and locked it on the outside. Then he slipped the key into his pocket. At the foot of the stairs he paused once more.

"Don't go up to lay the table till I return, Mrs. Rigg," he said. "An old college acquaintance of mine, Mr. Austin Adair, has come to call on me. He is in very bad circumstances and very much depressed, and he wants me to lend him some money. He will stop here for breakfast: so you may boil *three* eggs. But I think he'd better be left alone in my room till I return from Celebration."

"Very well, zur," Mrs. Rigg murmured with visible relief; for she was afraid of the strange man, and had not relished the idea of going up to lay breakfast.

Wainmaker turned towards the church. And now another and still more painful dilemma faced him. He was an honest and conscientious priest, with a deep sense of reverence for the holy things. How could he enter now into the house of God, to minister the most sacred rite of his religion, with hands which were morally if not physically blood-stained?

He stood aghast at the prospect. He dared not face it.

Chance or Providence favoured him. At the door of the church, to his profound relief, he found the young parson who was stopping at the "White Lion" with his bride, and on whom he had called last Wednesday afternoon.

"Let me see," he began quickly. "You are in priest's orders, I think, Whiteway; or are you only a deacon?"

"In priest's orders; oh, yes: I have just been presented to a living."

Wainmaker drew a deep breath. This was clearly a door opened to him.

"Then can you take this service for me?" he asked, in a voice which made it almost impossible for Whiteway to say *no* to him.

"I—I have been very much agitated and troubled this morning. An old Oxford acquaintance of mine has dropped in (gone to the dogs entirely, I regret to say), and tried to borrow money from me; me, who have none to lend him. But the event has upset me; and I hardly feel in the state of mind which one ought to have attained before——"

"I quite understand," Whiteway answered.

"By all means let me take your service, and go back to your friend."

Wainmaker faltered a second again. Should he go back, or should he stop? *Could* he face that body? His first impulse was to absent himself from church and devise some plan of campaign. His second was to go in and meditate. The calm and peace of the sacred building might help him. At first, to be sure, he had compunctions about entering the church unabsolved. Then he thought to himself, no; this was precisely the time to lay his trouble

bare and ask for guidance. Conscious of a great crime, half unwittingly committed under great provocation, he would beg forgiveness. He took a seat in the dim nave, and strove to calm himself.

Was he bound to give himself up to the law for this murder? Or was it a murder at all? Had he acted in self-defence? and if so, since there were no witnesses, and since it would be impossible for him to justify and explain his conduct without betraying his sister's secret, need he tell what had happened? Might he not leave society to find out for itself and to exact its own penalty? He bowed his head in all humility and laid his whole heart open. It was the impulse of a moment, more than half in self-defence, and under unspeakable torture. Would it even be just for him to run the risk of being hanged for such an act? To expose his family to such shame and misconception? And if society hanged him, would not society, of the two, be the greater criminal?

Yet, if he was wrong, if society was right, he prayed heaven that society might wreak its vengeance upon him.

The service proceeded. A nervous trembling

fell upon him. Sorely as he needed at that moment the solemn stillness, the soothing half-lights, of the church, he could not communicate. He began to think he must rise and steal away silently before the consecration. He dared not stop. The stain of blood lay too deep upon him. Yet even to steal away would be to risk detection. He thought of his mother, he thought of his sister, and dared not expose them to such ignominy.

It was almost a relief, therefore, when, in the midst of the service Job Womersley entered the church in an excited way, and, singling him out where he sat, whispered aloud in an excited voice,

"You must come away, passon. There's trouble to Mrs. Rigg's, zur."

Then all was out! He was glad of it, after all. Better arrest itself than this gnawing suspense. He accepted heaven's verdict—that he must be tried as a murderer!

CHAPTER III.

JOB WOMERSLEY, the brewer's drayman, had been asked by Mrs. Rigg to trim the Virginia creeper that darkened the curate's window. Just about the time when Keble Wainmaker was kneeling in agony in the church, Job set his ladder against the wall on the garden front, and began clipping the loose sprays that overhung the lattice. After he had cleared away a little, he happened to peep in with village curiosity. A strange gentleman was seated in the curate's chair, his head bent down on the table; for after Wainmaker left, the body had tilted forward with the shutting of the door, and fallen thus into an apparently despondent attitude. For a time Job thought nothing of this; folks often called to tell their troubles to passon; but after two minutes, when he had coughed twice apologetically, and the strange gentleman had taken no notice of the interruption to his train of thought, Job's inquisitiveness got the better of his judgment.

He pushed aside the lattice and peered in. The strange gentleman still sat motionless, with his head bent down, and then for the first time Job was dimly suspicious of something like a crimson puddle on the carpet.

He did not jump in to examine the body, however; indeed, considering the relative sizes of the window and of the drayman's capacious girth, it would have been a matter of the nicest adjustment to thrust himself through it. But he descended the ladder at once, and communicated his suspicions to Mrs. Rigg, his sister.

They mounted the stairs together, and knocked at the door. No answer! Job tried to open it. "Locked!" he exclaimed. Mrs. Rigg stood back, awe-struck.

"Do you think he have killed hisself, Job?"

Job lifted one hob-nailed boot.

"Us murt try," he answered.

The lock yielded to Job's ample kick at once; it was held, after all, by two screws and a staple. They entered and looked around. The strange gentleman lay with his head on the table, his arms limp by his side; close at his feet on the carpet they saw a knife

which he must have drawn from the wound
and flung down beside him.

"He's stabbed hisself!" Job exclaimed.

And Mrs. Rigg echoed,

"He's stabbed hisself!"

"Don't 'ee touch the knife, Susan; let un
lie," Job added. "'Tis ill luck to touch the
thing as did a suicide."

CHAPTER IV.

MUCH depends on first impressions. If a murder is described from the first as a murder, it takes a great deal of subsequent reasoning to reduce it to the level of a suicide or an accident. But if it is described from the first as a suicide or an accident, it takes an equal amount to raise it into the category of murder.

Job's immediate impulse was to rush into church to fetch out passon. Keble Wainmaker followed him to the portal, white-faced. In the porch, Job blurted out the whole truth as he conceived it.

"Thik ther gentleman in your room have stabbed hissself dead, zur."

In a flash Keble Wainmaker was conscious that he was saved. He looked at Job fixedly for a second. Then he asked in a slow voice,

"Have you sent for Dr. Stokoe?"

"No, zur; us have only just found un."

"Then send for him at once."

And he hurried on to his lodgings. At the door Mrs. Rigg met him, wringing her hands.

"And it was only 'alf an hour ago, zur," she said, "that I 'eard un zaying, as you left the room he could take a book and amuse hisself!"

Wainmaker hastened upstairs, Mrs. Rigg close behind him. While he mounted the steps, he felt that incriminating key in his pocket. To leave it there would be fatal. With a quick movement, unperceived by Mrs. Rigg, he thrust it into the door, inside, in passing. Mrs. Rigg was too overcome by the vastness of the tragedy to pay heed to detail. The curate gazed at the corpse, now growing white and deathlike.

"Yes, he is dead," he murmured mechanically: "dead, dead, poor desperate creature!" Then he glanced out of the front window, down the village street, where the parishioners, roused by Job's report, were assembling to learn the news. "Come up here," he said beckoning to one or two among them. "It is best you should see him. And send for the policeman."

In ten minutes report ran all over the village that a friend of passon's, a come-down gentleman (some said, a Vassity man), had

slept at the tramps' lodging house the night before: that he had called in the morning to borrow or beg from passon; that passon had left un in his room while he went to service; and that the come-down gentleman, finding luck too hard for him, had stabbed hisself dead in passon's chair in passon's absence. Stoke-Parva felt itself raised in the scale of importance: 'twas years since it had enjoyed a first-rate sensation.

When the policeman came, the first thing he did was to note that the key was in the lock, inside; the second, to observe the mark of Job's hobnailed boot on the door, outside; the third, to mark carefully the position of the knife; and the fourth, to question Mrs. Rigg most closely as to the exact moment when she heard the poor gentleman groaning. For of course she had heard him groan—could a landlady resist so grave a temptation?—about ten minutes after Mr. Wainmaker started for service.

At first, when it came to legal investigation, there seemed never a plainer case to set before a coroner's jury. Evidence showed, to begin with, that deceased, a ruined raki and a

confirmed brandy-drinker ("with a diseased liver due to alcoholism", said the local doctor who performed the post mortem), had arrived at Stoke-Parva late the night before, highly excited and in a destitute condition. After vain attempts to disturb his friend's rest, he had slept with vagabonds at the tramps' lodging-house, and had audibly wished (his fellow-tramps bore witness) that he was out of this (qualified) world, and at peace for ever. The curate of the parish testified that Adair had called in the early morning, and implored a loan, even accompanied by threats of personal violence. When the curate left for early service, Adair was seated in his easy-chair, and "I told him to amuse himself with a book while I was gone," the curate said, "wishing to decide upon my further action with regard to him when I returned from Celebration." Mrs. Rigg showed that she had knocked at the door just as the bell went seven: had seen the deceased sitting there quietly as if nothing was the matter, and had heard a short conversation between him and Mr. Wainmaker before Mr. Wainmaker set out for the usual morning office. Job Womersley

described the finding of the body and the position of the knife on his sister's floor. He was positive that the door was locked from the inside—"was it vor that he would vorsew hisself?"—and the policeman and Mrs. Rigg bore out this statement. Job had not entered the room from the window—not likely, was it? And the jury smiled as Job pointed good-humouredly to the capacious girth that he would have had to thrust through that narrow opening. Nobody even suggested that Job might have done it; which was the nightmare that most of all had terrified the poor curate.

So far, all went well. But when Doctor Stokoe was called, Keble Wainmaker bent forward with suppressed excitement. The trained medical eye must surely have gathered the truth. He felt that next moment must decide his future.

What was Dr. Stokoe's opinion, the coroner asked, as to the nature of the wound he had just described to them?

The curate scarcely dared to breathe. Then the answer came confidently:

"My opinion is that it was self-inflicted."

"On what do you base that opinion?"

“On the position, direction, and character of the wound. It is a wound of a sort which no one, holding a knife in his right hand, as he naturally would, could inflict upon another. A left-handed man, indeed, might hold a knife so and inflict such a stab—” and the doctor showed how, clumsily enough: “but no right-handed person could possibly do it. Moreover, a left-handed person would hold the knife-blade outward, thus; but this blade must have been held edge-inward, so, if the thrust were made by any but the deceased, the cut being upward. That is how a man naturally stabs himself, turning the knife in; but not how anybody would reasonably attack another person.”

Wainmaker let his breath go. The coroner made no remark.

After a few more pieces of formal evidence, the jury gave their verdict without even retiring. It was not an important case, and the conclusion was clear—a broken man from the tramps' lodging-house had killed himself in despair after an ineffectual attempt to raise money from a penniless curate.

“And your verdict is, gentlemen?” How easily the coroner said it!

The foreman cleared his throat. He was the village postmaster.

"That Austin Adair committed suicide while in an unsound state of mind, his temporary insanity being intensified by the cumulative effects of excessive drinking."

The schoolmaster and he were justly proud of that literary production.

"A very proper verdict," the coroner commented.

So that was all.

Wainmaker listened as in a dream. When everything was over and Adair buried, he waited some days; then he quietly resigned his curacy, on the ground that Stoke-Parva had become distasteful to him through the tragedy which occurred in his rooms. Everyone said that was quite natural with so sensitive a person. He found another curacy elsewhere without difficulty. And he accepted the verdict, rightly or wrongly, as an interposition of Providence; for, though he remembered the event with horror and shrinking all the days of his life, he never doubted that he had done right in the end in allowing natural justice to prevail over human and legal sanctions.

Luigi and the Salvationist.

CHAPTER I.

THE first Luigi knew about it was that he heard the words "Are you saved?" fired off at him like a blank volley, in a lugubriously hollow voice, and in most doubtful Italian.

Now this was odd, for it was late spring, and flood time was over; so what could there be to be saved from?

Luigi looked up from the top-artichokes he was carefully hoeing—hoeing with the ceaseless, uncomplaining industry of the overtaxed, hard-working Italian peasant—and beheld his questioner. The foreigner was a tall, gaunt man, with eager eyes and a quick, earnest manner: in point of fact, the ideal of an apostle, an ascetic, an evangelist. He wore a curious black cap, very military in its air, and marked with the words "Salvation Army," in

Italian, embroidered in red upon it. His fiery eye burned bright with undirected zeal. He was made for martyrdom.

All which things, however, Luigi just at first only dimly perceived, for he was slow of perception.

"Has the river risen?" he asked, glancing about him nervously.

"Are you saved?" the gaunt man volleyed again, unheeding his question.

Luigi felt uncomfortable. A weird, strange creature!

"There is no flood," he answered; "and if it were earthquake, should not I too feel it?"

"There is a flood," the gaunt man answered; "a flood of liquid fire! It is coming down the valley and breaking upon you this moment! Seek salvation!"

Luigi took his measure with a deliberate eye.

"The district of Siena is not volcanic," he replied in his slow way. "You have come from Naples?"

The stranger began to pour forth a fervent stream of somewhat turbid and mingled

eloquence. He spoke Italian fluently, though ill—he had learnt how to bring out a few fiery sentences of warning and exhortation. Luigi listened, and the truth began to dawn upon him. This man, though mad, was some sort of missionary. It was religious talk he was trying to shower upon him.

"Pardon me, signore," Luigi said at last with a gentle smile, leaning upon his hoe. "I understand your mistake. You are a new comer in these regions. You suppose we are heathens, and you wish to convert us. That is in itself a laudable design. But we are Christians! Christians!" To give more point to his remark and make himself better understood, he crossed himself demonstratively as he spoke, and murmured, half to himself, the usual formula. The Salvationist shuddered. "Look at our hills," Luigi went on. "Do you not see that we have churches everywhere? Furthermore, we grow in this district one of the most generous red wines in Italy—a delicious wine which is called Chianti," (another shudder) "and is exported, I am told, not to Florence alone, but even oversea to England, from which country I doubt not your serenity comes.

Your people in London begin to drink it; they prefer it to the beer which alone they can raise on their bleak hillsides. A most illustrious wine, our good Chianti.—Si, si, if we are Christians!

The Salvationist stared at him, aghast. What on earth was the man talking about.

"But you need salvation," he cried strenuously,— "salvation, and we offer it to you. Freely we offer it! By blood and fire we offer it to you!"

Luigi shrugged his shoulders, bowed politely, elevated his eyebrows, and went on hoeing his artichokes.

The Salvationist continued a long harangue of the stereotyped sort with which those of the north are so familiar. Luigi had never in his life heard anything like it. He went on with his work, but listened in a quietly interested way to this mad creature's raving. It was odd; it was piquant. At last, it began to strike him that the man was trying, in his grotesque way, to preach some strange heretical doctrine. Luigi was a great-souled, tolerant being. He leaned on his hoe once more, and made becoming answer,

"Signore," he said in a bland voice, "you are new to Italy: you have not been here long: you do not understand us. That which you describe is not the path to Paradise for us Italians. We are born: well and good; they baptise us instantly: and thereby we obtain baptismal regeneration. We grow up: we are catechised: we make our first communion. We become men and women: we consult our parish priest: we confess at least three times a year: we communicate at Easter: if we do anything wrong, we seek penance and absolution. By-and-bye we grow old: we feel death draw near: we send for our good father: we receive the viaticum: we obtain extreme unction: and we depart, forgiven. To make all sure, our children and friends after our demise see that masses are said for the repose of our souls." He expanded his palms. "What would you have?" he asked rhetorically. "We do all that the Church demands. We fulfil every obligation. We leave no command unbeyed. Where is the need for this strange thing that you call *conversion*?"

"You speak of the scarlet woman," the Salvationist cried, horrified.

"The scarlet woman?" Luigi exclaimed in a puzzled voice.

He looked round, but saw no woman, scarlet or otherwise.

"I mean, Rome," the gaunt man explained.

"Ah, Rome," Luigi repeated, delighted to hit upon a word he could understand. "Rome is the capital of the kingdom of Italy, and the seat of the Assembly!"

They spoke two alien tongues,—those two—the tongue of the north and the tongue of the south: neither could comprehend the other's standpoint.

Nevertheless, the human eye of the Salvationist attracted Luigi, who was above all things human.

"Might I enquire of the signore his honoured name?" he asked at last with sugared Italian politeness.

The Salvationist gave it:

"Arthur Biddle, a brother, and an evangelist," he answered.

"An evangelist!" Luigi echoed. How strange! He had understood those holy men were all dead long ago. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, he knew: but Arthur Biddle—

ncredible. He was confirmed in his belief, that the fellow was mad. Evangelist indeed! And yet—he liked him.

“Has your serenity rooms in Poggibonsi?” he asked after a pause.

“I have not where to lay my head,” the Salvationist answered, with quiet confidence.

“I rely upon those who love the Signore to find me lodging.”

Luigi reflected.

“Might my humble roof be honoured?” he suggested at last as the outcome of his reflection.

Arthur Biddle was not unwilling that this poor blind Italian should acquire the opportunity of entertaining an angel unawares, and he answered at once,

“You are very good. In the Signore’s name, I accept your proffered hospitality. . . . But,” he added as an afterthought, “tomorrow I expect a lady to join me.”

“Ha: the signora your wife?” Luigi interposed sagely.

“Not my wife, but a fellowworker—a Salvation lady.”

Luigi hesitated. Would it be right to

Chiara—a mere girl of eighteen—to introduce this doubtful lady to her.

“Indeed?” he said, with an interrogative undertone. “A lady! And *not* your wife, signore!”

“But she is a sister,” Arthur Biddle put in quickly.

Luigi nodded acquiescence.

“Ah, yes: I understand: the signore’s sister. *Quite* another matter!”

“Not my own sister,” Arthur Biddle continued, trying to steer his way through the dangerous rocks and complexities of Italian. “A sister in religion.”

“What! A nun! si, si. . . . Still, it is odd for a religious——. But there! you English, you do such droll things. Your ladies travel alone. Without a cavalier! Such droll, droll things! Almost as droll as those mad Americans.”

And at thought of the American women, strolling unconcernedly without a male protector across the breadth of two continents, Luigi could no longer control his sense of humour, and burst out laughing.

“You fear to take her in?” the evangelist asked, amazed.

Luigi sobered himself.

"Fear?" he cried. "No, no! But . . . I have a daughter, look you: a girl of eighteen. This lady—this religious—she is one with whom a young girl?—your serenity understands. A father must be particular."

Arthur Biddle in turn was fairly taken aback. It was a shock of nationalities. His Italian, such as it was, forsook him utterly.

"The lady," he stammered out, "—is a lady: a lady."

Luigi took his hand.

"Come on," he said, with a burst. "It is the hour of the *pranzo*. You are a strange specimen of these *forestieri*, I allow, signore, but, I know not why, I like you—I like you."

CHAPTER II.

THE breakfast was simple—black bread, such as peasants use, polenta, and red wine. Chiara served it—a pretty dark girl with the piquant coquettish Italian eyes and smile. Her eyes looked through you. Even Arthur Biddle, who heeded not the things of this world, observed for himself that the girl was pretty. A soul to save! He felt at once a fierce impulse to save it.

Luigi pushed him the red wine, in its wicker-covered flask, stopped with cotton-wool, and having a drop or two of olive oil floating on its surface to preserve it from corruption.

"Help yourself, signore," he said, with the generosity of his race. "'Tis our renowned wine of Chianti."

The evangelist pushed it away with a deprecatory gesture.

"Nay, nay," Luigi urged, mistaking his meaning. "It is yours, signore. All we have is at your service. You are wholly welcome."

"I do not drink wine," Arthur Biddle answered, with an austere face. "We do not in my religion."

"Ah, now I understand," Luigi put in with a bland smile. "Then you are *not* a Christian! My son was with the army in Eritrea, and he wrote to me that the heathens in those parts—Mohammedan heathens—would not drink wine, so as to distinguish themselves from Christians. And *you* will not drink wine! I see it all now. You are a Mohammedan missionary,"—he smiled a tolerant smile—"come to convert us to your own religion."

Arthur Biddle stood aghast. How he longed for words to confute this well-meaning but ignorant person!

"I *am* a Christian," he answered, "—and I have come to convert Italy. But true Christians do not look upon the wine when it is red. A snare, a snare! They know its deceptiveness."

"Ah, you prefer *white* wine?" Luigi broke in, eager to do his best. "Chiara, my child, a flask of that good white Montepulciano!"

"No, no," the evangelist exclaimed with an impatient gesture. "No wine! no wine! I tell you, I am a Christian."

Luigi was all sweet reasonableness.

"Every Christian," he answered, "drinks wine. It is a part of our religion. Why, even the priests must drink it. How can you be a Christian and refuse to partake of our good Chianti?"

"But when the priests drink it," Chiara put in, "it is no longer wine: you forget that, Father."

"True, true:" Luigi said, crossing himself. "I had forgotten it, I admit—sinful man that I am. But still, our Chianti! Why, do you not know, serenity, that holy bishops and cardinals are growers and sellers of Chianti?"

"Then they are snarers of souls," Arthur Biddle answered, warming up.

Luigi poured himself out a second glass, and held it up to the light, much wondering.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "Why, the best men do it! There is Cardinal Casale, for example, the Cardinal Camerlengo to his Holiness himself,—he owns a vineyard near Siena, and grows very rich wine, most luscious wine, which he retails in Rome at special *osterie*, under the cardinal's hat and arms: you

will not say a thing is wrong which is done by the Cardinal Camerlengo to the Holy Father!"

Arthur Biddle held his peace. He had no arguments with which to meet this wholly unexpected line of reasoning. In the north, he knew how to answer all objections and return all assaults; but this fixed faith of the south, this creed of authority, with its elaborate ceremonial, its etiquette of salvation, entirely silenced him. To him, the individual was sole judge of conduct: every man his own pope: Luigi nonplussed him.

After breakfast, Luigi went out for a minute, and the evangelist was left alone in the room with Chiara. He let his eye fall upon her. Chiara glanced back with her most coquettish glance. The *signore* foreigner was about to address her! He gazed at her long and earnestly. Chiara in her heart wondered what was coming. Then he turned with a fierce burst.

"Are you saved?" he asked fiercely.

Chiara was not more retiring than most other Italian peasant girls: but when a strange man leapt upon her with such a weird

question, her terror knew no bounds. She rose, glared at him, flashed fire from her eyes, clenched her fists instinctively, and then rushed with burning cheeks and beating heart from the table. She darted into her own room, slamming the door behind her. Arthur Biddle heard the turn of a rusty key in a lock, and a great sigh of relief. Thank Our Lady and the saints, she had got away from him in safety!

Presently, Luigi returned, and found the evangelist sitting disconsolate, with his head on his hands and his elbows on the table, a picture of misery.

"Where is Chiara?" the Italian asked in a rising tone of indignation.

Arthur Biddle pointed with one hand to the bed-chamber.

Luigi felt the door, found it locked, then turned angrily to the evangelist.

"What! you have abused my hospitality!" he cried, in an angry voice. "You have taken advantage of my back being turned to insult my daughter!"

Arthur Biddle recoiled like one stung.

"I only asked her if she was saved," he

answered; "and she rose from the table and fled as if I had struck her."

Luigi's sense of humour sufficed to take it all in. He burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"We do not understand one another," he cried, laying his hand on the evangelist's shoulder. "We are all at cross purposes! Can you not give up this attempt to convert the converted? We are Christians, I tell you, Christians. We grow the best red wine that is grown in all Italy. You are not satisfied to be as Christian as the Pope: you want to be more orthodox than the Holy Father!"

Arthur Biddle hardly saw the point of the joke even then. As Christian as the Pope! Why, if he had met the Pope, he would have accosted the venerable Pontiff with "Are you saved?" exactly as he had accosted Luigi and Chiara.

CHAPTER III.

THE evangelist slept at Luigi's that night, the father having succeeded after a little wheedling in convincing his daughter that the foreigner meant no harm, and was merely interested in her spiritual condition. Next day, the "sister" arrived—a tall sweet looking girl, with a wealth of fair hair, in a most unbecoming bonnet, Chiara thought: but there! what would you have? Our own Dominican nuns do not enquire too closely whether their dress suits them! The pair put the family to a severe strain: but things were managed. The evangelist had a bed in Luigi's room, while the "sister" shared Chiara's. Luigi was a great-hearted honest-souled creature: and in spite of everything, the evangelist attracted him.

Arthur Biddle and Sister Polly went out into Poggibonsi that very morning to save souls; and Luigi, fearing mischief, gave up an hour to accompany them. On the way, he met the Englishwoman. Now the Englishwoman was

well known and much respected at Poggibonsi: she had a house there. She was unmarried, an amateur painter, and a lover of Italy: she lived at Poggibonsi to be near San Gimignano, and yet in touch with the rail to Florence and Siena. Her name was Miss Beauchamp. At least, it was spelt Beauchamp, and pronounced Beecham, or as Luigi would have put it, Biciam.

Miss Beauchamp drew the rein of her little white pony to smile at Luigi and to stare at the Salvationists. Luigi spoke to her awhile: but he spoke rapidly in Italian, and the evangelist could not follow him. The Englishwoman listened. Luigi's palms were eloquent. His shoulders spoke. At last Miss Beauchamp turned to Biddle with a rather grave face.

"You belong," she said, "to the Salvation Army?"

"I do," Biddle answered. "Are you saved?"

Miss Beauchamp's white hand waved aside the question.

"My personal welfare is not now the point at issue," she replied with quiet firmness.

"I want to warn you. Be careful here what you say or do. These people are kindly people,

good honest people, very friendly people: but, tomorrow is the *festa* of Sant' Ilario, the great local patron. Beware how you run counter to their prejudices at such a time. They are excitable, and eager. If you hurt their feelings, if you insult their religion, which they dearly love, they may become ungovernable."

"I ask no better," Arthur Biddle answered, "than to be counted worthy to suffer for the truth's sake."

Miss Beauchamp smiled serenely.

"Truth is relative," she said in a slow voice. "You may not have it in greater measure than I have. But let me urge you at least to deal it out, if you possess it, to these good people with extreme caution. You are a new-comer here, and I can see from what Luigi tells me, you do not understand the Italian temperament. In the North, the theology you take for granted is immediately understood: all your hearers admit what you postulate—the need for salvation, for immediate conversion, for some sudden and definite change of heart, for a day of reconciliation. They may put it off, and put it off; but, in principle, they believe in it. Here, it is quite different. Not one of your hearers knows

what you are talking about. They will think you mad—that is all. Their way of salvation and yours are alien. Baptism, first communion, confession, penance, absolution, extreme unction—it is all mapped out for them: they fulfil their prescribed round with simple childlike faith, and have no misgivings. If you *must* disturb their rest, disturb it gently. Remember that they believe, and that their belief is dear to them."

The evangelist stood shocked at such lukewarm Protestantism. Why, this English lady, brought up in the light, was scarcely any better than poor blind Luigi. He longed to save *her* soul too: but the pony-carriage passed on and whirled it away from him.

They walked in silence into the main street of Poggibonsi.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT day, the evangelist and Sister Polly went forth with Chiara to survey the situation.

It was easy to see that something unwonted was happening. The little town was *en fête*: everybody was dressed in his *festa* costume: Poggibonsi was uproarious. All the little boys were engaged in firing most religious squibs, in honour of Sant' Ilario: all the little girls wore white flowers in their hair, and waved red handkerchiefs. Grave men stood smiling at the doors of their shops with a patronising air, as if the town, the crowd, and the saint belonged to them. *Confetti* strewed the ground—the degenerate modern coloured-paper *confetti*: vendors of gilt gingerbread extolled their wares at stalls in the street: a circus stood ready for action outside the village, as soon as the churches should have poured forth their throng of worshippers. It was a sad sad

right: all these heedless people were busy enjoying themselves in their own wicked Italian way, and taking no note of the alien evangelists who stalked tall and gaunt with their northern gospel through the midst of so much happy Tuscan humanity.

Suddenly, as Arthur Biddle looked, a loud cry rent the air—a cry that drew nearer and nearer each minute, with shrill variations: a cry which even his unpractised ears soon discovered to be composed of myriad voices all shouting with their might, “Il Santo! il Santo!”

Next moment, a motley crowd swept round the corner. At its head marched a man with a sort of monstrous tinsel-covered barrel, adorned with ribbons, and flashing in the full Italian sunlight. The barrel was raised high on a pole; assistants by the side helped to carry off the weight by sticks attached to it. Its approach was the signal for redoubled cheering. The thing swayed and rolled, and the crowd surged round it, shouting and laughing. As it swayed, they shouted aloud, “Ceri, Ceri, Ceri!” That was what struck the evangelist’s eye first: next instant, he

beheld behind it a colossal doll or stuffed effigy, some fifteen feet high, similarly borne by poles on four men's shoulders. The image had a great smiling face, most inanely beneficent; it was attired in gewgaws of the flimsiest material. Around it men and women pressed shouting, "Il Santo! il Santo!" As it approached they bowed their heads, exactly as if the doll were some worshipful object.

Just at the first glance, Arthur Biddle took the whole cavalcade for a mere toy or pageant—a sort of Southern Guy Fawkes or City Giant or King Carnival. But even as he watched, while the crowd pressed forward, a procession of priests with a great gilt cross issued from a church, and met the tumultuous popular orgy at a street corner. A bishop, gorgeous in his plum-coloured dalmatic, led the measured cortége of ecclesiastics. Where the two lines met and crossed, he stopped for a moment held up a couple of fingers in solemn benediction, and blessed the procession. The image in turn bowed its head, nodded three times, and then went on its way, inanely smiling. Arthur Biddle realised with difficulty that this was intended for a religious

event. The image was a saint, and the bishop had blessed it and been blessed in return by it!

As a matter of fact, the procession is one of those immemorial traditional popular ceremonies, so common in Italy, which are not of ecclesiastical origin at all, and may possibly even be pagan survivals, but which the Church has had the wisdom in part to recognise, and by recognition to mitigate and nullify.

"What is this Juggernaut?" the Salvationist cried, turning fiercely to Chiara.

Chiara had not the slightest idea what manner of wild beast a Juggernaut might be, but the man's tone appalled her.

"Oh, hush!" she exclaimed, crossing herself, "Don't speak so loud! This is our holiest *fiesta*, the Procession of the Ceri, and the image that you see is the effigy of our blessed patron, Sant' Ilario!"

A mad desire to testify broke over Arthur Biddle. This was sheer idolatry!

"Stand forward!" he cried in a tone of command to Sister Polly.

Sister Polly had less zeal or more common sense than her leader. She did not think the

moment propitious for testifying. However, as in duty bound, after a second's hesitation, she obeyed her superior officer. She stood forth, very white, as the procession approached them.

Arthur Biddle seized the leader of the *Ceri* by the arm.

"Are you saved?" he shouted aloud, in a voice that could be heard above the bang of the drums. "If not, I offer you, here and now, salvation!"

It took a minute before the crowd understood the interruption. They paused and listened, horrified. Stop the Procession of the *Ceri* in its mid career? Check the blessed *Sant' Ilario*! Incredible profanity! This man must be a heathen! But Arthur Biddle, in quick short sentences, proceeded to testify. He told them, in plain words, that the holy *Sant' Ilario* was no saint at all, but a vile idol, the work of man's hands, a clear violation of the second commandment. Eyes it had, but it saw not: ears, but it heard not: a vain tinsel-covered thing, powerless to answer the prayers addressed to it. He exhorted them to turn from this their

idolatry to the living light; he implored them to be saved: he argued, he wrestled with them.

As for the crowd, half-mad with religious fervour, half drunk with many cups of good Chianti, it knew not what to make of this amazing fanatic. At first, it was incredulous. Disbelieve in the Saint—in our own Sant' Ilario! Try to stop the procession on which depended the prosperity of the town and the success of the vintage! impossible! inconceivable! Why, even the Freethinkers and Freemasons and Liberals never sank quite so low as that! Signor Mancini himself, the atheistical doctor (as men called him), yet approved of the Ceri, and actually gave money once a year to keep up and gild the image of Sant' Ilario: nay, had he not written several pamphlets conclusively showing that Sant' Ilario himself went back to a remote and unknown antiquity, having once been a pagan god of great renown and power, before he was happily converted and Christianised—pamphlets which the curious may read to this day in the library of the Folklore Society in London? The

Inglese, then, were worse than Freemasons or Atheists! Inglese?—a Moor! He *must* be a heathen!

Burning with zeal for the glory of Sant' Ilario, they turned upon him, red with rage. Sister Polly slunk back, tore off her bonnet, and refused to testify. But the crowd heeded her not; it seized Arthur Biddle, and there and then almost tore him to pieces. He endured with courage—courage is a quality rarely lacking in Salvationists. They buffeted him about till he was more than half-dead. He thought at times he was on the very point of earning the crown of martyrdom. But just at that moment, while they wrestled and beat, Luigi stepped forward. Politic man, Luigi! He did not attempt to check their rage, but, smiling serenely, he called out,

“Do not kill him, fellow-citizens, before the very eyes of the blessed Sant' Ilario! It would surely bring bad luck to the harvest and the vintage if blood were to defile the Procession of the Ceri! Make him over to me instead—I will answer for him to you: and when you have replaced the blessed saint in his home in the chapel on the hill, and feasted the Ceri,

come for him to my house, and then do as you please with him!"

But this he said guilefully, with intent to deceive, that he might protect the evangelist.

The crowd shouted back,

"Luigi is right! Don't kill him here! It would bring the evil eye! Go on with the blessed saint, and tear him to pieces when the service is over!"

CHAPTER V.

AFTER the Ceri had been feasted, and the great cask broached and drunk, a body of roisterers at the inn in the Piazza shouted aloud, "Now, off to Luigi's,—and short work with the atheist!"

Luigi had bundled his man meanwhile into the old wooden chest in Chiara's room, and bade Chiara and Sister Polly sit upon it carelessly. Lest Biddle should choke, he had bored two holes for air with an augur at the back: the evangelist had just room to lie in the box with his long legs tucked up; but the position was uncomfortable.

Without one moment's notice, the roisterers burst into the house.

"Where is he?" they cried. "Produce him!"

Luigi came forward, wringing his hands in mock despair.

"Dear friends," he exclaimed, "the man is in league with Satan! I got him home with

difficulty: but on the very threshold, he gave me the slip and escaped. I fear by this time he is at Empoli or Florence!"

The crowd was furious. Baulked of their prey, they turned to cuff and maul Luigi. Luigi cried out the more, "I know not where he is! He fled and left me!" The evangelist in the chest, hearing this plain falsehood, was minded once more to rise up and testify. But on second thoughts he refrained—leaving Luigi to suffer vicarious martyrdom.

"Search the house!" one of the mob cried. The others turned to obey him. The evangelist lay low, feeling far from happy. Meanwhile, half a dozen enthusiasts kept punching and pummelling poor Luigi, to extract a confession. But Luigi was true as steel. He grinned and bore it.

They searched everywhere in the house,—except the chest. Chiara had thrown a coverlet and a couple of cushions on that, so that it looked for all the world like a piece of household furniture. She and Sister Polly sat upon it by turns. As to Polly, the marauders never recognised her for a moment. She had flung away her bonnet, and with her rich fair

hair hanging loose about her face she resembled anything on earth much more than a female preacher. For choice, a Bacchanal.

At last, after pulling to pieces everything suspicious in the house, the revellers dropped off, one by one, sulkily, leaving Luigi bruised and trembling, and the evangelist much cramped with lying so long in the narrow space allotted him.

CHAPTER VI.

HE *must* be got rid of somehow: that was clear. Poggibonsi was now too hot to hold him. But how? If he walked or drove openly from the scandalised town, the injured votaries of Sant' Ilario would tear him to shreds. The railway was out of the question. Luigi perpended. At last, he clapped his hand to his forehead suddenly.

"Ha!" he cried. "The English man!"

"She is good," Chiara echoed. "And the man is a compatriot! Yes, yes: she will help us!"

They waited till deep of night, till long past one o'clock, for strayed revellers were still abroad, more or less exhilarated, shouting "Viva Sant' Ilario!" in somewhat liquid and uncertain accents. About two in the morning, all was silent at last; not a voice broke the gloom; the *festa* had worn itself out, and the revellers were quietly sleeping, in bed or out of it. Luigi opened the door and peered

cautiously into the road. Nobody there! All well!

"Come this way!" he cried to the subdued evangelist.

Arthur Biddle followed him out of the village in the dark towards a big pink villa, standing in its own formal Italian garden, half a mile outside the precincts. With a hesitating hand, Luigi knocked hard at the door. After several attempts, a white-capped head protruded from an upper window.

"Who is there?" a servant asked. "What do you want at this hour, drunken one?"

Luigi explained in a few short words that he was not drunken, and had not been keeping Sant' Ilario. It was a matter of life and death. A head was in danger. Could the English signorina come down to speak at the door with him?

In a few minutes more, Miss Beauchamp came down, lightly clad in a soft artistic dressing-gown. Luigi trembled to ask her. It was much to ask a lady to receive a Man into her house in the small hours of the night: but to save life, you know! Might he dare to ask it? He explained the whole circum-

stances. Miss Beauchamp, motioning them both inside into the hall, and closing the door behind them, listened, smiling.

But what strange creatures, these English! As soon as he had finished, the signorina, smiling still, made answer at once without the slightest hesitation,

"Take him in? Why, of course! He is welcome to a bed: and to-morrow I will drive him in my pony-carriage to Empoli, where he can catch the early train for Florence."

Luigi was thunderstruck. A lady, in a house alone with her woman-servants, make no more bones than that about receiving a Man under her roof! These English are shameless—or else, they are irreproachable!

He groped his way back by himself to his own house, and slept till morning, in spite of his bruises.

When morning came, Miss Beauchamp got ready the pony-trap. She had heard the whole story, and knew how Poggibonsi was thirsting for the blood of the man who had openly insulted and denounced Sant' Ilario. So she insisted that the evangelist must double his long legs under the seat of the pony-trap.

Biddle protested in vain: Miss Beauchamp was imperative. He obeyed in the end and lay still in his place, while Miss Beauchamp and Sister Polly took their seats on the cushions and covered him with their dresses. Sister Polly had borrowed a hat with roses in it, and looked as worldly and as pretty as a Salvationist can look in her weaker moments.

A mile or two out of Poggibonsi, they allowed Biddle to emerge, much bent, and stretch his legs in the dickey. He rode on silently, ejaculating once or twice, in fervid asides, that he desired to save the soul of his present benefactress. Miss Beauchamp only smiled. The subject was one she declined to discuss before him and Sister Polly.

At Empoli station, who should meet them but Luigi, very hot and eager, still black and blue in the face with the beating of yesterday! He had spent a hard-earned *lira* in paying his passage by train, in order to make sure that his evangelist was safe from Sant' Ilario's vindicators.

Miss Beauchamp waited to see what greeting the preacher would give his preserver. Arthur Biddle took two tickets for Florence, and

jumped into the train. He leaned out of the window as soon as he was seated, and took Luigi's hand in his.

"Good bye," he said, with the same eager, impulsive voice as ever. "I will pray for your salvation. I will pray for your soul earnestly."

Miss Beauchamp smiled again.

"I do not think it is Luigi's soul you need trouble about," she answered in English. "*His* soul is right enough. There are others to see to. May not spiritual pride be worse, after all, than some things you think much of?"

The Salvationist stared. What could the woman be talking of?

"Remember," she went on slowly: "you know those words, 'Other sheep have I which are not of this fold: them also will I bring in.' Do not mistake your own little wattled enclosure for the whole church catholic. Luigi is a hero in his way; he has deserved more than prayers from you. Does it not occur to you that you ought to thank him?"

Luigi understood the tone, though not the words.

"Oh, as for that," he said modestly, casting down his eyes, "it is nothing, nothing. I saw

a man's life in danger, through a misunderstanding, and I tried to save it. If I did less than that, how could I call myself a Christian?"

The train began to move. The Salvationist thrust his head out of the window.

"I will pray for *both* your souls!" he cried.
"For both of you, for both of you!"

Miss Beauchamp turned to the Italian peasant.

"I ask *your* prayers for mine, Luigi," she answered humbly.

The Next Presentation.

THE Reverend Leonard Wolstonholme paced the Spa at Scarborough. He wasn't often there. Indeed, to say the truth, he made a point of avoiding it. It looks a trifle obtrusive, you see, to loiter about casually in the neighbourhood of a cure of souls to which you happen to possess the next presentation. And though the Reverend Leonard did not himself possess the next presentation to Moorby-juxta-Scarborough, his father-in-law did; which comes in the end to much the same thing, of course. So natural delicacy made Leonard Wolstonholme avoid the neighbourhood of the Queen of Watering-places (I quote the local guide book) while old Canon Dawkins remained still responsible for the future welfare of the inhabitants in his prospective parish.

On this particular occasion, however, chance

or providence seemed to point out fair grounds for a special exception. Of the two, the Reverend Leonard's vocabulary set it down to providence. He had been asked to preach one of his famous mission sermons on the Sunday at Whitby. He was a mighty missionary. What more natural, then, than to take the Monday morning train to Scarborough—especially as this was brilliant August weather—and stroll for an hour or two on the Spa in the sunshine? He might seize the opportunity to insinuate a few delicate enquiries of local shopkeepers into the state of the Canon's health, and otherwise to satisfy himself as to the position and prospects of that next presentation.

Leonard Wolstonholme didn't wish the old man any harm. As he said to himself plaintively, he was the victim of a system. Had it been possible to rise in the Church by pure merit alone, why, of course, he would have risen. His life was blameless: his sermons were acknowledged to be of superior quality. But in our Erastian establishment, alas, things are managed quite otherwise. He had been compelled, like others, by *force*

majeure to submit to what he felt in his heart to be a simoniacal system. He consoled himself with the thought that it was not *he* who had invested in the next presentation. That was his father-in-law's affair, a well-to-do shipper at Hull: his own hands were clean; he himself was guiltless. Mr. Shepston had chosen to provide for dear Louisa, not by settlement on the spot, as would have been more convenient, but by the purchase of a contingent rectory for her husband. Of course, it was his business how he preferred to invest his own money, and to provide for his own daughter; goodness knows, you can't hold a man responsible in this world for the acts of his father-in-law!

Still, Leonard Wolstonholme trod the asphalte of the Spa that sunny August afternoon, about three o'clock, in a very moody temper. He wished no harm to the poor old Canon, of course; and yet—like Charles II., the old man certainly took a most unconscionable long time dying. And what was worse still, unlike Charles II., he didn't apologise for it. It was fourteen years now since Leonard Wolstonholme, late of Oriel College, had

married Louisa Shepston, spinster, of the parish of Kingston-upon-Hull, in Yorkshire. And fourteen years ago they had read with interest that attractive advertisement in the first page of the *Guardian*,

NEXT PRESENTATION.—Delightful country Rectory. Close to Scarborough. Small population; light duties; no dissenters. Income, £860 a year; capital house, in good repair, with grounds and lawn-tennis. Present incumbent nearly seventy. Further particulars on application to SIMONS & SIMONS, Ecclesiastical Agents, Norfolk Mansions, Norfolk Street.

Fourteen years ago the incumbent of that rectory was nearly seventy, and confidentially described in the "further particulars" as "distinctly feeble." Yet for fourteen years he had stubbornly resisted all the attempts of nature and the faculty to put a merciful end to him, and was still drawing his £860 a year with the greatest regularity—the £860 a year that the Shepston-Wolstonholme family had bought and paid for in the open market. Such longevity under such circumstances was little short of dishonest. When you've discounted a man's death at a reasonable rate, you've a right to expect he will die in time to

prevent the vendor from incurring the sin of usury.

Very unchristian ideas, no doubt, the Reverend Leonard mused to himself with a pensive sigh. But then, what would you have? He was the victim of a system.

Besides, when you came to think of it, the provocation was unusual. He had married when fresh from Oxford and flushed with hope; married with every reasonable probability of keeping dear Louisa as she was accustomed to be kept, and of bringing up his children like ladies and gentlemen. But as things had turned out, the incomprehensible toughness of that unblushing old Canon had painfully upset all his best calculations. Humanly speaking, he felt he had made it a moral certainty that in four or five years he would be in possession of an income sufficient to maintain them all in the utmost comfort, and even to take a position in the county. Only the old Canon's obstinate clinging to life had discomposed everything. The fact was, Simons and Simons had no right ever to have described him as "distinctly feeble." It was obtaining money under false

pretences. He was sixty-eight at the time, and as hard as a fighting-cock. He was eighty-two now, and still capable of taking a leading part (to the dismay of the bishops) in every Church Congress. Meanwhile Leonard Wolstonholme's quiver was far too full. His family had increased in regular parsonical progression, at the rate of one in every two years, till there were now just seven of them, with power, as he feared, to add to their number. Leonard Wolstonholme was poor, decidedly poor, with that hardest of all forms of poverty to bear—the respectable poverty which had to disguise and conceal itself, to put the best face on its sordid shifts, and to mix on equal terms with comparative opulence.

The unhappy man's patience was well-nigh wearied out. Dear little Agatha, that crowing ten-month-old baby he loved so well, was the last straw that nearly broke the camel's back of Leonard Wolstonholme's endurance. For he was still nothing more than a curate at Winchester. Zealous, a mighty preacher, a capital parish organiser, and not without some lingering relics of belief in the doctrines he

was paid to profess and promulgate, he yet remained all those years a curate none the less, on a wretched stipend of two hundred and fifty. He had ninety pounds a year of his own besides, of this world's goods: and that was all. Now, if you've ever tried to bring up a family of nine persons, all told, upon a miserable pittance of three hundred and forty, you won't be surprised to learn that Leonard Wolstonholme considered himself the victim of a system. He hated worst in his heart the shabby meanness of it all. To send a man betimes to a great English university, and then to ask him to dress his children in the cast-off clothes forwarded him in charity by brothers and sisters better off than himself, is positive cruelty. And to that positive cruelty, with many other nameless indignities too small to mention, Leonard Wolstonholme had to submit, in patience possessing his soul, all because one hateful, selfish old bachelor canon wouldn't die at the time the vendor of the advowson had been paid to kill him at. No wonder Leonard Wolstonholme was justifiably angry.

As he sauntered along the Spa, however,

revolving these things to himself in his clerical soul, and marvelling with the patriarch Job why the world had not been otherwise constituted, temporally and spiritually—who should he stumble across of a sudden but the Canon himself, the author and begetter of all his troubles! The poor curate gave a start of surprise and discomfiture. He felt himself caught: and all to no purpose. It was three years since he had last seen the actual incumbent of the living of Moorby, and, strange to say, that bad old man was looking better and younger and more vigorous than ever. Leonard Wolstonholme lifted his hat involuntarily; he had always an instinctive respect for age and superior dignity.

“What, you here, Canon,” he cried; “who would have expected to meet you on the Spa this afternoon! And how are you feeling?”

Canon Dawkins smiled grimly. He was a solitary survivor of a past social age of Anglican clergymen.

“Oh, quite well,” he answered, screwing up his big face into a comic attitude of aggression. “Never was better in my life. A deal too well for *you*, my dear Wolstonholme. I mean to

keep you out of it another ten years at least, if I can manage it."

He wagged his old head. The curate smiled an awkward smile in reply. He felt the Canon's view was a great deal too near the truth to be either polite or agreeable. But he tried to laugh it off.

"I certainly never saw you looking better before," he said, turning the conversation rapidly. "And, indeed, you ought to be, for what lovely weather! I was over at Whitby, preaching a mission sermon yesterday for an old college friend of mine, the Vicar of St. Hilda's: and it was so delicious this morning, I couldn't help running over for a few spare hours, just to sun myself on the Spa and have a look at the people. My wife and children, you know, are with my father-in-law, as usual, at Withernsea."

But the Canon was in no humour to let him change the subject so readily. He was a sardonic old man, with a sledge-hammer view of life, and he rather loved to dwell upon these picturesquely barbaric and incongruous aspects of the clerical profession in this realm of England.

"No, *I don't* know they're there," he answered with some asperity; "or at any rate, I didn't until you told me so. Why should I, I'd like to know? You see, I haven't so much reason to look closely after *your* health and movements as you have after *mine*. Eh, Mr. Wolstonholme?"

The curate drew back half angrily. This was almost insulting. It was most indelicate, he thought, and contrary to all the established etiquette of the ecclesiastical place-market for a man in the Canon's position to speak in such a way to his prospective successor.

"You must remember," he said stiffly, "it is my father-in-law, not myself, who holds the next presentation to Moorby-juxta-Scarborough, and I have no reason to know how he means to bestow it." Though that was a mere diplomatic prevarication.

"Well, he's got no *other* son-in-law in the Church," the Canon answered sharply.

Then he chuckled to himself with a triumphant chuckle, like one who has unmistakably silenced an antagonist.

Leonard Wolstonholme assumed his most ecclesiastical manner.

"I should hope," he put in gravely, pulling his clerical collar straight as he spoke to enforce his argument, "our Church is still governed with more sincerity of purpose than you would seem to imply. I should hope that fitness and suitability for the cure have a little more to do with the appointment to livings, in the gift of our patrons, than mere selfish nepotism or other worldly considerations."

The old man looked at him keenly for a moment, as if to satisfy himself whether he could detect on those impassive features any trace of what one might call a mental wink; then he answered with much spirit, in the key of a bygone age, the one emphatic monosyllable:

"Bosh!"

It disconcerted Leonard Whiteholme. He walked on for a step or two by the Canon's side, feeling extremely uncomfortable. He was aware it *was* bosh, of course: but then, what are we all to do if people insist upon stripping off these decent disguises of convention from our inmost thoughts in all their hideous nakedness? The police won't allow

one to parade the public streets without the ordinary modicum of respectable clothing. Why be more lax in your treatment of our thoughts and ideas which often stand in far greater need of a decorous covering?

For Leonard Wolstonholme shared the common Britanic belief that if we were once to speak the truth it would be all up with Society.

"When I was a young man," the Canon began after a long pause, with senile garrulity, "there was a Bishop of Lichfield who had a great desire to get one of the fat dioceses they had in those days, like Durham or Winchester. Well, one day it happened the Bishop of Durham was reported ill in the *Morning Post*; and that very afternoon the Bishop of Lichfield drove round to his colleague's house in town, and sent up to ask after him. The old fellow was peppery and a very shrewd old gentleman; so he said to his servant: 'Tell him I'm better this morning, very rapidly mending: but I hear the Bishop of Winchester has a very nasty cough *if that'll do.*' Ha, ha, ha!" And he laughed sarcastically.

"I hope such a jest would no longer be

possible *from a bishop,*" Leonard Wolstonholme answered, looking and feeling genuinely shocked; for he had that more serious sense of the reality of his profession which has grown common nowadays among the younger clergy.

"Oh, he wouldn't *say* it now, of course!" the Canon answered, smiling; "but he'd *think* it all the same; we can't any of us help thinking. And that reminds me of another good story I heard the other day about an old Jew money-lender who bought up the life-policy of a confirmed drunkard, fancying he'd only have to wait a year or two to come into his money. Well, much to his surprise, the fellow went on living year after year in the most provoking way — *you* know how annoying it is when you're waiting for a reversion. At last the Jew almost lost patience, and complained about the matter to one of his fellow usurers. 'Oh, yes,' says the other; 'don't you know how it is? Why, I wonder you haven't heard; he's gone and turned teetotaler.' 'You don't mean to say so!' says the Jew, looking glum. 'Well I always did think him a most unprincipled fellow!'"

Leonard Wolstonholme felt this was really getting beyond the limits of polite endurance.

He was just going to make some excuse for withdrawing, when the Canon stopped suddenly with a brisk air of triumph before a crawling bath-chair on the broad Spa walk and presented him, almost against his will to the person who sat in it.

"My brother, General Dawkins!" he said, with an unmistakable twinkle about the crow's-feet of his sharp old eyes. "Tom, this is young Wolstonholme—you know who he is,—the fellow who's been waiting fourteen years to succeed me at Moorby!"

The General gave a funny little dried-up laugh. He was a tight-skinned mummy.

"You'll have a long time to wait then, Mr. Wolstonholme," he said, in a chuckling voice like the Canon's own, only a decade or so feebler, and thinner and more annoying. "You'll have a long time to wait if you're waiting for Charlie. Charlie's a boy still; a mere boy; a whippersnapper. Why bless my soul, he's only just turned eighty. You were eighty-two on the 4th of March, I think, Charlie. A hobbledehoy: a youngster! Then there's Guy, he's eighty-four; and Arthur eighty-six; and Dick ninety-one; and Maria

ninety-five; and myself ninety-seven; and we're all of us alive, and mean, while we can, to cheat the devil! Ha, ha, ha; it's a doosid bad family to buy a reversion in. We mean, while we can, to cheat the devil!"

They talked of it with a smile. They thought it a good joke they should go on living so long. But to poor Leonard Wolstonholme, it was no laughing matter. He stood positively aghast at the idea of the Canon's hanging on to the rectory for fifteen years more, till he was as old as the General. It was absurd, it was immoral for people to be born into this world of sin and sorrow with such incredible constitutions. Why, in fifteen years Cyril would be twenty-eight, and Monica twenty-two, and even little Keble ought to be ready for the university. The university, indeed! More like the workhouse infirmary! And they talked of it all with a smile, these selfish old men, who had made to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, who played whist every night in their comfortable club, and had never known what it is to raise and keep a family of nine, all told, on three hundred and forty!

He took a turn or two with them up and

down the Spa, hardly hearing a word of the Canon's caustic stories, or the interesting but voluminous military experiences they suggested in turn to the mind of the General. The drone of their sharp voices never reached his brain, though it pierced unpleasantly through and through his ear. People came and went, flitting by him as in a dream. He was immersed in thought, marvelling to himself once more upon this mystery of providence, how it was that the just man, with seven children to feed, should be kept so long out of his own, while the selfish and the childless, with no one to help or support, should flourish like a green bay-tree long past the age at which, according to the psalmist, their strength ought to be to them labour and sorrow. It was a great mystery. Leonard Wolstonholme could not fathom it.

As he walked up and down and talked as in a trance, he gradually became aware that he was getting impersonally interested in the conversation. It ceased to be to him mere meaningless chatter. He listened after a while to what the Canon was saying; for the Canon had got off on to his own pet subject of old age

pensions. The Canon, though a cynic, was a social reformer, with views of his own on political economy; it was he who had once startled a whole Church Congress by bursting upon an archbishop with "Oh, bother the liturgy! Have you anything to say about the housing of the poor in the slums of London?" And Leonard Wolstonholme, though poor enough himself to be fully occupied with the domestic economy of Louisa and the seven olive-branches, was yet modern parson enough to take an ardent interest meanwhile in his parishioners' welfare, and to have views of a mild type about pauperism, thrift, Malthus, and social democracy.

By degrees he found the Canon was beginning to awaken him. He walked and talked, walked and talked, walked and talked, or sat down on the benches for an hour or two. The Canon, though unsympathetic and hard-headed, took a human view of the nature of poverty; and Leonard listened to him long with a certain respect and no small amount of agreement. At last the Curate pulled out his watch. He gave a start of surprise, not unmingled with disgust.

"Why, I've missed my train back!" he cried, in no small chagrin. "I can't get home to Withernsea now to-night." Then he hesitated for a moment. "I shall have to go to an hotel," he said, bitterly regretting the necessity for that unwonted extravagance. "This is awkward, very; and my wife will be expecting me."

"Better come to the Crown," the Canon interposed, carelessly. "My brother and I are there. It's a very decent place. They'll make you quite comfortable."

Now the Crown is the leading and most fashionable hotel in all Scarborough. From a worldly point of view, it was everything a heart could desire. Yet Leonard Wolstonholme hesitated.

"It would be too expensive for me, I'm sure," he answered after a short pause, looking hard at the Canon. "I must try some smaller and cheaper place, up nearer the railway."

It occurred to him as he spoke that Christian charity might have moved the Canon to put him up at the Crown for the night. It would have been a graceful act of courtesy to

the man whom he was keeping so long out of his prospective living; but then he knew the well-to-do never think of these little alleviations. So, after waiting for a moment to give the Canon a last chance of performing a deed which would have laid up for him treasure in heaven, he added with an afterthought,

"It's a heavy expense for a poor man like me to find himself unexpectedly driven into a hotel for a night. I had never contemplated it when I came over this morning."

The Canon smiled blandly.

"Forgot yourself in talk," he answered, with the calmness of the man who loses nothing. ("Why, confound him," Leonard thought; "it was *he* who did all the talking, and politeness alone that made me forget to look at my watch earlier!") "Well, well, I won't detain you. But I say, Wolstonholme, you'll be in Scarborough, then, tomorrow morning. Look in at the Crown about one and have lunch with me, won't you?"

The Curate accepted the invitation without much *empressement*. Why he did so he hardly knew. It seemed to him afterwards as though

all things had worked together for good—had conspired to lead him where they ultimately led him. He went off, much depressed, and took out his little hand-bag from the cloak-room at the station. Things were looking very black. It really seemed as if that wicked old Canon were going to go on living for ever. Louisa and the children might pine and dine on cold mutton still for an indefinite period. Why did the Psalmist so grossly mislead us as to the average duration of human life? and why are some people born into the world with such disgustingly healthy constitutions as the Dawkins family?

That evening at the Yorkshire Arms was a gloomy one for the poor overburdened parson. The lions in his path seemed to rise up afresh before his mind's eye more rampant than ever. There was Cyril's schooling to be thought of,—and Monica's new dress,—and the serious question of boots and shoes,—and the interminable trouble of the doctor for little Keble. Leonard Wolstonholme's *I* was full of bitterness. The penitential psalms seemed to suit his mood best. He sank in deep mire, where there was no standing; he was come

into deep waters where the floods overflowed him.

As he sat alone in the little ill-lighted parlour, after his frugal dinner, revolving all these things in his unhappy head, he chanced to take up a stray number of the British Medical Journal, which some doctor visitor had left behind him as his legacy to the scanty literature of the establishment. Now the British Medical Journal, though a worthy periodical, does not afford a choice of exciting reading to any but professional minds. Leonard Wolstoneholme was tired, however, and his eyes merely followed the words mechanically, without much consideration of what they were driving at. The beautiful cases of rheumatoid arthritis fell flat on his soul; the operations for calculus failed to stimulate him.

But by-and-bye, as it chanced, his attention was arrested by a curious discussion on the strange and novel physiological effects of a certain new drug, easily prepared from the leaves of a North American plant, and said to be a peculiarly dangerous instrument in the hands of a certain class of poisoners. It appeared from the article that the properties of this

new drug were only just beginning to be fully understood;—in the interests of justice I withhold its name; but its peculiarity was this: that it could not be detected by analysis afterwards, the poison being all immediately absorbed by the assimilative system, and indistinguishable in the blood or organs from many harmless vegetable alkaloids, like theine and caffeine. Furthermore, it could be prepared as a simple infusion, exactly like tea, from the leaves of the plant; and being almost flavourless, could be administered with the greatest ease, beyond hope of detection.

As to its physiological effects, the writer observed, it was comparatively powerless on the young and healthy: it operated simply by depressing the heart's action; and where this was vigorous the effects were unimportant. But in old or feeble constitutions, it had often serious results, causing the heart to fail in a way that could not be physiologically discriminated from normal senile or ordinary failure.

The writer in the *British Medical Journal* feared the drug might be extensively used for criminal purposes in cases where it was desired

to get rid of very old or feeble persons, as well as for procuring infanticide in the first few days after the birth of the infant. Detection in such conditions, the eminent authority said, was impossible in the present state of science.

Leonard Wolstonholme laid down the paper with a faint smile of amusement at the thoughts it aroused in him. What a lot of good a cup of that tea, judiciously administered, would do the present incumbent of Moorby-juxta-Scarborough!

That was all he thought for the moment. Nothing more than that. The idea occurred to him as a mere notion *in nubibus*—a pure flight of fancy, having no reference of any sort to his practical hopes and fears and wishes. He thought of it only as the Bishop of Durham had thought of the Bishop of Winchester's cough, as a joke in season. A bitter joke, yet a joke in season. Nothing could be further from his mind than any desire to plot the death of the poor old Canon, who was only, after all, a disagreeable man with a selfish nature, but otherwise harmless. "Live and let live" is the motto of our creed. Though to be sure

the Canon, by living himself, did his best to prevent the letting live of Louisa and the children.

In this mood Leonard Wolstonholme went off to bed—a hard inn bed, with a stuffed straw pillow. He lay awake long—and thought of that amiable American drug so well calculated to redress some of the most crying inequalities of the universe. American, alas! Oh, too happy America, where every man could pick within a mile of his own house this useful expediter of ecclesiastical promotion! Why languish as a curate all the days of one's life when Nature herself thus pours forth from her bosom the necessary means for attaining a benefice?

At last, he dropped off, and fell by degrees into troubled sleep, where the Canon and the General seemed to jeer at him in concert and announced their intention of jointly and severally living on to the age of a hundred and ten on purpose to spite him.

Next morning he rose, unrefreshed, and strolled out after breakfast to the gardens on the South Cliff. They are prettily laid out and rich in exotic flowers. Many of the

stranger kinds have their (or what the gardeners believe to be such) painted on little hanging metal labels for the information of the botanically-minded tourist. Leonard Wolstonholme had once learnt a little botany, in the days before the parish and domestic difficulties absorbed all his energies; he had still some taste left for the dismal science; so he examined the labels with care and interest. There was one little plant, inconspicuous enough in a large back bed, with a very long name that seemed strangely familiar to him. He paused and reflected. Then it came back to him with a flash. Why, this was the very American plant he had read about last night in the *British Medical Journal*!

He clapped his hand up to his forehead vaguely. He smoothed it as in a dream. How strange! How remarkable! Providence itself seemed to be throwing the Means to an End in his way! A handful of *this* would make him rector of Moorby by the middle of next week! And for Louisa's sake and the children's—was it not surely his duty?

Without much thinking what he did, he stooped down and picked it. He picked some

ten or twelve large sprigs—more than enough, he felt sure, to brew the quantity of the infusion recommended for the removal of superfluous lives by the British Medical Journal. As he did so, he glanced about him curiously to right and left; he had an unwonted sense of guilt, a desire to reassure himself that nobody had seen him. Then he popped the sprigs into his pocket with a hasty air, and turned to walk on in the direction of Filey. As yet, he had no very definite idea in his mind what he meant to do with them. He only knew the plant might somehow happen to come in useful.

He walked to the end of the garden, and then turned back. As he reached the American plant again, a gardener was engaged in the very act of grubbing it all up. Leonard stopped and watched him.

“What are you doing that for, my man?” he asked at last with clerical inquisitiveness. A parson holds himself privileged to ask any man anything.

And the gardener, looking up, made answer at once,

“Whoy, that be nowt but doctor's orders,

sir. Seems they've joost found oot yon plant's a pison: and doctor he has charge o' the place, and wants it all stubbed oop for fear the barns might eat it."

Leonard Wolstonholme gave a little start. He wasn't superstitious, but still, two things impressed him about this coincidence. One was, that here, as it were, confirmatory evidence as to his having got hold of the right plant for his purpose was showered upon him gratis: the other was, that he had been permitted to pluck as much as he required of this peculiar poison at the very nick of time, when they were just going to destroy it. Accustomed as he was to envisage everything to himself in the stock dialect of his profession, he couldn't help feeling that his recognition of the herb at the exact moment of his life when alone he could have plucked it, was "quite providential."

He returned to the little inn with his prize in his pocket. Even now he had no definite idea in his mind of actually using it. Still, when chance or providence throws accidentally in one's way the precise means to the end one has most in view, it would be folly or worse to let it slip by without at least taking steps to

utilise it if necessary. There can be no harm at all in carrying home to one's room a new botanical specimen for further observation. And, indeed, perhaps in part to ease his conscience, Leonard Wolstonholme took out one little sprig from his pocket, as soon as he found himself alone in his own apartment, and began to examine it closely with his pocket-lens. So much still remained to him from his scientific period. One minute's inspection sufficed to identify the specimen. He recognised it at once as one of the *Solanaceae*. A most interesting weed with rather curious oil-glands!

After that, he walked over to his little black bag—and took out the etna. He never travelled anywhere without an etna; for though he had long since been compelled to give up tobacco for economic reasons, he still retained one redeeming vice,—the vespertinal glass of whisky toddy. They don't always offer you toddy at the country rectories where you go to preach, especially since the Church of England Temperance Society movement: and in any case Leonard Wolstonholme liked to feel sure of getting it hot enough, and strong enough, and also enough of it. So he never went any-

where without the flask and the etna. Dear Louisa had put them both in when she packed his bag, with her usual thoughtfulness. He took out the spirit-lamp and lighted it solemnly. Then he boiled a little water, merely to try the experiment of making the infusion.

The water boiled quickly. That was lucky, he thought, and, in its way, an omen; for sometimes it took a tediously long time. Leonard pulled off the leaves and put them gingerly into the tooth-tumbler. To make things doubly sure, too, he bruised them a little with the handle of his toothbrush. Then he poured on the boiling water. He poured on very little, however, because he thought to himself (being a prudent man) it would be better in case of eventualities to have the infusion as strong as possible, and in as small a compass. When all was finished, and the leaves drained dry, he tasted a mouthful with scientific curiosity. 'Twas an insipid mixture, reminding him strongly of very weak tea, such as Louisa gave him after the guests were all helped on her weekly At Home day. Absurd to think such innocent stuff as that could do anybody any harm! A mere old wife's *tisane*!

He shook his head to himself. Why, even if he gave the Canon a good big dose of it, he didn't believe that tasteless trash could possibly expedite matters.

Nevertheless, still in the same vague and undecided way, he took out the little bottle of eucalyptus tabloids, which he carried in his pocket as a preventive of clergyman's sore-throat, and emptying it of the lozenges, filled it to the neck with the pale green liquid he had strained from the infusion. Then he put it back in his waistcoat pocket once more, and started out to lunch at the Crown with the Canon.

From first to last, however, he had no very deliberate plan in his mind in any way. All through, he merely thought he would be governed by circumstances. If an occasion should happen to arise—and if the Canon was particularly provoking—why, then and in that case, perhaps . . . and if not, then otherwise. It is a common error to believe there exists such a thing as a class of murderers. Nothing could be more untrue. A murderer is anybody. A murderer is you and me, acting under the influence of exceptionally strong

motives, or giving way at the moment to the suggestion of exceptionally favourable circumstances. There are, of course, people who more readily commit murder, and people who less readily commit it. You and I probably belong to the latter class; Leonard Wolstonholme certainly did. When he left the hotel that day to go and lunch at the Crown, he had very little idea indeed in his mind of breaking even the least among the commandments.

At lunch, the Canon was in one of his perverse moods. He talked at Leonard in a way that was positively unendurable. And the General laughed the thin ghost of a laugh at his brother's sallies. Leonard wondered he had ever consented to come. It was *infra dig.*, it was degrading to him. Why, the Canon talked as if he thought Leonard would have liked to get rid of him for the sake of the filthy lucre; which was nothing short of rude in him. A boor like that deserves no quarter. Leonard fingered the tiny flat bottle in his waistcoat as he spoke. Except that he felt how inhospitable and ungentlemanly a thing it is to kill a fellow at his own table when you're

actually lunching with him, Leonard could almost have emptied it into the Canon's wine-glass. Very good wine, too: the Crown's best Château Léoville.

After lunch, the Canon rose, and proposed a smoke in his private room. Leonard didn't smoke, nowadays, but would thankfully accept a cup of coffee. The General acquiesced; he praised the local beer as better than his club's, the Senior United Service. They adjourned to the private room, and the coffee followed them. The Canon helped himself to a cup; so did the General; so did Leonard. Then their host went into his bedroom for a moment to fetch the cigars. The General was sniggering behind a copy of Pick-me-Up. It was an opportunity that might never again occur. For Louisa's sake, for the children's, Leonard felt, 'twas his duty to seize it. There was no time to deliberate: the hour had come for action. Quick as lightning, he leant forward and emptied the contents of the little flat phial into the Canon's cup. After all, 'twas the merest physiological experiment; the Canon's heart might be sound as a trivet: he knew nothing about it. In another moment, the

Canon had returned to the sitting-room. It was too late to draw back now. Poison or no poison, he must let the man drink it.

The Canon lighted his cigar and lifted the cup to his mouth.

"This coffee's precious cold," he said, with a grumbling air. "They've no right to bring it up like that, I say, Tom. It's next door to undrinkable."

"Mine's all right," the General answered, sipping it, and laying down his comic print. "You've let yours get cold. But it's doosid good coffee."

"Let me pour you out another cup," Leonard interposed, trembling and anxious, now it was done, to undo it, if possible.

But the Canon shook his head.

"No, no, I'll drink it," he said, with the air of a martyr, "and then I'll have another lot. But it's precious poor stuff, in spite of what Tom says of it. Tom doesn't know good coffee now from bad, that's the truth of the matter. He's growing old, I'm afraid; he's not so young by half as he was ninety years ago!"

He drank it down every drop, and then

poured himself out a second cup. Leonard waited till it was done, and then could stand it no longer. He rose to go. He must catch his train, he said. It was due in twenty minutes. The Canon didn't try to detain him. He went off to the Yorkshire Arms, packed his bag in a hurry, and took the train south for Hull and Withernsea.

As he went along the line, the thing that surprised him the most of all was the fact that he didn't feel one bit like a murderer. For he himself too had fallen into this vulgar error of supposing that murderers are something different from other people; and as he felt just the same as usual himself to-day, only a little bit flurried, he almost concluded the stuff couldn't have been the real drug after all, or that it wasn't going to take any serious effect upon the Canon's tough old Dawkins constitution. He returned to Louisa, however, in a disintegrated condition, little capable of listening with that interest he could have wished to the singular details of Liddon's symptoms (which pointed to measles), or of attaching proper importance to the awful fact that Monica had torn her best dress on a hedge

and left herself in a state of textile destitution which rendered it almost impossible for her to worship on Sunday with the rest of the congregation.

All that night long, he lay awake and wondered. He was very miserable. It is a serious thing for a country clergyman to take upon himself the responsibility of hurrying a fellow-creature before the throne of judgment. He shrank from it horribly. He couldn't even tell Louisa what it was that was bothering him. He could only explain his evident agitation by saying he had seen Canon Dawkins at Scarborough, and that the Canon had appeared to him extremely feeble. To which Louisa had simply replied, "Well that's a good thing, anyhow"; for, like most clergymen's wives, Louisa in the privacy of domestic life was never anything but frankly heathen.

So he lay awake all night, tossing and turning wretchedly. His happiness, here and hereafter, was at stake. Two terrible fears oppressed his soul; and he could hardly tell himself which was the worst of them. The first was, that the Canon would die from the effects of the infusion; the second was, that

he wouldn't. If the first came true, then he would know himself a murderer; if the second, then what on earth was to become of Louisa and the children? On the whole, Leonard Wolstonholme was inclined, of the two, to pray rather for the first; for otherwise, he would have burdened his conscience with an appalling crime, and all for nothing!

The worst of it was, he wouldn't know the truth even to-morrow. For supposing the Canon died on the Monday evening, his death wouldn't get into Tuesday's papers, and he'd have to wait therefore for Wednesday's Yorkshire Post before he could be sure whether he was or was not Rector of Moorby, whether he was or was not a wilful murderer. All night long, he lay silent in agonies of remorse, of terror, of repentance. The Canon might die; and then, oh heaven, he would know it was he who had done it! Or the Canon might live; and then, oh God, all his agony would go for nothing! Surely, surely if one undertakes to do a thing like that one should be allowed at least to succeed in it easily. It seems too hard to make a man sin so deep, and then get nothing for it after all for his wife and family!

And many times over he kept saying to himself it was no fault of his; he was the victim of a system. He wished the poor old man no harm; he bore him no grudge; he didn't feel towards him personally: it was all the system. If only he could have got that £860 a year in any other way, the Canon might have gone on living in peace, so far as he was concerned, to a hundred and eighty.

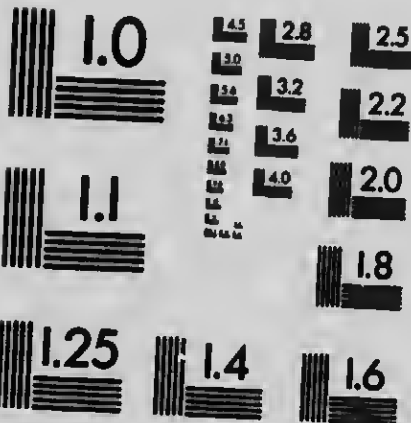
All next day he was miserable. He would have given worlds to telegraph to Scarborough and ask, "How is Canon Dawkins?"—but to do that would of course be to excite suspicion. So he had to go down on the sands as usual with Monica and Keble, and dig castles, and erect earthworks, as if nothing were the matter. Oh, how often he declared to himself in the course of that day that if once he could get clear out of this hobble, never again as long as he lived would he try or even imagine the murder of anyone!

The next night was even worse. With each hour that went on, his excitement grew more painful. He couldn't hide it from Louisa, and was forced to set it down to a violent headache. The Canon, he felt sure, had suffered far less



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than he. It was a painless death, he hoped; and such a poor old fossil! Life had long lost for him the savour of salt. He lay awake for hours. In the morning, he dropped off, and dozed till nearly nine. Then he was suddenly awaked by a sharp cry from Louisa in the sitting-room of the lodgings.

"What's the matter?" he enquired, starting up in his bed, with a thrill of terror and hushed expectation.

Louisa read aloud in a voice of unconcealed joy: "We regret to announce the sudden and very unexpected death of the Reverend Canon Dawkins, rector of Moorby. The deceased gentleman, who was well-known in Yorkshire, had been in excellent health for several weeks past, and was stopping in Scarborough at the Crown Hotel, with his brother General Dawkins, the Crimean veteran. On Monday evening, however, the Canon retired to rest in his usual health, after a game of cribbage, and was found dead in his bed by his servant at an early hour on Tuesday morning. We understand the cause of death is certified to be failure of the heart's action. There will be no inquest."

Leonard Wolstonholme let his head fall back on his pillow and burst into a flood of irrepressible tears.

"Thank God!" he cried, "Louisa. I'm so glad it's all over!"

His wife rushed into the bedroom, flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him wildly.

"Oh, Leonard," she cried, "so'm I! Now we shall get the rectory!"

But Leonard was thinking rather of the profound relief from that suspense and agony he had been suffering since Monday.

And as he lay there that moment he vowed to himself once more with a throbbing heart that not for all the world would he mix himself up again with another murder.

The Reverend Leonard Wolstonholme, that eloquent and successful missionary, has lately been offered a canonry of Ripon, which he has gladly accepted. He is one of the most fervent preachers in the northern Province, and he is considered first favourite for a vacant bishopric at an early date when his own political party gets once more into power.



Fra Benedetto's Medal.

THE picture progresses, signore; the picture progresses. What delicacy! what insight! what sense of architectural line and harmony! It does not disturb your worshipful serenity that an old monk hobbles round to look at it now and again, and to estimate your labours? No? *sta bene*, then: we have but little to distract us here on our specular hilltop—we, the handful who linger on out of due season, mumbling our *aves* and swinging our censers, mere pensioners on the charity of King Umberto's government. Strangers? Oh, yes, we see strangers and to spare—but strangers, such strangers—them of the red look, *orestieri*, tourists, respected clients of the esteemed house of Cook, whom we personally conduct round the church, the tower, the monastery, the cloisters—so much of them, that is to say,

a; has not been turned into profane barracks. Am I sick of piloting them round and pointing out to them in the same words our Perugino, our Buonfigli, the carving of choir-stalls—am I sick of it, I ask you? "Observe how beautiful an effect of light on the Saint's left shoulder." I lead them round like a flock of sheep every day; and they—well, they stand and stare in the same open-mouthed vacancy, and gaze a bit with heads critically on one side, and pass on, with "How interesting! By Perugino! 'Really!'" But the signore's excellency is an artist. He understands these things. When we see a man who understands, then indeed we know that it is quite different.

A trifle more blue in the shadow there? What think you, serenity? And the dust on the crockets of that tomb in the recess, where the ray of light from the belfry window slants down, oblique, and gilds it into gold-dust—scarce luminous enough, is it? A bit of a critic? No, no, most worshipful; a poor, shambling old monk, rheumatic, toothless, who knows only his beads and his "Path to Paradise": yet . . . who should be critics

If not we at San Pietro? Why, our church, is it not called the jewel of Perugia? Look at our campanile, that tall and slender spire, a flame blown upward, known in all the country round as the Plume of Umbria! Can we live every day with these aspiring things and not love beauty? Can we look out on our broad view and not note the play of sun and shadow? And when we see you painting these arches and these tombs that we know so well, that we have watched from our stalls in every flickering light, and followed in every line as the blue cloud of incense steals over them, shall we not tell you when we think you have espied the very soul of Mino's garlands of flowers, or missed the meaning of Fra Damiano's many-glancing intarsia work? Aye, by Sant' Ercolano we will: and to swear by Sant' Ercolano, who holds our town in the hollow of his hand, is still in these unbelieving modern days the greatest and most binding of all oaths for a Perugian.

You notice my medal, signore. Yes, many people notice it. It is strange, indeed, to see a Benedictine brother wear a token that is not a religious emblem. But this, mark well, is of

the good King Victor Emmanuel—the medal for the helpers in the liberation of Italy. It surprises you that a monk of San Pietro should bear that decoration. Well, it surprises ourselves; some it scandalises, but still, in spite of the weaker brethren, I bear it. I keep it (heaven forgive me!) for pride, pure carnal, earthly pride—pride of the part I bore in freeing Perugia. But no less in saving three gallant gentlemen's lives, which is a work of charity. Ah! those were the brave days, those. If you can bear with a chattering old brother's garrulity, I will tell you the story. Nay, nay, don't pause. You can go on with your painting, and listen or not as you choose; I will drag a reed chair over here into the cool of the aisle and sit down and meander on, after an old man's fashion.

Serenity stops, I think, at the Albergo Brufani. A luxurious house, the Albergo Brufani; but at the time I speak of there stood no great hotel there, no brand-new Prefettura, but a huge frowning fortress; Pope Paul the Third's fortress, strong, invincible; built, as the inscription on its front declared, to crush the proud souls of the

free Perugians—"Ad coercendam Perusinorum audaciam." It was a colossal fortress, that, as black as night, it stretched from the top of the hill, where Brufani's now stands, right down the long slope, and over the whole Piazza d'Armi, where you see to-day the soldiers and the white oxen. We pulled it down in 1860, these hands themselves helping; if we did wrong, I pray God and our Blessed Lady and all holy saints for forgiveness of my trespass. But we did *not* do wrong, signore, if a poor monk may set up his particular judgment in earthly matters—which differ from questions of faith and morals—against the Holy Father's. These be nice points of casuistry for a doctor to decide, and I am no St. Thomas; but we, who were Benedictine brothers in Perugia in those days, had need to decide them for ourselves; wherefore we acted for the best and made our minds up boldly. Still, you shall hear how the Holy Father himself, against whom we acted, gave judgment on our side. He allowed we had done right. That was the blessed Pio Nono, of course, of ever-revered memory, whom no good Catholic can mention without love and respect—not even we who

we were driven by his hirelings to rebel against him. For we distinguish between the temporal and the spiritual acts of the Sovereign Pontiff—else what could we say, we moderns, of the Borgians and the Farnese?

Ebbene, 'twas in 1859 that Perugia grew sick of the Papal government. Grew sick, do I say? It had grown sick long before; but 'twas then that it determined to rise and throw it off in one burst of enthusiasm. All Italy was in a ferment. You remember these great days—Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour, the *Ré Liberatore*! The French had swarmed over to help our Sardinians against the Austrians in Lombardy, and had won the battles of Magenta and Solferino. Wild news came daily. Bologna had driven out the Cardinal Legat. Parma, Modena, Reggio, the Emilia was rising. Could Perugia hold back when the entire fatherland was struggling to be free? It surged and heaved like a sea before the storm. Then our people rose in force, and proclaimed their independence. But it was too soon, too soon. Our friends in the north were powerless to help us; Napoleon held back—he feared to touch the States of the

Church: and the Holy Father sent his vile Swiss troops to reduce us to subjection. They came, under their Colonel Schmid—Schmid, Schmid, with such execrable Tedesco vocables did the Holy Father surround himself—and they fell upon our defenceless city, so many ravenous wolves, slaying, wounding, and plundering. We fought like demons; but the Swiss fought like trained soldiers. So they beat us. As they went through the streets of the city, marching, marching, with fixed bayonets, they cried aloud that their master the Pope had given them orders that none should be spared. We knew that was not true—we, who understood the Holy Father's benevolent disposition; but it helped us little. What does it console one for being run through that those who run you through are exceeding their instructions?

Now we Benedictines of Perugia sided, of course, with the Perugian people. Why do I say "of course," signore? Well, because we were men, because we were Umbrini, because we were Italians. Do you think, in that we were priests, we had ceased to feel with our fellow-citizens, to regret the gre—

days of Perugia's freedom? *Ma ch., ma che,* signore: that is not how we of the proud mountain-tops are built. We were born to be freemen. A Pope conquered us once, by force of arms, as an Emperor might have conquered us: Pope or Emperor, we will rebel when we see a chance of reasserting our country's liberty. Priest and layman we will rebel: 'tis the instinct of the proud hearts . the Perugians. Pope Paul was wrong: he never broke our audacity; he kept it in check—that was all; our day arrived, we rose, and let it flare out again.

Oh, a day of terror when Schmid and his Swiss re-entered Perugia! We had risen too soon; we knew it, and we paid for it. But we fought hard at the gates, we monks with the others, for we were Garibaldians to a man; if his Holiness did not like it, he had nothing but his own officials to blame for it, his officials whom he sent us. Thieves, persecutors, eaves-droppers! Tonsure, or no tonsure, I found myself at the Porta San Pietro with the rest of them. Eh, it was bloody work, I can tell you—no rosewater revolution; Schmid's men charging us with their accursed bayonets, we,

standing up against them with our improvised arms, what weapons we could make, so many lambs for the slaughter. Presently I looked round and saw that the Pope's troops had cut us off; only four of us left; four, outside the gate, the soldiers pressing forward and occupying the monastery. One of the other three turned to me. He was grimed with fighting, but I saw through the blood and dust it was Signor Antonio Bellucci, a young man of good family, a brave gentleman whom I often saw at San Pietro. White as a ghost he showed beneath his grime. "Well, Fra Benedetto," he cried to me, "we may as well ask your absolution now; all is over but progress; in ten minutes more these Swiss will arrest us and shoot us."

They had closed the gates and it looked like it. All the road behind was closely guarded. But I could not see them massacred—three honest patriots.

"There is one chance," I answered. "I can let you into the monastery."

"How?"

They trembled with anxiety. I knew why. They were not cowards, but two of them were

betrotthed, and the third had married a young wife six weeks before. They were thinking of their *donne*.

"This way," I said, leading them. "There is a back door here through the thickness of the wall into the campanile of San Pietro." And I led them round by the rear and opened the door with my key, for I had charge of the postern.

We were only just in time. I hustled them into the tower, pushed them up the dark staircase, and opened a panel behind into a cupboard in the organ-loft. Will it please you to come this way and see it for yourself, signore? Take care where you step, the staircase is dark. Mind that overhanging beam. More than once have I knocked my head against it. This is the cupboard, here. It was built originally to hold the music-books for the organist. But it is dark, as you see; oh, but it is dark, and you will notice this door, how unobtrusive, how unseen, till you know where to open it. They did not intend it to be a secret door, I think; but, being so deep recessed in the arch, like all the other arches, it retires somehow. I packed them all three in there—Signor

Antonio Bellucci and the two others, one a Baglione of the great Baglioni, the other a Donato. Not much room, you will say—ha, ha, ha! No, no, the accommodation does not equal that which you enjoy at the Albergo Brufani. But when one flies for one's life, you know, *per Dio*, one is satisfied enough with a very modest bedroom.

I just bundled them in and shut the door, turning the key in the lock, and left them there, crouching. Signor Antonio did not like it.

"Here, Fra Benedetto," he cried out, "don't lock us in. Suppose they set fire to the campanile, what will become of us?"

"Ho, ho," I answered merrily, for I was flying for my life myself, and nothing makes one merrier than that—the exhilaration, the excitement! "If they burn the tower of San Pietro, the Plume of Umbria, Perugia's Pennon, why should any of us desire to live any longer? What would life be worth without it?" And, chuckling to myself, I left them there, safe, but dark and uncomfortable.

I was only just in time, as I said, for even as I stepped down again into the church, in the

gloom of the aisle, whom should I see but Schmid and his myrmidons—Schmid! what a name! You will forgive me, serenity, if I wound your refined and illustrious ears with that Teutonic barbarism—Schmid, indeed! That the Holy Father should think to surround his sacred chair with Schmids, when Oddi and Donati, Colonne and Barberini would have been proud to serve him!—whom should I see but this Schmid creature and his hirelings bursting into the nave, this very nave, this beloved San Pietro, and, regardless of our blessed patron and of St. Benedict, our founder, ravaging and sacking it as if they had been simply Goths or Vandals, Freemasons and Freethinkers. And all in the name of His Holiness! Oh, it was horrible, horrible! There, before my very eyes, among the guttering candles, those wretches rushed into the sacristy—*si, si, signore*, our revered sacristy where the Peruginos are kept: that very same shrine of art, that most holy sacristy; and with the Abbot looking on and trying to restrain them, looted and carried away our gold and silver ornaments, stole our jewelled flagon of sacred oil, tore our precious and saintly vest-

ments to threads and shreds, and destroyed our manuscripts like so many Attilas. Orders from Rome, indeed! It made one's blood boil. These men were sheer heathen. Had we not been monks, who never fight (save at need on barricades in defence of the fatherland), we might have fought then and there for our sacred vessels: and in my humble opinion, signore (mine who am no doctor), God and all saints would have absolved us for so doing. Why did not our august patron himself, the blessed apostle Peter, when Malchus, the High Priest's servant—What is that you mutter? “They that draw the sword shall perish by the sword.” *Verissimo! verissimo!* I perceive that your excellency, though heretical, has read the scripture. But we are all of us men, and to see San Pietro sacked—well, monk or sinner, I own I longed to grasp a good sword in my hand just then, and I would have taken my chance along with the blessed apostle.

Presently, as we stood trying to defend our chalices and our dalmatics, one of the Swiss looked hard at me.

“Ho, Frate,” says he, with his gross German

accent—you know their voice, signore: *brah, brah, brah*, to split one's jaw almost: "Ho, Frate," says he, laying a hand on my arm, "were not you too at the gate? Did I not see you laying about you with a club like the best of them?"

Well, what would you have, signore? Not for nothing is this monastery dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles. I denied, stoutly.

"Me!" I cried; "a poor brother! What should I know of fighting? I am more learned in plain-song: I lead the choir. If it were Gregorian chants, now——"

He stared at me hard still.

"Colonel," he said at last, turning to the Schmid creature, "this monk was outside the Porta San Pietro with those three who fought hardest. I slammed the gate on his face. He must have brought them in and hidden them."

"Is that so?" the Schmid man asked me roughly. "Have you concealed any fugitives within this monastery?"

Well, I thank the Signore and the Blessed Madonna that they gave me strength and countenance that day to lie, boldly; for a lie,

in due season, to save three precious lives, is rightly held no sin, but the contrary. Especially to save patriots from a roaring lion of the name of Schmid—of Schmid!—going about and seeking whom he might devour. And those three the friends of Perugia's freedom. So I outstared him back in the face, as innocent as a Paschal lamb, and I said,

"Me, signore colonel; I have been up in the tower all the time, looking out upon you peaceably. I know nothing of this matter. I have charge of the bells. I am a benevolent neutral."

The most reverend Abbot glanced into my eyes.

"Is that true, Fra Benedetto?" he asked. But I knew from the tone in which he asked it he meant, had I really been successful in saving three good Perugian patriots from these ravening wolves of Papal soldiers.

So I answered very humbly,

"*Si*, most reverend Father."

And the Abbot understood, and darted approval into my eyes, for he, too, was a Perugian. Then he turned to the Schmid man.

"Fra Benedetto speaks the truth," he said.
"You can trust Fra Benedetto."

The Schmid man bowed.

"If you say so, venerable Father."

"I could swear 'tis the man," the soldier broke in, dissatisfied.

And the Schmid creature began to smile.

"My children," says he, "you are all good hands at swearing." And that they were, serenity; they swore as I have never heard swearing elsewhere; rough German oaths to curdle your blood, with *ach's* and *so's* and *himmells* in them innumerable.

Well, lest I weary you, the Schmids and the Sterns and the Baumgartens and the rest of them—the base spawn of Lucerne—took possession of our monastery, and filled it for weeks with High German profanities. They blasphemed in gutturals. We had nothing to do, we poor monks, but in patience to possess our souls, and allow them to possess all else that belonged to us. They swelled about like turkey cocks. But at night the Abbot came to me, very still and confidential.

"Fra Benedetto," he asked, "is it true that

you have concealed three brave patriots in this church of ours ? ”

“Most reverend Father,” I said, “it is true—*è vero, è verissimo*—I have hidden them——”

He cut me short with a wave of his hand, thus. He was a most wise and prudent man, our good Abbot, on whose soul may God and all blessed saints have mercy.

“Don't tell me where, Benedetto,” he cried; “don't tell me where, I pray you. The less I know of their place of hiding the better. Besides, dear brother, I have not your gift. I lie with difficulty.”

“It is an art, most reverend Father,” I answered with humility, “which grows by practice. But on an emergency, even the unskilled li' myself may do well at times, by sudden inspiration.”

He smiled a thoughtful smile: 'twas a wise man, our Abbot!

“All gifts are useful,” he answered, “at their proper moment. This I have not. But what I wish to say to you is somewhat different, my son. I have a patriot of my own concealed in the confessional!”

Well, I laughed aloud.

"Most reverend Father," I cried, seizing his hand, and kissing it, "you are a true son of Perugia."

He coloured up a little.

"It is hard for a Churchman to know what he should do in these days," he answered slowly. "One loes not want to play false with the Holy See—but how can one betray a fugitive and a suppliant who comes for sanctuary? Still, we must get rid of him, we must get rid of him somehow: for the confessional is not safe, and besides, can I hear confessions if the fugitive is there? We must smuggle him out of the place, my son Benedetto."

"It is well," I answered, "Padre mio! as he is only one, we might possibly manage it. We have an extra dress in the place, I suppose: a novice's dress. Let us make a monk of him; and then I will go forth with him to buy bread for to-morrow."

All this time, you must remember, Signor Antonio and his friends were doubled up in the dark in that small close cupboard, and no help for it!

Well, without more said or done, we made a monk at once of the patriot in the confessional.

It was Signor Allesandro Siepi—the serene-looking old gentleman, somewhat stout and rotund, who keeps a bookshop in the Corso nowadays—*si, si*, the same, *signore*. And a fine monk we made of him. While the Swiss were at dinner after their bloody work—ah, you should have seen their hands, reeking with the red stains of patriots—we crawled into the confessional, on hands and knees, with shaving-tackle and soap and a bowl of hot water. He took the tonsure like a lamb, though he was already even then the father of a family. And I shaved his beard and turned him into a capital Benedictine. When we had dressed him in our robes, you might have defied a hundred Schmids or Sterns or Baumgartens to detect the prisoner. Why, his own wife disclaimed him at first when we took him home that night. He was transformed indeed. St. Benediet would have passed him for one of his own order.

However, I gave him the refuse of the monastery in the tin pails—we used to carry it out so in those days, you know, for the dust-carts to get rid of it—two pails to him and two to me, and with these in our hands we

walked past the watchful sentinels at the doorway. Then was seen our wisdom making the man a monk. The soldier challenged him. "Off with your cowls!" says he, in his insolent Swiss tone, "and let me see if you are tonsured!" We off with them at once, the man growled, and let us pass. I took my gentleman home, after depositing the pails, and then set off to return to the monastery.

As I walked down the Corso, pretending to look unconcerned, whom should I meet, all panting and trembling, but Signorina Fede Guidalotti. I knew her well; she was the young lady betrothed to Antonio Bellucci. Beautiful was the young lady. Black hair, black eyebrows, black appealing eyes, a creamy brown skin, such a sensitive mouth, such eager, anxious features. Yes, yes, very true, I am a monk, signore painter, but still I can admire a beautiful woman's face, especially when it has a soul in it. And Signorina Fede—you see that Saint Lucy in Buonfigli's picture there?—as pure a soul as that, but more intense, more human, more daring, more passionate. Up she comes to me, clasping

her hands downwards, so, her very muscles all twitching and quivering.

"Eh, Fra Benedetto," she cries, lifting up her great eyes at me, "where is he? where is he?"

There was only one *he* for her in the world, you see. She was absorbed in Signor Antonio.

"*Stu tranquilla, figlià mia,*" I answered; "he is well; I have taken good care of him."

"Where, where, Father?"

"In the tower of San Pietro, my child. But if you whisper a word of it, even to the signora your mother, all is lost. The vile Swiss will shoot him."

She clasped her hands harder than ever till the blood came almost where her nails dug in.

"But I may come to San Pietro to confess, and to be near him, may I not?"

"You may come," I said, "my daughter: in these dangerous times we all need spiritual guidance; but you must be careful, most careful."

So I returned alone, dangling my empty pails in my hand, to San Pietro.

At the doorway, once more the soldier challenged me.

"Where is the other one?" he asked.

"He buys bread," I answered glibly—you see, I was becoming quite an expert at lies; "presently he will be back again." And in I went to the refectory.

Well, later that evening I took bread and wine, as much as I could easily conceal under my robe, and stole up into the tower. There, I unlocked the cupboard, thrust in the bread and wine and whispered in a very low voice to my fugitives, "You must manage to lie still; whenever a chance occurs we will do our best to save you. They didn't like it; oh, no! Who would relish being locked up in a dark hole like that, with soldiers all about thirsting for one's blood? But it was their only chance, and worldly men will give much for life. They have more to lose in it, I suppose, than we shaven churchmen. Besides, the ladies! I am a man, signore, I am a man; I can figure to myself how much a man will dare for his lady's happiness.

Next day out came a proclamation, in big black letters, triple crown and keys above, signed below by the Cardinal Legate and the Commandant of the town, the Schmid creature,

setting a price upon the heads of the chief rebels, Antonio Bellucci, Vittorio Baglione, and Michael Felice Donato; announcing, also, that whoever aided or abetted the escape of the criminals should be shot when taken. Martial law, martial law; we knew where we stood: If we risked our lives, we understood we were risking them. Free pardon and reward to those who should betray their fellows. I was glad I had not told the most reverend Abbot where I had hidden my men. His life at least was safe, and that of the other brethren.

In deep distress, Signorina Fede came to me that morning.

"Oh, Fra Benedetto," she cried, "you will not betray them!"

"Betray them, my daughter!" I answered. "Am I not an Italian? Am I not an Umbrian? Am I not a Perugian? Since when did Perugians for thirty pieces of silver betray their brethren who have taken sanctuary within their walls? The men with the jaw-breaking names may shoot me if they will; but never shall a Benedictine give up a fugitive!"

The Dominicans and the Franciscans,

signore, the Dominicans and Franciscans were all for currying favour with the Cardinal Legate ; but we Benedictines, we have a history and a character to keep up : we have not forgotten the glorious events of the Monte Cassino.

For three days those poor gentlemen lay close turned up in their narrow dark cupboard ; and day after day, in fear and trembling, I mounted the staircase and took bread and wine to them. On the second day, the Colonel Schmid ordered a search to be made for suspected persons. I accompanied the searchers. Oh, but my heart went throb, throb, throb for that poor signorina—for, heaven forgive me, 'twas the girl I thought about, not the three brave gentlemen—as the Pope's men mounted the steps to the organ-loft. They peered here, they peered there, they tried this wall, and they tried that : tap, tap, tap : but thanks to the good architect who planned our tower, the Plume of Umbria, they never discovered the cupboard door, although, as I went by it, I could hear the men's breath stop still, then come hard and fast within it. But those Teutonic ears, heaven be praised, heard

nothing. What can you expect from men with names like Schmid and Stern and Baumgarten?

On the morning of the fourth day Signorina Fede burst in upon me once more.

"Oh, dear Fra Benedetto," she said, looking almost as if she would fling her arms around me, "unless he escapes to-day I shall die of fear and anxiety. I cannot sleep at night for thinking of Antonio shut up in that narrow place among those cruel soldiers. We *must* let him out somehow. Dear Father, devise it!"

She talked of *him* all the time, not of *them*, don't you see? That is love's own selfishness.

"My daughter," I said, "all earthly love is vanity. . . . Still, we must do our best to release a captive."

"Father," she cried, clasping her hands, "I love him! I love him! I love him! I love him!"

But she was quite right. I began to see that affairs were growing desperate. My cupboard was no better than an Austrian dungeon.

"Let us reflect," said I; and I reflected. Just at that moment, as luck would have it—do I say luck, faithless one? nay, rather, the providence of the Divine Will and of our dear Lady—what should sound but the bugle call for the Sterns and the Adlers and the Baumgartens to receive their weekly pay. Not a man but answered. Trust a Swiss for that. Out they came trooping at the sound of the clarion from all parts of the monastery, all the cloisters that they desecrated with their oaths and their presence, ran, scurried, hastened, formed line in the courtyard there, hungry for pay, stood at attention, alert as beagles, each waiting for his money. I saw they were absorbed in the one pursuit more important to their base souls than even their dinner. Then a wave broke over me. I fell on my knees and prayed. I asked to be helped to save these three brave patriots' lives from the Schmi^d and his myrmidons. I asked for strength and courage. Something or someone put it into my heart that, though I were shot for it myself, I must save my fugitives at all hazards. And I knew who put it there, signore, for, mark you, we men are weak, and impulses

to save men's lives at the risk of one's own can come to us only from One who gave up His life to save us. I am a poor ignorant simple old monk, little versed in dialectic; but *that* I know quite firmly. I prayed for light and obtained it. A radiance from within seemed to flash and illuminate me. I rose from my knees quite brave and calm.

"Come on, signora," I said, seeing my way now, "I shall have need of you."

She followed me up the stairs into the tower of San Pietro.

We spoke no words. No words were needed. Oh, but she was quick and understood me. Glancing at her, I took out my knife and cut the ropes of the bells. Stout they were, and hard to hack; but, with patience and goodwill, I sawed them through gradually. Signorina Fede took them from me as I cut them. Then we went on tiptoe to the cupboard, which I unlocked.

"Quick, quick!" I said low. "Not a moment to be lost. Follow me noiselessly."

Signor Antonio came out first, and just touched his lady's hand. She was brave, oh, but she was brave; she restrained herself well;

she did not even attempt to kiss him. She just held his hand and followed me. I led them out this way; will you please to look, signore, if I might disturb your serenity from your work one moment? You may not have seen that view, and, indeed, for the view alone it is worth the seeing. Exquisite is the prospect. Here, up these worn steps; bend your head a little again as you pass the beam. Now, see, I open this door; it gives direct on to a little balcony. Stand out on the ledge, signore, for hence you may behold the noblest sight in Perugia. Ay, ay, 'tis wide. Sheer down below, the cleft valley of the Tiber; beyond it, white in the sun, Assisi, smouldering on its arcaded hillside; further off, the jagged Apennines, and away in the distance, clambering up their flanks, innumerable grey towns—Spello, Foligno, Montefalco, Deruta. And, far behind all, the snows of Falterona! "A glorious prospect," you say. Ha, ha! I thought the view alone would repay you! We are proud of that view. Our fellow-citizen, Pinturicchio, used to admire it greatly. 'Tis the background of half Perugino's frescoes.

But 'twas not of the view we were thinking that morning, I can tell you, with Schmid's mercenaries below us, ready to catch and shoot us all if we failed of our enterprise. That makes the blood come and go, the breath catch quick. Not a word was spoken, all understood silently. Finger on lip, the signorina led the way: her face was bloodless. You see, all knew the spot, and knew that this balcony overlooks the dry ravines outside the city wall, down which a man, who is acquainted with the ground, may skulk unperceived among brushwood and black cypress hedges, for these are overgrown gorges. I fastened the ropes together, so, as well as I could, Signor Baglione helping me, for he had been an officer for some years in the Austrian navy and knew how to tie knots far safer than any I could have devised with my unskilled fingers. Then we secured them to the balustrade of the balcony thus, and hand over hand the first man descended. It was Signor Donato. He let himself down, half sliding, and disappeared into the jungle. Next came the Baglione's turn: he went second, and as he went we began to hear a sullen tramp of feet as of the

soldiers returning from pay parade. Tramp, tramp, tramp. But we let him down silently. Off he ran into the bush and made for free Bologna and the Garibaldians. Last of all came Antonio Bellucci's chance. He waited till the last, both because he was youngest and swiftest, and also because Signorina Fede held his hand in hers so that he could not disentangle it.

But when his time arrived she acted, as she had acted throughout, like a brave woman and a patriot. She let it drop at once, just whispering, "Now, carissimo, addio!"; and with one squeeze of her hand down he slid. We watched and wondered. We heard the tumult of the soldiers running about in the courtyard. What cries! what hubbub! If they caught us now it would be all up with Antonio!

Yet he slid down in safety, we two leaning over and watching him with all our eyes. Next moment he had waved his handkerchief and was off into the ravine. That very same evening, as we learned later, he was safe with the General. *What General?* Why, serenity, Garibaldi, of course; in those days,

for us Italians, was there more than one general?

As he disappeared, Signorina Fede, unable to restrain herself, flung her arms around my neck and kissed me passionately. It was irregular, yes; but I understood, of course, and—I forgave her.

Trembling with suspense we descended the tower. At the bottom we found the Swiss soldiers waiting. They had scented mischief and were making another search. As we crept softly down we crept into their open arms. They seized us at once. The signorina held up her head high, haughty, unweeping. She feared for nothing now—her lover had escaped. I saw at a glance, if we were to be shot, we might as well be shot for something as for nothing.

“What have you been doing?” asked the guard.

I answered boldly,

“I have been up in the chamber in the tower with this lady feeding the fugitives who have taken sanctuary with San Pietro.”

May God and all the saints forgive me the many lies I told that week! But politics,

politics! Without breaking of eggs, no omelette. You cannot confine yourself to the strict truth when you are mixed up in revolutions.

You see, I told them this one in order to make them think that fugitives were still hiding in the tower chamber. That gained them time for escape. If the Sterns and the Baumgartens had known they were flown they would have scoured the country round and very likely intercepted them, though our Perugian ravines—well, you have seen them, signore, and you can readily understand that they are easier for natives than for foreigners; especially for Swiss, whom their Maker has made a thick-headed, blundering, slow-moving people.

The Schmid man measured me with his cold blue eyes. "Arrest them," he said, in his *brah, brah, brah*. And they arrested us.

Then they began overhauling the tower once more. This time, being put on their mettle, they looked closer, but not for half an hour or more did they discover the cupboard. I had locked it and carried away the key, so that even when they found it, 'twas still some time

before they could force the door open. When they did prise it apart, expecting to catch their victims, they saw signs of recent habitation, but their birds were flown. Even so, they didn't bethink them at once of the balcony. Slow brains, fat paunches. They concluded we had hidden our men somewhere else in the monastery, since the guard at the door had not seen them pass out. So once more they searched church, cloisters, everything. We looked on, smiling serenely. At last one of them, quicker than the rest, suggested that they should peal the bells, to try and frighten them. They started to peal—and then, of course, they found the bell-ropes cut. That gave them the clue. They soon hit upon the balcony. There the ropes were still hanging, tied to the balustrade exactly as we left them in our hurry. So now they knew all. They returned to interrogate us.

"I confess," said the signorina, "I helped to free them."

"And I too," I answered, having nothing now to gain by further lies. "But mark you, I am a priest: the lady acted under my advice as her spiritual director. I urged

her to do it as one of the seven works of mercy."

I thought *that* ought to tell with the Pontifical Government. The Holy Father could hardly sanction the shooting of a woman for having obeyed the spiritual advice of her confessor on a point of morals.

The Schmid man bit his lip.

"If I followed my orders," he said curtly, "I should shoot you both. But—thunder-weather!—one cannot shoot in cold blood a monk and a woman. At least," he added with an after-thought, "in the patrimony of St. Peter."

"Make no monk of *me*!" I cried, bridling up at his insolence. "I am a free Perugian. I *demand* to be shot, in my secular capacity. Spiritually, I am the Holy Father's most obedient son: but temporally—well, the Holy See conquered us and held us fast by right of conquest: surely we may rebel against its temporal rule as against the rule of any other monarchy! I fought like a soldier at the barricades the other day: shoot me now as a soldier: but spare this innocent lamb, who acted wholly and solely on the spiritual advice I gave as priest to her."

The Schmid man held his peace, and walked up and down gloomily, stroking his chin with his fingers.

"If I shot them, I shall be blamed," he said at last to his second in command; "and if I refrain from shooting them, I shall be blamed also. But once shot, shot for ever; once reprieved, you can shoot again to-morrow. Not shot then is safest. I shall wait for this matter till I have telegraphed to the Vatican for instructions. 'Tis ticklish work being a soldier in a priest's army."

So we were remanded that day. Meanwhile they scoured the country-side in vain pursuit of our three fugitives. Of course it was useless, once they had got a fair start. Was not all Umbria in league against the Holy Father's Government? For the Holy Father himself was a spotless lamb, I grant you; but that cunning fellow Antonelli—politics, politics, politics! The Church is one thing: your Richelieus and your Mazarins and your Antonellis, 'tis quite another.

Next day, in came a telegram from the Cardinal Secretary: "Release the girl; she acted under her confessor's mistaken advice;

reserve Fra Benedetto for further consideration."

And now, signore, you shall hear indeed how God protects His Church, and how the Holy Father, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra* on questions of faith or morals, is yet swayed by the gentlest and best of motives. Oh, yes, you shall understand that, though I was a rebel against the Papal Government, I love the Head of the Church, and have ever been an obedient and loyal son of the Roman Pontiff. For three weeks later, when all was over, and the Swiss—vile paunch-bearing wretches—had evacuated the monastery, we were all summoned to Rome, we Benedictines of San Pietro, to answer for the part we were accused of having borne in the abortive insurrection. The Abbot was fined for his share in the good work, and so was the monastery. It was a brave scene—chamberlains, prelates, red-robed cardinals, gorgeous bishops in copes of plum-colour. There we all stood, in a great hall of the Vatican, with Swiss guards in cocked hats preserving order, while the Holy Father listened, half yawning, to our explanations and excuses. Last of all came my

tutu, trembling for my skin. Everybody thought I should be imprisoned for life by administrative order. For what would a secular ruler have done with me? Why, promptly shot me. I recognise that, signore: I was in open rebellion, and a secular prince would have promptly shot me.

Instead of which, what did His Holiness say? He looked at me and deliberated.

"Fra Benedetto, is this all true?" he asked, after the Schmid man had told his embellished story. "Did you do this thing?"

I looked up and answered,

"Holy Father, it is true. I did—God helping me."

At that word His Holiness paused again. He smoothed his round cheek—drooping churchman's flesh. At last he turned to Colonel Schmid and the Abbot.

"If Fra Benedetto did indeed this thing," he said slowly, with that benign smile—you know it well—on those venerable features, "no doubt it was God who put it into his heart, for he risked his own life to save three fellow-creatures. We must ever respect the promptings of God within us. He took his

life in his hands; shall we not restore it to him?"

The Schmid man frowned. He saw how hard it is to be a priest's soldier. But the Holy Father's smile emboldened me to make reply.

"Most wise and virtuous Pontiff," I said, bending low, "you have spoken the truth, for before I cut the bell-ropes, I prayed for guidance; and guidance came to me that it was the will of Heaven that I should risk my own life for those three gallant gentlemen."

His Holiness took my hand, and waved me from him.

"Fra Benedetto," he said slowly, "go back to thy Perugia in peace. But take no part in revolutions hereafter."

"Holy Father," I answered, "that will be as God pleases. Still, I thank you for your noble clemency."

So that was all. As for the rest, 'tis soon told. Next spring, the good King Victor Emmanuel sent his general Manfredo Fanti to free us from our bondage; and this time, we beat the Swiss, and marched them at last, two by two, without their arms, out of Pope

Paul's fortress. Then, oh, then you should have seen Perugia's joy, Perugia's eagerness! In three hours' time our people had pulled down every single stone of the great black fort; the proud spirit of the Perugians brooked no more repression. *Si, si*, I bore my part—with these very hands, signore, I bore my part. We tore down that visible sign of the Holy Father's temporal supremacy in our midst, and abolished for ever Papal rule in free Perugia.

When the King came to us at last he made many men cavalieri and commendatori, but at the end of it all he asked: "And now, which is Fra Benedetto?"

"Here am I, most exalted Majesty," I answered, much wondering.

And the King pinned a medal on my frock, saying as he pinned it: "This for the bravest man who fought in those days for Perugia's sake and Italian unity!"

But *I* knew better, knowing I was only a poor weak monk, who tried to save three brave gentlemen's lives, and all—may the Signore forgive me—for the sake of a lady.

"What reward do you claim, Fra Bene-

detto?" the King asked from behind his genial big whiskers.

"By Sant' Ercolano," said I, "I desire as reward that when Signor Antonio Bellucci is wedded to the Signorina Guidalotti, this poor brother, though no secular priest, may be allowed to perform the sacrament of marriage."

And it was so.

THE END.

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